

*The
Tantric
Tradition*

AGEHANANDA
BHARATI

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Rider

THE TANTRIC TRADITION

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Agehananda Bharati

This book breaks fresh ground: it is the first major study by an initiate of the complex field of Hindu and Buddhist tantrism. The very delicate position of the tantrics, their teaching and literature, has caused Indian and Western writers to give them a wide berth. The powerful erotic and sensual symbolism, the apparently amoral tendencies of the teachings and the care with which their inner meaning has been guarded have made their objective study extremely difficult.

The author analyses from within the literary, linguistic, ideological, philosophical and ritualistic patterns of tantrism, illustrating them with freshly translated passages from the Indian and Tibetan texts. He gives special emphasis to *mantra*, initiation, the male-female polarity symbolism with its ritualistic corollaries, and to the history and development of tantrism in India and Tibet. His book is essential reading for all interested in the East and in culture in depth.

Agehananda Bharati is a member of the anthropological faculty at Syracuse University, New York, and the first Western monk of the Daśanāmi Order of Hindu Sannyāsins.

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THE OCHRE ROBE

A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF INDIAN THOUGHT
AND ITS SOCIAL MARGINS

Agehananda Bharati



THE TANTRIC TRADITION



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या देवी मम हृदये
शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता ।
कमलायै सुकोमलायै
तदर्पितं प्रोत्साहित्रे ॥

To
LILLIAN Y. NAKAI

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would certainly reject this identification, and the possible rejoinder that he does so because he has to insist on being fundamentally different from the Brahmin tradition is not justified until there is a precise analytical formulation of *brahman* and *śūnyatā* juxtaposed. No such formulation has come forth so far.⁵

The element common to Hindu and Mahāyāna philosophy is what Indian scholastic methodology calls *samanvaya*, i.e. the institutionalized attitude of reconciling discursively contrary notions by raising them to a level of discourse where these contradictions are thought to have no validity. It is due to *samanvaya* that the gap between the phenomenal (*saṃvṛti*, *vyavahāra*) and the absolute (*paramārtha*) truths spares the Hindu or Mahāyāna thinker the philosophical embarrassment the outsider feels when he views *paramārtha* and *vyavahāra* philosophy side by side, in Indian religious literature.

What distinguishes tantric from other Hindu and Buddhist teaching is its systematic emphasis on the identity of the absolute (*paramārtha*) and the phenomenal (*vyavahāra*) world when filtered through the experience of *sādhana*. Tantric literature is not of the philosophical genre; the stress is on *sādhana*. But it seems to me that one philosophical doctrine inherent in esoteric Hinduism and Mahāyāna Buddhism—especially of the Mādhyamika school—the identity of the phenomenal and the absolute world—was singled out by all tantric teachers as the nucleus around which all their speculation was to revolve; I also believe that the doctrinary discrepancies between the various schools of speculative thought are *really* resolved in tantric *sādhana*: all scholastic teachers in India declare that there is *samanvaya*, but the tantric actually experiences it; I have tried to elaborate a model of this phenomenon, which had been suggested to me by my own preceptor, the late Viśvānanda Bhāratī.⁶

The other philosophical doctrine common to Hindu and Buddhist tantra is probably due to some sort of doctrinary diffusion. It is of the type of a universe-model: reality is one, but it is to be grasped through a process of conceptual and intuitive polarization.⁷ The poles are activity and passivity, and the universe

'works' through their interaction. The universe ceases to 'work'—i.e. its state of absolute oneness and quiescence is realized—when these two poles merge. They are merged doctrinally by the repeated declaration of their fundamental oneness, and are experienced by the tantric's reliving of this merger through his integrating *sādhana* or spiritual disciplines.

Only this much is really common between Hindu and Buddhist tantric doctrines, for their respective ascriptions to the two poles are obverse to each other. The Hindu assigned the male symbol apparatus to the passive, the female to the active pole; the Buddhist did the opposite; the Hindu assigned the knowledge principle to the passive male pole, and the dynamic principle to the active female pole; the Vajrayāna Buddhist did it the other way round.

All tantric philosophy sets forth the power of a conceptual decision, notwithstanding the fact that the execution of ritualistic contemplation is carried out in minute detail. It appears that conceptual decision leading to permanent enstasis (*jñāna*, *bodhi*) has higher prestige than other procedures. Thus we find this statement in the account of a Tibetan teacher:

'by a doctrine which is similar to the application of fat to a wound when an arrow piece remains inside, nothing can be reached; by a doctrine which is similar to tracing the footsteps of a thief to a monastery when he had escaped to the forest and mountain, nothing can be gained, so also *having declared one's own mind to be non-substantial* (by its nature), the fetters of the outside world will fall off by themselves, because all is *śūnyatā*.'⁸

I have no scriptural evidence for this surmise, but I feel that the tendency to supersede the necessity of minute exertion by a basically intellectual act is a typical tantric element of speculation. We find an important analogy in orthodox Brahmanical thought: Śaṅkarācārya declared that the cognitive understanding of the meaning of the four great Upaniṣadic dicta, 'this *ātma* is *brahma*', 'I am *brahma*', 'thou art that', and 'the conscious self is *brahma*', results in immediate liberation. Most of his contemporaries and particularly his later opponents (especially Rāmānuja in the

eleventh century, and his school) opposed this notion vehemently, insisting on prolonged observance and discipline. Śaṅkarācārya's attitude towards tantra is ambivalent, but there is reason to believe that he was profoundly influenced by tantric notions.⁹

Romanticizing German indology was highly enthusiastic about Indian thought, and this is one of the reasons why Hindu pandits are full of praise for German indology.¹⁰ Thus, H. V. Glasenapp wrote:

'... the notion that the whole universe with the totality of its phenomena forms one single whole, in which even the smallest element has an effect upon the largest, because secret threads connect the smallest item with the eternal ground of the world, this is the proper foundation of all tantric philosophy.'¹¹

There is decidedly such a thing as a common Hindu and Buddhist tantric ideology, and I believe that the real difference between tantric and non-tantric traditions is methodological: tantra is the psycho-experimental interpretation of non-tantric lore. As such, it is more value-free than non-tantric traditions; moralizing, and other be-good clichés are set aside to a far greater extent in tantrism than in other doctrine. By 'psycho-experimental' I mean 'given to experimenting with one's own mind', not in the manner of the speculative philosopher or the poet, but rather in the fashion of a would-be psychoanalyst who is himself being analysed by some senior man in the trade. This, I think, is the most appropriate analogue in the modern world: the junior psychoanalyst would be the disciple, the senior one the guru. The tantric adept cares for liberation, like all other practising Hindus or Buddhists; but his method is different, because it is purely experimental—in other words, it does not confer ontological or existential status upon the objects of his meditations. This is the reason why tantrics are not in the least perturbed by the proliferation of gods and goddesses, minor demons and demonesses, and other creatures of various density and efficacy—they do not attempt to reduce their number, for these are necessary anthropomorphic ways of finding out 'what is inside the mind'. The tantric entertains one or two axioms, no doubt—the absolutistic and the

phenomenal-noumenal-identity axioms, but they are not really important except as speculative constructs. Similarly, the psychologist entertains a few axioms, as for instance the one identifying sanity with adjustment to the cultural milieu of his environment which he shares with the anthropologists interested in 'culture and personality', or the axiom that there is such a thing as mental illness;¹² but the practising analyst is not really interested in these axioms as he carries on his work—in fact, these axiomatic notions are quite irrelevant to the execution of his work. They are 'at the back of his mind', but he can leave them there when he works.

To sum up the rambling question whether or not we should make a distinction between what is specifically tantric and what is not. On the theological and speculative level the answer is decidedly yes. All tantrics flout traditional, exoteric orthodoxy, all put experiment above conventional morality denying ultimate importance to moralistic considerations which is not contradicted by the fact that most tantric texts pay initial homage to conventional conceptions of morality; and all agree that their specific method is dangerous, and radical, and all claim that it is a shortcut to liberation.

I do not believe that either the Hindus or the Buddhists were consciously working out a similar psycho-experimental pattern, and I do not think that they were making a conscious effort to unite Hindus and Buddhists, even though they may well have been aware of great similarities between their practices. But B. Bhattacharya's statement

'... the *kālacakra* or Circle of Time¹³ as the highest god was set up by a particular section which wanted that the Hindus should unite with the Buddhists under the common nonsectarian banner of the Time-God Kalacakra in order to present a united front against the cultural penetration of Semitic peoples which had already invaded Central Asia and Iran.'¹⁴

hardly deserves attention except as a statement *à la mode*.

Hindu scholars, with no exception to my knowledge, believe in a virtual doctrinary identity of Advaita monism and Mādhyamika absolutism, and this is detrimental to the study of Indian

of Buddhism had been dismantling the notion of Being and of Self; nor by the oft-propounded idea that an ideological group which keeps up its distinct identity chiefly by refuting another ideological group gradually assumes the latter's terms and ideas. This may be so among political groups (the Nazis developed a system and a language which was very similar, in many points, to communism which they fought), but it is hardly believable about scholars who are critically aware of their doctrinary differences from the ideology which they oppose. In other words, I cannot bring myself to believe that Asaṅga or Advayavajra or any other tantric Buddhist teacher should have been unaware of the possible charge of 'your *śūnyatā* or your *nairātmya* are so thoroughly rarefied that there is no difference left between them and Brahmin notions of Being'. *Śaṅkarācārya* was called a crypto-Buddhist (*prachanna-bauddha*) by his Brahmin opponents, because his *brahman* was so utterly rarefied and depersonalized that it reminded the less informed of the assumed Buddhist nihil, the *śūnya*.²⁷ Had any of the famous Buddhist teachers been charged with being a crypto-Hindu, such a charge would have probably been recorded. As it is, scholastic Hindus feel a strong doctrinary resentment against Buddhist doctrine, and it is only the occidentalized, 'all-religions-are-basically-one' Hindus who declare the Buddhist teachings as a form of Hinduism or vice versa. The Buddhist dialectician proceeds from the denial of any entity, from the axiom of momentariness, and arrives at the notion of *śūnyā*; the Hindu dialectician has a built-in deity as the basis for his speculations on a self, on a static entity. To the outsider, however, the rarefied *brahman* of the Vedānta monists and the Buddhist *śūnya* may look similar or 'virtually' identical as intellectual constructs. But they are not. Buddhism has no ontology, no metaphysics; Hinduism has a powerful ontology—this is the one unbridgeable difference between all of its forms and Buddhism of all schools.

That the psycho-experimentalist, the tantric, or anyone who takes *sādhana* seriously (and taking *sādhana* seriously means regarding it as more important, though not necessarily more interesting, than philosophy), may come to feel that there is some sort of

identity between *śūnyatā* and *brahman*, is a different matter: it does not conflict with what is said above, and there is no gainsaying the fact that reports on the 'feeling' in Vedānta-trained enstasis and in tantric enstasis is very similar indeed. Yet, even if two authentic reports on enstatic experience should coincide, it does not follow from this that the schools from which these reports derive teach a similar philosophy. The notion upheld among religious teachers in India today that a specific *sādhana* yields a specific philosophy or vice versa, I believe to be wrong; it hails from an understandable pious wish that the corpus of doctrine, embodied in one tradition, should be autonomous, and should encompass both *sādhana* and philosophy.²⁸ To put this point succinctly: no specific *sādhana* follows from any one philosophy, nor does any specific philosophy follow from any particular *sādhana*. Our own tantric tradition provides the best illustration: tantric *sādhana* follows a single pattern, Vajrayāna Buddhist and Hindu tantric *sādhana* is indistinguishable, in spite of the immense disparity between the two philosophies.

I admit, however, that the language of Vajrayāna suggests ontology to a degree where a scholar, who did not know Hindu or Buddhist philosophy, but did know Sanskrit and modern occidental philosophy, would be at a loss to realize that Buddhist philosophy was non-ontological as opposed to Hindu philosophy. To quote a typical passage from a Vajrayāna text: 'of firm essence, unfragmented, unbreakable, indivisible in character, incombustible, indestructible, *śūnyatā* is *vajra* (i.e. the Buddhist Void is the Buddhist Adamantine, the *Vajra*).'²⁹ Word for word, this description of *śūnyatā* and *vajra* could apply to the *brahman* of the Vedāntin, and for that of all Hindus, and I do not think there is any adjective in this passage which has not been applied to the *brahman*, with the exception perhaps of *asaṁśṛyam* (lit. 'unperforated'), which I have not seen in a Hindu text; 'unbreakable, indivisible, incombustible', almost in this order, is the description of the infinite *brahman* in the Bhagavadgītā.³⁰ It is futile to speculate why the tantric writers availed themselves of terms which were excessively popular with their Brahmin opponents, in

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'gyur (Derge ed.), rgyud, vol. zhi, fol. 58 b- (Guenther gives his translation only, not the original): "The nature of pure transcendence—*gnyug ma'i sems keyi rang bzhin-nijacittasya svabhāva*—is intuited by pure sensation to be nothing, but it is not something declared to be empty (lit. made empty) by the reasoning intellect." And, continuing the passage, Sarāha says further "since the world of appearance (appearance is not to be understood in Kant's or Bradley's sense, it is symbolific transformation in the sense of Susan K. Langer) does not exist here, there is nihilism, a state of misery (despair), but when this state of misery (despair) has disappeared, the world of appearance as it exists for the philosopher (Guenther consistently renders *rnal 'byor pa*, *yogin*, as "philosopher"—and does not use the Sanskrit *yogin* as other Buddhologists would do) turns into radiance and nothingness." According to a manuscript of the "oral tradition", "radiance" (*gsal*, *prabhāsvara*) refers to the *nam pa*, Skr. *ākāra*, which could be translated as "causal characteristic", and which essentially signifies the dynamics of symbolific transformation. But this dynamics is not anything concrete, it is again *śūnya*, and in this passage belief in its "existence" is rejected in a manner similar to Whitehead's treatment of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness".

⁶ Vd. appendix to this chapter.

⁷ Vd. Chapter, 'Polarity Symbolisms'.

⁸ *Blue Annals*, I/290, G. N. Roerich, Calcutta 1949-53.

⁹ Although the *Saundaryalaharī*, ascribed to Śaṅkarācārya by orthodox Brahmin tradition, is probably not his work (vd. N. D. Brown, *The Saundaryalaharī*, H.O.S. 1959), the fact that it has been persistently ascribed to him is in itself an important indication: he was constantly exposed to tantric environments. The *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, his biography ascribed to his disciple Padmapādācārya, recounts his conversion from a monism which excluded the female principle is polar as in all tantrism. That particular episode tells how Śaṅkarācārya, when walking along the Ganges at Benaras after having taken his bath, encountered a wailing woman holding her dead husband's body over her knees. When the *ācārya* demanded that she remove the polluting corpse from his presence, she said to him something like 'why don't you, an omnipotent *ācārya*, command the corpse to remove itself?' Irritated, Śaṅkarācārya exclaimed 'how could it, there is no *śakti* in it'—whereupon the lady, manifesting her real form as the Goddess, the magna mater, instructed the *ācārya* about his error: nothing can move without *śakti*, dynamis. It is on the basis of this incident that Śaṅkarācārya is said to have compiled the *Saundaryalaharī*. This story is well known far beyond the narrow circle of scholars who read the "*Digvijaya*". The best account of Śaṅkarācārya's "conversion" from nonpolar monism to polar monism of the Śākta variety is found in a Bengali work *Ācārya-Śaṅkar-o-Rāmānuj* by S. Bhattacharya, who also published an excellent study of Hindu tantrism in Bengal "*Tantra Paricaya*". We should also remember that Śaṅkarācārya's opponents called him a "*prachanna bauddha*", a crypto-

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Buddhist, with possible reference to tantric Buddhism which was then very much in vogue in India. It is also interesting to note that some of the most important Hindu tantras, like the *Mahānirvāṇa* and the *Kula-cūḍāmaṇi*, refer to him as the "ādigura", the first preceptor (of tantrism); tantric commentators frequently refer to him as *Draṃiḍācārya*, i.e. the Dravidian Master, though this identification with the actual *Draṃiḍācārya* is pure fantasy.'

¹⁰ The notion prevails that Sanskrit is compulsory in German high schools; vd. my *Ochre Robe*, Ch. VIII, Allen & Unwin, London 1961.

¹¹ Glasenapp, 'Tantrismus und Schaktismus', *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, VI, 22, 1936, 120, 'die Vorstellung, dass die ganze Welt mit der Fuelle ihrer Erscheinungen ein ganzes bildet, bei dem auch das kleinste auf das groesste eine Wirkung ausueben kann, weil geheimnisvolle Faeden auch das geringste mit dem ewigen Weltgrunde verknuepfe, ist die eigentliche Grundlage aller tantrischen Philosophie'. 'Geheimnisvolle Faeden' etc. sounds very nice, and Indian pandits are fond of such colourful simile; but this style is not really helpful for the study of Indian thought. The less edifying, but more precise, terminology of analytical modern philosophy is not popular in India, mainly, I think, because it lacks 'inspiration' and is hence thought to be less close to the spirit of Indian philosophy. This is wrong. Indian commentarial literature is at least as dull and unedifying as modern analytical terminology.

¹² There is a growing school of psychiatrists which denies that there is such a thing as mental disease; its spokesman is Prof. Thomas S. Szasz, of the New York Upstate Medical College, vd. *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Harper Bros., New York 1961.

¹³ An important tantric doctrine with much literature, it figures importantly in the Tibetan *rgyud* tradition as the *kālacakra-dus kyī khor lo*: Prof. Hoffmann in Munich is working at a history of the *kālacakra* system, whose origins are mythical, or at least very obscure.

¹⁴ A confusion very frequent among pandits in India; Islam—it is to this religion that the line refers—originated among Semitic peoples; it spread into parts of Asia through Arab missionaries no doubt, but it was the Turks, Afghans, and the Mongols who carried Islam into India; there had been some Arab settlements in Sind as early as the eighth century, barely a hundred years after the *Hijra*, but they did not make converts, being merely merchants and obviously not interested in spreading the Faith. This confusion is due to the influence of nineteenth-century German indologists, which was the first learned group to spell out the Aryan myth; a myth which has been immensely popular with Indian pandits ever since.

¹⁵ *Niṣpanṇayogāvali*, intd. p. 15, G.O.S. CIX., Baroda.

¹⁶ *Aadvayavajrasaṃgraha*, G.O.S. 40, *pratibhāso varaṇaṃ kāntaḥ pratītyotpāda-mātrakaḥ*/na syād yadi mṛtaiva syāt śūnyatā kāmīnī matā.

¹⁷ G.O.S. 40, introduction, xiii.

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tradition; quite apart from the many tantric and non-tantric passages, Hindu and Buddhist, where *mudrā* means a ritualistic or iconographic gesture.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to analyse some crucial Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist tantric terms and to establish their exact connotation. This has so far not been done, largely due to a lack of communication between philosophers and cultural anthropologists on the one side, and philologically oriented Buddhologists on the other. The fault seems to be that of the Buddhologists, who did not care, up to this day, to brush up their occidental vocabulary and to provide precise renditions of Buddhist, and *a fortiori*, tantric philosophical terminology. The reason for this neglect seems to lie in the notion that occidental philosophy works on totally different lines and that it can therefore not provide terminological equivalents. This was true with the traditional western philosophers who excluded Indian thought from their study as below philosophical dignity¹ and whose attitude was reciprocated by the orientalist brand of counter-arrogance: that western philosophy was lacking the spiritual insight which could help it tackle the esoteric problems of Asian thought. Traditional philosophy—say, up to Russell and Ayer—was really not interested in creating a precise vocabulary that could suggest operational equivalents for Indian and Tibetan scholastic terminology. The analytical schools of Britain and America, however, have worked out a vocabulary which could be highly useful in rendering the former intelligible. To my knowledge, however, no indologist with the exception of H. V. Guenther in India and Europe and Karl H. Potter in North America have cared to avail themselves of the work that has been done by occidental philosophers who regard language analysis as the main function of philosophy.²

I shall start with a simple example: Tibetan *sems*, Sanskrit *citta*, is translated by such vague terms as 'mind' or even 'soul'—the latter being a downright atrocious translation so far as Buddhism is concerned. At best, the inadequacy of such renditions is admitted with a shrug—as a bequest of last-century indology. However, I

feel convinced that modern philosophy does give us an instrument to work out these vexing problems. With the growth of Tibetan Buddhist studies arose the habit of giving the Sanskrit term for the Tibetan in lieu of a translation, thus shelving the real issue; for while it is true that, for example, '*nirmāṇakāya*' is the Sanskrit equivalent of '*sprul sku*', it is not very helpful to just write '*nirmāṇakāya*' in Roman characters, although the realization of the inadequacy of a term like 'phantom-body' is laudable. For what, then, is the '*nirmāṇakāya*'?

It goes without saying that we cannot impugn the Tibetan translations of the original Sanskrit terms, and that for logical reasons: the Tibetans had no concepts matching the learned terminology of their Indian preceptors. We must assume that Buddhism was planted on a conceptual vacuum in Tibet. Any term chosen once, and used without modification, had come to stay. It is quite unlike trying to find an occidental term for a Sanskrit or Tibetan scholastic idiom, because occidental languages have a backlog of viable, even though risky, Graeco-Roman-Judaeo-Christian concepts. This shows itself in the translation of such innocuous words as *lha* (*deva*) as 'god'—or *dños pa* (*vastu*) as 'substance' or 'nature'. 'Substance' cannot get rid of its Thomistic or Aristotelian flavour, and there is nothing of the kind in the Buddhist '*vastu*'. We shall see, however, that contemporary, non-Aristotelian philosophy might provide a useful term for the Buddhist concept. H. V. Guenther suggests 'reality',³ which would be acceptable if, as he does, the word is used as shorthand for 'all objects'; in other words if the Aristotelian flavour hovering around nouns suffixed by *-ty* can be kept out. I would recommend 'totality of sense-data' or even just 'all objects'; and never omitting the article—for *deva* (*lha*), 'a god'.

To say that Tibetan renditions of Sanskrit terminology are 'more exact'⁴ than any western rendition is a sort of wrongly formulated tautology: the Tibetan term had to create the new concept, not to translate it. Translation is possible where both languages have words for a concept; if we call the work of the *Lo tsa ba* 'translation', it is either incorrect or a courtesy: for he had to

the most-read sacred literature of the Hindus, the Purāṇas—'Suvarṇadvīpa', i.e. the 'Golden Continent' is mentioned in all of them, but the referends differ—the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*⁴ calls it *pālebhya pūrve sthita*, 'located eastward from the Pālas, i.e. Bengal', which might mean Burma or perhaps Siam; the more recent *Skandapurāṇa*⁵ refers to Suvarṇadvīpa as *agneyeṣu viśṛtaḥ* 'stretched out in the south-east', which would point to the usually accepted identification of Suvarṇadvīpa with Indonesia.⁶

The third reason for the lack of geographical detail in Indian texts seems to me the unbelievable credulousness of the Indian religious with regard to reports on places of worship outside his own ken—this has not changed through the ages. I have heard two Hindu priests at Ernakulam (Kerala) saying that Śakti herself dispenses drugs against gout and other diseases: She, in the form of a virgin, lived in a cave at a shrine in a far-off western land called 'Rudradeśa', i.e. 'Region of Śiva'. I found out that this news was inspired by the fame of the Lady of Lourdes in France; the history of this modification was easy to trace, and exemplifies the said credulousness: the area around Ernakulam has a substantial population of Syrian Christians, and many women of that community have been given the name 'Lourdhammal'⁷ since the beginning of this century. 'Lourdes' sounds very similar to 'Rudra-deś' when pronounced by speakers of Malayalam and Tulu—most Syrian Christians unfamiliar with occidental languages and spellings would pronounce the last syllable of 'Lourdes' not knowing that it is mute in French.

More possible reasons for the scarcity of topographical reference or for the lack of geographical accuracy in such references can be readily adduced and subsumed in the above three headings. Caste-Hindus lose their caste when they cross the northern mountains just as when they cross the ocean; places that cannot be inspected are not described with any claim to precision; escorts of Buddhist missionaries who returned from Tibet told wild tales about that inaccessible country, with impunity; Tibetans who came to study at Nālandā or Vikramaśilā might have done the same.

We can hardly trust Tibetan sources when they tell us about the

conquest of large parts of India by Tibetan rulers, with which Tārānātha's *History* is replete; chiefly because no Indian sources whatever corroborate these reports. It is thinkable that Tārānātha did not really mean a region beyond Nepal or beyond Bengal when he speaks of 'Central India'.⁸ Tibetan warrior chiefs seem to have made inroads into Magadha, Bengal, and perhaps the regions adjacent to Western Nepal, i.e. the districts of Almora and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. Nothing comprehensive has yet been written about these Tibetan conquests on Indian territory; there are scattered references in volumes 3, 4, and 5 of the encyclopaedic *History and Culture of the Indian People*.⁹ One of the very few reliable sources of Indian historiography is the famous *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* by the Kashmiri court scholar Kalhāṇa, who flourished in the twelfth century A.D.¹⁰ In this enthusiastic treatment of King Lalitāditya, who ascended the throne of Kashmir about A.D. 724, Kalhāṇa reports the king was 'eager for conquests and passed his life chiefly on expeditions'. He sent a diplomatic mission to the Chinese Emperor in A.D. 733 to induce him to make common cause against the Tibetans.¹¹ In his enumeration of countries and kings whom Lalitāditya defeated, Kalhāṇa writes,¹² 'he conquered the Kambojas,¹³ the Tukharas, Bhauṭṭas (i.e. Tibetans), Dāradas (i.e. the Dardic groups of which the actual Kashmiris are a part), and vanquished a king named Mammuni.'

In the first half of the eighth century, Tibet wielded enormous influence over Nepal. In a grant of the Licchavi King Śivadeva, dated A.D. 714, there is a reference to 'Bhoṭṭa-Viṣṭi' or a corvee payable to Tibet.¹⁴ That Nepal was a vassal to Tibet during this era is not documented by any Indian or Tibetan source, except for this casual reference to the corvee; there is only a Chinese source which throws light on this phase.¹⁵

King Yaśovarman of the Central Indian Chandella Dynasty ascended the throne after his father King Harśa's death around A.D. 925. An inscription at Khajuraho in Vindhya Pradesh, Central India, mentions that he received an image of the God Viṣṇu from Devapāla (i.e. of the Bengali Pāla Dynasty which was one of the foremost champions of Buddhism), which had been given to

(i.e. the ingredients of left-handed tantric ritual, *mada* wine, *matsya* fish, *māṃsa* meat, *mudrā* parched kidney bean and other aphrodisiacs, and *maithuna* or ritualistic copulation) are (constituents of) *Cīnacāra* . . . and they must not be disclosed (to the non-initiate).'

The Buddhist goddess Tārā and the goddess Nilasarasvatī (i.e. the blue goddess Sarasvatī) are probably identical.³⁵ She is called 'akṣobhya-devīmūrdhanyā' (having Akṣobhya on her head)—and she is said to dwell 'on the west side of Mount Meru', implying Mahācīna, Bhoṭa, etc. The text is the fifth chapter of the *Sammoha Tantra*³⁶ which is a rather late Hindu or Buddhist work current in Nepal—it was composed approximately in the thirteenth century according to Sastri's introduction. The text is a good specimen of Professor Edgerton's Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.³⁷ Bagchi renders it thus:³⁸ Maheśvara said to Brahmā: 'Hear from me with attention about Mahānilasarasvatī. It is through her favour that you will narrate the four Vedas. There is the lake called Cola on the western side of Mount Meru. The Mother Goddess Nilogrātārā herself was born there. . . . The light issuing from my upper eye fell into the lake Cola and took on a blue colour. There was a sage called Akṣobhya, who was Śiva himself in the form of a *muni* (seer), on the northern side of Mount Meru. It was he who meditated first on the goddess, who was Pārvatī herself reincarnated in Cīnadeśa (the country Cīna) at the time of the great deluge. . . .'

Bagchi adds, 'It is idle to try to find out a precise geographical information here, but it may be suggested that Cola is probably to be connected with the common word for lake *kul*, *kol*, which is found with names of so many lakes to the west and north of T'ien shan, i.e. in the pure Mongolian zone.'³⁹

The third chapter of our *Sammoha Tantra* enumerates a number of *pīṭhas* (centres of worship of a female deity),⁴⁰ and divides them into regions according to their use of the *kādi* and the *hādi* methods, respectively.⁴¹ 'Bhoṭa', 'Mahācīnā', and 'Cīna' are enumerated only with *kādi pīṭhas*. The commonly accepted, though by no means undisputed, orthodox idea is that *kādi* mantras and their use as part of a ritualistic method are aimed at securing worldly or magical success; *hādi* mantras on the other

hand are said to help towards the supreme achievement of *nirvāṇa* or its Hindu equivalents. I think that something like this accounts for the fact that Bhoṭa, Cīna, Mahācīna are listed in *kādi* areas, and not in the *hādi* area enumeration. The regions beyond the mountain stand for magic and *siddhi* whose pursuits are always viewed to an extent as heretical. Some of the *hādi* regions listed in the text (vol. 7a) 'cannot be identified' so Bagchi avers;⁴² some of them, however, seem to be adjacent to Tibetan soil but are still cis-Himālayan—thus 'Bāl'hika' which must be Balkh, 'Dyorjalā' which might well be a predecessor of 'Darjeeling', which name is derived either from Tibetan *rDorje-glin* 'thunderbolt (*vajra*) region', or from Sanskrit *durjayalinga*, 'the invincible Śiva'.

The same text also lists the number of tantras current in different regions, and claims 'in Cīna there are a hundred principal and seven subsidiary ones'. I do not know if this number correlates with any listing of the *Rgyud*-sections in the Tibetan canon or with any other non-Indian enumeration.⁴³

The *Kālivilāsa Tantra*⁴⁴ is a late Hindu text, whose age has not been determined; from its style I would think we might safely place it between the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries. It is very popular among non-tantric Brahmins in Bengal, and it sounds a note hostile to left-handed rites which were equally popular with the non-Brahmin tantric groups of Bengal. The text condemns the ritualistic use of women, wine, etc., and says that the tantras enjoining left-handed ritual are 'prohibited in our era' (*kalau varjitāni*). The *Kālivilāsa*, quoting the *Mahāsiddhasarasvatī Tantra*,⁴⁵ says that the tantras of the Āśvakrānta region, i.e. the region from the Vindhya mountains northward including Nepal, Tibet, etc., were promulgated to confuse the hypocrites (*pāṣaṇḍa*) and the heretics. Quoting the *Kulārṇava Tantra*, the text says Mahādeva (Śiva) spoke of the *kaula*-rites (the left-handed rites of the Āśvakrānta region) 'lest all men should get liberated (i.e. prematurely)'—which is a rather insidious statement against left-handed forms of tantric practice, in a tantric text of the right-handed tradition.

The next quotation is from the famous *Karpurādistotram*, a

Hindu tantric work which has given much pain to non-tantric Hindus. The work is fairly old; though Avalon⁴⁶ did not try to establish any date, I would place it between the ninth and eleventh centuries; its style bears marked similarity to that of the *Saundaryalaharī* traditionally ascribed to, but certainly not much more recent than Śaṃkarācārya (eighth century); the latter inspired a lot of poetical piety among tantrics and non-tantrics in the following two or three centuries, and I think this work can be safely classed as belonging to this category. It has been extremely popular in Bengal and Assam up to this day. Of all the major Hindu Śākta tantras, this one is the most radically 'left-handed'. Verse 16 says:⁴⁷ 'Whosoever on Tuesday midnight . . . makes offering but once with devotion of a hair of his Śakti in the cremation ground, becomes a great poet, a Lord of the earth, and goes forth mounted on an elephant.' Now the commentator explains this passage as '(he who) offers a pubic hair of his Śakti with its root'—*ritualem post copulationem semine suo unctam*.⁴⁸ In a subcommentary⁴⁹ called *Rahasyārthasādhikā* (i.e., aid to the hidden meaning [of the *Karpurādistotra*]), Vimalānanda Svāmī says that this refers to 'Mahācīna—sādhana' and to the *sādhana* (mode of worship) of the Goddess Mahānīlā who is worshipped in that region. This note—which is not called for by the text—would corroborate my previous suggestion: a text which expatiates left-handed rites will usually be given a metaphorical ('afferent' in my terminology) interpretation by an orthodox Hindu commentator; but if the text is so overtly left-handed that no such interpretation is possible, the doctrine is made to lie outside India—and Mahācīna is a sort of scapegoat. Once this is done, there are no scruples about putting it thickly, i.e. *yonī-śīśna-galita-bija-yuktaṃ samūlaṃ cikuraṃ*, *ibid.*, 'radice extirpatem capillam cum semine membro virile pudendoque muliebri ablata, sc. qui offert.'

The *Kaulāvalinirṇaya*⁵⁰ must be a late text (about sixteenth century), as it quotes from almost all the well-known Hindu tantras including the *Karpurādistotra*. The text identifies Tārā with the somewhat uncanny Hindu-Buddhist goddess Chinna-mastā, 'Split-Head', the goddess who holds her own chopped-off

heads (two of them) in her hands, blood gushing forth from her decapitated trunk, which she catches with her mouths thus supported by her hands. Verse 54 says 'he who is desirous of wealth should meditate through *japa*-repetition of the mantra on the Vidyā (i.e. Tārā, Chinnamastā) through the ritualistic union with the supreme woman (*parayoṣit*—either the consecrated Śakti, or, literally, a woman married to another man; the latter interpretation being the one given by the opponents of the tantric tradition), emitting his semen in the 'creeper-mood' (*latābhāva*—compounds with *latā*—'creeper', as first constituent always indicate left-handed rites, the derived meaning being the (consecrated) woman who embraces the adept like a creeper, 'he, the best of the adepts; let him ceaselessly do *japa* of his mantra for the sake of obtaining *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, thus Tārā grants quick success in the Cīna-method'.⁵¹

This is a typical instance of what I have come to regard as a pervasive convention: the methods of 'Cīna', *Mahācīna* and 'Bhoṭa'—the terms seem to be used interchangeably in these texts—are conducive to all kinds of success *except* that of total liberation; in this verse there is the most perfect statement of the convention: *kāma*—creature comforts; *artha*—secular success; *dharma*—religious merit leading to better rebirth, but not '*mokṣa*', the supreme human goal—are granted by the votary of the 'Cīna', etc., methods.

Verse 59 repeats the proposition expressly for Chinnamastā: 'in the method of *Mahācīna*, the goddess Chinnamastā bestows success'.⁵²

The most outstanding purely Buddhist text relevant to our topic is the *Sādhana-mālā*, a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit classic. The oldest manuscript is of the year A.D. 1167 as the colophon shows.⁵³ The *Sādhana-mālā* has two *sādhana*s (ritualistic procedures) dedicated to the goddess *Mahācīnatārā*, and two *dhyāna*s (meditations), one in prose and one in verse, describing the goddess in identical form.⁵⁴ *Sādhana-mālā* No. 127 describes her thus: 'she stands in the *pratyālīḍha* posture (i.e. with one leg straight, the other one slightly bent), is awe-inspiring, has a garland of heads hanging from her neck, is short and has a protruding belly; of terrible

looks, her complexion is like that of the blue lotus; she is three-eyed, one-faced, celestial, and laughs terribly; in a pleasantly excited mood (*suprahr̥ṣṭā*—in the mood of erotic excitement), she stands on a corpse, is decked with an eightfold snake-ornament, has red, round eyes, wears garments of tigerskin around her loins, is in youthful bloom, is endowed with the five auspicious *mudrās* (here postures, i.e. counting her four hand gestures, and her bodily posture as the fifth), and has a lolling tongue; she is most terrible, appearing fierce with her bare fangs, carries the sword and the *kartrī* (in the classical idiom *kartarī*—a knife) in her two right hands, and the lotus and skull in her two left hands; whose crown consisting of one chignon is brown and fiery and is adorned with the image of Akṣobhya.⁵⁵ This is the *Sāḍhanā* of Mahācīnatārā.' According to the colophon,⁵⁶ the *Sāḍhanā* of Mahācīnatārā was restored from a tantra called the *Mahācīnatāntra*, and is attributed to Śāsvatavajra.

The Hindus took over this goddess into their later pantheon; the *Tārārahasyā* of Brahmānanda who taught in the sixteenth century, and the *Tantrasāra* of Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, of still more recent origin, contain iconographical descriptions of Tārā that are almost literally identical with that of Mahācīnatārā just quoted. By that time, the distinction between the Hindu goddess Tārā, wife of Śiva, and her Buddhist namesake had become completely blurred—if indeed it was ever rigidly adhered to. The two Hindu texts do not mention Mahācīna, etc., the originally alleged provenance of the goddess having either been forgotten or ignored.

Sāḍhanāmālā No. 141 describes the worship of the goddess Ekajaṭā (lit: 'having one chignon'), so do a few more *sāḍhanās* in this collection. The colophon of *sāḍhanā* 141, however, contains the cryptic words '*Āryanāgārjunapādaiḥ Bhoṭesūddhṛtam iti*', which B. Bhattacharya⁵⁷ renders 'restored from Tibet by Ārya Nāgārjuna', not the author of the *Mādhyamika-Kārikā*, but the famous Siddha from among the eighty-four Vajrayāṇa Buddhist sorcerer-saints, to whom many *sāḍhanās* are attributed.

The last text I want to adduce here seems to be the most

complete Hindu statement of tantric topics pertaining to Tibet, etc.; from among the extant Hindu tantric works (i.e. disregarding the aforesaid *Mahācīnatāntra*, which is not known to be extant) the *Śaktisaṅgama-Tantra* contains a whole chapter captioned *Mahācīna-krama* 'the Method of Mahācīna'.

Śāktas all over India regard the *Śaktisaṅgama* as an extremely important text, and its popularity ranks second perhaps only to the *Mahānirvāṇa*. The text is fairly old—I would place it in the eighth to ninth century on some inner evidence: first, there is in it much preoccupation with Vajrayāna Buddhist terminology, quite a few mantras occur in the *Guhyasamāja* and other Vajrayāna works. We have '*vajrapuspeṇa juhuyāt*' ('he should sacrifice by means of the *vajra*-flower') in the 18th Paṭala, No. 17, which presupposes the entire notion of libations based on the adept's identification with *vajra*-hood; or '*vairocanāṣṭakam pūjya tataḥ padmāntakān yajet*' in the 15th Paṭala, No. 38 ('having worshipped the eight forms of Vairocana he should offer sacrifice to the ones with '*-padmā*' at the end of their names i.e. the goddesses Manipadmā, Vajrapadmā, etc.); or again '*śūlarājā mahākṛūra sarvabhūtapriyaṃkara, siddhiṃ saṃkalpitaṃ dehi vajraśūla namo'stu te*', 68th Paṭala, No. 18, i.e. 'O king with the trident (i.e. Śiva), great terrible one, bestowing favours on all the *bhūtas* (demons, etc.), give the desired success, *Vajra*-trident holder, be praised.' This one is particularly interesting, as it shows a combination of Hindu and Buddhist elements of equal power. Hence it seems the Vajrayāna literature was either contemporary with or still greatly in vogue at the time this tantra was composed, which would not be the case later than A.D. 1000; on the other hand, its doctrines are deeply influenced by the monistic interpretation of Śāktism initiated by Śaṃkarācārya and his disciples (eighth century), hence I think it is quite justifiable to place it in between A.D. 900 and 1000. The *Śaktisaṅgama* is a large work and three-fourths of its total bulk has been published so far.⁵⁸

I am giving a free rendering of the '*Mahācīna-krama* section in the *Śaktisaṅgama*, which is contained in the Second Book, *Tārākhaṇḍa*, Vol. XCI, G.O.S., p. 104 ff.⁵⁹: The Goddess said to

Śiva: 'I desire to know the method of Mahācīna.' Śiva then replied: 'O Tārā, by the method of Mahācīna results are quickly obtained; Brahmā-Cīna, the celestial Cīna, the heroic Cīna, Mahācīna, and Cīna, these are the five sections or regions; the method of these has been described in two manners, as "*sakala*" (with divisions), and as "*niṣkala*" (undivided). That which is *sakala* is Buddhist, that which is *niṣkala* is Brahmin in its application.' Then Śiva seems reluctant to continue with the instruction, as this knowledge is not even obtainable by the *devas*, *yakṣas*, by saints and great scholars, etc. The goddess thereupon implores Śiva to be merciful and to reveal it nevertheless, and moved by her entreaties Śiva consents and continues. The initial portions of the *Mahācīnakrama* are pretty much the same as usual meditative procedure: a bath must be taken, the mind must be purified through '*japa*', etc., *tarpana* (offering of water) has to be made, clean raiments have to be donned; then, 'he should constantly worship the goddess, having bathed and having taken food (as contrasted to non-tantric procedures where fasting is enjoined previous to formal worship). At midnight he should bring his sacrifice through *mantra* (or, accompanied by the proper *mantra*, "*baḷiṃ mantreṇa dāpayet*", v. 28). Never should he dislike women, especially not those who participate in the ritual, and having entered the place for "*japa*", he should perform a great number of "*japa-s*". The adept should go to the woman, touch her, look at her, O Thou with the Gem in the Crest, he should eat betel-nuts and other edible ingredients (i.e. used for the ritual); and, having eaten meat, fish, curds, honey, and drunk wine as well as the other prescribed edible she should proceed with his *japa*. In this *Mahācīna*-method there is no rule about the directions (i.e. about which direction the aspirant has to face, etc.), nor about time, nor about the posture, etc., nor is there any rule for the choice of time for "*japa*", nor for invocation and sacrifice. The rules are made according to his own liking in this *sādhana* of the great *mantra*, with regard to the garments worn, the posture, the general arrangements, the touching and non-touching of lustral water. And, O Queen of the Gods, he should anoint his body with oil,

should always chew betel (*tāmbulaṃ bhakṣayet sadā*), and should dress in all sorts of garments (as he pleases). He should undertake the *mantra*-bath (i.e. he should meditate on the *mantra* in lieu of any ritual, "*mantra-snānaṃ caret*"), should always take refuge in me. This, O Goddess, shall be the sage's bath according to the method of Mahācīna (*mahācīnakrame devī viprasnānamidam bhavet*). He should keep his mind free from apperceptions, i.e. in the state of "*nirvikalpa*" (*nirvikalpamanascaret*), he should worship using incense, white and ruby-coloured lotus leaves, vilva blossoms (or rather "the pericarp leaves of the vilva" as opposed to the green leaves of the vilva tree), and bherukā leaves, etc., but he should avoid (the use of) the (otherwise auspicious) tulsī leaf.⁶⁰ He should further avoid the vilva leaf—there is no contradiction here; he should use the vilva blossom, but should not use the leaf of the vilva tree, though I don't see why. It would be more natural if the text read "*arcayet*" instead of "*varjayet*", e.g. "*varjayed-vilvapātrañca*", vs. 37), and he should diligently avoid the abstention from drinking ("*maru*", a fast where no liquid is taken). He should not harbour any kind of (sectarian) malice, should not take the name of Hari (Viṣṇu), and should not touch the tulsī leaf. He should always drink wine, O goddess, and should always demean himself like the rutting elephant (or "like Caṇḍāla women", *matangiḃhir vihāravān*; low-caste women are said to be particularly lascivious and given to amorous demeanour); he should, O goddess, do *japam* with singular attention.⁶¹

'... the threefold horizontal lines of fine sandel paste mixed with *kesara* (*Rottleria Tinctoria*) seeds (*kucandanaṃ tripundraṃ ca tataḥ sakesaraṃ śive*, vs. 44) spread on his forehead, O Śiva, wearing a garland of skulls around his neck and the skull-bowl in his hand, he who is given to this *ācāra* (discipline) becomes a Mahācīnite (*Mahācīnakramī*, one following the *Mahācīna* method); always in a joyful mood, always serving the devotees, he wears ... (here follows a lengthy enumeration of other articles, rosaries, etc.).' The goddess then expresses her doubts as to whether such rites are beneficent, and how Brahmins can practise them, these rites being obviously non-Vedic (*vedavihīnaśca ye dharmā* verse 49). In

reply to this query of his spouse, Śiva winds up saying that Brahmins—or, as I understand it, people who insist on Brahmin ritual—are not entitled to these (*Mahācīna*) rites in this age (*kalau tatra niṣiddhaṃ syādbrāhmanānāṃ Maheśvari*, verse 50.) Those who follow the *Cīna* (identical with *Mahācīna*) rites are dear to him, if they perform their ablutions in the manner indicated earlier, and if they eat and enjoy the ingredients designed by him for the rite (*sarvameva hṛdaṃbhoje mayi sarvam pratiṣṭhitam*, verse 57). 'Cherishing these attitudes in his heart, his mind ever directed towards their fulfilment, abandoning any dualistic attitude, he becomes Lord of all *siddhis* (spiritual powers); Brahmā and Vasiṣṭha, as well as the other great seers, they all worship in the undivided method (i.e. the *Mahācīna-krama*) at all times. The worshippers of Tārā, O great goddess, they are the true Brahmins; in this age the great Brahma-knowledge is indeed hard to attain.'⁶² This, incidentally, seems to suggest that the rites called 'undivided' (*niṣkala*) should be called Brahmanical—who could be more Brahmin-like than Brahmā the demiurge and Vasiṣṭha—and this in spite of the fact that their origin be located in Tibet.

Summarizing this chapter, we would have to say that mutual references in Indian and Tibetan texts are quite disparate. Whereas the Tibetans have looked to India as the *Phags Yul* (*Āryadeśa*) 'the Noble Land', not only as the birthplace of the Buddha, but as the locus of the original teaching, as the actual or stipulated centre of Tibetan culture, there is no reciprocity of any sort. Historiography being a virtually non-existent genre in the Indian tradition, tracts of an historical or quasi-historical character could hardly have gained the prestige of religious writings. The Tibetan 'Histories' of Buston and Tārānātha are religious histories; just as the Chinese pilgrims in India were solely concerned with places of pilgrimage and with Buddhist topography, Tibetan monks and laymen who visited India through the ages did so only as pilgrims to the shrines of their faith. With the exception of Mount Kailāsa in Tibet, there is no locality on the northern side of the Himālayas which would be of any interest to the Indian pilgrim. Thus, whereas it may be difficult to find any Tibetan text which does not mention India

one way or the other, we have to thumb through tomes of Indian religious literature to find references to Tibet. Even these references, as was shown in this chapter, are of a non-geographical, quasi-mythical character. Any place or region located to the north of the Himālayas seems to stand for the highly esoteric, slightly uncanny, potentially unorthodox, heretical: whether it is Bhoṭa, Mahācīna, or Cīnadesa, the actual location of those regions is of no concern to the Indian hagiographer, not even to the tantric.

There is, however, a strong fusion of Tibetan and Indian elements in tantric literature, apparently both Buddhist and Hindu. Names and epithets of deities both male and female have Indian or Tibetan provenience, and in many cases it is hard to say where a god or a goddess originated. It is almost impossible to study this situation diachronically because in the final analysis even purely Tibetan gods and goddesses may have some sort of Indian background. The village deities of the pre-Aryans in India never died out. There is a strong tendency to banish gods, teachings, and other religious configurations, which oppose the general feeling of orthodoxy in India, and to place them beyond the mountains, possibly where they can cause no mischief. The erotocentric sādhanā called *Cīnācāra* probably got its name due to this tendency; types of religious exercise which could not be accommodated in the framework of Indian *sādhanā* were thus extrapolated into an inaccessible region.

We shall see in the next chapter how sanctuary topography assimilates extraneous elements, and how it cuts across the boundary lines in a tentative or potential fashion.

NOTES

¹ Monier Williams, p. 412, rounds it up: 'The central one of the seven continents surrounding Mount Meru (India in Buddhist texts named thus either from the Jambu trees abounding in it, or from an enormous Jambu tree on Mount Meru visible like a standard to the whole continent).' The Jambu tree is the *Eugenia Jambolana*, i.e. the Indian rose-apple tree.

day and a half, so the total *pradakṣiṇā* lasts four and a half days. On the other side of Mount Kailāsa there is another lake only slightly smaller than Manasarovar; it is called *Rakkastal* by the Hindu pilgrims, and I think it is a local Kumaoni variety of *Rākṣastala*, 'lake of the *rākṣasas*' or demons; the pilgrims do not go near that lake, as its water is thought to be inauspicious (hence the name?); they only cast a glance *bandanī nazar*, 'the glance of veneration', and fold their hands; they are advised not to look at it more often than just that one instant.

There is no built-in theory, in tantric written tradition or in tantric oral lore, which would establish a hierarchy of thematic importance: these decisions seem to be left to the individual tantric. The scholar, I believe, cannot do much more than rely on some sort of intuition by analogy: in most Indian religious traditions there is such a hierarchy in the gamut of religious exercise (*sādhana*). Meditation first, belief in the theological framework—with the devotional (*bhakti*) schools this might stand first—then ancillary exercises, then perhaps charity, then study and reading. The Upaniṣad enjoins 'listening, cogitating, meditating' *śrotavyaṃ mantavyaṃ nididhyāsitavyaṃ* in this order, and the general understanding is that 'listening' is the least important, 'meditation' the most important step. It is by no means certain that this orthodox hierarchy holds for tantrism. Ritual of all sorts seems so much more important in tantrism than it does in non-tantric literature of the same level of sophistication, that it seems quite possible that tantric masters did regard activities like pilgrimage and circumambulation to be as nuclear to the process as, say, deep meditation. If the proportion of textual injunction can be a guide, these activities, which may be regarded at the most as accessories to the religious life, by non-tantrics, have not been given any shorter shrift than meditation proper. Just how central these activities are to the practising and succeeding tantric we are in no position to say; yet, we cannot omit them in a survey of the tantric tradition just because most modernistically oriented or 'philosophically' inclined students and votaries of a religion may regard them as marginal, or even inferior, pursuits.

emotional patterns of fear, awe, devotion, in fact all the *rāgas* or passions, provide the purpose of *mantra* as fulfilment of the need of propitiation, and as belief in the efficacy of propitiation.

Acquisition is the most widely ramified purpose of *mantra*: acquisition of things which are thought to be unobtainable or not so easily attainable through secular or other religious efforts; in short, acquisition of powers of control, which includes remedies, prophylaxes, all the occult *siddhi*-s and magical skills, and the tantric and yogic '*śaṭkarma*'.³⁷

The most sophisticated purpose *mantra* can have is what I call identification or introjection. It fits every type of religious consummation envisaged in indocentric traditions, regardless of such vast doctrinary differences as between Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The most hallowed *mantra* of the Vedānta tradition is the *mahā-vākyam* or great dictum of the Upaniṣad, establishing identity of the individual with the cosmic soul *aham brahmāsmi*, 'I am Brahman'; and the meditational key-mantra of Vajrayāna Buddhism is *Om śūnyatā-jñāna-vajra-svabhāvako 'ham*, 'I am of the nature of the *vajra* through the intuition of *śūnya*'; of the Hindu tantrics of the Śākta tradition *mantric* propositions establishing identity with the goddess, like *aham devī na cānyosmi*, 'I am the Goddess, none else'. The oldest and most tenacious form of *mantric* identification is the process of *bhūtaśuddhi*, 'purification of the elements', which is an obligatory observance for such disparate worshippers as the vedic priest and the Buddhist tantric. The *Mantramahodadhi* calls it a rite preliminary to the worship of a *deva*,³⁸ but this is misleading as it covers only the formal, and in this context the least important, aspect of *bhūtaśuddhi*. It is actually a step-by-step dissolution of grosser into subtler elements in the cosmographical hierarchy, and culminates in a visualized merger with whatever supreme being or state the particular tradition postulates. In this rite, which is a congeries of thoroughly standardized *mantras* and *mudrās*, a process of gradual involution is thought to take place whereby at first the body is identified with its various elementary sources; earth is associated with the sense of smell, water with taste, fire with sight, air with touch, and ether with

sound: these individual functions of the subtle body (*liṅgaśarīra*) are 'merged', one by one, into their sources, the practitant then identifies the last element (ether) with the element-principle (*tanmātra*), sound, and with the ego (*ahaṃkāra*), the ego with *mahat* (the cognitive totum of the cosmos), and this into *prākṛti* (total nature); finally *prākṛti* is identified with the Brahman, the supreme absolute neutral deity. Then, to eradicate the negative, all sins are driven out through a special *mantra* aimed at the sins anthropomorphically visualized as a black man or another uncanny phantom; thus, partial, gradual, progressive merger leading to the final identification which is tantamount with the target of each tradition respectively is the ultimate purpose of *mantra*: and as it has doctrinal sanction as a means to realize the aim of the teaching, it is its most hallowed purpose. For even the humblest sorcerer who uses *mantra* for propitiation or for acquisition will readily admit his shortcoming—at least in India; he will emend, if pressed to do so, that the actual purpose of *mantra* ought to be something close to what I called identification, or introjection.

Next we have to look into the origin of the *mantra*; although the two overlap, this will have to be studied from a mythological and from a literary angle: outside these two, there is no locus where *mantras* originate. In the case of *dhāraṇīs* and *kavacas*, this is relatively easy: they are abbreviations of longer passages, contractions of longer canonical passages, of *sūtras* in the case of Buddhist *dhāraṇīs*. The tendency to contract passages of canonical literature into indefinitely smaller units seems to me to rest upon the ancient Indian scholastics' love of succinctness in spite of the risk of opacity; a famous adage ascribed to a number of teachers, mythical and historical, like Vyāsa, Śuka, Gauḍapāda, etc., says the commentators would rather sacrifice their own sons than add a single syllable in elucidation of what they feel is the shortest possible statement. Also, it appears to me as though this succinctness creates precisely the awe and the numinous feeling that goes with the use of *mantra*. *Mantras* of unambiguous origin are therefore the *dhāraṇī*-like *mantras* like the *Gāyatrī*, the *mahāvākyam*-s of the Upaniṣads, the Vajrayāna formula quoted earlier, and the like.

common synonym for Śiva; why *ra* is *prākṛti* is not quite so evident—it may be due to the phonetic dominance of the 'r' sound in the word *prākṛti* itself, or it may be a conscious or an unconscious synonym of *prākṛti* having *ra* as initial; thus *rā* means 'giving', 'gold', 'yielding in abundance, i.e. nature'; it also means 'amorous play', one of the main functions of *Prākṛti* or nature.

The obvious parallel in occidental, especially in neo-Platonic, thought is the 'music of the spheres', which some mystics or other specially gifted individuals can 'hear'.

Many more hypotheses might be worked out, but they would have to come from psychologists or theologians; psychologists might tell us 'how' *mantras* come about in a manner analogous to 'how' expletives come about or even 'how' poetry emerges; and the theologian might show us by way of axiomatic deductions that the orthodox mantric devotees' claim to *mantra* being revealed is justified in a theological context.

As to the construction of *mantra* within the textual framework the material is vast. Every tantric text, in all the three religions inculcating *mantra*, abounds in instructions about the correct form and pronunciation of the *mantra*; in fact, these instructions seem to be obligatory in every tantric text, although this is not directly enjoined in any canonical text I have seen.

There are two ways in which instructions about how to arrive at a *mantra* are given: the direct way, in which the *mantra* is simply listed in the text; and the indirect way, in which the instruction is couched in heuristic propositions using circumlocutory terms for *mantra*-constituents and *bījas* which are known only to the initiate or to scholars conversant with tantric terminology. These instructions are therefore in *sandhābhāṣā*, and they are the only *sandhā*-passages in *mantric* instructions of any kind; that is to say, instructions about *dhārāṇi*, *γāmala*, *kavaca*, *yantra*, and *maṇḍala*, are not couched in intentional language. The reason for this seems to be that secrecy attaches only to the *mantra* itself in a degree comparable to instructions on esoteric practices, especially of the left-handed variety. *Mantra* loses its power if revealed to the non-initiate.

The *sandhā*-terminology that has to be understood in these instructions is quite limited; it is the most frequent *bījas* that have invariable *sandhā*-names, and parts of the written letters constituting the *bija*. I am listing the most important ones:

- OM is called *praṇava*, *tāra*, *setu*, *bridge*, etc.
 HRĪM is called 'māyā-bija'
 RĀM is called 'vahni' (fire, syn. of Agni), 'rakta' ('red')
 HŪM is called 'kūrca' ('bundles', 'heap')
 AIM is called 'vahnijāyā' (i.e. wife of Agni—the Vedic termination mantra 'svāhā' is said to be the exoteric name of Agni's consort); 'vāgbhāva' ('she of speech-existence'), 'vahni-kāntā' ('beloved of Agni')
 KLĪM is called 'kāma-bija' (i.e. *bija* of Cupid), but more often simply 'kāma' or any of its synonyms (*madana*, *manmatha*, *ratipati*)
 KRĪM is called 'ādyā' (incipient)⁵¹ and also *Kālī-bija*
 ŚRĪM is called 'Lakṣmī-bija', or simply 'Lakṣmī'⁵²
 HUM is called 'varma' ('warrior')
 PHAṬ is called 'astra' (weapon, already discussed)
 EM is called *yonī-bija* ('womb-bija')

Each deity has his or her *bija*, which is used in the worship of the deity of whose total *mantra* it is a component part.

There is a vast number of other *bījas*, some of which are formed, as previously indicated, by the first letters of the name of the respective deity, i.e. *GAM* for Gaṇeśa, *DUM* for Durgā, etc.

I shall now quote two typical paradigms of *sandhā*-instruction for the formation of *mantras*, one from Hindu and one from Buddhist lore:

a) (Hindu): 'placing the lord of life (*prāṇeśa*) on the fiery one (*taijasa*) and adding to it *bheruṇḍa* (name of an attendant of the Goddess *Kālī*) and the *bindu* (dot on the *anunāsikā* symbol) the first *bija* is formed; after this, proceed to the second *bija*: by placing the dawn (*sandyhā*, intentional for *sa*) on the red one (*rakta*, intentional for *ra*) and adding to it the left eye (*vāmanetra*, intentional for *i*) and the *bindu*, the second *bija* is formed; now listen (to the formation of) the third *bija*: the Lord of the born things (*prajāpati*, intentional for *ka*) is put upon the light (*dīpa*,

the term *paśu* (animal), no doubt derogatorily used in this scheme, derives its connotation from the south Indian Śaivites, where the triad is 'the Lord, the bound-one, the fetter' (*pati-paśu-pāśa*), the folk-etymology¹ connecting *paśu* (animal) with *pāśa* (fetter, bond rope) is pervasive in later religious literature, not only in the south. The epithet Lord of *Paśu-s* (*Paśupati*) for Śiva is very old, and I have little doubt that the original term had nothing disparaging about it.

The *Rudrayāmala*, one of the most reliable treatises on Hindu tantrism, distinguished three types of tantric *sādhana*, adding '*kulācāra*' (the practice of the tantric in-group) to right- and left-handed worship. It enjoins 'in the morning the bath and the *sandhyā* are performed, and at daytime *japam* is done, a woollen seat is to be used, and milk and sugar are to be eaten, the *rudrākṣa* rosary is used, a plate of earthenware (lit. stone) (is made and used). One's own wife (only) is enjoyed—this is right-handed practice.² The understanding is, however, that one's own wife (and no one else) should be enjoyed if celibacy cannot be kept—for continence ranks higher than legitimate indulgence.

Left-handed practice is considerably less philistine; it enjoins what is a real inversion of the injunctions for right-handed practice: 'I shall proclaim left-handed practice, the supreme *sādhana* of Durgā; following which the adept obtains *siddhi* speedily in this *Kali*-age. The rosary should be made of human teeth, the bowl (or plate) of a man's skull; the seat of *siddha*-skin, the bracelet of woman's hair. The sacrificial ingredients saturated with wine, meat, etc., are to be eaten, o beloved. His solid food is young fish, etc., the *mudrā* (here gesture) is the "Viṇā-sound"—(*viṇā-rava*) gesture (possibly the *viṇā-mudrā* usually given to the goddess Sarasvatī Viṇāpāṇī ("Holder of the Viṇā"). Ritualistic intercourse is held with a woman who is not one's wife (the literal translation "another's wife", though lexicographically correct, may be a distortion of anti-tantric writers and interpreters), and women of all castes are equally eligible. Thus is left-handed practice described which bestows all *siddhis*, o Benign Goddess."³

Left-handed rites defy the usual time-schedules; worship can

be done at any time, preferably at midnight (when other worship is more or less avoided); there is no rule about the time for bathing and evacuating. There are no caste-restrictions all castes are viewed alike. Yet there is certainly an anti-Brahmin undertone in these instructions—very few Brahmins would undertake *vāmācāra* worship unless they were prepared to court complete ostracism. In Mahārāṣṭra, even the term Śākta has an unpleasant connotation; *vāmācāra* is identical with gross fornication—not only in Marāṭhī usage but virtually in all languages with the exception of those spoken in regions of tantric predominance (Bengal, Assam, Kerala—although even there the Hindu Renaissance is gradually effecting a pejorization of the terms).

The *kulācāra*, the third division according to the *Rudrayāmala*, is a more opaque matter. It seems to unite and transcend both the right- and the left-handed traditions in a sort of dialectical synthesis. Some authors identify *kulācāra* with *Rājayoga*,⁴ though a *Rājayoga* with a left-handed slant. The text is terse 'I shall now propound *kulācāra* performed by the best yogins: if one worships always and everywhere the *kula*-woman, the *kulaguru*, and the *kula*-goddess, o Great Goddess, this is called *kulācāra*.'⁵

Now the 'three dispositions' are usually—though not always—allocated to the three types of worship. The *Kālivilāsa Tantra* says 'Listen to the three dispositions, o Devī, they are classified as the divine (*divyabhāva*), the heroic (*vīrabhāva*), and the animal-like (*paśubhāva*). The first is god-like, the second is intensely exciting, the third is always pure and shining white.'⁶ Notice that the animal-like disposition is not being disparaged; the categories seem almost value-free, and if this was really meant to be so, then it was an intellectual achievement of no mean order. However, all texts do not display this degree of sophistication—there is a derogatory tone in the more frequent evaluations of a hierarchical order, as in 'the disposition, o Lord, is threefold—*divya*, *vīra*, and *paśu*; the first (i.e. the *divyabhāva*) is the best, giving total perfection, the second (i.e. *vīrabhāva*) is mediocre, the third (*paśubhāva*) is totally objectionable'.⁷ The Hindu tantric tradition assumes that every kind of worship—i.e. Vedic, tantric, or heretical—falls under

orthodox forms of yoga—but tantrism is anathema and felt to be downright scandalous by the orthodox paṇḍits, especially where left-handed rites are involved. The paṇḍit's argument against these rites runs somewhat like this: the fact that a set of instructions is given in Sanskrit does not in itself guarantee that these are valid and emulable instructions. If a book or a chapter starts: 'Śiva says' or 'the Devī says', this does not guarantee that it has any canonical status whatever. It is only the consensus of learned, orthodox (i.e. Vedic, Brahmanical opinion), and the tradition of every specific opinion which makes a text acceptable as either *śruti* or *smṛti*.

All this, from the *vīra*, i.e. the left-handed 'hero's' viewpoint, is the talk of the *paśu*. From the orthodox Brahmin viewpoint the tantric is a self-appointed *vīra*, though it is he who really is a *paśu* who gives his passions free play. The controversy is semantic yet fundamental and is bound to stay.

Before we proceed, let us repeat that the *vīra* considers both the Vedic and the Patāñjala yoga procedure as *paśu*—hence the injunction to practise *prāṇāyāma* (breath control,) ²¹ one of the salient features of Patāñjali's course, is included in the practices incumbent on one who is still a *paśu*. The *vīra* is explicit about the Vedic observance being *paśubhāva*, but he does not mention Patāñjali or orthodox yoga. It seems to me that tantric authors wanted to have an ally in Patāñjali's followers as well as in *Haṭha-yoga*—and although tantric apologetics constantly assert the conformity of tantric with Vedic injunctions, they know they have already antagonized the Vedic traditionalists so strongly that it hardly matters if they describe their observances as *paśu*-ritual.

The Buddha then continues his instruction to the Brahmin sage: 'In the next higher stage, the body begins to tremble; this is the middling stage. In the last, the highest stage, the body of the contemplative begins to levitate. In this manner, through the fruition of *prāṇāyāma*, the worshipper becomes a (true) yogi. Thereupon he should undergo a vow of silence, and should meditate in solitude on Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā, etc., and should imagine that they are as fickle as the wind. Then the *sādhaka* should establish his mind in the primordial Śakti, who is of the

essence of cognition (*citta*). Then the *sādhaka* should assume the attitude of the great *vīra* and should worship the Śakti-circle, the Vaiṣṇava-circle, the nine planets, and the supreme goddess of the *kula* (*Kulakātyāyanī*). She is the foundation of intuitive wisdom (*jñāna*) and of bliss (*ānanda*). She is that eighteen-armed goddess Raudrī, who is fond of mountain-like heaps of wine and meat. All the great gods obtained their power of manifestation, preservation, and destruction through the grace of that *Magna Mater*, and she can be obtained only through the *vīra-sāadhanā* which crystallizes in *cīnācāra*. One who thus proceeds obtains the occult power of attraction in one month, in two months he becomes as knowledgeable and learned as Brhaspati (the Vedic god of speech, knowledge, and the sacerdotal skills), after four months the practicant becomes as powerful as the Lords of the Directions, after six months he becomes like Cupid (note the high rank sexual attractiveness and success is given in this discipline), after six months he is as powerful as Rudra (Śiva) himself. In six months, a Brahmin, if united with a Śakti, can become a full-fledged yogi.'

The last statement is quite revealing: *śakti-sahita* may of course mean 'together with Śakti' in the sense of 'through the offices of Śakti', i.e. the goddess, whom he worships, *Sahita*—also having instrumental import. I don't think that this is implied, but simply that he does *cīnācāra* or *vīra-sāadhanā* which involves worship in union with *śakti*—i.e. in *yuganaddha*, as the exact parallel to the Buddhist Vajrayāna's union with the *mudrā* (*phyag rgya*). Why a 'Brahmin'? Brahmins are the main target of the *paśu*-parlance. They are often excluded from tantric *sāadhanā* altogether—which works both ways, as the orthodox Brahmin would not stoop to such things as *vīrācāra*—'left-handed' (*vāmācara*) is a term of overt abuse for all orthodox Hindus. Now unless Brahmin here means just a learned or well-disposed person in general—a virtuous man much in the sense the Buddha uses the term in the Pāli canon—it must be an expression of the tantric proselytizing zeal which I found to be quite subtle. 'Even Brahmins are accepted'—a concession of no mean importance—for in a way the Brahmin *qua* Brahmin is the arch-foe of the tantrics: he has usurped the monopoly of Vedic ritual and of

I shall, however, try an hypothetical explanation: the Buddhist tantric's concern is purely esoteric, his method experimental. He has no stake in ritual *per se*, and the notion of sacrificial oblation and libation means little if anything to him. His preceptors taught the spiritual and magical potentiality of the control of breath, thought, and sperm, and the importance of their retention. For the Hindu, on the other hand, the notion of ritualistic sacrifice is all-important. In fact, the idea of sacrifice (*yajña*) being at the base of every religious act has remained focal in Hinduism, though the interpretations have changed. Yet, just as the Upaniṣads were a quasi-philosophical rendition of the *saṃhitā* portion of the Veda, the tantras provide a psychological or therapeutical interpretation, if you wish, of the Vedic and Upaniṣadic lore. The ritualistic ideal of the Hindu is abandoning, renouncing, giving up of all the ingredients used, at times including one's own life. Nothing is held back, ever so dear and important. The same holds for the Buddhist, no doubt—that the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas renounce is the keynote of the Jātakas and other Buddhist legends—but this giving up is, in his case, bereft of the fundamental notion of ritual; this, from any Buddhist angle, is as it should be, for the Buddha broke away from the Brahmin ritual.

If this be acceptable, then it must follow that no ritualistic ingredient including the ingredient which constitutes the fifth M can be held back—it, too, has to be abandoned into the fire of sacrifice, in whatever manner the fire is conceived. The Hindu tantric's argument would be: if the liquor and the meat and the fish and the parched cereal are given as libations and oblations to the goddess as *kulakuṇḍalinī*, then the fifth ingredient has to be given to the goddess, too, his Śakti being the embodied goddess.

Whether the Buddhist retention or the Hindu emission is more conducive to the achievement of the spiritual postulate—*mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*—is a mute point and cannot be discussed by anyone at all; there are no instruments for comparison. This much seems certain to me, that both practices are, under the laboratory conditions of the yogic training and environment, highly numinogenic, if another neologism be excused; they both engender the intensive,

euphoric, oftentimes hallucinatory and perhaps psycho-pathological feeling which goes with religious experience—or which is religious experience.

I shall conclude with a few quotations which support the practice of the five Ms within the tantric tradition. It must be said that some Hindu tantras do not mention the *pañcamakāra* at all, others hint at them in an opaque manner, whereas at least one important tantra (the *Kālivilāsa*) is directly antagonistic towards left-handed rites culminating in the five Ms; and it has been said in other places that non-tantric Hindu sources deny any merit to the *sādhana* involving any of the five ingredients, but especially wine and woman. Paramahansa Ramakrishna, the famous Bengali saint of the late nineteenth century, used to warn his disciples asking them to stay away from the two great evils, *kāminī kāñcana*, woman and gold, in spite of the fact that he himself had been initiated into tantric *sādhana* by the Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī, a woman-tantric of his day.

'He who worships Caṇḍī (i.e. the goddess) without the five Ms, the four (goods), i.e. long life, knowledge, splendour, and wealth, they perish for him.'⁸⁸

'Liquor, meat, fish, *mudrā*, and copulation, these, o Goddess, are the five Ms, which give the favour of the gods (or which are dear to the gods—this is how Paṇḍit Vaidyarāj interprets it).'⁸⁹

'With liquors, meats, fish, *mudrā* and copulation with women, the great *sadhu* should worship the Mother of the Universe.'⁹⁰

'That liquor which is called "release—giver" in the world, in all actions, that liquor's name, of goddess, is *tīrtham* (i.e. lustral water, or place of pilgrimage; probably connected with the root *tr*, *tar*, for "transcend"), —it is indeed difficult to obtain.'⁹¹

We have now reached the end of the central and the most delicate topic of the tantric tradition. It now remains to be seen how tantrism can be operational as a practised religion. The last

who opposed traditionalism at a time when Indian nationalism came to the fore. And here is one of the chief errors of some of the best modern cultural anthropologists, both Indian and occidental: what they call Sanskritization is in reality a pattern of anti-Sanskritization. The modern swamis around whom throng thousands and thousands of Indians who know some English as well as an increasing number of guffawing occidentals who seek diversion in the mysterious East because they are bored or appalled by the unmysterious West represent the Hindu Renaissance which is largely spurious.

Tabulating twenty-five Hindu and ten Buddhist tantras of a median length of six hundred *ślokas* or other verses, the following averages for various themes emerged:

<i>mantra</i> notation and <i>mantra</i> instruction:	60%
<i>maṇḍala</i> construction and use:	10%
<i>dhyānas</i> for various deities:	10%
preparation of ritualistic ingredients:	5%
amulets, charms, etc.:	3%
the <i>mokṣa</i> -complex proper, including afferent and efferent <i>sandhābhāṣā</i> :	7%

The rest are tantric miscellanies; astrological indications, *phalaśruti*, 'accounts of the gains' with reference to various *sādhana*s, mutual eulogies between the male and the female deities who hold the didactic discourse. The latter are completely stereotype; at the beginning of almost every tantra, Hindu and Buddhist alike, the questioning deity beseeches the questioned one to let out the secret and it requires a considerable amount of pressing until the partner gives in and talks; then the god or the goddess would say that the secrets now to be divulged have never been divulged by anyone or to anyone, but that they were now going to be said due to the great love or admiration, etc., for the other divine partner.

This list does not really conflict with any of the patterns of topics which tantric commentators ascribe to tantric literature—

the topics listed as constituting an *āgama* are so standardized that each specific theme can be covered by any of these topics. No Indian commentator ever gave an estimate or a rule about the proportion which each topic should or did occupy in any given tantric text; this need has simply never been felt and the orthodox Hindu and Buddhist feeling about these things is strictly non-quantitative. Whether a topic occupies two verses in a book of one thousand verses or whether it occupies one-fourth of the whole text does not seem to be of conscious concern to the commentator. The Hindu commentator's terms *śrūyate*, 'a canonical text says', and *smāryate*, 'the non-canonical scripture says', were diffusely applied: a single mention is as good as a hundred mentions. This is an important point to note: what has made the tantras famous in India and among students of Indica and esoterica in general are the erotocentric passages within the redemptive frame—in other words, the passages which utilize erotic imagery, either in *sandhā-bhāṣā* or otherwise, as indicators of an absolutistic, redemptivist teaching. The fact that these passages occupy less than seven per cent of the total bulk of tantric texts seen in diffusion is somewhat disappointing to the unwary philologist reading tantric literature; he has to search for the salient passages, interspersed as they are between awesome masses of other topics of questionable interest for the student of tantric thought proper. These topics are shared with all other genres of religious literature—the epic, the Purāṇas, the *śāstras*. To the tantric commentator, however, all these topics are equally important, at least in theory if not in homiletic practice. It would be both frustrating and misleading to direct any but a marginal interest of large tracts of material thematically shared with other kinds of religious literature in India. If tantrism has anything unique about it, which sets it into relief from other religious writing, the one aspect has to be singled out which is not shared with other texts. This aspect, clearly, is the one that made tantrism both famous and infamous through the ages. I have been trying to make up for the unpardonably antagonistic or apologetic tone of previous students of tantric literature. In so far as they were Indian, their hedging was understandable: anyone, scholar or poet

alike, had to side with the puritan against the hedonist, with India's official culture against everything else. Arthur Avalon, Herbert Guenther, and a few others including myself have tried to state things without chips on our shoulders over a span of fifty years. But then, Avalon, Guenther, and this author were not Indian by birth, in spite of their varying commitments to the tantric tradition.

Whatever the distribution of topics in tantric literature, there can be no doubt, either to the practising tantric or to the analysing scholar, about the target of the tantric tradition. Opponents to tantrism, in India and elsewhere, have put forth as their chief argument the somewhat silly charge that tantrics pretend to be religious in order to indulge in drink and fornication. Silly, because drink and fornication can be relatively easily indulged in, even in India. The late Jay Shankar Prasād, the famous Hindi poet from Banaras, once wrote in a letter to his friend: 'why bother, is sexual intercourse ever unobtainable?' (*maithun durlaḥh kahān?*) No one has to undergo the excessive hardships, the degree of control, the tedium of initiation, of ritualistic perfection, and of minute detail in order to have fun, even in puritan India. No one in his senses would deny the fact that there has been a lot of misuse where pleasure was simply unobtainable; but there has been an equal amount of misuse in the non-tantric tradition. The late M. N. Roy, the keenest perhaps among Indian minds of this century, once told this author: 'The Marwāṛī (member of the Indian merchant caste) washes his abdomen and his body five times a day, following the minutest ritual; and he sucks the poor man's blood with equal vehemence.'

We must give all tantrics the benefit of doubt. This is precisely what India at large has neglected to do. Amongst South Indian Brahmins, particularly of the Śaivite tradition, there is a saying that no one can judge a *sādhu* except Śiva himself; the implication being that the possibility of misuse of the garment is known, but must be politely ignored. A secular government, admittedly, cannot share this attitude, but the tantric's concern here is not governmental or even secular.

What, then, is the final target of tantric *sādhana* and of the tantric life? It is the same as that of all Hindu and Buddhist religion, namely the freedom from the misery of attachment. I deliberately avoid the term worldly existence (*saṃsāra*), because Vajrayāna Buddhism and for that matter all Mahāyāna Buddhism would then have to be counted out; for in it *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are inextricably one. And it does seem that Hindu tantra surreptitiously shares this sentiment with Mahāyāna and much of psychological analysis. I would go even so far as to say that this basic tenet of Mahāyāna Buddhism has been taken over consciously or otherwise by the Hindu tantrics who would have to continue making a speculative distinction between the worldly and the spiritual, *saṃsāra* and *mukti*, the phenomenal (*vyahāra*) and the absolute (*paramārtha*). The method of tantrism is more radical than that of any other system, and the immediate aim of the tantric ritual is to achieve ecstasy. Following Professor M. Eliade, I used the term 'ecstasy' instead of ecstasy. Ecstasy connotes the various experiences described in the contemplative traditions of India and of the countries that were under Indian tutelage in matters of religion. Ecstasy was used as a generic term, subsuming about a dozen Indian terms and their Tibetan equivalents—like *samādhi*, *kaivalya*, and others, each of which branches off into more specific terms which were meant to describe more specific experiences. There is, however, no Indian or Tibetan word which could be called an exact equivalent of either ecstasy or ecstasy, because these terms belong to a descriptive, critical universe of discourse meaningful to the sympathetic but critical outsider. The only Indian term which might justify lexicographical equivocation is *unmāda*, which has, however, a derogatory flavour, because words which use the root *mad* are pathological sememes in Sanskrit and in the vernaculars. Ecstasy would perhaps correspond to such Indian terms as *bhāvanā* or *antarbhāvanā*; these are not pejorative, but they are almost totally colourless.³

The trouble is that the ecstatic theme has been victimized in recent times by fraudulent esoterism of the sort that is rampant in the western world, and in some Indian circles which derive their

stimulus from the lay appreciation of occidental mystery seekers, a process of progressive deterioration through reverse diffusion. Writing about tantrism, or any serious research in esoteric lore, tends to invite the charge of phoniness from the orientalist professional; but then one cannot really desist from important research for fear of this charge. Some of the best scholars are now working with tantric material: G. Tucci, the doyen of Tibetan research, in Rome, Hellmut Hoffman in Munich, deJong in Leiden, D. L. Snellgrove in London, H. V. Guenther in Canada, Alex Wayman and myself in the United States; apart from it, no scholar working in the Tibetan literary field can really avoid esoteric material in the long run, if he is at all interested in Buddhist matters.

Enstasy then is the ultimate target of all meditative disciplines in Asia, and the term applies equally to Christian mysticism and to sufism, from the comparativist viewpoint. Modern Hindu authors of pious popular literature use traditional terms to connote ecstasy when they speak about Muslim or Christian saints. From the *sādhus*' and *paṇḍits*' platforms in India one often hears such statements as 'when Jesus had achieved *samādhi* . . .' or 'when Mohammed entered *kaivalya* . . .'

Enstasy, in all these traditions, is a non-discursive, quasi-permanent condition of the individual agent, and it is highly euphoric. In Indian theological parlance—Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain—it is tantamount with supreme insight or wisdom, and all other knowledge attained by discursive processes is thought to be vastly inferior; formal learning of any kind is, by implication, essentially opposed to ecstasy, marring its voluntary repetition and intensification. I might add that modern pharmacology has produced some drugs which do indeed create an emotive approximation to ecstasy; lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD 25) and certain other alkaloid drugs which cause a mental pattern that shows striking analogies to ecstatic experiences, and which have achieved enormous, not-too-pleasant publicity in North America and parts of Western Europe during the past few years, could decidedly be classified as ecstatic drugs.⁴ Indian mystics have been using alkaloid

drugs of simpler varieties since Vedic days; we do not yet know what exactly the *soma* of Vedic literature was, but studying the elaborate descriptions contained in the *soma*-hymns of the R̥gveda, of the manner of which this potion was brewed, and its effects, I am tempted to think that the state of mind described in them comes much closer to alcaloid drug experiences than to alcoholic intoxication. In the previous chapter we have seen that the tantric adept uses hemp each time before he undergoes the main observance. The term for the drug, variously prepared, is *bhāṅg* in northern India, *siddhi* in Bengal—and we are aware that *siddhi* also means occult power—but the classical word used in the tantric manuals and in scholastic reference is *vijayā*, victory, or victory giver (feminine). *Cannabis Indica*, which has the same active ingredient as marijuana, creates a strongly euphoric mood, and the term *vijayā* might have been coined to signify it.⁵

The main difference between drug-induced experience and yogic ecstasy is, however, that the latter yields enstatic information beyond the duration of the inebriated state, which the former does not.

There cannot be the slightest doubt that the Hindus and probably the Buddhists of earlier days did regard the taking of psychedelic drugs as part of the wide range of *sādhana*s which lead to ecstasy, albeit perhaps only on the preliminary stages. The mythological and iconographical corollary to this feeling is, apart from the personification of *soma* as the quintessence of all mind-affecting beverages, the frequent epithet of Śiva as the Lord of herbs (*Auṣadhiśvara*). In Nepal, in the Gorakhpur district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, as well as in Mithila, Śiva is frequently depicted with a bowl filled with herbs under his arm, as one of the emblems of the mendicant.

Indian orthodox traditions teach asceticism as a prerequisite to contemplation leading to ecstasy. It is certainly no overstatement to say that asceticism and orthodoxy are coextensive in most Indian notions of the religious life. Where such a life cannot be led, it is the pervasive ideal postulate. The ascetic remains the cynosure of the Indian people and India is even now referred to, from many

Breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) is common to all yogic disciplines, classical and later, and indeed it already forms part of the Vedic *sandhyā* ritual, though in a less elaborate form. The idea seems to be that by the control of the relatively most conscious somatic or vegetative function the adept begins to control other less conscious somatic events such as the heart-beat, which he also aims to arrest at will in pursuit of more intensive enstatic states. I am informed by Professor R. Leifer of the Psychiatry Department of New York Upstate Medical College that arrest of respiration in itself causes hallucinatory states under certain circumstances, and that aggregation of carbon dioxide is being used in psychiatry for the therapy of certain depressive states.

Control of the seminal fluid is thought to entail control of all passions and the achievement of desirelessness—and of course this notion stems from the common Indian ascetical heritage which postulates that passions jeopardize the advance towards ecstasy. Loss of semen is a pervasive and ancient fear in Indian lore, and it is probably the core of the most powerful anxiety syndrome in Indian culture.

Finally, the control of the mind is almost tantamount with the various terms denoting the supreme achievement of the yogi, intuitive wisdom and freedom from rebirth. Control of mind, in the technical sense of the yogic and tantric traditions, means precisely what Patāñjali said in the opening verse of the *Yogasūtra*, *cittavṛtti nirodha*, withholding the mind from all discursive objects, or a total cessation of the cognitive, conative, and volitional functions of the mind.

This triple control is hierarchically conceived, control of breath being the first and easiest step, control of seminal ejaculation during sexual union the next higher, and preventing the mind from apprehending any external objects the final and highest step. These controls have to work simultaneously in the end, and the whole process of esoteric meditation converges towards the skill of arresting breath, seminal emission, and object apperception simultaneously. The successful retention of the three is *yuganaddha* (Tibetan *sku grub* or *zung 'jug*), 'binding together the opposed

poles', Śiva and Śakti in Hindu tantra, *Prajñā* and *Upāya* in Vajrayāna, male and female adept in the human replica of the cosmic process of ecstasy.

All the texts stress that these controls can be learnt only under the guidance of a personal teacher who has got to be an adept himself, a *siddha* who has succeeded in stabilizing these controls in himself or in herself as the case may be, and who must also be able to gauge and to classify any prospective disciple as to the latter's potential capacity for acquiring these controls. This takes us back to one of the oldest insights of the Indian tradition, the pervasive notion of *adhikārabheda*, which means 'difference in the individual's entitlement for a specific meditation'.

The prospective *guru* has to study his disciple for a considerable time in a close symbiosis. The *gurukula* of the Vedic period, the coenobite set-up of the Indian monastic tradition, conduces to this study, and the process is by no means unilateral. Both the teacher and the disciple have to test each other in order to effect a complete transference. The tantrics refer to this set-up simply as the *kula*, the family or clan, which is a real in-group. Then the *guru* judges which *mantra* or auditory instrument he will impart to the disciple, by using which the latter will learn the threefold control leading to ecstasy.

Breath control is relatively easy to achieve. The process is roughly this; using the *mantra* as a time unit, the adept practises retention of breath by reducing his respiratory speed, keeping out and holding his breath for gradually increasing periods. This, when properly practised, brings about a certain euphoric effect, accompanied by mild hallucinations chiefly of a photic variety. Next, he learns to practise breath control together with his Śakti or *Mudrā*, his consecrated female partner. With her he enters into sexual union, the procedure being described somewhat perfunctorily in the tantric texts, but taught orally by the *guru* in great detail and variation according to the different somatic and psychological constitutions of the individual disciple and his Śakti or *Mudrā*. Most frequently, the female adept sits astride on the male yogi's lap who himself takes one of the traditional yogic postures

India wants to get ahead in the modernistic, technological, and economical domains. Every country that moved towards modernity has undergone a long period of puritanism. Britain, Germany, Russia, the United States: some of these countries have outgrown puritanism and have begun to enjoy the fruits of their former labours. Others haven't. I do not see, however, why a puritanical phase is necessary at all en route to modernity. A prediction, on the basis of an analogy, of the form 'all countries have so far undergone a phase of puritanism, therefore India has to . . .' rests on what Karl R. Popper has been castigating as historicism—the naive and dangerous notion that one can learn anything from history except history itself; that we can make predictions on the basis of historical precedence.¹⁵ Speaking in terms of 'ought', I think that tantrism ought to be given a chance in India. I do not think it will.

Matters are different outside India. It is conceivable that the more affluent and more critical of the West, particularly Western Europe and North America, might espouse some form of tantrism, or some elements of the tantric tradition, properly translated and modified for western use, as one of its possible ideological, spiritual, or psychotherapeutical alternatives. Some steps have been made, but probably in the wrong direction: the frustrated middle-aged North American lusting for the mysterious has opened a door for tantrism to enter. However, I feel that this entry is dangerous, and that it would entail a misinterpretation, that it would make havoc out of tantrism. There are two kinds of audiences in the western world in whose hands any esoteric tradition would be bound to fail: the first, more numerous but less dangerous, are the truth seekers who feel frustrated with what their own religious traditions at home offer. Just as the Theosophical Society, the anthroposophists, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, the Divine Life Society, the Self-Realization League, Zen, etc., have found their way into the affluent West through these audiences, tantrism—in a watered-down, untutored form—may gain entrance in these countries. The other audience, small but more dangerous, is the one that looks for 'kicks', to use

hardy American vocabulary once more. I'm not in principle against the use of drugs, against esotericism as an additional instrument for enriching individuals' lives, but I am decidedly against popularization, an unscholarly attempt at assimilation of imported systems. Let me put it this way: tantrism, like yoga and Vedānta and Zen, could be respectable even in the western world, provided that the tradition of solid scholarship, of learning and of intellectual effort which had been their base in the countries of their origin, did accompany their migration into the occidental world. Without these cultural efforts, I regard them as fraudulent. The expedient notion that yoga and esoteric practice are much more difficult to pursue than the knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tibetan, leaves me unimpressed. For if this were true, there would be fewer crackpots around the Atlantic, and many more orientalists. The oriental institutes, the anthropological and ethnographical departments at occidental universities would be filled with people who really want to learn. As it is, the pseudo-orientalized esoteric circles in the western world and the academicians in *Orientalis* give each other a wide berth. This cannot be remedied, until the non-expert yields to the expert, and the expert, suffice it to say, is the sympathetic scholar. Facile claims to spiritual superiority on the side of enthusiastic esotericists leave the scholar who has studied the tradition by the sweat of his brow as cold as they do the initiate. And if the intelligent in modern India could view the tantric tradition with that warm empathy which the builders of Khajuraho and Konarak must have felt, tantrism in India may well be therapeutical for many cultural ills that beset her today.

As for the West, if the tantric camel is to enter at all and with profit it must enter through the eye of the needle that sews in Sanskrit and Tibetan, and that probes in terms of modern anthropology and analytical philosophy, and not through the offices of any non-intellectual, anti-academical, albeit spiritual eastern proselytization.

NOTES

¹ Cultural anthropology is virtually the same as social anthropology in Britain. The reasons why American anthropologists prefer the term 'cultural' to 'social' anthropology are somewhat intricate and not within the purview of this book. For the subject matter of our study however, the term 'social anthropology' just won't work. Tantrism has enormous cultural implications, but its social implications, at this time at least, are negligible. I dealt with this point in detail in an article, 'Die Geistigen Kraefte Asiens in der Krise der Gegenwart', in *Universitas* (see Bibliography).

² The first scholar who showed that Hinduism was basically polytheistic is a convert to Hinduism himself—Professor A. Danielou, *Polytheisme Hindu*, Paris 1959—proved that the monistic and absolutist philosophy is a sophisticated superstructure on Hinduism which by no means supercedes a healthy and intensive polytheism, of which all but the modernized Hindus seems to be aware; for its English version, see Bibliography.

³ *Unmāda* 'mad', overly exulting, is one of the 1008 names of Śiva in the *Śivasahasranāma* which is chanted daily by all Śaivites throughout India as well as by almost all monastic sects. Here the term does indeed connote intensive ecstasy; Indian mystical literature and hagiography frequently refer to the saint as behaving like a madman—thus Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa: 'ei je pāgaler mata byābahār kare' (*Ramakṛṣṇakathāmṛta*, Bengali ed.), 'he (is a true saint) who acts as though he was a madman'.

Other terms for madness in a more or less clinical sense are derived from the same root, i.e. *unmattatā*, *sonmādatvam*, *pramādyam*, *unmādiṣṇu*; terms not derived from *mad* are compounds indicating loss of sense, etc., *naṣṭabuddhi*, *bhraṣṭabuddhi*, *hatajñāna*—all meaning simply loss of intelligence; *vikṣipta* (-buddhi) seems to indicate a particular sort of mental disorder, 'wandering' of the mind such as is the case with certain schizophrenics. Finally, there is an interesting term *vātula* which literally means 'inflated with wind'; this hails from the fact that Indian medicine (Ayurveda) holds the humour wind (*vāyu*, *vāta*), which is one of the three medical humours, responsible not only for rheumatism and gout, but also for mental derangements of all kinds.

⁴ There is an ever-increasing amount of literature, partly serious, partly popular, and partly trash, on alcaloid drug experiences. Lysergic-acid-diethylamide experience seems closest to yogic enstatic states. R. H. Ward's *A Drugtaker's Notes*, Gollancz, London 1959 is a good statement; Constance C. Newland, *Myself and I*, Signet Paperback, New York 1963, is the most recent account of LSD experience. LSD 25 is the trade name of the drug; it has become a highly controversial subject in the United States, since two psychologists were removed

from the faculty of Harvard University on account of their having administered the drug to undergraduate students, in 1963.

⁵ The drug is taken in two different forms in India: Brahmins in northern, central, and eastern India tend to take it as *bhāṅg*, prepared as a dessert in the shape of molasses; or as a beverage with sweet sherbet. In the north-west of India, especially among Sufi-Muslims, the hemp is dried and smoked; this of course is hashish, a term known to many Urdu speakers; however, the Urdu and Hindi term for smoked *Cannabis Indica* is *gāñjā*, and there is an overall notion that the taking of *gāñjā* is 'dirty', whereas the eating or drinking of *bhāṅg* is just a bit funny or out of date. There is some amount of government control; *bhāṅg* must not be exported from Bihar into Bengal.

⁶ *Nitya* (eternal) refers to the rituals that have to be performed every day by the male members of the twice-born castes; *naimittika* (instrumental) refers to any ritual of a supererogatory type, rituals for special purposes, on special occasions, with a specific object in mind.

⁷ Professor V. Raghavan, Head of the Department of Sanskrit of Madras University and Chief Governmental Adviser on Sanskrit studies, who is an orthodox Brahmin, told me in 1954: 'None of your yoga and even less of your tantra is necessary to reach *mukti*. Any person who fulfils the religious duties of his class will achieve *mukti* when his body drops off. There is no shortcut, even through the methods of Patāñjali.'

⁸ There is a notion among the tougher Brahmin traditionalists that a person who does not master Pāṇinian Sanskrit cannot understand *darśana*, or philosophical theology. This criticism extends to all Buddhists, including the Theravādins, for Pali (as all Prakrits) are thought to be just bad Sanskrit, as also to Jainism, whose main texts are in Ardhamāgadhī. Professor F. Edgerton, when Holkar Visiting Professor at Banaras Hindu University in 1953, found it impossible to convey to the paṇḍits of the Samskrta Mahāvidyālaya that Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit was *not* bad Sanskrit; for them, it was and remains just this, composed by people who had not studied the language properly.

⁹ More literally 'by that act by which the beings boil in terrible hell for 100,000,000 *kalpas*, by that very deed the yogi is released', '*karmaṇā yena vai sattvāḥ kalpakotiśatānyapi pacyante narake ghore tena yogi vimucyate*'. (Also *Jñānasiddhi*, p. 31, 15).

¹⁰ From Sarāhapādas *Dohakośa*, Hindi edition by the late Rahul Sāmkṛtyāyana, Ch. III. It is interesting to note that a well-known American psychiatrist, considered as an avant-garde thinker by his colleagues, has voiced a convergent view in his book *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Basic Books, Inc., New York 1961. Professor Thomas S. Szasz had not been aware of this medieval Indian parallel before I communicated it to him; this excludes the possibility of a guided premonition so frequent among psychologists of the Jungian type.

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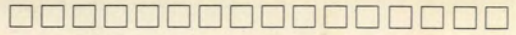
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Agehananda Bharati comes from a well-known Austrian family and became interested in India at the age of nine, when he began to study Sanskrit and other Indian languages at his native Vienna. During World War II he served as an interpreter in the Indian National Army and moved to India in 1947. He there became the first European to be ordained in the Daśanāmī Order of Sannyāsi monks under the monastic name 'Homeless Bliss' (Agehananda). Later on he received full Tantric initiation in Assam. Since 1961 he has been a member of the anthropology faculty of Syracuse University, New York.

THE ŚŪRĀṄGAMA SŪTRA

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Translated by Charles Luk (Lu K'uan Yu)

Enlightenment in Mahāyāna Buddhism consists in transmuting the mind into the Great Mirror Wisdom. And so the Śūraṅgama Sūtra points directly at the Mind which when stirred by the first thought creates the basic illusion of an ego and splits the Whole into subject and object. In consequence it is still a primary source for the Ch'an or Zen school.

In this sūtra the Buddha began by stripping Ānanda of his attachment to the illusory body and mind before revealing the One Mind. To teach how this One Mind can be realized he asked twenty-five Bodhisattvas to describe the different methods by which each had attained Enlightenment. Avalokiteśvara's method of turning inward the organ of hearing was judged the most suitable for mankind today.

The Buddha disclosed the cause of transmigration through the six worlds and of the attainment of the four saintly planes, describing these ten regions in some detail. Finally he detailed and warned against clinging to the various mental states experienced when practising the Śūraṅgama Samādhi.

We in the West know of the Creation according to the Bible, but readers will now find in this sūtra how man and his world came into being as taught by the Buddha.

Lu K'uan Yu's translation from the Chinese of this important sūtra is based on Ch'an Master Han Shan's late sixteenth-century commentary, portions of which are included in the footnotes.

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