

Devotions & Demonesses

by Phil Hine

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For this issue, I did originally intend to look at some of what I considered the key characteristics of Tantric practice, and then to go on to discuss some of the magical practices in Tantrism. However, I've decided to, for the moment, concentrate on discussing the magical work, and will return to the key characteristics in part three.

The difficulties of approaching Tantric practice have been compounded by what might be termed the pseudo-imperialistic attitude to non-Western magical systems. Francis King's *Tantra for Westerners* is a case in point. King asserts that there are (at least on the surface) many similarities between Tantric concepts and Western Qabalah. Hence his book presents a 'qabbalized' perspective on Tantra. Fitting the unfamiliar into familiar models may well be useful up to a point, but it becomes a limiting exercise. An analogous situation would be the efforts of early anthropologists to characterize shamanic behaviour as 'epileptic'. It might well fit the theory, but it doesn't tell the whole story. I feel that, to approach Tantra, it is necessary to, at some point, examine orthodox Hindu culture, in terms of history, religion, and psychology - in order to get a grip on the *context* from which Tantrism springs. There is a tendency for Westerners to treat Tantrism as an 'added flavour' to spice up familiar magical practices, or for that matter, one's bedroom antics (which is the concern of many populist books on the subject).

Devotion and Magick

The generic term for ritual in India is *Puja* which can be translated as 'worship' or 'magic'. According to Tantric doctrine, the purpose of ritual is to use special techniques in order to make contact with the higher states of being which we call gods and other supernatural beings who can guide and assist us in our efforts to progress. The different worlds are in harmonic relation to each other; and through ritual action, they can be made to respond, just as a stringed instrument will respond when one of its harmonics resounds. Ritual, combined of sound, forms, rhythms, gestures, flowers, lights, incense and offerings carries the operator toward the world of the divine, whilst the deity, also enchanted, is brought nearer. Ritual is thus a bridge to establish and maintain this contact.

It is further held that, since the subtle worlds are many, the effects of ritual may not always be apprehended, and that results quite contrary to the intent may result. Ritual is therefore a potentially dangerous instrument and, whether internal (mental) or external (*puja*), should follow a systematic ordinance. All elements of *puja* are based on correspondences and subtle levels of relation.

In Indic magical psychology, man becomes what he worships, and his desire (*kama*) shapes the form of his becoming.

Those who worship the gods become gods; those who worship Ancestors become

Ancestors. those who worship the elements master the elements, and those who worship me gain me.

Krishna, The Bhagavadgita

When considering Puja, we must bear in mind that in Tantric Magical Psychology, all deities are manifestations of self. This is not to say, however, that we should regard deities in the sense of mere aspects of our psyche in the sense that Jungian psychologists or New Agers might.

Thus, by performing Puja, we:

- (a) receive the blessing of the deity
- (b) develop awareness of our own inner divinity.

Another point that should be borne in mind is that Indic magic is heavily based on the interplay of levels of correspondences, in very much a similar way to how modern qabalah has developed. Careful study and personal research with these correspondences and concepts will enhance the experience of Puja considerably. I would go as far as to assert that study of these concepts within the context of what they mean in puja is superior to mere study of them in isolation, since in puja, you can begin to gain insights into how correspondences and concepts relate to each other.

The Primacy of Three-fold Experience

The Three-fold nature of experience is a primary concept in Tantric Magical Psychology. For example, the tantric understanding of perception is three-fold:

The measure - The object to measure - The act of measuring.

Other significant triplicities include: Creator (Brahma) Preserver (Visnu) Destroyer (Siva); The three worlds, the three times, the 3 gunas, Sun Moon Fire.

Thus, by performing puja, we are moving through a three-fold relationship with the chosen deity;

- (a) Identifying the deity as originating from within

Externalizing the deity, in order to experience it as separate from us

- (c) Re-Identifying with the deity in the light of the above.

The object, or aim of Puja is to establish communion between devotee and deity.

I occasionally hear the comment that Tantric magic is 'too devotional' in its character. This, I feel, springs from a misunderstanding of the nature of devotional magic and the tantric conception of the relationship between practitioner and deity. In Puja, I was taught by my guru (50p in the swear box!) to firstly to internally identify with the chosen deity, through meditation, visualization, mantra, and Nyasa (the identification of different parts of the body with deities, through touch). Secondly, to externalize the deity by breathing or projecting it into a form (a

statue or other image) in order to 'worship' the god or goddess, and finally, to reabsorb them after the completion of worship. The tantric conception of deities is that they are both transcendent *and* immanent. From a tantric perspective, the Universe is the embodiment of the transcendent Shiva and the immanent Shakti. Existence flows from, and *is*, their union.

In performing puja, my aim is often to offer a sacrifice to a deity, in order that she or he will grant a boon. Litanies to deities often speak of them 'making the gestures of dispelling fears and granting boons'. I currently interpret the word 'fears' as the obstacles ('Kleshas') which hold me back from attaining the bliss of the god-state (more on this in a mo'); the phrase 'granting boons' is the power of the god or goddess to assist me in the removal (or, more accurately, *integration*) of those fears. The underlying process in this approach to puja is similar to that which underlies most forms of ritual magic. A desire-form is made conscious (i.e. stated), and separated from the ego-complex by offering or sacrificing it to the god or goddess who is the focus of the puja. Finally, the god-form is reabsorbed, and the realization of the desire-form takes place organically (some might prefer the term, 'unconsciously' here, but I feel this is too limiting a concept).

So how does this work in practice? Last year, I performed a Ganesha Puja with the general aim of finding myself the 'right' job. Not merely, 'a job', but the most appropriate for me. Since I'm now writing this article at work, you can be assured that this was successful. However, what I feel is just as significant here is that the puja, and daily meditation on Ganesha enabled me to 'dispell the fears' around *not* finding a job, and everything that goes with that - which naturally involved a good degree of *willed* self-work as well as the relaxed certainty that 'something would turn up'.

To worship a deity, a man must become the Self of that deity through dedication, breath-control, and concentration until his body becomes the deity's abode.

Gāndharva Tantra

I feel that some of the squeamishness that surrounds this kind of devotional magic is due to the general background of monotheistic Christianity in modern occultism. After all, it's one thing for magicians to invoke one god for one purpose, and another god for another, but once you start invoking the same god for everything, it starts to look like religion (or mania) - which raises hackles in some quarters. The major Indian deities however, are so multivalent in their aspects and forms that it is quite possible to do this. It also means that the tendency of western occultists to categorize gods on the basis of the Tree of Life becomes unstuck. Ganesha is a good example. One might argue that he has a Jupitorean aspect, as he is associated with wealth. However, he is also Mercurial, since he is a scribe. He also battles demons (Mars), rules obstacles (Saturn), and is often given as the guardian of the Muladhara Chakra (Earth). He has at least 32 popular forms and there are more that can be discovered through practical experience.

Sorcery and Demons

I have discussed devotional puja at length since it is the major approach I have used to Tantric ritual so far. This is not to say that there are no other forms. In *The Earth Mother* (1989), Pupul

Jayakar describes a "Witches' Spell" from the Atharva Veda which involves familiar elements such as the creation of an image of the target of the spell, the recitation of mantra over a period of days, and so forth:

"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, none-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.'

Jayakar, p60.

The above litany is used to invoke the 'Asuri Woman' - a form of the goddess Durga.

A more extreme form of ritual is related in Sudhir Kakar's *"Shamans, Mystics & Doctors"* (1991). This is sadhana (practice) directed towards a demoness named Karna. The sadhana is carried out over three days before the new moon. It requires ten days of preparation, and a further ten days of ritual after the sadhana is completed. For ten days the practitioner abstains from all the sacred acts prescribed for a Brahmin. He did not clean his teeth, change his clothes, and used the same dirty plate for each meal. In the three days of the sadhana itself, the practitioner satisfies his thirst by drinking his own urine, and satisfies his hunger by eating his own feces. On the first night of the sadhana, the practitioner locks the doors of his house. He lights eleven large oil lamps in his room. He wears a string of fifty-four bones which he has dug up from the cremation ground at night, and holds a similar string in his hands. Facing south, he begins to recite (japa) a mantra 115 times. He urinates and defecates without breaking the repetition, and rubs the shit and piss over his body. Finally, the practitioner relates how he is visited by "an attractive woman, twenty-five to thirty years old, completely naked...". She sits next to him, fondles his penis, smears both their bodies with his feces, and disappears when he has finished the recitation of the mantra. On the third day, she "incited" him to have intercourse with her. Upon commencing his final period of japa, she appears again, sits down on his lap, and defecates & urinates all over him, again, smearing him body with her urine and feces. She then tells the practitioner "Whenever I want intercourse I'll come to you and you will have to satisfy my desire. Whenever you ask a question I'll whisper the answer in your ear." Kakar's correspondent writes that, as a result of this sadhana, he can no longer perform the sacred tasks and rituals of a Brahmin, but that his astrology business has boomed, due to the powers of the demoness in giving him knowledge of his clients' past and future and in drawing more clients towards him.

This ritual is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it violently confronts and transgresses orthodox Hindu taboos concerning cleanliness and ritual purity - in fact I would think it would have a similar effect on most westerners! Secondly, this sadhana is based again, on *identification* which the entity which is the focus of the practice. The practitioner behaves in

such a manner as to become acceptable to the demoness, his practice culminating in a kind of *hieros gamos* which, for the Brahmin, is as shameful as it is ecstatic. The result of this sadhana is that, while he becomes prosperous, he has effectively become an 'outcast' in society.

Ananda and Lila

The term 'lila' is used to denote divine play, sport or dalliance, and the gods are often referred to as being in this state in their relationship to the Universe. In aspiring to the divine play of the gods, the tantric seeks to become unfettered and unconditioned. In playing, you leave behind the perception of the 'ordinary' world, and enter a magical world. As divine players in this world, the gods are joyous, graceful and spontaneous beings, taking delight in the universe. Related to this idea of divine play is that of 'ananda' - which is usually translated as meaning 'bliss'. When we try and approach bliss in this sense, we need to be quite careful with terms and distinctions. For example, many people think of bliss states such as samadhi as being characterized by a fugue-like withdrawal from the world. But the tantric goal is not about retreating from the world, but enjoying it. For myself, I rather like the definition of Ananda given in Kakar, p166-167, by a correspondent:

"The true tantrik is always in a state of nonsuppression and enjoyment. The purpose of every moment of life is to experience ananda. Ananda is active enjoyment of everything that comes your way. ... A tantrik has only those desires which the environment is ready, willing and in a position to satisfy. This is not because he denies any of his wishes or rationalizes them later, but because he has developed his capacity for attention and is intensely aware of where he is and what he is doing at every moment of time."

Hence Tantric magic places great stress on enhancing awareness of one's senses, of one's physical presence, of the world around us, of identifying and integrating the fetters of habit, restriction, attachment - the 'obstacles' which impede us from experiencing ananda. Tantra is a path of Psychosomatic Alchemy, which starts with the basic premises of sensuality and worship, pleasure, energy and compassion. This alchemy is dynamic, demonstrating that the body is a seething cauldron of activity: neural firestorms flicker across the brain in milliseconds; complex molecular transactions take place within an instant, the heart sheds energy like a furnace. Tantric magic encompasses all the so-called techniques of Gnosis, from silent contemplation of a cobweb at dawn to frenzied ecstasy. One of the core virtues of Tantra is Compassion, arising out of empathic identity with the species, the Earth, and beyond. This embedded 'openness' to the world is metamorphic, deepening vision, strengthening the heart. As such, systems of control based on fear and blind obedience have always viewed Tantra as suspicious, if not seditious.

Sources

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