

LEFT-HANDED TANTRA

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I would like to begin with a quote from the sacred writings of Sri Gurudev Mahendranath Dadaji:

*"The maiden said my lips are red
Just kiss three times and off to bed
And if you serve my body well
Then what a story I shall tell
And all the girls who hear of you
Will all line up and form a queue
And wait with such impatient haste
That each in turn may get a taste.
A King-size penis it is told
Is more than one small girl can hold."*

INTRODUCTION

What is Tantra? Is it this? Or is it that? Western Occultists, with their fondness for identifying, labelling and isolating spiritual paths from each other, have tended to be confused when confronted with the spiritual life of India. This has been described as the most complex and outwardly confusing pattern of thought which has existed in any place in the world or at any time throughout history. India's scriptural texts are enormous, its deities so numerous, its teachers so diverse, and in a land of teeming millions, everyone seems to be in a separate sect of which he is the only member.

Now when I mention Tantra, some people invariably think of weird yoga postures, particularly those convoluted sexual postures found in the coffee-table books on how to have a better sex-life without pulling several muscles. Tantra can be translated as meaning tradition, to spread, and to weave, and it is a vast subject which encompasses astrology, yoga, sorcery, alchemy, devotional worship, medicine, and the search for enlightenment. It is not a religion, though it does have religious elements, nor is it a way of thought; it is a way of action.

BEGINNINGS OF TANTRA

The roots of Tantra are lost in antiquity, although it is known that Tantric ideas predate the development of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain thought. The earliest Tantric texts bear no trace of the hierarchical caste divides prescribed in the Vedas, and symbols used by Tantrikas can be traced back to Paleolithic

Europe (20,000 BC). More importantly, Tantra is a living Tradition. That is to say, it is continually changing, it is a river of change, which changes as it flows through different eras and cultures, to meet the needs and desires of those who imbibe its waters.

To understand the beginnings of Tantra, it is necessary to understand something of Indian history. Orthodox Hinduism, the so-called Great or Brahmanic Tradition, has its roots in the Vedas, which encapsulate the religious ideas of the Aryans, who invaded India around 1750 BC, subduing the indigenous peoples with their iron weapons. In the following centuries of pressure, much of that indigenous culture retreated - there was a retreat away from the cities and migration routes into the forests, mountains and villages. The vast hinterlands of India allowed the survival of isolated centres of cultural life which retained elements of great antiquity. Gradually, a landscape emerged along the northern river valleys of cities, supported by a vast countryside divided into isolated village societies. Whilst the orthodox culture was dominated by the Vedic rituals of the Brahmins, there also existed a parallel vision, the Vrata tradition, operating through song, dance, art and magical incantations - a storehouse of both archaic wisdom and contemporary action.

According to some scholars, particularly those influenced by orthodox Hindu or Western ideas, Tantra was a degeneration from the rarefied atmosphere of Yoga, into witchcraft, alchemy, and astrology. This is erroneous. There is an increasing body of evidence pointing to the emergence of Tantra from the rituals and concerns of the tribal peoples. A very early Tantric manuscript, the *Kubjika Tantra*, written in the sixth century, is concerned with the rituals of potters. From the prehistoric period, the pot has been the symbol of the Great Mother goddess. Some scholars believe that Tantra emerged from the blending of alchemy and agricultural magic. A rich source of proto-tantric ideas is the *Atharva Veda*, which was compiled by singing sages several centuries after the Rig Vedic Hymns. These texts are concerned with magic and medicine, the magical use of plants for talismans and mind-expansion. Again, many of the concerns of

the spells are practical. Here is a description of a spell from the Asuri Kalpa, a witchcraft practice based on Atharvan foundations:

"To propitiate the goddess, rites were enjoined for the preparation of a Kunda or fire-pot, which took the form of a yantra, symbolic of the yoni. An oblation of Ghee (clarified butter) and brown sugar was offered to the Kunda. The witch put on garlands of red, sweet-smelling oleander, wore red garments, and lay facing South. The mantra, called the whisper spell, was then used to invoke:

'Om reverence Rudra, Om, O pungent one, thou of the pungent leaf, blessed, Asuri reddish one, thou of the red garment, O daughter of Atharvan, non-terrific one, non-terrific wonder-worker, smite, smite, burn, burn, cook, cook, crush, crush, so long burn so long cook until you have brought (name) into my power. Svaha.'

This was followed by other ceremonies, including the making of an image of the person against whom the spell was directed, and the recital of the mantra 108 times over six days. On the seventh day, the victim succumbed."

Tantric practices emerged as an identifiable stream from around the second century of the Christian Era.

LEFT-HAND AND RIGHT-HAND PATH

The Left-Hand Path is esoteric, whilst the Right-Hand Path is exoteric. The RHP is basically the Brahmanic Tradition; there are rules laid down for the orthodox to follow - follow the instructions and you will go to heaven. Its tools are orthodoxy, superstition, and priestcraft. It is the path of steady progress, and according to the Brahmins, takes many lifetimes to accomplish.

The Aryan invaders were more prudish than the conquered Dravidians, and the Rig Veda contains a prohibition against allowing "those whose deity is the phallus" to enter the sanctuaries of their temples.

The Left-Hand Path, or Vama Marg, is described as "Shigra, Ugra and Tivra" - meaning "fast, terrible and intense." On the LHP, being a individual is all-important, and there are no rules to be slavishly followed.

MAYA - ILLUSION OR ENJOYMENT

The Brahmanic concept of Maya - illusion - is believed to be the major cause of man's suffering. The phenomenal world is something which must be transcended, by means of austerities and observances - again, it takes many lifetimes.

The Tantric world-view is more life-affirming - a process of dynamic involvement in the world. Instead of suppressing desire and sensation, they are to be cultivated, an idea expressed in homilies such

as "a man must rise with that which might cause his fall".

THE PATH OF THE HOUSEHOLDER

Although other religions and mystery traditions have developed both a 'householder' community and a intensified 'spiritual' community, it was Hindu Paganism which set the pattern and understanding that there are two distinct and separate paths of behaviours, teaching and outlook. These are the PRAVRITTI MARGA - the Way of the World, and the NIVRITTI MARGA - the Path of Return.

The Pravritti, the people of the household life, were not considered as inferior to the Nivrittis. Both have their purpose and function to fulfil. Between these two paths there lies a third strata - the MUMUKSHUS - the ones who have a great desire for Liberation, although mostly they remain as householders, as certain duties still bind them.

Hindu Paganism has always stressed four legitimate aims in life.

These are DHARMA - righteousness and duty; ARTHA - the pursuit of wealth; KAMA - sensual pleasures, and MOKSHA - Liberation. These four 'Noble Truths' are common to both Vedic and Tantric patterns.

YOGIS AND SADHUS

Sadhus and Yogis - the image of the wandering mendicant conjures many nuances of mood and meaning. Homeless, wandering holy men, with amulets and rudraksa beads around their necks, rhinoceros-horn ear-rings, ashes on their foreheads, unkempt hair, singing praises of god, roaring like a bull, behaving like madmen - the appearance of whom in an Indian village could be both an image of profound terror and potency. To the Yogi, Nothing is forbidden - he is free from society and its moralities. The Yogi is magician-sorcerer, master of alchemy, astrologer, juggler, poet, seducer of mind and heart, and also the awakened man.

These naked wonder-workers had their origins in the pre-Vedic traditions before the Aryan Invasion and the establishment of the Brahmanic Tradition.

DATTATREYA

The legendary 'founder' of Tantra is Dattatreya, the first Tantric, prototype of all yogis and sadhus. In many stories he appears as a naked sadhu, drinking wine and eating pig meat - all things which are abhorrent to the orthodox. Here is a quote attributed to Dattatreya:

"If all the commandments are negated, if everything is realised to be the highest Self, if Mind is free from dualistic ideas, and if the talk of luck and so on are abandoned, then in the case of the aspirant

there is neither purity nor impurity, nor the distinction of sex."

SOME VAMA MARG SECTS

Three of the most interesting and colourful of the Vama Marg sects are the Nathas, Pasupatis, and Aghoris. All found their way into Tibet, and all three were both respected and feared. The Nathas and Pasupatis were Saivite Sects, whilst the Aghoris were worshippers of the Great Mother.

THE NATHAS

The Nathas are considered by some to be the original sect of Tantric Sadhus. The term 'Nath' is a Sanskrit word for 'Lord' and is an epithet of Shiva, as the Lord of Yoga. It is thought that the Nathas became a distinct sect around 300-400 AD. The two most important figures in the legendary history of the Nathas are Matsyendranath and his disciple, Goraknath. Goraknath is often credited for devising or reintroducing Hatha Yoga in the 11th Century AD, and also the now-familiar images of chakras and kundalini. Goraknath became a legendary hero-figure, appearing in many stories as a mysterious stranger, curing the sick, bringing rain, raising the dead. He was later deified as an incarnation of Shiva, and several Temples are dedicated to him.

The Nathas were great bards, and many legends were carried by them from village to village in a mixture of song, dance, religion and magic. They also carried the compassionate truths of the Buddha into Saivite doctrine. Their monasteries became repositories of art and literature concerned with magic, palmistry, alchemy, astrology and divine ecstasy.

THE PASUPATAS

The Pasupatas were another colourful sect of Yogis. Their roots are lost in antiquity, although some scholars trace them to a Dravidian Sect, which was driven underground during the Aryan invasion. These ascetics behaved in the fashion of poor madmen - gibbering nonsense, twitching, snoring, limping, making lewd gestures to women, and publicly masturbating. By courting disfavour from others, the Pasupatas demonstrated that they had lost their attachment to pride and egotistical tendencies.

THE KAPALIKAS

The Kapalikas were a sub-sect of the Pasupatas. They went naked, used a human skull as a food-bowl, bathed in the ashes from cremations, and were believed to commit human sacrifice.

Naturally, they inspired fear and distaste in the orthodox. The term 'Kapalika' can be translated as "bearer of the Skull-Bowl", and these sadhus

worshipped Bhairava, the Supreme Beggar, a terrible aspect of Shiva, who carried with him the severed fifth head of Brahma.

THE AGHORIS

The Aghoris too traditionally went naked and carried a skull food-bowl. They inhabited cremation grounds and were reputed to eat anything, from carrion to excrement and corpses. Aghoris were feared for their powers of necromancy and viewed with disgust, but, as with other Vama Marg Sects, deviance from the common rules of conduct is evidence of liberation and therefore sanctity.

In India, they were also revered as saints. During the Raj several Aghoris were convicted of murder and other offences arising out of their strange practices.

SOME TANTRIC CONCEPTS:

1. SELF-WILL-GOING

A key Tantric principle is that of SVECCACHARA, which can be understood as the 'path of following one's own will,' or 'self-will-going'. There has been some speculation that Aleister Crowley came across this idea during his travels in the Orient. Indeed, Benjamin Walker renders the non-literal translation of this term as 'Do as thou Wilt.' This can be understood to indicate that the Tantric creates his own path, rather than following anything laid down by orthodoxy.

The very plasticity of Tantra creates problems of understanding for Western Occultists, who often tend to be literal-minded. I recall, for example, reading Kenneth Grant's *Cults of the Shadows* in the late 70's, and was very much impressed by his knowledge of Tantra - particularly all the parts which were asterisked as being "initiated Kaula Comment". A few weeks ago, I was somewhat amused to hear that when Grant's books first appeared, one of the few Kaula Adepts remaining in India used them as toilet paper!

I think it is important to remember that Tantric texts evolved from the oral traditions. There is a great deal of detail which is metaphorical, or aimed at a Tropic level of understanding - that which might lead to Gnosis, the heart-knowledge which implies change and action. After all, Tantric sages do have a reputation for deliberately 'winding people up', just as the God Siva appears to his devotees in the shape and to the extent that they were ready to see him.

2. GURUS

This point brings me to one aspect of Tantric practice which, on the surface, seems to be at odds with its individualistic stance, and that is the figure of the Guru. The figure of the Guru has come under

a great deal of scrutiny over the last few years. This is due to the great number of fraudulent Gurus, and, as Pete Carroll has pointed out, this stems from the difficulty of finding out immediately if one has encountered a great master or a fraudulent one. There is a strong antipathy in contemporary western magick to Guru-relationships, although people seem only too willing to allow their individual magicks to become entangled with bizarre individuals.

I have had Guru-type relationships for over a decade now, and as far as I call tell, none of them have eroded my personal will or encroached upon my individuality. But there are more important issues to look at here.

Firstly, there is the question of Dharma, or duty, which, in the modern idiom, is taken as 'respect'. Expressions of loyalty, personal honour, awareness of duty, respect for others (particularly those who merit respect), are all manifestations of moral character, and therefore of one's Will. To be able to manifest these qualities is therefore a reflection of one's magical power.

If I should have a particularly stunning Illumination, I will thank my Guru, who after all initiated me into the clan of the Adinatha. He is most likely to say "piss off, will you". but we both understand this relationship. I can rely on my Guru to be honest with me to a level that no other person can be, to listen to my ravings, and lend me money on occasion.

Another expression of respect is to the Guru-Line. Dattatreya is the Adinath - the legendary founder. Matsyendranath is the human founder, and from him there is the unbroken chain of initiation leading up to the present-day and the flowering of the Adinatha in the West. These are my 'ancestors', and I invoke them in ritual as a crowd of wild men and women, waving tridents and yelling 'go for it kiddo'.

A third aspect of the Guru-condition is the Tantric idea that the great guru, the teacher, is omnipresent; that any experience can suddenly twist you into illumination. There is a story about Dattatreya, that a princeling asked the MahaYogi who his Guru was, and that Datta silently indicated the rocks and plants around him. This idea is echoed in the Words of William Burroughs: "the realisation that everything is alive and significant". There is no mundane life v magical life, and any encounter can lead to vast changes that we are unprepared for.

KLESHAS

Another core of the Adinatha path is the importance of working with the Kleshas. This term can be translated as 'fetters, obstacles, or blocks'. Kleshas must be untangled by various means.

The Five Kleshas are:

IGNORANCE
EGO
REVULSION
ATTACHMENT
CLINGING TO LIFE

And the process by which one untangles them is Klesha-smashing. A basic approach to Klesha-smashing is to be aware of one's immediate physical presence - to be responsive to the world, rather than what we project onto the world.

Three words in Sanskrit express the essence of the Natha Way of life:

SAMA - balance, equality, equipoise;
SAMARASA - nondiscrimination, the mind at rest;
SAHAJA - natural-joy or spontaneity.

There is a Tantric saying that there is no Mukti (freedom from delusion) without Bhukti (enjoyment). Thus the Tantric seeks to enjoy and accept all experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

This is merely an introduction to some of the core ideas of Left-Handed Tantra. I've said nothing about sexuality, Kundalini, Siva-Sakti, rites of necromancy, yoga or the innumerable legends of the Goddesses. I would like to close, as I began, with some words of Dadaji:

"Do not mistake religion for Spiritual Life.
Do not mistake Scriptures for Divine Wisdom.
Do not mistake civilisation for Progress.
Do not mistake endurance for Happiness.
Do not mistake submission for Acceptance.
Do not mistake obedience for Freedom."

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