

TANTRA LOKA OF ABHINAVA GUPTA

Introduction

Tantra which literally means thread. This thread, however, happens to have been used in one of its earliest usage in the Rgveda itself in such deep sense as understanding binding the entire reality together in a single fold of comprehension so beneficial as to transform the human nature of all its baser kind of tendency into most idealistic form which is known as the divine. The mantra concerned advises wise men as follows:

'While spreading the thread for weaving out into piece of cloth, follow the illumination of the higher light and safeguard the path having been prepared through meditative effort. Weave out the cloth of the ideas spun in the form of the threads setting them perfectly in an even form and thus become contemplative humans having the prospect of giving birth to the class of divine being (Rgveda, X.53.6)

If we study analytically, we find that Tantra is but an extension of Yoga. No doubt Yoga is the greatest gift of In India to mankind and is a gift of Sam magnitude from the Indian side as science is from the Western

with this difference, however, that while the fruits of science began to be relished by people at large right from the very beginning, Yoga continued to remain confined only to the selected few for aeons. Even while remaining so, it has produced effects quite splendid as a device of bringing to the fore man's talent potentialities, as is evident from the creativity of the Vedic seers. Upanisadic sages, poets like Valmiki and Vyasa, sages like Kapila, Adinatha, Mahavira, Buddha, Sankara and Abhinavagupta.

It is also observed that all systems of philosophy, except the materialists, may differ with each other theoretically but there is one thing they have in common and i.e. Yoga which they accepted and tailored it in order to fit in their system of thought. In spite of tailoring of it by different philosophical systems, yoga retained its pan-Indian identity and flourished as the background foundation of all of them.

The necessity of writing this Introduction arose because to remove the cloud of misconception or iron out the creases created by many contemporary scholars who either are not aware of the tradition or are ignoring the hard fact for the sake of exclusivity that

Tantras and Saivism diametrically opposite to Hinduism like Islam is to Christianity and are non-Vedic in origin.

There are also certain scholars who translate the word Tantraloka as Wisdom of Tantra instead of Light on Tantra, the word prakasa, light means shedding light, comment or exposition but it cannot be taken as wisdom because the word wisdom in Sanskrit is called viveka but not prakasa.

Tantra has been reduced to eroticism or hedonism and free sex in the West and to some extent in India and was also propagated by Osho which was quite contrary to what the Vedas, Upanisads and Abhinavagupta (in Chapter 29 of Tantraloka) say. In fact, this approach or method is one of the aspects to experience the Ultimate Reality, which is of the nature of bliss and finally the couples transcend it. This type of sadhana has its seed in the Rgveda, I.27, in the form of dialogues between Lopamudra and her husband Seer Agastya, The purpose behind it is to reconcile the vital and the spiritual. This topic has been discussed in this Introduction as well would be dilated upon in Chapter 29, Secret of Kula System vis-a-vis Abhinavagupta's views.

The introduction has been divided into two Sections. Namely, part I and II. The first Section deals with the antiquity of Saivism, Origin, Vedic Saivite, Discovery of Consciousness, consciousness of the unconsciousness, cakras, states of consciousness, etc. from the viewpoint of the Vedas while Section II is a critical analysis of Tantraloka.

I Background And Foundation

Antiquity of Saivism- Yogic Motifs in Indus Seals

Problem of Relationship between the Vedic and Indus Civilisation

Presence of yogic motifs in a number of seals of the Indus civilisation is a tangible evidence to prove the antiquity of yoga in India. As is evident from the carbon fourteen dating, this civilization dates from 2800 B.C. to 1400 B.C. Seals depicting yogic motifs have been found on almost all the seven layers of it. This is sufficient to bear out the fact that yoga was in practice continuously throughout the entire span of time of that civilization. It is also significant to note that the Indus civilization was not confined to the areas along the bank of the Sindhu River. As is evident from excavations conducted after the

partition and the consequent loss of Mohan-jo-daro and Harappa in favour of Pakistan, this civilisation had spread over almost the half of northern India and was quite coincident to the Vedic in several respects. As such, now, it gradually ceasing to be considered as alien to the Vedic. In the process of revision of the view in regard to the relationship between the Vedic and Indus civilization, the yogic motifs of the seals play a vital role.

Yogik Matifs concerning Asanas

The yogic content of the seals may be classified into three groups representing as many levels of practice. On the lowest level, we have a set terracotta figurines bearing out certain poses of the kind of asanas and mudhras. The most significant feature of these poses and mudras is the erectness of the backbone of the figurine brought in deliberately through the position of legs and hands. The Figurines are the following as indentified by Professor B.B. Lal and published in the Hindu Renaissance in the Makar Sankranti YUgabda 5105

Out of these figurines, 1 to 4 belong to Harappa while 5 to 6 have been excavated from Mahen-jo-daro. In spite of the two sites having been placed from each

other, there is considerable affinity among the figurines of them. The affinity lies in the strenuous folding of hands in figurines 3,5 and 6 besides deliberate straightening of the backbone. Figurine 3 is particularly interesting inasmuch as it involves specific position of legs besides hands. Here the legs are folded and requires considerable Sitting in this posture, though a little difficult, facilitates meditation. Figurines 5 and 6, through a little easier in their posture, are quite significant on account of straightness of legs, folding of hands and straightening of the backbone. While figurines 3, 5 and 6 indicate youthfulness of the practitioners, figurines 1,2 and 4 bear out advancement in age and the consequent reclining in the posture and yet continuance of the practice.

The Motif of the Yogin in the Sambhavi Mudra

Another class of yogic motif is formed by a bust in steatite with eyes half closed, a talisman worn around the head, another around the right arm, with a shawl worn above the left shoulder and below the right arm, with the head clean-shaved and the beard well trimmed. It is evident from details that the bust represents a special type of person who had to deal

things than normal. The posture with half-closed eyes is known in the yogic tradition as sambhavi mudra. The individual sitting in this posture of eyes is supposed to maintain perfect balance which makes them unbalanced in getting adjusted in life. Sambhavi mudra is the yogic practice meant for restoration of the balance. Shaving of head is suggestive of the sense of renunciation while trimming of beard indicates due care for the physical appearance. Both, thus, combined are supportive of the philosophy of life sought to be inculcated through the practice of sambhavi mudra. The talisman tied around head and arm may be taken to have been meant for facilitating success in this arduous task of maintaining balance so as to lead a successful life outwardly and pursue one's higher goal inwardly. Decoration of the shawl worn around the bust in the aforesaid manner is also indicative of the same balanced state of things. In view of these features of it, the bust can be taken neither as that of a deity nor that of a religious teacher, as Mr. Madho Sarup Vats, one of the Indus excavators, has suggested.' As is obvious from different depictions of Pasupati, had this bust been representative of a certain deity, it would have been

adorned with some sort of a headgear. As regards the idea of the religious teacher, that is something post-Buddhist when religion began to be treated as a matter of preaching and teaching. Earlier, it was a matter of spiritual sadhana and sacrificial performance. On account of the sambhavi mudra, the bust concerned looks much more meditative than anything else.

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