

Chapter - I

HISTORY AND SCOPE OF TĀNTRIC LITERATURE

It is a widely accepted fact that every major religion of the world has a Founder, a Scripture and a Church. Hinduism is a solitary exception to this general pattern. It doesn't have a specific point of instruction or a single place of worship. Yet it has seen great religious leaders, great books and great movements. Although the Vedas have been widely recognized as basic scriptures by most of the sects, cults and groups of Hinduism, a number of other religious and philosophical works have also occupied cordial positions in its cults and sects. It is for this reason that Paul Bowen, the western scholar, called Hinduism a 'world religion'¹. Among the many priest, and atheist, streams of philosophy that flourished in ancient India, the Tāntric thoughts, traditions and the literature thereon occupy a prominent place.

Tantra - A Brief History

Two distinct and independent systems of worship Vedic and Non-Vedic had existed in parallel in ancient India. Kallūkabhāṭṭa, the first scholar to give an exhaustive interpretation to *Manusmṛti*, divided

traditional Indian thoughts into two branches, Vedic and Tāntric². Matriarchy, which was the accepted norm in ancient and original Dravidian clans and tribes, naturally gave a prominent status for women. To them, the productive women and fertile land were reflective of one and the same power of the divine. The followers of Veda, especially Ārya Brahmins, did not attach much importance to agriculture and hence, they never encouraged cultivation of land. Out of ten thousand four hundred and sixty-four verses which constitute the Ṛgveda, there is reference to agriculture in only twenty-five verses. Of these twenty-five, twenty-two Ślokas are confined to Uttarakāṇḍa. When settled agriculture began, women took the role of preparing and providing food and other essential commodities for the community.³ As agriculture was the main activity involving women, they began to take active interest in Māntric rites associated with agriculture. Primitive man believed that a congenial climate and plentiful harvest could be guaranteed if agricultural activities like-sowing of seeds, and harvesting were accompanied by chanting of Mantras to propitiate the powers of nature. But the Vedics, who did not give importance to agriculture, gave a subservient role to women in Vedic rites and traditions in general. It is no wonder that the Aryan society assigned an inferior status to women, as it was male-dominated, coming as they did as nomads, conquering the native tribes through their superior might and establishing the Vedic tradition in the conquered lands.

The Vedics who created a male – centred society, therefore, saw nature in the form of man (Puruṣa) and tried to conquer nature through the practice of Māntric rites. Women – centred communities, on the other hand, saw universe in the form of women or Devi, and attempted to dominate nature in their own way. It may be mentioned in this context that women were appointed priests and chief priests in temples in ancient Rome and Greece.⁴ At the same time, both groups, held the common belief that the external universe possessed similar feelings and emotions of their own, and hence, it could be influenced and altered to do their bidding through mental and spiritual powers.

It can be safely assumed that the Indus Valley civilization gave a prominent and well –disserved status for women and it was Tāntric in nature. Worship of goddesses may be extremely ancient in South Asia. Female figurines of backed clay have been found in the North-West at Mergarh and Sherikhan Tarakai, dated to the sixth or fifth millennium, and terracotta figurines have been found at Mohenjo-Daro (c.2500-2000 BC), the major city of the Indus Valley civilization.⁵

As indicated earlier, the woman was controlled to ensure the continuity of the population as she was integrally connected with agricultural activities and the production and nourishment of the progenies. Hence, she presided over the religious rites; known as Bhairavis or Yogins, they practised and perpetuated Tantra vidyā as a

ritual tradition. That Tantra vidyā is also known as 'Vāmācāra'⁶, probably due to its feminine connection⁷. Until male descendants (patriarchy) and male dominants found general acceptance, Tantras and accompanying Vidhis continued to be accepted by the people as a whole. With the ascendancy of Brahmanism, the followers of Tantra were reduced to the status of a minority. It is a fact that from time immemorial the Tāntric movements were very much in existence. But many western scholars and their followers do not concur with this view.

Age of Tantra

According to Winternitz, there is no mention of Tantra even in the last part of the *Mahābhārata* and hence Tantra is post - *Mahābhārata* in origin. It may be pointed out that the Dravidian Siddha, Tirumullar, who lived in the 2nd cy A.D., refers in his works to Śaivāgamas and hence, Śaivāgamas were prior to the 2nd cy. Winternitz and others further hold that '*Ahīrbudhniśamhita*' was the oldest among the Vaiṣṇava śamhitas and that it dates back to the 4th cy. And over the centuries since then, certain Vaiṣṇava Tantras came to be evolved. Śākta Tantras which form part of the Tāntric system were comparatively modern, having their origin in the 12th cy. A.D. Several Tāntric texts belonging to this class continued to be written until the 18th cy., according to several scholars. But E.V. Raman Nambootiri, who wrote an intro. to Cennas Nambootiri's *Tantra Samuccaya*, is totally opposed

to all the above views on the origin of Tantra, and is of the firm opinion that Tantra is of very ancient origin. According to him, there is a pointed reference to Tantra in the context of performance of 'Vidyā samuddeśa' in the 'Rājadharmā prakaraṇa' forming part of the Śānti parva of the *Mahābhārata*, which is proof enough to its pre – *Mahābhārata* origin.⁸

There is sufficient evidence to the popularity of Tāntric rites not only during the period of the *Mahābhārata* but also the *Rāmāyaṇa* too. The 'Nikumbhila homa vidhi' handed down to Indrajith by Śukrācārya for use only in an exigency and made use of by Indrajit with desired results, is a case in point. This is referred to in the 85th Sarga of *Yuddhakāṇḍa* of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and in the 25th Sarga of *Uttarakāṇḍa*. There is mention of how Śukrācārya made Indrajit to perform several Yajñas. Among them was the Vaiṣṇavite Gomedhayāga and a Yajña belonging to the Mahesvara genre. From this, it is clear that even during the period of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tantra was practised for *abhīṣṭhasiddhi*. It is apt to recall in this context the well known adage that the *Mahābhārata* contains everything that is found in the world and that one cannot find anything in the world that finds no mention in the *Mahābhārata*. This points to the all-inclusive (past, present & future), comprehensive nature of the *Mahābhārata*.

Above all, excavated findings from the sites of the Indus Valley civilization- Harappa & Mohan-ja-daro- clearly place Tantra back to

5000 years. B.C. (some scholars now maintain that it could be even 10,000 years. B.C.). One of the important aspects of these highly developed and urban cultures was the representations of ideas and pictures known in modern historical parlance as hieroglyphics.⁹ The second volume of the book 'Ṛgvedic Culture of the pre- Historic Indus' also provides very valuable information on Tantra which is especially relevant for a student of Tantra s̄āstra.¹⁰ Whether pre-or post vedic, there is no doubt that Tantra is of very ancient origin. If we accept the assumption that the Vedas were so ancient that their exact date is indeterminable, the ancient origin of Tantra becomes all the more possible. Certain other scholars assign contemporary status to Tantra with the Vedas, on the strength of Tāntric elements found in *Atharva veda*. It is again due to the pictorial Tāntric representations in Tantra that Sankarananda Swamy places Tantra as post- vedic:

The relation between Tāntric idols and Vedic deities; the concept of 'Ūrdhvamūlāśvaddhabrahma' referred to in Upaniṣad and Gīta which got evolved as Yūpa in *Yāgnikakhaṇḍas*, and as temples and Śivaliṅgas in Tantras; the Prākāras, Ṣaḍcakras and Yantras in Tāntric tradition which are a gradually evolved version of Tantra's vedic origin, are but a few of the items of information from '*Ṛgvedic Culture of the Pre-historic Indus*'.¹¹

Tantra – Its meaning and importance – A brief study

The nomenclature of 'Tantra, does not confine itself to a single meaning. In fact, it denotes several things. It can be, among others, a technique, a method, a system of thought, a set of practices, or a collection of books. It appears that the word takes its original meaning from the loom used by the weavers, ¹² the strings or fibres (Tantus) which was central to the profession of weaving. Thus in a sense it is a vocation – derived word. In the collection of written or spoken texts pertaining to the Vedic period, too, Tantra, is the loom on which the threads are 'spread out' or 'extended'. It also stands for the pattern or design that ultimately emerged from this spreading or extension. (The same idea finds further elaboration hereunder. Tantra in Sanskrit meant loom ; also specifically, the warp thread that dresses the loom and gives support to the fabric formed by the moving shuttle, in a rug, the individual knots without it, there can be no cloth). It may also refer to the cord used for stringing beads to make a necklace, a rosary, māla or garland. Tāntrik is the adjectival form of Tantra and it has come to mean continuous, in the sense of unbroken. There is a teacher-student linkage in Tantra, the learning of the Tāntric skills is handed down by the teacher to the disciple with a special kind of permission which, in Tantric parlance, is called Dīkṣa.¹³

In the latter sense, it stood for a book or a chapter of the book in which arguments and explanations postulated a theme (as in

Sastitantra), stories illustrated a moral point (as in Pañca Tantra). Originally used to refer to individual manuals, in course of time, Tantra represented a whole literature of religious and magical treatises. More significantly, Tantra implied the theme of books belonging to this category, viz., the act of spreading of, or the process of extension of techniques, methods, practices, tricks, etc. The expression 'Tantra' thus symbolized skill or competence displayed in perpetuating these methods and techniques. D.N. Bose and Hiralal Haldon add that the meaning of the term 'Tantra' includes the rules and regulations of a system or an administrative code.¹⁴

An early use of the word 'Tantra', in a non- magical context, is found in the Āyurvedic system where the word means 'the body' and the word 'Yantra' denotes the machinery of the body. The body is an interdependent collection of organs (Aṅgas), an organization of forces (Dhātus, Doṣas and Malas), and a pattern of living. In its extended sense, 'Yantra' means a geometrical pattern, a synthesis of lines and 'seed-letters' (Bījākṣaras). A comprehensive representation of 'mantra', likewise is an organization of sound systems such as letters and words with some uncommon power of potency which assumes the role of a magical formula. Thus, technically speaking, Tantra is a process of relating the unusual patterns (Yantra) with the mystical and mental formulae (Mantra). Common and basic to both patterns and formulae

is the belief that the human body is the ground where they operate with efficacy. Yantras are merely extensions or externalizations of the lines of forces conceived as working within the individual ; and Mantras are in the nature of concretisations or formalisations of the vibrations occurring within the individual. Tantra, therefore, refers to the common fields wherein these forces and vibrations are at work viz., the body.¹⁵ *Ajitāgama* gives the following definition to Tantra '*tanoti vipulānarthān*'.¹⁶

The most authentic Malayalam lexicon attributes several meanings to the word 'Tantra' as also to 'Tantri'¹⁷. The plethora of meanings and definitions bear testimony to the spread and depth of Tantra and naturally most of the major works on Tantra incorporate such wide details as are found in an encyclopedia.¹⁸

Monier Williams considers Tantra as a class of "works teaching magical and mystical formulae, mostly in the form of dialogues between Śiva and Durga and set to treat of five subjects – 1. The creation, 2. Destruction of the world, 3. The worship of the Gods, 4. The attainment of all subjects especially of six super human faculties, and 5. Four modes of union with the supreme spirit by meditation."

The Tāntric text *Piṅgaḷamata* defines Tantra thus –

'आशावस्तु समन्ताह्व गम्यते इत्यागमो मतः
तनूते त्रायते नित्यं तन्त्रमित्थं विदुर्बुधः'¹⁹

Tāntric texts proclaim the origin and significance of Tantra as

शब्दार्थं सृष्टिर्मुनिभिर्च्छन्दो देवतैर्सह
विधिश्च यन्त्रमन्त्राणां तन्त्रोऽस्मिन्नभिधीयते।^{19a}

Thus, according to Tantra śāstra, there are 36 sṛṣṭi tattvas (creative principles). In the creation of the universe the first was the sound and then evolved its meaning. Sound is Brahma which identifies itself with 'Parāśakti'. It naturally follows that it is from Parāśakti (supreme power) that everything springs. The sound is light and its meaning is the display of light (Prakāśyam). Sabda and Artha are one and the same as Prakṛti and Puruṣa.²⁰ It is this very sound which comes from kuṇḍalini in the form of waves of 'Sphulingas' like 'Parā', Paśyanī and 'Madhyamā' stages and emerging through the 'Jihvā' as 'Vaikharī' in different modes as Mantras, words, sentences (Vācaka), poems and the like.²¹

Viṣṇu Saṁhita has attempted to give the etymology of the term 'Tantra' as follows :

'सर्वेर्था येन तन्यन्ते त्रायन्ते च भयाज्जनाः।'
इति तन्त्रस्य तन्त्रत्वं तन्त्रज्ञाः परिचक्षते।
वेदमूलतया तन्त्रमाप्तमूलतयाऽथिवा।
पुराणवत् प्रमाणं स्यात् तथा मन्वादिवाक्यवत्।।²²

Tāntric texts generally give only the explanations and definitions of the word 'Tantra'. As an exception, 'Śabdārthacintāmaṇi'

provides a very exhaustive and detailed definition of the word Tantra,
thus:

“सर्गश्च प्रतिसर्गश्च मन्त्रलक्षणमेव च
देवतानां च संस्थानं तीर्थानां च वर्णनम्
तथैवाश्रमधर्मश्च मन्त्रसंस्थानमेव च।
संस्थानं चैव भूतानां यन्त्राणां च निर्णयः॥
उत्पत्तिर्विबुधानां च तरुणां, कल्पसञ्ज्ञितं॥
संस्थानं ज्योतिषां चैव पुराणाख्यानमेव च॥
कोषस्य कथनं चैव व्रतानां परिभाषणम्।
शौचाशौचस्य चाख्यानं नरकाणां च वर्णनम्॥
हरचक्रस्य चाख्यानं स्त्रीपुंसोश्चैव लक्षणम्
राजधर्मो दानधर्मो युगधर्मास्तथैव च॥
व्यवहारः कथ्यते च तथा चाध्यात्मवर्णनम्।
इत्यादि लक्षणैर्युक्तं तन्त्रमित्यभिधीयते॥”²³

Medinīkośa, ranked among reputed Śabdakośas, attributes
different meanings to the word ‘Tantra’:

“तन्त्रं कुटुम्बकृत्ये स्यात्, सिद्धान्ते, चौषधोत्तमे
प्रधाने, तन्तुवान् च, शास्त्रभेदे, परिच्छदे
श्रुतिशाखान्तरे, हेतुबुभयार्थं प्रयोजके।”²⁴

The *Kāmikāgama* of the southern school of Śaivism,
Śaivasiddhānta, says:

‘तनोति विपुलान् अर्थान् तत्त्वमन्त्रसमन्वितम्
त्राणञ्च कुरुते यस्मात् तन्त्रमित्यभिधीयते।’²⁵

While explaining the Lakṣaṇas of Mahatantras,
Aghoraśivācārya in *Tattvapraṅkāśika* explains the meaning of Tantra, thus:

‘त्रिपदार्थं, चतुष्पादं महातन्त्रम्।’²⁶

Tantra is generally deemed to be that which helps to realize the desires of the Sādhaka and that which protects people from fear. It has an authority on a par with the purāṇas since it traces its origin to the Vedas, or with Smrtis like Manusmṛti, since it is as trustworthy as the words of a reliable person. The term 'Tantra' is said to be derived from the root 'tanu' meaning 'to expand' or 'to perform'.²⁷

A very wide and general view of Tantra treats it as a class of Hindu or Buddhist religious literature written in Sanskrit and concerned with powerful ritual acts of body, speech and mind.²⁸ The word 'Tantra' is derived from the combination of two words 'Tattva' and 'Mantra', Tattva means the science of cosmic principles and Mantra referring to the science of mystic sound and vibrations. Tantra, therefore, is the application of cosmic sciences with a view to attaining spiritual ascendancy. In another sense, Tantra means the scripture by which the light of knowledge is spread ; *'tanyate vistāryate jñanan anena iti tantra'*.²⁹ While accepting that Tantra is too wide and comprehensive a concept to have any numbers of definitions and meanings, its real meaning, perhaps, is lost in antiquity. According to some, it traces its origin from the Sanskrit or Hindi word for fabric or tapestry, meaning that it is woven into one's life. Some others, say that it comes from two Sanskrit words, *'tanoti'* and *'trāyate'* – *'tanoti'* means to expand consciousness and *'trāyate'* means to liberate consciousness. In other

words, Tantra is said to expand and liberate consciousness. While being the highest possible synthesis between love and meditation, Tantra is also the connection between the third dimension and other planes of existence beyond mere materiality. Although it is not a religious philosophy, Tantra encompasses a deep spiritual understanding of life and is an ancient art of living in harmony with existence.³⁰

Tantra, because of its inherent intricacy, inscrutability and hidden, mystical and occult nature, is considered esoteric, or something that can be understood by a learned few. Very often we find injunctions in Tāntric texts against divulging knowledge to non – initiates or warnings to the effect that if one attempts to apply the techniques without having received initiation (Dīkṣa), dire consequences will follow. Tantra, therefore, pre-supposes an authentic guru for the successful understanding and practice of its principles by the disciple.³¹ Although the Tāntric texts give manifold meanings and definitions to Tantra, they commonly give importance to its ultimate aim which is none other than total submission and devotion to God. This ancient branch of scientific knowledge, enriched and embellished by abundant wealth of principles and Mantras, is said to provide ultimate salvation – ‘jani– mṛti–mokṣa’ – to those Sādhakas who strictly adhere to its stated principles. The above idea finds its clearest expression in the following lines in ‘Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati’.

‘श्रद्धाभक्ति समभ्यासात् सर्वे सिध्यन्ति सर्वदा।’³²

For the fulfilment of the Tāntric dictum ‘शिवोभूत्वा शिवं यजेत्’ I must be perfect harmonization of Jñāna, Yoga, Kriyā and Caryā. A happy blending of the above four factors is said to bring about a state of being where the Sādhaka, without being aware of it, attains a divine existence. In other words, he identifies himself with the divine. This is what is implicit in the worship of Devatas and Kṣetrārādhana in general. Here we find the revelation of the *Caturmahāvākyas*—*aham brahmāsmi; tattvamasī; ayamātmā brahma; prajñānam brahma* – which constitute the very essence of Indian thought.

Tantra – Vedic or Non - Vedic

There existed a lot of controversy among scholars of yore regarding the Vedic or non-vedic origin and nature of Tantra. The controversy has apparently subsided now with the near unanimity among scholars that Tantra is both Vedic and non-vedic in origin, nature and content. The observations made by Monier Williams in his book ‘*Religious Thought and Life in India*’ have held the attention of the followers of the *Avaidikasiddhānta*.³³ However in the Vaiṣṇavit system of worship, in Śaivāgamas and in the Śaktik forms of worship, the Veda sūktas and Veda mantras are used extensively. This can be taken as proof to the predominance of Veda in Tāntric rites. But the Tāntric texts by themselves claim superiority over the Vedas. For eg:

‘कलिकल्मषादीनां द्विजादीनां, सुरेश्वरी।
मेध्यामेध्यविचाराणां न शुद्धिः श्रौतकर्मण’।

(*Mahānirvāṇatantra 2nd ullāsa*)

It may be pointed out that the above view has not been accepted by all. The pro-voidiks, on the other hand, refer to the chapter ‘Mārgaprāmāṇyavarṇana’ in the Yajñavaibhavakhandā of *Sūtasarhita*

According to the above, all Tattvas and Siddhāntas are of divine origin and they are passed on to the successive generations through tradition and practices and that each one has its own importance and prominence. Being of divine origin they should not be subjected to the scrutiny of reason or rationality. Yet, at the same time, they hold the supreme importance and predominance of the Vedic path. They further claim that there is nothing unattainable to the real followers of the Vedic mārṅa and strictly prescribe other paths which are in fact meant for those with inferior intellect, incapable of understanding and assimilating the most exalted and omni-giving nature of the Vedas. It is this very idea, that is reiterated most exquisitely by Madhusudanasaraswati in his book ‘*Prasthānabheda*’.

The authorities in whom vests the right to perform Tantra have been clearly defined by Brahmānanda Bhārati in his reputed work ‘*Puruṣārtha prabodham*’ wherein they have been classified into four, viz., Śuddha vaidikas, Tāntrika vaidikas, Śuddha tāntriks and Vaidik

tantriks. The qualities to be possessed and the qualifications to be attained by one to be a suitable and merited member of each one of these groups are also specified in the book along with the authoritative texts to be followed by each. But in *Sūtasamhita* there is only passing mention that Avidiks (non-vidiks) are Tāntric authorities.

Although the word 'Tantra' finds mention in the Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, they are not meant in the sense in which it is understood at present, but denote weaving of Tantus in war and weft (woof) to make clothes and rugs. In Sāma vedā, there is not even a single mention of the word 'Tantra'. A close scrutiny of Tāntric texts reveals the presence of several Mantras in them. Scholars have opined that there are elements of Tantra to be found in the Atharva veda, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. "Some essential traits of Tantras can be found as far back as in the Atharva veda as well as in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads".³⁴

The illustrious Tāntric scholar, Madhavji, in his work '*Kṣetracaitanya Rahasya*', provides evidence to the evolution of Tantra from Vedic rites of worship, to establish the Vedic origin of Tāntric rites. According to him, the chanting of mantras like *Om vaṣat*, *vouṣat*, *svāha*, etc., which were an integral part of Vedic rites, later came to be used in Tāntric rites. Madhavji presents clear proofs to his conclusions.³⁵

Kullūkabhaṭṭa's gloss on *Viṣṇu purāṇa* states that Veda and Tantra are the two main streams of Indian thought. Āgama Tantra tradition is considered authentic and as important as the Vedic tradition. 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 Āgama represents God as a personal deity with recognizable form and characteristic attributes.³⁶

Yet another view of Tantra, Vedic or non Vedic, runs thus. Corresponding to the Saṁskāras prevalent among the followers of the Vedic tradition, there were Saṁskāras meant for Tāntric practitioners. There were fire sacrifices (Yajñas) incorporated into the Tāntric worship. *Jayākhyasaṁhita* 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 Tāntric sources :

<i>Ṛgveda</i> from Rudra	-	Yāmaḷa
<i>Yajurveda</i> from Viṣṇu	-	Yāmaḷa,
<i>Sāmaveda</i> from Brahma	-	Yāmaḷa and
<i>Atharvaveda</i> from Śakti	-	Yāmaḷa. ³⁷

Debiprasad Chatopadhyaya traces the connection of Tantra to Lokāyata on the strength of which he claims that the Tāntric tradition was non-Vedic and was much older than that of the Vedas.³⁸ According to John Wooddroffe alias Arthur Avalon, the Tantra śāstra is a later development of Vaidika karma.³⁹

There is a school of thought which holds that in the authoritative Vaiṣṇavite, Śaivite and Śāktik texts that emerged since the beginning of the Tāntric movement till the 16th and 17th cy and the Kriyāvidhis and Homavidhis and Mantras that they embody, one can discern the vehement impact of vedic mantras, both explicit and implicit. There is hardly any reason to dispute the above averment. Some scholars go even to the extent of stating that Tāntric rites acquired refinement under Vedic influence. It has to be admitted that anything that is refined must have had its primitive or rudimentary beginning, and Tantra certainly had it, as is evidenced by the Pañca 'ma' kāra system. What can be inferred from this arguments and counter-arguments is that both Tantric and Vedic traditions had strongly and paralleley developed and coexisted and in course of time there must have been a gradual diminution of the power and importance of Vedic cult and culture and a corresponding enhancement of Tantra until it reached its peak, resulting in many Vaidiks adopting and embracing Tāntric cults after incorporating certain Vaidik elements into it. When

two very highly developed and refined intellectual streams exist side by side there is always bound to be conflicting claims regarding their relative superiority. But these disputes and claims have no more value than the age-old question whether the seed preceded the tree or vice-versa. Although the present controversy is not as fierce, the heat of claims of superiority among some Vaidiks in certain places doesn't seem to cool down despite the passage of time. However, at the present point of time, there appears a lot of confusion and ambiguity among priests of either pursuit as to what exactly their philosophy symbolizes or epitomizes.⁴⁰

Pramāṇas of Tantra

Every Indian traditional philosophy or school of thought, be it theist or atheist, had its own distinct Pramāṇas and Pramākaras. From Cārvāka, considered to be the most ancient, to the Pourāṇiks had 8 Pramāṇas and 8 Pramākaras which form their theoretical foundation. They are 1. Pratyakṣa, 2. Anumāna, 3. Śabda, 4. Upamāna, 5. Arthāpatti, 6. Anupalabdhi (Abhāva), 7. Saṁbhava, 8. Aitīhya. The specific Pramāṇas meant for each school of thought is authoritatively put forth in *sarvamatasāṅgraha* thus:

प्रत्यक्षमेकं चार्वाकः, कणादसुगतौ पुनः
अनुमानं च तच्चाथ सांख्याः शब्दं च, तेऽपि
न्यायैकदेशिनोऽप्येकमुपमानं च केचन,
अर्थापत्या सहैतानि चत्वार्याह प्रभाकरः

अभावषष्ठान्येतानि भट्टा वेदान्तिनस्तथा
संभवैतिह्ययुक्तानि तानि पौराणिका जगुः।।⁴¹

Melputtur Narayanabhatta has expressed the same idea in

Manameyodaya :

‘चार्वाकस्तावदेकं द्वितयमपि पुन
बौद्धवैशेषिकौ द्वौ
भासर्कज्ज्ञश्च सांख्यस्त्रिक्षतयमुदयना
द्वाश्चतुष्कं वदन्ति;
प्राहुः प्रभाकराः पञ्चकमपि च वयं
तेऽपि वेदान्त विज्ज्ञाः
षष्ठकं, पौराणिकास्त्वष्टकमभिदधिरे
संभवैतिह्ययोगात्⁴²

There is no mention of Tāntric Pramāṇas in any of the Pramāṇic (authoritative) stipulations shown above. But the Tāntrics have, nevertheless, accepted and adopted the eight Pramāṇas and Pramākaras in toto and added one of thier own, called ‘Ceṣṭha’, the proof of which can be found in the following statement.

“सम्भवैतिह्यानां सह प्रमाणाष्टकं पौरा-
णिकानामभिमतं चेष्टाऽपि प्रमाणान्तरमिति
तान्त्रिका वदन्ति⁴³

‘Ceṣṭha’, as the very word signifies, is about gestures and gesticulations shown while performing the Tāntric rites. No school of thought questioned the propriety or relevance of this addition. Although the Madhvas who are Dvaitiks, and Rāmānujas who adhere to Viśiṣṭhādvaita, both having Tāntric inclination, have not accepted the 9th Pramāṇa.

Tāntric elements in other Sāstras

The essence of Tāntric principles is not confined exclusively to Tāntric texts. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Tāntric ideas permeate into every branch of ancient knowledge and thought. Elements of Tantra can be traced in Atharva veda, Upaniṣads and the Purāṇas. Strong influences of Tantra are evident in Jyotiṣa, Śilpaśāstra, Nṛtta-Gīta-Vādyā, Āyurveda, Itihāsa Purāṇas and Buddhism, Darśanas like Sāṅkhya and Yoga.

Tantra and Jyotiṣa

Tantra plays an important role in Jyotiṣa and vice versa. *Sārāvali* and *Praśnamārga* are the two texts that exemplify the different ways in which Tāntric rites are incorporated into Jyotiṣa. The most auspicious time for such important Tāntric rites as Mantradīkṣa (initiation), Devapraśna, Pratiṣṭha (installation), Utsava (festival), Jīṛṇoddhāra (renovation), Parihāras (expiatory rites), Śilānyāsa (laying of foundation of temples) etc, is fixed as per Jyotiṣa śāstra for their successful completion and attainment of their desired results. Similarly, most of the Grahadoṣa nivāraṇa kriyas (expiation rites) for individuals suggested by astrologers are Tāntric and Māntric in nature. There are several extend astrological texts and their modern commentaries that provide extensive details on which specific Tāntric rites please and propitiate which particular god and goddess, for the granting of specific wishes

of the persons concerned. But it may be noted in the present context that while both remain mutually complementary, there appears to be wider popular acceptance for Jyotiṣa than for Tantra.

Śilpa śāstra and Tantra

Temple architecture and idol making (Bimba nirmāṇa) are integrally connected with Tantra śāstra. Such authentic texts as *Prayogamañjarī*, *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati*, *Tantra samuccaya Śilpadhāga*, *Nṛttaraṅgajīṛṇoddhāra* of Kuzhikkāttu Bhaṭṭatiri, *Narttanaraṅgavivarāṇa vyākhyā* (anonymous), *Narttanaraṅgajīṛṇoddhāra krama* (anonymous) etc. provide exhaustive and intricate details on Śilpaśāstra and Vāstuvidyā. Similarly, the Śilpaśāstra texts like *Mayamata*, *Śilparatna*, *Devālayacandrika* give details on Tāntric rites. All these go to show the intercomplimentary aspects of Tantra, Śilpaśāstra and Vāstu vidyā.

Āyurveda and Tantra

A close scrutiny of Āyurveda brings out the fact that Tantra and Tāntric principles and rites are implicitly and sometimes explicitly present in it. There is very close resemblance between Tantra and Āyurveda in that both accept Pañcabhūta and other Tattvas, the relation between the body and the mind in similar ways. Māntric and Tāntric methods of treatment are employed in *bālacikitsa* (*kāśyapa saṁhita*), *viṣacikitsa*, *jvara cikitsa*, etc. The prescriptions for the treatment of a

wide variety of ailments especially for Grahapīṭha, Bhūtabādhā etc. given in the *Mantra pāda (ISGP)* is ample proof to the above. There is the strong influence of Tantra and Tāntric rites in such authentic Āyurvedic works as *Suśruta saṁhita*, *Carakasāṁhita*, *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* etc. Moreover, in *Kalaśavidhis* and *Homavidhis*, for deities too, there is special importance given to *Ouśadhakalaśa* and medicinal herbs as *Homadravyas*. These medicines and *Homadravyas* are the ones used in Āyurvedic medicines too, eg., *Dravyas* for *Sahasra kalaśa*, *Madhuparka*, *Pañcagavya* etc. The western scholar A.S. Gaddon is of the opinion that one-third of Hindu religious rites and half of the medicines have been borrowed from Tāntrics.⁴⁴

It can be seen from the stanza quoted below from *Smṛiti* that elements of Tantra are present in *Smṛitis* too.

‘वेदमूलतया नित्यं प्रवृत्ता अपि सत्ताम् ।
क्वचित् कदाचित् स्मर्त्तारिस्तन्त्रार्थाश्च ब्रुवन्ति हि ।’⁴⁵

Tāntric Elements in Nṛtta-Gīta - Vādyā

The ‘*ceṣṭas*’ or ‘*mudras*’ which play the most important role in Tāntric rites have an equal importance in *Nāṭya śāstra*. Both in Tantra and in *Nāṭya*, the gestures and gesticulations during performance are accompanied by music and musical instruments. What is important to be noted here is that both follow a definite rhythm. The *mudras* in *Nāṭya* and Tantra display wonderful resemblance to one another. Just

as *mudras* in Tantra are significant, so is Āṅgikābhinaya in Nāṭya. In the *Prasanna pūjā vidhis* as per the tāntric ācāras (*dakṣiṇācaras*) for Devatas, *nṛtta-gīta-vādyā trayas* have a very prominent role. In times of yore, different forms of dance in accordance with Nṛttavidhis were actually performed (eg. *Devadāsi nṛtta*, *Dāsiyāṭṭam*, *Ṭiṭampāṭṭam*, *Teyyam*, etc.) in temples as part of *pūjāvidhis*. Now they are performed in *saṅkalpa* and not in actuality.

Gītam and Vādyam continue even in the present day as integral parts of temple worship. Sopāna saṅgīta, Aṣṭāpadis, Pulluvanpāṭṭu, Cintupāṭṭu etc. are examples of Gītam; and Idakka, Timila (pāṇi), Rāja vādyā or Nāgasvara, Ceṅṭa etc. are examples of Vādyā (percussion instruments specific for each Devata). In addition, one can trace Tāntric elements in the works of great Carnatic composers – cum – musicians, Muthuswamy Deeksitar, Syamasastri and others. In the light of the above, it will not be an exaggeration to say that Tantra has played a major role in the perpetuation of many traditional art forms, eg. mural paintings had originated from Tāntric diagrams and graphic representations.

Itihāsa Purāṇas and Tantra

Critics are of the opinion that the *Ramayana* is the Tāntric version of the story of Śrī Rāma. There are elements of Tantra in the *Mahabharata* and purāṇas like *Viṣṇu dharmottara Purāṇa* (VDP), *Devīmāhātmya*, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Devībhāgavata*, *Skandapurāṇa*,

Agnipurāṇa and Sivapurāṇa. Scholars have identified several Tāntric elements in such great literary landmarks as *Naiṣadhīya carita* by Śriharṣa and works of Kalidasa, Sankaracarya etc. *Pratyabhijñādarśana* of Abhinavagupta dealing exclusively with Tantric philosophy is accepted as a classic literary work.

Sāṅkhya–Yoga and Tantra

The philosophy of Tantra has evolved from Sāṅkhya-yoga systems, in respect of its 25 principles to which Tantra has added 11 of its own to constitute 36 principles as obtained now. The added ones are Niyati, Kāla, Rāga, Vidyā, Kala, Māya, Śuddhavidyā, Īśvara, Sadāśiva, Śakti and Śiva⁴⁶. For the Śiva (Rudra) and Śakti concepts, Tantra is indebted to the Upaniṣads, *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* and *Mahānārāyopaniṣad*. To explain it further as grammar to a language, it appears that as a philosophic explanation or interpretation to Tāntrika vidyā, Sāṅkhya siddhānta was propounded by Kapila maharṣi. The Sāṅkhyas explained away the creation of the universe as the product of evolution of natural energy. In this context, it may be noted that *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad*, believed to have been written in 3rd century B.C, assigns primacy to the forces of nature and gives only secondary importance to Puruṣa. The 25 Sāṅkhya principles and the 25 Tāntric principles also closely resemble one another, and it is the added 11 which stand distinct from the others.

In both Yogavidyā and Tantravidyā, the fundamental aim is the activation of *kuṇḍalini* power through consistent Abhyāsas (practice) and Upāsanas. Moreover, during the Upāsanas performed by a Tāntrik, many of the Yogācāryas like Āsana, Prāṇāyāma (Kumbhaka, Recaka etc.) play a major role. This being so, the close connection between Yoga and Tantra is a fait accompli.

A minute examination of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Vedānta, Advaita-darśanas, Vyākaraṇa śāstra and Sabda śāstra reveals the fact that they have very close links with the principles and practices of Tantra śāstra.

Similarly, there is inseparable relation between Tantra śāstra and Mātrkā varṇamālas in that the Nyāsakriyā in Tantra and their Mantras are systematically arranged in Dīrgha and Hrasva syllables. Another notable feature is the way in which all Mantra-rahasyas are kept concealed in *kaṭapayādi* formula. Just as the dispute between Vaidiks and Tāntriks regarding their precedence, the relative antiquity of Tantra śāstra and Varṇamāla should serve as food for thought and further probing.

Buddhism and Tantra

The general assumption is that Tantra has been and is practised in the confines of *Bhārata varṣa* and is exclusively related to

the Ṛṣis. A study of Tantra will remain incomplete without a mention of the contribution of Buddhists to that branch of ancient knowledge. The Buddhists, The Tibetans and The Chinese also practised Tāntric rites and had a rich tradition of Tāntric literature too. The Buddhists have written a number of works on Tantra like *Mañjuśrīkalpa*, *Tathāgataguhyaka*, *Lalitavistāra* etc.

The Buddhists conceived the Buddha and Bodhisattva as male deities and a female deity was substituted in the place of Śakti. What was conceived as Prakṛti-Puruṣa concept and evolved as Śiva and Śakti corresponds to Prajñā and Upāya in Buddhism. It is due to the Tāntric influence, we may infer, that the idols of Jainayakṣinis like Jvālāmālini, Padmāvati and Ambika had been installed and worshipped in temples. The Taoists of China, through hard physical training and practice and mental discipline had imbibed Yoga vidyā and Tantra vidyā, the remnants of which are evident in the different regions of China.

Tantra śāstra permeates virtually every branch of Indian knowledge and thought from the Śruti, Smṛti, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Itihāsas, Sāṅkhya, Yogadarśanas, Buddhism, Traditional arts, Literature, etc. The list is too long to enumerate.

Tantra in Christianity and Islam

Certain elements of Tantra are visible in Christianity, especially

in the Catholic sect. Many of the gestures during performance of prayers in the church conducted by Catholic priests bear wonderful resemblance to the gestures shown during Tāntric religious rites. The Catholic church, rich with the experience of ages and clothed in splendour, has introduced Japa, Mantras, Dhūpa, Ācamana, Vādyā, Veena, bell, flowers, etc., in its method of worship. ⁴⁷ In this context, it would be apt to recall the fabled magician priest of Kerala, *Kaḍamaṭṭathukattanār*, whose magic exploits have been beautifully recorded by Kottāratil Śaṅkuṇṇi in his renowned work *Aithihyamāla*. The author also refers in it to what is called the *Kaḍamaṭṭattu sampradāyam* (Kadamaṭṭom tradition) of magic⁴⁸. It needs mention here that magic is one of the 64 branches of Tantra and Kaḍamaṭṭattu Kattanar must have been familiar with Prākṛta Tantra in general which made him a past master in magical feats.

Tāntric elements are present in traditional Islamic system of treatment and healing of diseases, especially mental ailments. 'Hakkims' using Mantras for the removal of physical as well as mental ailments are still active in many parts of India. There are also Muslim families which have followed the Tantric tradition for centuries. ⁴⁹

When we take into account the diverse ways in which Tantra and Tāntric rites influence every facet of our lives, it would be no exaggeration to state that every single act in the life of every individual

has some element or other at least remotely connected with Tantra, knowingly or unknowingly, and hence its all - pervading nature stands uncontested.

Date of Tāntric works

It is difficult to determine the exact period of origin of Tāntric texts. Winternitz opines that the written works in Tantra have emerged after the *Mahabharata* period.⁵⁰ According to Monier Williams, they were written during the 6th and 7th C.E. (*Indian Wisdom*, p.504). Benjamin Walker fixes it between 723 C.E. and 1200 C.E.⁵¹ E.V. Raman Namboothiri has tried to establish the origin of the early Tāntric texts in the vedic period itself.⁵² This view appears to be more balanced and hence acceptable.

The origin of Tāntric books in South India

The Tāntric texts are said to have become popular in South India during the early 11th century with the advent of iconoclast Muslims who created unrest among the Hindu population in the north. One of the immediate effects of this unrest was the exodus of the custodians of Āgama literature to South India and to Kashmir to seek refuge and patronage. Muslims did not make an inroad into Kashmir until the late 12th century and thus the Śaivas and Āgamas could survive in that part of the country till it was overrun by the Muslims. Siddhānta – Āgama as well as its texts found the conditions in South India congenial to its

consolidation. This explains how Agama literature disappeared almost entirely from North India. It was nurtured in South India and has, therefore, acquired a typical South Indian colour and flavour. The Śaiva-āgamas, which were preserved in Kashmir, lost their temple orientation after the domination of that area by the iconoclast Muslims. What could survive were only the philosophical portions of the Āgama literature. Thus, Śaiva-āgama in the temple context is now found only in South India. During the period in question, some of the Āgama Tantra literature migrated to Nepal, Tibet and adjoining countries. Along with the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Āgama ideology also made its impact. ⁵³

The form and subject matter of Tantra

Perfectly in line with the intellectual intercourses in early times, the earlier Tantra texts were also generally in the form of dialogues, the difference in Tantra being that it is instruction and advice. The subject is presented in most of the texts as told by Śiva to his consort Pārvati who asks the former about the performance of the rites related to Tantra and the Mantras of the same⁵⁴. A complete Tantra treatise should consist of four parts, called Padas-Jñāna-Yoga-Kriyā and Caryā. The first relates to the problem of Tantra - centric philosophy; the second states the different disciplines necessary for acquiring union of the self with the Divine, and the last two deal with the observances and rites for the

same. *The Āgama Encyclopedia* prescribes the details of the four pādas that an ideal Āgama text should invariably have.⁵⁵ While the above is the ideal division prescribed and postulated for all Āgamas, in actuality, however, very few Āgamas comprise all the four divisions.

The threefold divisions of Tantra

Tantra in general falls into three divisions – Viṣṇu Krānta, Ratha Krānta and Aśva Krānta (see Appendix) : Some authority says that this division is in fact based on the regions in which the Tantras are popular. To each of these three regions, where they remained popular, 64 Tantras each are assigned. *Sabdakalpadruma* quotes the verses mentioning the names of these Tantras.⁵⁶ According to another Tantric text, *Śaktimaṅgala Tantra*, Viṣṇu krānta extends from Vindhya mountains to Cittagong, thus including Bengal. The Rathaḥkrānta perverts from the same place to Mahācīna including Nepal; Aśvaḥkrānta from the same mountain to the great ocean apparently including the rest of India. Thus a total of 192 tantras are popular in these regions.⁵⁷

The seven Tāntrika ācāras

There are seven Ācāras (Sapta- ācāras) recognised in the tantras, such as Vedācāra, Vaiṣṇavācāra, Śaivācāra, Dakṣiṇācāra, Vāmācāra, Siddhantācāra and Kauḷācāra. By Vedācāra is not meant here the practice prescribed in the Vedas. It is a type of Tāntrikācāra.^{57a}

Though the sevenfold practices are recognized in Tantras generally, only Dakṣiṇācāras and Vāmācāras are followed by Śāktatāntrika Sādhakas. It is followers of Tantra in Kerala who mainly follow the Dakṣiṇācāra tradition (Vaidika Tantra).

Tantra - Subject wise division

Subject-wise, Tantras are broadly divided into Āgama, Saṁhita and Śāktatantra, each having its own respective authentic texts.⁵⁸

Āgama

‘आ’गतं पञ्चवक्त्रन्तु
‘ग’तं च गिरिजानने
‘म’ तं च वासुदेवस्य
तस्मादागममुच्यते ।

(Paramasaṁhita)

Āgamas embody the corpus authoritative of Śaivite texts. There are altogether 28 texts that are well known. They are Kāmikāgama, Yogāgama, Cintyāgama, Karmāgama, Ajitāgama, Deeptāgama, Sūkṣmāgama, Sahasrāgama, Amśumadbhedāgama, Suprabhedāgama, Vijayāgama, Niśvāgama, Svayaṁbhuvāgama, Anilāgama, Veerāgama, Rouravāgama, Makutāgama, Vimalāgama, Candrañjānāgama, Bimbāgama, Prodgītāgama, Laṭitāgama, Siddhāgama, Santhanāgama, Sarvoktāgama, Parameśvarāgama, Kiraṇāgama and Vātulāgama. Āgama texts, no doubt, extol knowledge and prescribe ritualistic actions but they emphasise that without

devotion, they are in - effective and become irrelevant. And in Āgama context, devotion is defined as intense interest in worship and so on (pūjādiṣvanurāgaḥ bhakti).⁵⁹

Nigamas

In addition to Āgamas, there are some texts called Nigamas. Here, the topics are narrated by Parvati to Siva. There are several compositions which belong to this group. The Āgamas and Nigamas have their own sub divisions – Upāgamas and Upanigamas.

Samhita

द्विषट्सहस्रपर्यन्तं संहिताख्यं सदागमम्।
ये चान्ये चान्तराला वै शास्त्रार्थनाधिका रातैः।
सर्वेषां संहितासंज्ञा बोद्धव्या कमलोद्भव॥

(Pouṣka ॐrasaṁhita)

The Saṁhitas contain ritualistic details besides other topics connected with Tantras. These Saṁhitas are a class of texts with a wider scope-having 12000 stanzas for each text. As already mentioned, they belong to the Vaiṣṇava sect.⁶⁰ From the above, it can be inferred that a Saṁhita should have 12000 ślokas. The exact number of such Saṁhitas has not yet been determined (See Appendix).

Śākta Tantra

In a very limited sense, the term 'Tantra' denotes the texts of Śākta system. The Śāktas consider Śakti or the female deity as the

supreme being. *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* and *Tantrarāja Tantra* are examples of Śākta Tantra texts. Among the 77 Śākta Āgama texts, five are Śubhāgamas; 64 are Kaulāgamas; and 8 are Miśrāgamas.

Tantras have two classifications namely, Dāmaras and Yāmalas.

Dāmaras

There are mainly 6 Dāmara texts, viz., *Śaiva dāmara*, *Yoga dāmara*, *Sarasvati dāmara*, *Brahma dāmara*, *Durga dāmara* and *Gāndharva dāmara*.

Yāmalas

‘सृष्टिश्च ज्योतिषाख्यानं नित्यकृत्यप्रदीपनं
क्रमसूत्रं, वर्णभेदो जातिभेदस्तथैव च
युगधर्मश्च संख्यातो यामलस्याष्टलक्षणम्।

The principal Yāmalas are eight in number. They are *Rudra yāmala*, *Skanda yāmala*, *Brahma yāmala*, *Varuṇa yāmala*, *Yama yāmala*, *Vāyu yāmala*, *Kubera yāmala* and *Indra yāmala*.

Rahasyas and Sūtras

Tantra also falls itself into some other classifications like Rahasyas and Sūtras. The most authoritative and important Rahasya text is *Varivasya rahasya* of Bhaskaraya. *Śiva rahasya*, *Brahma rahasya*, *Viṣṇu rahasya*, etc., are the other texts belonging to the Rahasya class and are named after gods.

Nārada bhakti sūtra, Vaikhānasa sūtra (Vaiṣṇava); Pāśupata sūtra, Bhūtiśāsana (Śaiva), Śakti sūtra, Paraśurama kalpa sūtra (Śākta) etc. are some of the sūtra texts ⁶¹

It may be mentioned here by way of conclusion that almost all the texts mentioned above have so many explanations and interpretations and commentaries. Moreover, based on each Tantra prasthāna, there have also been many independent works. *Tantrā loka* by Abhinavagupta, *Tattva prakāśa* of Bhoja deva, Vedanta deśika's *Pañcarātra rakṣa*, and *Varivasyārahasya* by Bhaskararaya are but a few of them.

Paddhati Literature⁶²

Hemachandra defines the term 'Paddhati' as "granthārtha bodhaka grantha" – a treatise purposed to explain a text.

Bhaṭṭarāmakatha, in his commentary on *Sārtha Triśatikālottara*, defines Paddhati, thus:

पद्धतिः प्रतिशस्त्रं विक्षिप्तस्य श्रितस्य
तत्सामर्थ्याक्षिप्तस्य च मन्त्रतन्त्रानुष्ठानाय
संक्षेपात् क्रमेणाभिधानं, यजुर्वेदादौ यज्ञसूत्रादिवत्

For any scripture, a Paddhati is a text which enables the performance of the rituals (of that scripture) along with the Mantras (that accompany them) by succinctly arranging in the order of performance (I) The instructions explicitly stated but dispersed in

various places and (II) whatever these explicit statements imply an example is the *Yajñasūtra* in the case of Yajurveda.

The Śaiva literature mentions 18 Paddhatikāras which differing in the different sources. 1. Ugrajyoti 2. Sadyojyoti 3. Ramākantha 4. Vaidyanātha (Vidyākantha) 5. Nārāyaṇa (Nārāyaṇa Kantha) 6. Vibhūti Kantha 7. Śrīkantha 8. Nilakantha 9. Somaśambhu 10. Īśānaśambhu 11. Hṛdyasambhu 12. Viriñci (Brahmasambhu) 13. Vairāgyaśiva 14. Jñanaśambhu 15. Trilocanaśiva 16. Varuṇaśiva 17. Īśānaśiva and 18. Aghoraśambhu.

“Among the development of Śaiva literature from the 10th cy. onwards we see that Śaiva authors produced an array of āgama commentaries (vṛttis), rituals manuals (paddhatis) and philosophical treatises. The corpus of Paddhati texts both ritually and philosophically followed in the path set forth by the Śaiva āgamas. The Paddhati authors aspired to write simply, concisely and clearly, and were inspired to set forth their system to distinguish the Śaiva siddhānta route prominently from the many paths prescribed by authors. The Paddhatis had their task to clarify the views of the Śaiva siddhānta school and to refute the wrong views of others”⁶³.

Tantra in the modern world

It is an undeniable fact that the growth and spread of modern

education has resulted in a sort of hatred and aversion to Tantra in general, due to the queer, covert, secretive and often repulsive rites like Kumārī pūja, Pañcamakāra systems and certain other 'Gupta' tantras employed as part of Tāntric rituals. Some early western scholars and their Indian followers also were against Tantra as a desirable branch of knowledge⁶⁴. Winternitz in his book, *Indian Literature*, while accusing Vedic literature of being the work of inferior writers written in barbarous and ungrammatical Sanskrit, admits that whatever may be our opinion of the literary, religious and moral value of the Tantras, historians of Indian religion and culture cannot afford to neglect them and from the point of view of comparative religion too, they contain valuable material⁶⁵.

It was the general and arduous efforts put in by scholars like John Woodroff that saved Tāntric science from the accusations of grossness, grotesqueness and ambiguity. John-Woodroff brought to light the real inner meanings of Tantra and reinstated it to its pristine glory, thereby restoring the status it richly deserved.

Although Tāntric practices and performance of Tāntric rites and rituals are in vogue in different parts of India in its Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta versions, it is in South India that Tāntric forms of worship endures and strongly too. But it is worthwhile to note here that the Tāntrics in general sadly lack an in-depth knowledge in the basic tenets

of Tāntric Tattvas (philosophy and principles) confining themselves to its externalities only.

Tāntric tradition in Kerala

Tantra, in the opinion of concerned authorities, must have taken roots in Kerala and has spread almost concomitant with the origin of Kerala itself. Two schools of thought about the history of Kerala support this view. One is 'Abhyūhika prasthāna' and the other 'Āgamika prasthāna'. The first is based on the inferences of geologists, social scientists, anthropologists and the like. The second has its moorings purely on ancient myths, fables, legends and is hence mere conjecture. The first school appears grounded on rationality⁶⁶.

The precise of origin of Tāntrism in Kerala are unclear, though the tradition may have come from Kashmir.⁶⁷

Kerala and Paraśurāma

In the history of Kerala, in Charitra kavyas (Kerala carita, Kerala Māhātmyam, Keralaṭatti, Keralaḍaya, Keralaviśeṣaniyama, Samskr̥ta Kerala Māhātmyam) and the fables and myths connected with its supposed reclamation from the sea, the name of Paraśurāma stands as a character, unique and exclusive to Kerala. 'Paraśurāmakalpasūtra' known as the Tantra text of Kerala is fabled to have been the work of Lord Paraśurāma. It is through this most ancient Tāntric work, the

interpretations and commentaries thereon, and the temples of Durgā, Śāsta and other gods and goddess said to have been consecrated by Paraśurāma, that we get to know about the Kerala connection of Paraśurāma. Moreover it is also believed that the right to perform Tāntric rites in the temples consecrated by him has been directly handed down to certain Brahmins by Paraśurāma himself. Such tantries are the original legatees of Tantra in Kerala.

The Tāntric origin in Kerala - a Historical perspective

According to A.Sridhara Menon, the famous historian, there were different modes of worship in ancient Kerala, like Nāga worship and the Pitrupūja, that are Dravidian in origin and he traces the construction of most of the temples during the 8th cy. A.D. He further holds that it is during the period of the Bhakti movement and the revival of Hinduism that the present forms of Tāntric worship gained prominence in Kerala.⁶⁸ This may have resulted in the development of different modes of Tāntric rites and rituals in Kerala. Although the Tāntric tradition in Kerala is predominantly Dakṣiṇācāra, there are certain elements that exhibit Vāmācāra. They are mainly performed in temple traditional considered inferior. There are three main recognized Tāntric schools- Kashmiri, Bengali and Kerala-of which the Kerala school generally known as Dakṣiṇācāra and predominantly Vedic, and hence Sāttvik in nature, is held in great esteem. That there still exist rudiments of

Vāmācāra rites in Pañcamakāra which includes animal sacrifice in certain temples of Kerala is sufficient proof that there once existed in the ancient past Tāntric rituals totally different from the Dakṣiṇācāra system, the most popular and widely accepted in India among the different Tāntric schools, it is practised which pre-emptively maintain vedic purity, chief characteristics where Ahimsa, clarity of hymns and credibility of their *Phalasiddhi*.

The Tāntric tradition of Kerala assigns equal importance to all deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Durga, Gaṇapati, Bhadrakālī, Śubrahmaṇya, Śāsta, Saṅkaranārāyaṇa, etc.⁶⁹ There are in Kerala several thousands of temples for each one of these deities, and well established and orderly system of worship in strict conformity with Tāntric traditions has been laid down for each. In this context, it may be noted that Dr. N.P. Unni, gives a brief description of the daily rites and rituals followed in temples of Kerala.⁷⁰ The famous literary and Tāntric commentator, Bhaskararaya, has held 'Keralācāraṃ' as the most eminent and exalted among all the Tāntric schools,⁷¹ the basic reason being its innate nobility and superiority which can be traced to its Śaiva origin, and the Kerala school of Tantra, therefore, has found wide acceptance all over India.

Tantric preceptors in Kerala

Kerala always had two categories of Tāntric Acāryas, Karmis (Tantris) and authors of Tāntric texts. But this classification does not in

any way signify that tantris never wrote any Tāntric texts or that the authors of Tāntric texts never performed Tantra. The Tāntric history of Kerala makes it abundantly clear that the Nedumpalli Tarananallur Namboothiri family were important Tāntric performers in Kerala. It is said that Tarananallur had received rights to perform Tāntric rites directly from Paraśurāma. The line of his family is still in existence. *Kerala caritra* further confirms that besides Taraṇanallūr, twelve other Namboothiri families were also assigned the right to perform Tāntric rites.

तन्त्रिणो द्वादशश्रेष्ठान्
प्रतिष्ठामकल्पयेत् ⁷²

There are also other Namboothiri families who received Mantra Dīkṣa from the original twelve Tāntric families. In the present time, there are also several well known Tantris and Tāntric families who are non-Brahmins.

The famous Tāntric families in Kerala

The following are the most important and well known Tāntric families in Kerala, bearing a long lineage – Manalikkara Potti, Kuzhikkattubhattatiri, Kukkara potti, Kulakkadappandarattil, Tazhamanpotti, Parampurubhattatiri, Kadiakkodu Nampootiri, Manattattu Nampootiri, Itattalli Nampootiri, Kainikkara Nampootiri, Vempiliyattu Nampootiri, Kuttalakkattu Nampootiri, Mattappilli Nampootiri, Kunnattu

Bhattatiri, Chennasu Nampootiri, Kallur Nampootiri, Kattumatattu Nampootiri, Pampumekkattu Nampootiri, Andaladi Nampootiri, Potayur Nampootiri, etc. These Tāntric families were honoured with titles and generous gifts, wealth and lands by the rulers of the numerous princely states. In Vāmakeśvara Tantra the significance of Tāntric gurus is described thus;

शिवे रूषे गुरुस्त्राता
गुरौ रूषे न कश्चन ⁷³

The student of Tantra and the preceptor of Tantra who teaches him ought to possess certain minimum qualities (lakṣaṇas). These qualities are specified in all authoritative Tantric texts. In *Tantra samuccaya*, Ācārya lakṣaṇa is described thus,

विप्रः कुलीनः कृतसंस्क्रियौघः
स्वाधीतवेदागमतत्ववेत्ता;
वर्णाश्रमाचाररतोधिदीक्षो
दक्षस्तपस्वी गुरुरास्तिकोस्तु ॥⁷⁴

The Tantris of yore were invariably those possessing all these qualities. But, of late, it seems that the only criterion for one to be a Tantri is to belong to a Tāntric family. This runs contrary to the tenets and principles laid down in authentic Tāntric texts. This unhealthy state of affairs has been pointed out by the famous Tāntric ācārya, Kakkatu Narayanan Nampoothirippadu, in his book, *Saparivāraṁ Pūjakaḷ*. The above observation is born out by the unsavoury trends in the

performance of Tāntric rites and the materialistic pursuits of Tantrists in general.

Kerala Tāntric Literature – A Study in Brief

Broadly speaking, the Tāntric literature in Kerala may be divided into three periods – the period upto 'Nārāṇattubhrāntan', from then to the *Tantra Samuccaya*, and the post – *Samuccaya* period. The exact date regarding the life of 'Nārāṇattubhrāntan' is not known, but it is generally assumed by scholars to have been 1500 yrs. ago. He was the brother of Mezhathol Agnihotri. 'Nārāṇatt' is fabled to be the earliest and the most famous among Tāntric authors although his work remains untraceable.⁷⁵

The 2nd or the middle period begins with Saṅkaracarya, whose work *Prapañcasāra* is the earliest available Tāntric text in Kerala, and ends with *Tantra samuccaya*. The third period can be generally termed the post, *Samuccaya* period and is characterized by an excessive emphasis on the practical side of Tāntric rites and rituals at the cost of its philosophical and mythological attributes. Both the pre-*Samuccaya* and post-*Samuccaya* Tantra treatises are reflective of the typically Keralite milieu (background) of Tantra. The following is a concise mapping out of the major Tāntric works produced in Kerala. The full lists of books, texts and other materials referred to for the present study is too long to enumerate and hence the most relevant among

them are listed below. Besides Tāntric treatises, works on architectural texts and commentaries have also been gone through for the study, since the subject of Vāstuśāstra, Śilpaśāstra, etc. has an important bearing on the Kriyāpāda of Tāntric texts.

It is very difficult, nay, well-nigh impossible to pinpoint the exact period during which Tantra took roots in Kerala. But there are clear and sufficient proof to the fact that the Tāntric form of worship must have been definitely associated with temple worship. A vast collection of Sanskrit texts and, to a lesser extent, Malayalam commentaries and original compositions did exist in Kerala. Many of the Sanskrit texts are still available in manuscript form and in print, and they continue to be valid. They are authoritative sources and authentic guides for learned Tantrics, scholars and students of Tāntric literature.

1. *Mayamata* of Maya⁷⁶
2. *Prapañcasāra* of Sankara⁷⁷
3. *Bhavatrāta*⁷⁸
4. *Prayogamañjarī* of Ravi⁷⁹
5. *Viṣṇu Saṁhita* of Sumati⁸⁰
6. *Gopālānuṣṭhānakrama* of Kṛṣṇaṁlāśuka⁸¹
7. *Pradyota* of Trivikṛma⁸²
8. *Bahudaivatya* of Nārāyaṇācārya⁸³
9. *Works of Rāghavānanda*⁸⁴
10. *Mādhava*⁸⁵

11. Rahasyagopālatantra cintāmony of Vasudeva⁸⁶
12. Tantra samuccaya of CennāsNarayanan Namboothiri⁸⁷
13. Śeṣa samuccaya of Kṛṣṇa Śarma⁸⁸
14. Anuṣṭhānapaddhati (1) of Parameśvara⁸⁹
15. Anuṣṭhānapaddhati (2) of Vāsudevasomāyaji⁹⁰
16. Tāntrika kriyā of Kṛṣṇa Pāṣāṇa Vipra⁹¹
17. Anuṣṭhānasamuccaya of Narayana⁹²
18. *Anuṣṭhāna*⁹³
19. *Śaivāgama Nibandhana*⁹⁴
20. *Tantra prāyaścitta* of Narayana⁹⁵
21. *Kriyāleśasmṛti*⁹⁶
22. *Kriyā saṅgraha* of Sankara⁹⁷
23. *Kriyāsāra* of Ravi⁹⁸
24. *Tantra sārasaṅgraha* of Nārāyaṇa⁹⁹
26. *Tantra saṅgraha vyākhyā – Mantra vimarśini* of Svarnagrāma Vasudeva¹⁰⁰
27. *Soubhāgyamañjari*¹⁰¹
28. *Tantra rājavyākhyā – Manorama*¹⁰²
29. *Śilparatna* of Srīkumara¹⁰³
30. *Prayogasāra* of Govinda¹⁰⁴
31. *Śrīkṛṣṇa Tantra* of Kubera¹⁰⁵
32. *Śivacandrika* of Vāsudeva¹⁰⁶
33. *Skandānuṣṭhana Sangraha* of Kuzhikkattubhattatiri¹⁰⁷
34. *Nṛttaraṅgajīrṇoddhāra* of Kuzhikkattu Bhattatiri¹⁰⁸

35. *Narttanaraṅganavīkṛta Vyākhyā* (anonymous)¹⁰⁹
36. *Vaiṣṇavānuṣṭhānakalapasaṅgraha* of
Garttavanāsankara¹¹⁰
37. *Vaiṣṇava Navīkaraṇa Prākārah* of Narayana¹¹¹
38. *Bhadradīpika* of Narayana¹¹²
39. *Tantra sāra* of Subrahmanya¹¹³
40. *Mantrasāra* of Sankara¹¹⁴
41. *Dourgānuṣṭhānakalāpa saṅgraha* (anonymous)¹¹⁵
42. *Laghutantrasamuccaya*¹¹⁶
43. *Kalaśacandrika* of Narayana¹¹⁷
44. *Upahāraprakāśikāvyaṅkya* of Valiya Godavarma
Tampuran of Kottuññallūr¹¹⁸
45. *Tattvaparakāśavyākhyā* of Srikumara¹¹⁹
46. *Śrīvidyā mantrabhāṣya* of Raghavan Sastri¹²⁰

An assortment Sanskrit works on Tantra

In addition to the works listed above, there are numerous Tāntric works related to rites and rituals like installation, consecration, purification, renovation, expiations, measurements, Mantras, Dhvaja (flag staff), temple, theatres etc. Most of these groups are explanations and expositions on specific subjects taken from original treaties by authorities. The following are some of the titles belonging to this category.

Uttamabrahmavidyāsāra, Jīrṇoddhāra, Tantrasiddhi,
Tantrānuṣṭhānakrama, Nārāyaṇātmake, Bimbalakṣaṇam,

Brahmatāntrikam, Puṣpāñjalividhānam, Pūjā-kalaśodbhavaprakāra,
Kaumārabali, Kālītantram, Dvādaśyārādhanā,
Maṇḍalacatuṣkalakṣaṇam, Prayogaratnamālā, Mahāgaṇapatikalpaṁ,
Balikalpaṁ, Mahāsaṁmohanatantram, Mātṛsadbhāvam, Vijayabalikalpa,
Nāgabalikalpa, Kukkuṭakalpam, Mūrttitrayakalpam,
Skandasadbāvam, Dhvajapraṭiṣṭhāvidhi, Śāstrpūjākrama,
Viṣṇuśāstrupūjākrama, Viṣṇupūjakrama, Pārvatyupāsanakrama,
Raktacāmuṇḍīkalpaṁ, Āvhatikalpam, Kriyākramadyotikā,
Tantranirṇaya, Kṣetrapārajīrṇoddhāra, Prayogaratnākaram,
Vanadurgākalpa, Tantrasamuccayaśilpabhāga, Śrīmūrttilakṣaṇam,
Keśavādicaturdaśamūrttilakṣaṇam, Rudrādimantrakrama,
Aṣṭamūrttilakṣṇa etc. Seen in the background of the importance assigned
to Tantra into traditional Kerala society, it is a safe guess that there
could have been many more Tāntric and related works and works on
art, architecture, murals, iconography, sculpture etc. in Kerala which
remain untraced and unpublished and, in many cases lost due to neglect
which is the direct offshoot of the influence of modernity.

Important Malayalam works on Tantra

There have been many original adapted and translated
versions of standard Tāntric works into Malayalam besides religious
based one commentaries in the vernacular. Some of the important ones
from among them deserves special mention and is listed here in the

order of primacy.

47. *Kriyādīpika or Puṭayūrbhāṣa* of Vāsudevan Nampoothiri of Poonthottattu¹²¹
48. *Kuzhikkāṭṭupacca* of Mahesvaran Bhattatiripadu ¹²²
49. *Saparivāraṁ pūjakaḷ* of Narayanan Nampoothiri¹²³
50. *Tantradarpaṇa* of Mangalappalli Sankaran Nampoothiri¹²⁴
51. *Durgā Kalāśa*¹²⁵
52. *Bhāṣātantra* of C.Veluvaidyan¹²⁶
53. *Tantraratna* (anonymous) ¹²⁷

This is a little known Tāntric work whose author is not traceable since the first few pages of the extant book are missing. The old text of the printed work is available but there is no indication what so ever is the text for its Malayalam commentary about the author. However the numbering of the pages in Malayalam numericals typical of the 19th and early 20th centurys leads us to conclude that the work must have been written during that period. The language of the book in vernacular learning a close resemblance to other Tāntric works of the period like Tantraratnāvali and Laghupūjāratna also support the above conclusion.

This may be considered a work of distinctive and rare Keralite origin since it is not found mention in any of the works on Malayalam literary history or among the books listed in the stocks of important libraries in Kerala on Tantra.

54. Tantraratnāvali and Laghupūjaratna¹²⁸

Composed by Srinivasasastri. A., these Tāntric works have been published by Narayanan vaidyan. V. of Koṅgal Vallimuttil of Paravoor in Kollam district in Kerala after buying copyright from the author in the year 1912 and printed at Sree Kṛṣṇa Vilasam Press, Kollam. The above details are available from the opening page of the extant text.

It is surprising that Tantraratnāvali and Laghupūjāratna are little known among works on Tāntric literature in Kerala, with practically no mention or reference about them made by either scholars or researchers. Although the author's family or social background is unclear, from certain allusions in the introduction to 'Laghupūjāratna' the book is assumed to have been written by a Tuḷu Brahmin.

There are, thus, innumerable worthy and weighty works that enrich the Tāntric literary corpus of Kerala, some published and the rest yet to see the light of day. Many of them, long forgotten, neglected, or stocked away in the dusty environments of the archaic attics storerooms and abandoned personal libraries in the ancestral homes of long dead authors, scholars and academics, have been and are being sort out, brought to light, deciphered, interpreted and published owing to the ardour and arduous efforts of scholars, universities, Tantra vidyāpīṭhas, publishers, libraries and research students. For most

among them, are the names of T. Ganapati Sastri, Ulloor S. Paremswara Iyer, Vatakkumkoor Raja Raja Varma, E.V. Raman Namboothiri, Dr. N.P. Unni, Dr. N. V. P. Unithiri and Kāṇippayyoor.

This rich literary heritage, handed down to us in Sanskrit as well as in the vernacular, provide not only the fullest possible revelation of Tāntric principles and practices, but through ample light on the multifarious aspects of the cultural, social and religious ethos of Kerala. Without the slightest shadow of exaggeration, one can say that no survey of the literary history of Kerala will be complete without duly taking into account the valuable contributions of Tāntric literary compositions and the commentaries thereon.

End notes

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7. Balakrishna Kurup, K., op.cit, p.14.
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9. Gavin Flood, op.cit., p. 28, 29,
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 45. Raman Nambootiri E.V., *TSM*, p.26.
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 47. Manoranjan Basu, *Fundamentals of the Philosophy of the Tantras*, pub. Mira Basu, Calcutta 1986, p. 82.
 48. *Aitihyamāla*, Sankunni, Kottarattil Memorial Committee – Current Books, eds. 3rd, yr. 1982) p.459
 49. A case in point is that of Kiriyankulambu House belonging to the Kurukkal vaṁśa of Karipodu deśa, Puthunagaram Pancayat in Cittoor taluk in Palakkad district, which claims a tradition of Jyotiṣa, Vaidya, Tantra and Mantra vāda for 5 generations. An interesting aspect of their belief is that their isṭamūrti is 'Nili', the favourite ārādhana mūrti of māntriks in Valluvanādu. Refer weekend edition of Kerala Kaumudi – July 24, 2005.
 50. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. I p.578.
 51. *The Hindu World*, vol II, pub. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London 1968, p. 482.
 52. For details see *Tantra samuccaya*, intro. , pp. 54-62.
 53. Ramachandra Rao, S.K., Prof., op.cit. p.20.
 54. Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, p. 212
 55. Ramachandra Rao, S.K., Prof. op.cit., p.21.
 56. E.V. Raman Nambootiri also listed them in *TSM*, intro. , pp. 30-40.
 57. Arthur Avalon, *Principles of Tantra*, intro. for a list of 192 Tantras, pp. 57-59.
 - 57a. Mishra T.N. *Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art*, D.K.Print World (P). Ltd, Delhi, 1997, ch.5, p.57.
 58. Radhakanta Deva Raja, op.cit., p. 584.
 59. Rramachandra Rao. S.K. Prof. *TAE* p. 7
 60. Ed. by Ramachandra Rao, S.K., Prof. The *Āgama-Kosa*, vol. I, 'What is Āgama?' pp.1-22, pub.
 61. Vide *TSM*, intro. p.30
 62. Sarma, S.A.S., *The Paddhati Literature of the 'Saivāgamas* (unpublished monograph) E.F.E.O., Pondicherry.
 63. ibid
 64. For eg. Rameshchandra Dutta, the famous Indian scholar in his *Prācīnāryāvartta*; Sivanathasastri, M.A., in his work *Brahmasamājīa caritra* and Moner Williams, have all held Tantra in ill repute.
 65. For details see E.V. Raman Nambootiri, *TSM* intro, p. 33.
 66. ibid. p. 63; The authentic work, '*Temples of Kerala*', authored by S. Jayashankar and published under the title 'Special Studies of Kerala' by Census of India, provides

- sufficient materials supportive of both versions of the origin of Kerala.
67. Gavin Flood, *An intro. to Hinduism*, pub. Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.171.
 68. *Kerala Saṁskāra*, pub. Sāhitya pravartaka sahakarana sangham, Kottayam 1992, pp.160-161.
 69. Vide-TSM-with vimarsini commentary (TSV), Eds, Ganapati Sastri.T, Reprinted with an intro. by Unni, N.P., Dr, Pub-Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1990, pp.11,12.
 70. Ed. by Unni, N.P., Dr, *ISGP- A Study*, vol. I, pub Bharatiya Vidya Prakasan, 1990, pp.6-7.
 71. Narayanan Nampootiri Kakkadu, '*Saparivāram Pūjakaḥ*', pub. Panjangam Pustakasala, Kunnankulam, p.3.
 72. *ibid.* p. 28
 73. *ibid*
 74. *Tantra samuccaya*, vol. I, Patala-1, Sl-1
 75. E.V. Raman Nampootiri, *op.cit.*, p. 81
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 78. See- *Tantra Literature of Kerala*, Unni. N.P.Dr- New Bharatiya Book Corporation p-58
 79. *Prayogamañjari*, No. L 674 & No.L 647 Oriental Manuscripts Library, Thiruvananthapuram; *KSC*, Vol.I, pp.200-201.
 80. Ed. by Ganapati Sastri.T., *Viṣṇu Saṁhita*, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, No. LXXXV, 1925, *Reprint with introduction by Unni, N.P., Dr. , Nag publishers, Delhi, 1993*; *KSC*, vol.II, p.348, Eds. V, pub. Kerala University)
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