



## **22. A Study on the Emergence of Tantric Literature in India and its Influence on Indian Knowledge Systems**

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### **Abstract:**

*According to Kullukabhattacha, as quoted in the Viṣṇu purāṇa, Indian thought has two main sources: the Vedas and Tantra. More recently Agama Tantra has been claimed as an authentic tradition and equally important with its Vedic counterpart. These two traditions have divergent view-points regarding some details like God, the relation between God and man, the path to salvation and the ways of worship. The Vedic conception of God is that of an omniscient, omnipotent and formless entity manifesting itself in natural forces and natural phenomena, whereas the Agama represents God as a personal deity with recognizable form and characteristic attributes. Yet another view of Tantra, Vedic or non-Vedic, runs thus. Corresponding to the Saṃskāras prevalent among the followers of the Vedic tradition, there were Saṃskāras meant for Tantric practitioners. There were fire sacrifices (Yajñas) incorporated into the Tantric worship. Jayākhyasaṃhita prescribes the last rite (Antyeṣṭi) and Vātula-tantra enjoins expiation ceremonies (Prāyaścitta) on Vedic lines. Some Tantras claim that they originated from the Vedas; Narāyaṇīya Tantra argues that the Vedas themselves were derived from Tantric sources: Rigveda from Rudra, Yajurveda from Viṣṇu Samaveda from Brahma, Atharvaveda from Sakti.*

*Focusing on research published over the past decade, the discussion covers the following subjects: early scriptural literature (the Śaiva tantras or āgamas), exegetical and philosophical traditions, ritual and yoga, the roots of Tantric Śaivism, intersections between tantra, and the medieval temple, and debates concerning the relationship between Śaivism and Tantric Buddhism. It is based on a holistic approach that integrates different aspects of human life, such as mind, body, and spirit*

**Keywords:** *Tantra, Saṃskāras, Āgama, saṃhitā, sūtra, Aparvarga, Bhoga, Bhukti*

### **Introduction**

Tantric literature represents a significant and often misunderstood aspect of Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions. Emerging around the 6th century CE, Tantric texts encompass a wide range of practices, beliefs, and rituals that have influenced various facets of Indian culture,



philosophy, and spirituality. This study aims to explore the origins of Tantric literature, its core concepts, and its profound impact on Indian knowledge systems, including philosophy, religion, art, and social structures. The emergence of Tantric literature can be traced back to the intersection of various religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The socio-political milieu of ancient India, characterized by the decline of Vedic orthodoxy and the rise of new religious movements, provided fertile ground for the development of Tantric practices.

The spirituality of Tantrics is more enigmatic. It is full of hidden techniques that use meditation, unique phrases (mantras), and rituals to help us discover our inner power. By extensively examining its philosophies and practices and how they have influenced Hindu spirituality over time, this paper will delve deeply into Hindu spirituality through the Vedic and Tantric traditions. Furthermore, despite their apparent differences, the study will examine the ways in which Tantric and Vedic traditions have impacted one another and demonstrate the relationship between traditional and modern views. This research paper aims to clarify the enduring influence of Tantric and Vedic spirituality on Indian Knowledge Systems,

### **Tantric Literature based on Tantra Sádhaná and Tattwa Shuddhi**

Modern researchers have shown a great deal of interest in the antinomian elements of the later non-dualist Tantras of the Buddhist and Maiva traditions. However, it appears that a number of important "terms of art" have been virtually completely disregarded in the interpretation of their core texts. The fact that the phrases in question are terms of art rather than technical terminology in esoteric usage undoubtedly accounts for this error. Terms of art are words that have primary meanings other than their specialized usages, in contrast to the latter, which are specific to their respective settings. Although this is understandable, fixing such omissions is crucial for advancement in this field because doing otherwise leads to and perpetuates widespread and systemic misinterpretations of Tantric literature.

Tantra Sádhaná is the process by which latent divinity is transformed into the Supreme Divinity. In the language of spiritual seekers, the sleeping divinity in animality is called the kulakuṇḍalinii. Hence, we discover that the essence of Tantra sádhaná resides in elevating the kulakuṇḍalinii toward the spiritual objective by introducing a vibration within her.

The significance of the term tantra is "liberation from bondage [the bondage of dullness, or staticity]". The letter ta is the seed [sound] of dullness. And the root verb trae suffixed by dá becomes tra, which means "that which liberates" – so the spiritual practice which liberates the aspirant from the dullness or animosity of the static force and expands the aspirant's spiritual self is Tantra sádhaná. So there cannot be any spiritual practice without Tantra. Tantra is sádhaná. Spiritual practice means practice for expansion, and this expansion is nothing but a liberation from the bondage of all sorts of dullness or staticity. A person who, irrespective of caste, creed or



religion, aspires for spiritual expansion or does something concrete, is a Tantric. Tantra in itself is neither a religion nor an ism. Tantra is a fundamental spiritual science. So wherever there is any spiritual practice it should be taken for granted that it stands on the Tantric cult. Where there is no spiritual practice, where people pray to God for the fulfilment of narrow worldly desires, where people's only slogan is "Give us this and give us that" – only there do we find that Tantra is discouraged. So only those who do not understand Tantra, or even after understanding Tantra do not want to do any spiritual practice, oppose the cult of Tantra. The factors behind their repulsion from sādhanā are two in number. The first is what is known as the psychology of spiritual inertness, and the second is a sort of phobia. The spiritual phobia is the greatest enemy of human society. This phobia is the main discouraging factor.

Tattwa Shuddhi is an ancient tantric practice for purification of the elements, published for the first time in this comprehensive text. Every individual is comprised of five basic elements. Through the process of tattwa shuddhi, the purification and transformation of these elements takes place. This book written by Swami Satyanandasanga contains the theory of tattwas and detailed instructions for the practice. Tattwa shuddhi uses the tantric tools of yantra, mantra and mandala.

Another trace of Tantra we can observe in the book 'Secrets of Yantra, Mantra & Tantra' by the author named L.R. Chawdri . Unveiled in this book are the secrets of these occult sciences to help the reader achieve worldly success and spiritual enlightenment. Detailed instructions are given for the preparation and application of Yantras for specific purposes: to win favours, defeat enemies and cure diseases, among others. The methods of selecting and using Mantras to attain miraculous powers and fulfilment of one's desires are explained fully.

### **Tantra as Experimental Science**

One of the central arguments that Śivacandra levelled against the critics of Tantra, and by extension against the corruptions of Western education, is the "practical", scientific, and "experiential" character of Tantric sādhanā. Time and again, his Tantratattva emphasizes that it is not blind faith that binds the Tantric practitioner to his sādhanā, but the experience of actual, tangible results. In their introductions and commentaries, Arthur Avalon repeatedly stressed this aspect. In the Introduction to volume one, we read: "For the understanding of the Tantrik, or, indeed, any other beliefs and practices, the usual dry-as-dust investigation of the savant is insufficient. In the first place a call should be made upon actual present experience."

This argument is extended to the valuation of religion in general – that is, religion in its orthodox form, free from reformist corruption:



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It is Sadhana which alone in any system, whether Hindu or otherwise, is really fruitful. The Tantra claims to be practical in that it affords the direct proof of experience. The Tantra further claims not only to be practical and to contain provisions available for all without distinction of caste or sex, but also to be fundamentally rational.

This argument is not only based on the authority of scriptural and oral tradition, but also on the claim that many Indian concepts conform to the results of the most recent scientific and psychological research and metaphysical speculation . . .”

The practice of “Tantrik Yoga, for instance, should be regarded as “a ritual which is at the same time, when rightly understood, singularly rational and psychologically profound. With reference to a review from The Quest of October 1913, it is maintained that Tantric ritual was “perhaps the most elaborate system of auto-suggestion in the world.”

This was one of Woodroffe’s/Avalon’s favorite comparisons among many others, scattered across their numerous writings whose later editions often saw chaotic modifications and expansions. For instance, Woodroffe gave a range of lectures that were later turned into chapters of Shakti and Shakti, some of which were first delivered to the Vivekananda Society in 1917–1918 and to the Dacca Literary Society in 1916, which was then printed in The Theosophist of October 1918.

### **Yoga in Tantric tradition**

Yoga, the ancient practice of meditation and wisdom comprises one of the vestigial practice that is followed in Tantra. It however did not had its origin within the frame of Tantra. The origin of yoga is a debatable subject and could not be established precisely. But the fact which cannot be overlooked is that, it was within the frontier of Tantra, yoga was commercialized. Yoga collaborated with Tantra received publicity and became a tool of amusement. Yoga and Tantra both contributed each other in its enhancement. Yoga subsequently became allied with Hindu Tantra than Buddhist Tantra. “The Tantra arose out of and within the residual Yoga tradition of the time (third century C.E.) and as the collaboration between Yogacara and Tantra became more intense over the next few centuries, the persona of at least the Yogacara practitioners came to resemble more that of the Indian yogi than that of the Buddhist monk.”(Soeng, 2010) Yoga comprises a distinct and well established school in Indian philosophical thought but in union with Tantra, it is identified as Tantric Yoga, which is discrete in its way from the Indian philosophical yoga. Gavin Frost and Yvonne Frost bring forward the earliest evidence of tantric yoga, “In Pakistan, on the



Indus River in the ancient city of Mohenjodaro, stands a monument bearing a golden seal, reliably as dated being 6000 years old. It depicts a person sitting in a Yoga posture performing a tantric ritual. This is the oldest evidence known of Tantric Yoga sometimes called the eight path.”(Flood et al., 1989) Kinsley is of the view that “Tantric yoga is supposed to awaken one's consciousness, to expand and intensify it. In classical yoga, the practitioner de-creates the various elements of prakrti, going against the natural rhythms of creation, in an attempt to still or transcend the limitations of the physical world. Classical yoga is the process of dissolving the creation in order to transcend it.

Tantric yoga aims to unite the practitioner with the deity.”(Kinsley, 1998) Feuerstein shares his view regarding Yoga in Tantra and Vedas. According to him “Tantra is a profoundly yogic tradition and the Tantras call themselves sadhana- shastras, or books of spiritual practices. The Sanskrit word Yoga means both „discipline“ and „union“ and can be translated as „unitive discipline“. The oft- used compound Tantra yoga means simply „Tantric discipline“ and captures the intensely experiential character of the Tantric heritage. Tantra yoga is unitive discipline based on the expansion or unification of wisdom by means of the beliefs and practices promulgated in the Tantras and the exegetical literature that has crystallized around them... Tantra yoga as understood here, is a latecomer in the long history of yoga. As we have seen, however proto- Tantra elements can be detected even in the Vedic era. To be sure, the taproots of yoga are to be found in the Vedas, composed some five thousand years ago. In its most archaic form, yoga was a combination of ritual worship and meditation, having the purpose of opening the gates to the celestial realms and beyond.”(Feuerstein, 1998)

Witnessing yoga in cultural setting or religious setting is a debatable outlook. Albeit yoga has invariably been allied with religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantra, it constantly maintained its innate feature. Tantric yoga unfurled an approach for creative uplift. However, for commercialization and exhibition purpose Tantra and yoga were bracketed with sexual union. This bracketing augments popularity and inquisitiveness of both Tantra and yoga, which eventually paves the path for its survival in popular culture.

### **Misunderstanding of Tantric texts and practices**

This limited understanding of Tantra can be attributed to error in comprehending of Tantric texts and practices. Gavin Flood has accepted this error in his writings. Misunderstanding of Tantric texts and practices does not limit itself with western scholars, but scholars of Indian origin also fail to grasp the inner meaning. Esoteric feature of Tantra limits its understanding. Tantric texts were written in a secret language, not revealing its true meaning. “Tantric texts are often composed



in an "intentional language" (sandhya-bhasa), a secret, dark, ambiguous language in which a state of consciousness is expressed by an erotic term and the vocabulary of mythology or cosmology is charged with Hatha-yogic."(White, 1970)

### **Conclusion**

Tantra albeit one of the most misrepresented Indian religious traditions, have eventually survived, which is evident in popular cultures. Western and Indian scholars have made ample contribution towards it with writings including both the nature of advocacy and critiquing. Broad knowledge of Tantra depends on its depiction. As the language used in tantric texts are of an unrevealing nature, it is challenging to grasp the true meaning. Thus they are habitually misunderstood and thus misrepresented. This can be observed in both Western and Indian writings.

Tantra brings forth the power of resonance, vast unbound resonance. Tantra is access to the life force both within our body and within our surrounding world and the vast cosmological universe. Tantra is resonance within the various dimensions of existence. These dimensions are Nirmanakaya, Sambogakaya and Dharmakaya. Nirmanakaya is the ordinary life of existence. Sambogakaya is archetypal dimension of existence, and Dharmakaya is pure potentiality of being. Being which is not a being or thing in itself, rather being which manifests being in everything and anything as beings.

Tantra embodies the elemental-ness of phenomena and Tantra is the experience of all appearance as elemental-ness. Tantra embodies fire, earth, wind, space, and water within the world that we are. Tantra is spontaneous openness that gives us accessibility to the subtle dimensions of elemental-ness. Tantra is the transmission of elemental-ness. Tantra opens the alchemical doorway of experiencing the unfolding of elemental views and the infinite configurations of the elements. Tantra allows us to experience and relate to the elemental dimensions of our innermost experience of the vital-ness of life, the vital elemental-ness of phenomena.

Tantra brings forth the experience of soma. And Tantra brings forth the experience of psyche. Tantra brings forth the experience of the indivisibility of psyche and soma. Tantra is both physical and deeply beyond the physical, deeply subtle. Tantra is both gross and most subtle. Tantra requires the awakening of awareness. Tantra requires us to become aware of awareness within us and beyond us. Tantra requires us to experience all phenomena as primordial ground awareness manifesting itself as phenomena. Tantra is the experiencing of the manifestation of primordial awareness as everything and anything





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Brochures, workshops, events are organized to draw attention. This may augment the survival of tantric yoga in popular culture, however it does not present the complete image flawlessly. Flawless understanding of Tantra should be endeavoured by scholars. Initiation of correct understanding could be noticed in the writing of contemporary scholars. But still an extended study has to be carried out to erase the misunderstanding regarding Tantric tradition and its practices.

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