

OCCULTISM IN ŚĀKT RELIGION

JAMUNĀ PRASĀD

The general character of Śāktism, which is considered to be a licentious type of Hinduism, is fairly well-known but comparatively little studied. It is believed that this sect is older than the age of Buddha, if not pre-vedic; but in its present form it seems to have gained popularity among the population of Bengal and Assam about the fifth century A.D. From Bengal it spread to the north and south of the country between the fifth and ninth centuries. Though it is not positively hostile to Vedās which were the core of Hindu religion, it propounded that the precepts and rituals of Vedās were too difficult and cumbersome for Kaliyuga (present age) and hence an easier doctrine was needed. Moreover Vedās were not accessible to śudrās (low caste) and women, so it was felt that there should be a doctrine which may be accessible to all without prejudices of caste, religion and sex. This prepared a flourishing ground for the prevalence of Śāktism and its doctrine of Tantra. There are documentary evidences in Hindu scriptures that Tāntrism of Śākts is best suited for Kaliyuga—the present era. Srimadbhāgavata says, “Keśava assumes different forms in different yugas and should be worshipped in different ways, and that in Kaliyuga, he is to be worshipped according to Tantra.” Kulārṇava Tantra narrates, “For each age a suitable Śastra is given—namely in Satyayuga, Śruti; in Tretā, Smṛti; in Dvāpar, the Purāṇas and in Kaliyuga, the Tantra.”

It is said that Buddha himself worshipped Śakti in the form of Tārā in his later life to attain salvation. A. K. Maitra in his introduction to Tārā Tantra states that Buddha and Vaśiṣṭha were Tāntrik munis and Kula-Bhairvās. But the influence of Śākt philosophy and its practices on Buddhism was largely felt in its later period, i.e., second half of the eighth century and through Buddhism it went to other countries like Tibet, China, Burma and Nepal. By and large the Buddhists were converted to Śākt philosophy and followed Tāntrik practices. Mahāyān, who attained Buddhahood, was himself initiated to Tantra. Mahāyān Sūtra contains a chapter on Tantra, on worship of Tārā and Tāntrik practices. It opens with

a dialogue of a god with a goddess. Many of its topics are essentially Tāntrik. Buddhist mythology and mysticism are freely mixed with that of Śākt. Buddhism borrowed meditation on corpses, restraint of breathing, inducing of trance from Tantra. Buddhists also advocated worship of women but their emphasis on sexual union and some other offensive practices led to corruption in Buddhist monasteries which brought Śāktism in disrepute. Śākts are spread all over India and in some other countries also, and they wield considerable influence in Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Kashmir.

Śākts are the worshippers of the active female principle: Śakti, the wife of Lord Śiva whom they consider the creator of the universe. She is Jagadambā, great mother of the universe who is worshipped in different places under different names: Kālī, Durgā, Chamuṇḍā, Tārā, Devī, Pārvatī, Chandī, Kālikā, etc. Śākts believe in the popularized version of Sāṅkhya philosophy of the union of the soul (Puruṣa) with the primordial essence (Prakṛiti). They regard the self-existence of Being as not only single, solitary and impersonal, but also inactive. Once it becomes conscious and personal, it acts through the associated female principle which is conceived to be possessed of a higher degree of activity and personality. Śakti is considered to be the energy of the supreme, (Śiva and Śakti are one) who is to be worshipped to attain Mokṣha (Salvation) and union with Brahman.

Śakti cult is no new innovation. Glimpses of it are found in all the Hindu scriptures—Vedās, Purāṇas, Śruti, Smṛti wherein worship of Devī is advocated. Prof. de la Vallée Poussin, on the basis of his observations, concluded, "There is a base common to the Veda and Tantra. The Mahābhārat contains hymns in the honour of Devī. Srimad Bhāgawata provides worship of Umā. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa narrates the greatness of Devī. The autumnal Durgā Pujā is mentioned in many Purāṇas. Vārāh Purāṇa says, "He who worships Her ever worships Him. He who worships the Devīs pleases Rudra (Śiva) and becomes for ever Siddha." In the Atharvaveda, there is the Sarasvatī Sūkta, in the Yajurveda the Laxmī Sūkta and in Ṛgveda the Devī Sūkta. The famous Śakti Stotra "Hymn to Śakti" named Ānandalaharī is everywhere known to be the work of Śāṅkarācārya, who was a Śaivite. Worship of Śakti (female principle) is not limited to India, its religion and philosophy, but was prevalent in Egypt in the form of "Militta," in Greece in the form of "Sivali," in Phoenicia and African countries by different names. Muslim Sādhana and certain esoteric religious practices of Roman Catholics and Greek churches is based on the groundwork of Tantra. Tāntrik Sādhana is manifest in Confucianism and Shintoism also.

Śākts are essentially monists but they do not deny dualism. They realize the reality and existence of this world. According to their philosophy, the Brahman (Supreme) is reached through its universe. Thus Śāktism takes into its orbit both dualism and monism and by its Sādhanā and spiritual knowledge, generated thereby, it provides the means whereby their anti-omies are resolved.

Śākt religion has drawn heavily upon Āryan (Hindu) mythology though many of its tenets have been taken from non-Āryan cult. Many of the rituals and Sādhanā practices have been taken from Hindu religion. Śākt religion has many common points with Vedānta philosophy but is different from its orthodox system. It adds a fifth caste, i.e., Sāmānyas (common hybrid caste from the others) to the Vedic four and follows only two Āśhramas (state of house-holder and ascetic) instead of four of Vedānta.

Śākt religion and its practices are secretive in nature and are not told unless one is ceremoniously initiated by a Gurū (teacher). Before initiation, one remains "Paśu," who after being initiated passes through various stages of elevation, viz., Vira, Siddha, Kaulā and Divya. Divya is one who has attained self-realization and unison with Śakti, the highest heavenly state. Bhairavaham, Śivoham (I am He). He becomes the Śiva himself.

Śākts generally divide themselves into two major sects: Vāmamārgīs (leftists) and Dakṣiṇamārgīs (rightists) according to whether they attach greater importance to female or male principles respectively. Though both are worshippers of Śakti they differ in rituals and Sādhanā. Dakṣiṇamārgīs who are nearer to Vaishṇava Śākts are free from sensuality and worship their deities in public, while Vāmamārgīs who mostly inhabitate the Assam and Bengal regions follow the foul secrets of Tāntrik cult. They acquire siddhis for self-exaltation or for annihilation of opponents: a practice which has brought a bad name to this cult. One of the practices for annihilation of opponents is to wrap an earthen pot with a red cloth, and with a burning candle inside it make it travel to the opponent. The pot on reaching the destination calls out his name. The opponent, as soon as he sees the pot, vomits blood, which usually proves fatal.

Śākt religion has been much criticized and termed as debased Hinduism for its sacrificial nature and for its use of Panch Makārs, five essentials, viz., Madya (wine), Māmsa (meat), Matsya (fish), Mudrā (which ordinarily means rituals, gestures with fingers, or postures of body, but here used in its technical sense connotes delicacies of parched grain), Maithuna (sexual union). Śāktism is a religion which advocates offering sacrifices in order to invoke and adore Śakti. Sacrifices of bulls, buffaloes, etc., and at times of human beings, especially by Vāmamārgīs, are frequently heard of. The Dakṣiṇamārgīs and Buddhist Śākts prohibit sacrifices of animals and

human beings although they believe in offerings of materials and flowers. Woodroffe, in defense of the five M's, opines that they are to be used only in the circle of the initiated and only after having been purified by sacred formulae and ceremonies. Just as poison which is fatal becomes medicine in the hands of a doctor, similarly when used under the guidance of a Gurū (teacher), these become nectar. Any abuse of these five essentials is not to be tolerated. Even in the vedic era the use of wine and meat was a common practice. Animal sacrifice was one of the practices on religious and ceremonial occasions. Perhaps under the influence of Buddhism and Jainism these were prohibited. Śākt religion advocates sexual union only with one's wife. There are many Śākts even in Vāmamāragīs who do not take meat and lead lives of celibacy although Tantra tells that one cannot attain self-knowledge (Mokṣh), the highest goal of a Śākt and cannot perform worship without them. These bestow Bhukti (enjoyment) and Mukti (salvation).

Śākts believe in the doctrine of Tantra which is a later development of Purāṇic creed. Tantras are the most sacred and secret religious treatises of Śākts, the secret doctrines which are not to be communicated to any uninitiated person. These, besides elevation to divinity, relate to acquiring siddhis of paramount and paranormal importance. In fact the tantras are considered to be the fifth Veda in Śākt religion.

Occultism, of which Tantra is a treasure, signifies the doctrines of hidden and mysterious practices and rites, and extends its meaning to cover the realms of magic and mystery, marvel and miracle of every kind. In its broader sense it embraces so vast a field of varied phenomena that it has all the appearance of being a vague generalization of no scientific value. In a restricted sense the term is however being confined to open verifiable human knowledge and to paranormal phenomena which are being experimented with by scientific methods. Hence many occult phenomena which till recently were dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration, are now being considered fit for careful investigation. The scientific research work being done on psychophysical and psychical phenomena promises to offer valuable clues for better understanding of the unknown dimensions of the human mind.

Tantras are said to have emanated from the holy mouth of Lord Śiva and are generally in the form of a dialogue between Śiva and his Śakti, Pārvatī, the form in which Satī his spouse reappeared after her death at Dakṣa's Yajña. According to Purāṇic literature, Satī, though not invited, went to attend the Yajña of her father (Dakṣa) in spite of counseling from Śiva not to do so. There she could not tolerate the insult and disrespect shown to Lord Śiva, and threw herself in the sacred fire from which she

reappeared in the form of many Śaktis. In order to save himself from the Wrath, Dakṣa had to worship Śākti. The dialogues between Śiva and Śākti are either called Āgama where Śiva answers Devī's questions revealing the doctrine and observances to be followed, or Nigama where Devī is the teacher and Śiva her disciple. The ultimate aim of these teachings is the union with Śākti, but the contents of these teachings which are in the form of tantra are really magical and mystic.

A complete Tāntrik philosophy centers around four main themes: (1) Jñān (knowledge): includes philosophical doctrine; knowledge of occultism, i.e., knowing the secret powers of letters, syllables, yantras (diagrams), etc.; (2) Yoga-awakening of Kundalini: piercing the six cakras in order to acquire magical powers; (3) Kriyā, i.e., instructions for making idols and consecration; and (4) Caryā (conduct), i.e., rules regarding rites and festivals, and social duties. No single tantra deals with all these four branches and hence they are complementary to each other, containing a medley of philosophy and occultism, mysticism and magic, and rituals and ethics. In tantras, one finds the highest and loftiest ideas and profound speculations side by side with the wildest superstitions and occultism.

Tantras are said to be sixty-four in number, but many of them are not known. A great deal of Śāstra has disappeared. Most of the tantras which survive and which are still numerous are in manuscript form. The occult portions of tantras are extremely rare. Even John Woodroffe who endeavored to procure the manuscript of the second portion of Mahānirvāṇ Tantra did not succeed in getting it. However, some of the outstanding tantras are Mahānirvāṇa (the great liberation), Kulārṇava, Mantra, Yogini, Prapancasara and Tantrarāja Tantra. Mahānirvāṇa is the most popular and widely known tantra in which we see the best aspect of Śāktism. It speaks of Brahman, the highest divine principle, the eternal force (Śākti) out of which all things have been created. Śākti is the embodiment of all the gods and all the energies and therefore all the philosophical concepts to which language has been assigned are in the feminine gender. She is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the world. Mahānirvāṇa Tantra attaches great importance to mantras, yantras and worship in the invocation of Śākti. It describes in detail how the goddess Śākti is to be worshipped to be in union with Her. It has also the description of the sacraments (manual of morality) and different stages of elevation of mankind: Paśu, Vira, Siddha, Kaulā and Divya. The goal, i.e., liberation, can only be achieved through the practices of this tantra.

Kulārṇava Tantra, which is mostly practiced in the eastern region, teaches about six forms of life (ācāra), viz., Vedācāra, Vaisṇavaācāra, Saivaācāra, Dakṣiṇācāra, Vāmācāra, Siddhantācāra. These are an intro-

duction to Kulācāra which leads to Brahma: Jñāna (knowledge of Brahman) and liberates from sufferings and leads to salvation. Each of these ācāras is more excellent than that which precedes them. Of these ācāras, the first three are included in Paśubhāva, Dakṣinācāra is midway between Paśu and Vira, Vāma and Siddhānta are in Virabhāva, and Kulācāra, although it is in Virabhāva attains in its highest stage Divyabhāva. Since no one can fully observe the rules of Vedaācāra, Vaishṇavācāra and Śaivācāra in the present age, hence only Tāntrik rites are said to bear fruits. Kulārṇava Tantra is based on yoga (awakening of Kundalini Śakti: piercing the six cakras) which helps in acquiring innumerable supernatural powers, as well as Bhoga (enjoyment), but only for those who have purified their minds and have gained control over their senses. It describes the worship of Śakti with yantras (diagrams) which bring psychokinetic powers (Kundalini Yoga), and the union with the great mother. A part of it deals with magic and occultism.

Another important tantra is Prapanāsāra Tantra which is ascribed to Śankara-Śiva. It literally means "expansion," hence it is the Essence of Universe. The work begins with the account of the Creator and also with potency of occult doctrines of Kundalini and mantras. Mantras are considered to be very efficacious to attain "Siddhis" and paranormal powers by Sādhaks. As an atom is the source of great energy, so the mantras are the source of self-purification, self-knowledge, worship and Sādhana and supernatural powers. Even gods, demons and demi-gods, compelled by mantras, come to the sorcerer who may perform miraculous feats through them. Mantras possess subtle powers of action on the spiritual, mental and physical planes of existence.

Tantrarāja Tantra, the king of tantras, deals with Śriyantra, the famous diagram which consists of nine triangles and nine circles cleverly drawn one within the other and each one of which has a special mystical significance. Śriyantra comes into being when the Supreme Śakti of Her own will assumes the form of the universe and sees Her own being. By meditation with the aid of Śriyantra one attains knowledge of the unity, i.e., the knowledge that everything in the world is one with the Devī. It deals with various kinds of tantra rituals and meditations on various forms of Devī.

It will thus be seen that Tantra, the most secret and sacred scripture of the believers of Śakti cult, is full of mysticism and occultism; the efficacy of which is realized by those who practice it. It contains rich material of paranormal importance and is said to bestow superhuman and divine powers by the force of its own mantras, yantras, worship and Sādhana. Destruction (Maraṇ), driving away (Ucchāttan), establishment of control over persons or things (Vaśhikaraṇ), captivating (Sanmohan), arresting

forces of nature (Stambhana), causing antagonism between persons (Vidvesaṇa), curing and helping power in diseases, misfortunes and dangers (Svastyana), and such other powers are supposed to be acquired by Tāntrik practices. It is claimed that Tāntriks, while still living in this mortal world, can obtain direct visions of super-sensual activities of the world of Devas through the potency of mantras. Swāmi Rāma Krishṇa Parām Hans was a worshipper of Mother Kālī in his initial stages of Sādhanā. He was told about Vivekānanda by Śakti who lured him to be his disciple.

Tāntrik literature is full of rites, mantras, ceremonies, yantras and Sādhanā of occult significance. Tāntrik worship leads to acquiring of various "Siddhis" which have rich and verifiable psychical material.

The special virtue of Tantra lies in its mode of Sādhanā. The object of Tāntrik Sādhanā is to merge the self (Puruṣa) into the universal (Prakṛiti). Liberation, it is believed, can be achieved by worshipping Śakti who raises the Sādhaka step by step from the most external belfry, to the innermost Tabernacle of Mother. Tāntrik Sādhanā attaches special importance to Gurū (teacher) and can only be performed successfully and effectively under his guidance. It is the Gurū who prescribes different forms of worship and different aspects of Divinity to initiated Sādhaks of different temperaments. Tāntrik Sādhanā first expurgates the physical and mental impurities so as to be susceptible to the Divine Light within. Concentration, meditation, rituals and rites, worship and communion are the principal features of Tāntrik Sādhanā. It attaches special importance to the knowledge and use of Bījas (mystic syllables), mantras, yantras and five essentials. Mantras are of paramount importance as they help the Sādhaka to ward off evil spirits and other obstacles in Sādhanā. Siddhis, occult powers, control over spirits and deity come from constant repetition of mantras. They help in awakening the Kundalini and superhuman Śakti. By intense Sādhanā the Sādhaka attains mystic powers and frees himself from the chain of Karma and his onward progress continues, until he merges himself with the Supreme.

Tantras are encyclopedic amalgams of elements of varying character and extend from the doctrine of a lofty speculation to practices through which occult powers are attained. They are the repository of esoteric beliefs and practices. The practice of trance helps the Sādhaka to possess magical powers. Restraint of breath gives mastery over thoughts and body which together with mantras and yantras give him various psychokinetic powers. Mantras are capable of developing the latent faculties of mind and psychic powers. Talismanic spells give powers over ghosts and spirits who haunt places such as cemeteries. But these esoteric and mysterious teachings can

only be fully understood through personal experiences which are the practical fruits of Sādhanā.

It is claimed that practice of tantra not only leads to acquiring of paranormal powers but enables a siddha to transfer his powers to others. Pt. Gopi Nath Kavirāj, who is a follower of Devī cult, in his memoirs narrates an incident where a Tāntrik from Assam transferred his powers to a boy of fourteen years of age. It provided the boy, Jyoti (pseudonym), the ability to go out of the body and have astral travels. Once during his astral travels the boy went to a Kālī temple in the hills which was familiar to him. It revived memories of his past life and he was able to know that in his previous life he used to live in this temple and was a follower of Śakti. Jyoti demonstrated his ability to go out of the body at will before Mrs. Annie Besant and recorded his experiences during astral travels. Bhakt Rām Prasad Sen and Vamakshepa have been outstanding Tāntriks of Bengal. S. K. Bandopadhyaya in *Tārāpith Bhairab*, biography of Vamakshepa, has described many incidents of paranormal significance. Through his occult powers he granted long life to a child of one of his devotees, all of whose other children had died in infancy. Maharāja Rāmeshwar Singh of Bihār who had Sir John Woodroffe initiated to Tantra was himself a great Tāntrik and he is said to have changed the direction of the current of the holy Ganges. There are many renowned Tāntriks still living in India such as Swami Ji, of Pitāambarapīth (Datiā). Madhya Pradesh is said to foretell correctly and accurately future events of national and international significance. Pitāambarapīth (Datiā), Shyāma Āshram (Patna), and Siddha Āshram (Unnao) are the seats for the disciples who wish to be initiated to this sect.

As with other Tāntrik practices, Tāntrik medicine is equally mysterious. Tantra chemistry discovered ages ago many truths, some of which were discovered by scientists much later. It claims to be the first medical practice in the world to use mercury, snake poison and metals as medicines. Tantra claims to provide other curative practices. Here we find what may be called a science of psychophysical culture which renders the physical body obedient to the will and thus by certain postures not only enables it to ward off and cure diseases but also to control the mind by the use of mystic syllables, mantras, diagrams and amulets (Kavacha). There are documentary evidences of Tāntrik cures of serious and incurable diseases. Vamakshepa, the renowned Tantrik of Tārāpur, Bengal, could cure many such patients through his occult powers and amulets.

The Śākt cult attaches special importance to (a) Mantras, i.e., prayers, formulae and Bījas (syllables of mysterious significance); (b) Yantras, i.e., diagrams of mysterious significance drawn on metal or paper; (c) Mudrās, i.e., special postures of fingers and movements of hands in order to imbue

one's body with the life of Devī. By using all these means, the worshipper causes the deity to show good-will towards him and compels the deity into his service by his Sādhanā, and becomes a Sādhaka, a sorcerer. Sorcery is one of the principal aims of a Sādhaka. The cult of Devī thus leads to grossest misuse of powers by means of sorcery as well as to the ideal of salvation. The sensual and spiritual elements are well mixed in the cult itself.

From the above description, it will be seen that Tantra and its practices, which are followed by Śākts, are mysterious, magical, and full of occultism. The efficacy of these can be realized only by those who practice them under the guidance of a Gurū after being fully initiated. The secrets of Tantra are not open and meant for all, and this has restricted to a considerable extent empirical studies on Tantra. Moreover, many of the practices as described above are either harmful to others or meant for self-exaltation. It is neither possible nor desirable to design studies on such practices. However, there are many practices pertaining to medicines or psychokinesis or using agents to bring things by crossing the barriers of space and time etc., which could be studied. Undoubtedly Tantra provides rich material and several psychic and psychokinetic phenomena for experimentation and study, although its secretive nature makes the task difficult.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BARNETT, L., *Antiquities of India*.
 BANDOPADHYA, S. K., *Tārāpith Bhairab*. In Bengali (Calcutta, 1951).
 CHAKRAVARTHI, K., *Lectures on the Hindu Religion* (Calcutta, 1893).
 DUTT, M. N., *Wealth of India* (Calcutta, 1900).
 DOUGLAS, N., *Tantra Yoga* (1971).
 ELIOT, C., *Hinduism and Buddhism* (London, 1921).
 GHOSE, M. N., *A Brief Sketch of the Religious Beliefs of the Assamese People* (Calcutta, 1896).
 GRUNWEDAL, A., *Buddhist Art in India*.
 HASTINGS, J., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vols. I to XII (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).
 HOWELLS, G., *The Soul of India* (London, 1913).
 JACOLLIT, L., *Occult Science in India and among the Ancients* (New York, 1900).
 KAVIRĀJ GOPĪNĀTH, *Tāntrik Vangamaya in Śākt View*. In Hindi (Vārāṇasi: Chaukhamba Prakashan, 1970).
 ———, *Sādhu Darsan Tathā Sat Prasang*. In Hindi (Vārāṇasi: Chaukhamba Prakashan, 1967).
 KRISHṆAMĀCHĀRYA, M., *History of Classical and Sanskrit Literature*.
 MUKHERJI, A., *Tantra Art* (Delhi, 1971).
 PANDE, K. C., *Abhinava Gupta, a Historical Philosophical Study* (Vārāṇasi: Chaukhamba Prakashan, 1966).
 WOODROFFE, J., *The Garlands of Letters* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1971).

- , *Tantrarāja Tantra and Kāma kalā* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1971).
 ——, *Shakti and Śākta* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1921).
 ——, *Principles of Tantra*, Vols. I & II (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1969).
 ——, *The Great Liberation—(Mahānirvāṇ Tantra)* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1971).
 ——, *Kulārṇava Tantra* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1971).
 ——, *Introduction to Tantra Śāstra* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1969).
 WILLIAMS, M., *Brahmanism & Hinduism* (London, 1891).
 WINTERNITZ, M., *A History of Indian Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927).

DISCUSSION

SMITH: Thank you, Professor Prasad, for a most interesting paper.

SERVADIO: First of all I wish to congratulate Professor Prasad for his presentation, which I found extremely precise and to the point. But I would like to ask him to clarify two major points. One is this: all during my stay in India and in my studies of Hindu traditions and philosophy, I came to the conclusion that the final aim for any Yoga school is not the pursuit or possession of paranormal or occult powers. I wish to know if this is exact, because I seem to remember that in the third chapter of Patandjali's *Yoga Sutra*, which I think is the maximum authority in Yoga, it is very clearly stated that, as I said, the pursuit of paranormal powers is not the aim. If this is so, we must come to a couple of conclusions and I wish that Professor Prasad would say whether I'm right or not. First, that the Tantric school of Yoga cannot have as its supreme aim the pursuit and the possession of occult powers, otherwise it would be out of the Yogic tradition. But another conclusion which is more interesting for us is that if the supreme aim of Yoga is as the name itself says, that the unity between the Atman and Brahman are identical, then I think that our hope to obtain something valuable for our parapsychological studies from that source is an impossible hope, because a true Yogi will not have us in his presence since this would be contradictory to his main philosophy.

PRASAD: I am very thankful to you, Professor Servadio, for correcting me if I gave that impression. The final aim of Tantra and of Yoga is to attain salvation and if any of these powers are a by-product, and if I gave a different impression, I am glad I have been corrected by you. That answers your first question. The second is, you are absolutely right when you say that it is very difficult to arrange and conduct any experimental studies on yogis. In fact, for the last two years now, we have been trying to do a longitudinal study of those who practice yoga and to see at what stage they develop these powers, and it has been very difficult for me to pursue the

studies with those who practice yoga, to agree to be subjects for our study. In the first place, let me confess very earnestly that the real practice of yoga is fast disappearing in India also. It is very difficult to find really good subjects who really want to practice yoga. Most of them want to practice what gives them physical fitness only; but the real yogis are very few and even when they are found, they do not agree to be subjects for empirical or experimental studies. Luckily, there are some in a certain district where I persuaded the swami, who was very scientifically oriented, to cooperate in the interests of research. Also, there were about nine foreigners practicing yoga with him, and they agreed. So I began my experiment in the hopes that perhaps this would give me some data. Unfortunately, after the war with Pakistan in 1971, their visas expired and were not extended and almost all of them left, so the experiment has to be begun afresh. So I entirely agree with you that it is very difficult to arrange experimental studies in the field of yoga and also in the field of Tantra. But all the same, they were very valuable and very potential subjects or fields. Have I answered you?

SERVADIO: Yes.

SMITH: Mr. Walter?

WALTER: Yes. I have one experience of an EEG recording of a Hindu colleague some years ago. He was in a lotus position in our laboratory in London and he attained a state in which his alpha rhythm which is a sign of tranquility, became like an oscillator: absolutely regular rhythm for about twenty minutes in the lotus position. I didn't try to arouse him because he was in abstract meditation or whatever one would call it, but his alpha rhythm became absolutely continuous and uninterrupted. I tried variously to talk to him, to say something, but the rhythm was absolutely regular as though it came from a machine. And then when he had completed his study, he became a normal person again, became responsive, and it was very interesting. But for twenty minutes he retained a complete abstraction from the outside world, even objectively, in the record; I have the record still. So that was one experience. I believe some California people have also made some studies on this, in India.

SMITH: At the Menninger Clinic, a swami was studied and he was asked if he could, at will, break the alpha rhythm, and he did so. They asked him how he did this, and he said, "It was easy. I thought of all the things I wish I had done and didn't in life; all the things my friends thought I should have done and didn't, etc."

BHARATI: I was told that you get the same uninterrupted alpha rhythm when you do an EEG on a woman who has sexual intercourse and who doesn't have an orgasm, which I understand happens frequently. So sometimes I feel that those controlled apparatuses are selectively slanted to show something which might also apply in other situations. Therefore I think there's a much easier method to approach all this. Since the clinical controls that could be used would probably also show similar results in totally different situations, I think what we have to do is to simply watch what happens. I remember Arthur Koestler once wrote that in some village in India someone could suspend himself in mid-air, but what really happened was that he was lying flat on his back in an expanse of water. Now since people in India don't usually swim, this seemed to them very important. I myself had a very interesting experience in India. Someone told me that a certain Yogi in the Almora area could levitate. This was something I had to see. So I went there, and all these people were sitting and chanting and the man was sitting on his mat. In the morning they asked me if I had seen him levitate. I said no. They said, "That's because you're not initiated." So I think that what really happens, the key to these phenomena in the first place, is of a linguistic sort. The ascription of occult powers, at least in the Hindu tradition, works very much like terms such as "the guy is popular." When you say a person is popular, you say nothing about the person, but you say what people say about him. That's the meaning of "popular." Our colleagues from Oxford know that from people who have studied linguistic behavior when they refer to all kinds of experiments or events. Now in Jamuna Prasad's presentation, what I found rather tricky was that there are about five people in this room who know the Sanskrit terms he uses. These terms are not that important in an international philosophical or experimental prospective. So I think what we have to see is that what he really did was to present the views of a believer, for whom all these things have some kind of objective reality. Whether they have objective reality or not is beside the point. I would say that the first thing that you have to do when you study mystical behavior anywhere in the world is to know the very important axiom first started by W. T. Stace, and I quote him, ". . . Mystical experience of any sort does not confer existential status upon its content," which means, that although a person thinks he has an experience of a certain power, it doesn't mean that this power has any objective corollary. Now, whether it has or not is beside the point. I'm not really interested in that, so therefore when you talk about occult and other powers, what really happens is that occult powers are ascribed to a particular set of persons, and that is all really we can do. Now regarding the

Menninger Clinic and your experiments with the yogi—all this is very interesting, but I don't think it's very important because the clear alpha rhythm, it seems, can be elicited by many other means or in many other situations as well.

HALIFAX-GROF: I would like to disagree with you. The work being done at the Research Department of the Menninger Foundation, Langley Porter Institute, and in Baltimore demonstrates that biofeedback has medical application and from that point of view, it is important.

BHARATI: Yes, from that point of view, but not from the point of view of describing the objective content of occult experiences. After all, psychiatrists and psychologists supposedly offer some good therapy, but what they think about the way the human mind works in their patient is usually more questionable. Because you have a therapeutic effect on a person, it doesn't mean that you understand him. We don't know how aspirin works. It works somehow.

HALIFAX-GROF: From the "emic" point of view, that state is supposed to have a therapeutic effect on the individual; it is supposed to be a healthy state. We can then transliterate the "emic" point of view into the "etic." That is to say, if a culture bearer experiences and subsequently interprets that kind of behavior (which he doesn't have an EKG or an EEG machine to measure) as valuable, therapeutic, etc., we can take that bit of learning and apply it in the modern medical framework. And we have with biofeedback, in terms of eliciting these kinds of behaviors.

LEWIS: I would like to ask Professor Prasad a question, if I may. Could you tell us a little bit about the membership of Tantra, Tantric cult and sex? Are there any distinctive features about social background in the Indian context of the membership?

PRASAD: There is quite a good percentage of persons who don't follow this religion who do practice Tantra.

LEWIS: Do they relate, for instance, to a discernible caste system or to any specific age group or sex or occupation?

PRASAD: Caste is no distinction.

BHARATI: Well, that means in fact that the people who practiced Tantra were usually of low caste origin because that was a very important fact in the genesis. It is anti-Brahmanical, but some Brahmans in the Tantric areas as in Bengal practiced Tantrism. But there's another point: that the

Bengali Brahmans are not accepted as Brahmans at all by other Brahmans, because they eat fish and do other offensive things.

KREITLER: Since the point was brought up of discussing two kinds of approaches, I must remind my colleague Professor Bharati, that what he calls an observation, namely, looking at papers, noting down what is being done and trying to understand what it means, is in fact an interpretation, as is Grey Walter's interpretation of EEG. Now, which one of these two interpretations is relevant depends on the aims and on the professional approach of the researcher, and I therefore would not say that the interpretations of psychologists or biologists are either irrelevant or nonsensical. An anthropologist's descriptions can also be nonsensical.

SMITH: Benson Herbert.

HERBERT: I recently talked to a professor in Moscow who had heard of a yoga in India who could levitate, and he received a very considerable grant from the Soviet Union to go and investigate this yoga gentleman. On investigating him, he found that he lay flat on the floor and he was able by his will to contract his muscles to leap a little into the air, although one could not see the movement of the muscles. Then he fell down again, and that was the levitation!

KREITLER: Didn't he stand up again?

HERBERT: No. He fell down again. And then my friend returned to the Soviet Union and made his report.

WALTER: Which psychologist was it in Moscow?

HERBERT: I have it in mind but I can't remember just at the moment. Another point I'd like to make is a comparison between Indian ancient philosophies, etc., and similar ancient philosophies and religions here in England in a form of Druidism. There are certain points of differences and certain points of similarity. In the case of Druidism, according to the ancient books of Wales, which perhaps date 400 A.D., we find that there were positive indications that the purpose of these rites was to have paranormal powers. You had the cauldron of Keridwen, for example, and this gave second sight, etc., and curative powers. The other point is a point of similarity throughout the excellent paper we heard from our Indian friend here: We heard repeatedly the notion of secrecy, that the rites had to be secret; that the people outside this system were not allowed to know of the secrets. This is very similar to what happened in Druidism where they used scripts, which I'm sure you know of. The Druids used a sort of shorthand

with their fingers. The scripts resembled twigs on trees and they had one finger, two fingers, three fingers, etc., and also some ancient Greek alphabet, which the other people in the king's court could not understand. So they could keep their secrets, and chat away behind the king's back as it were, among each other. I would like to hear Professor Servadio's views on the psychoanalytical idea of all this secrecy, like the freemasons forming bodies that nobody else should know about. There's some psychological element behind this. Can you say something briefly about this?

SERVADIO: No, I can't. It's impossible to describe that secrecy and what it means in depth in just a few words. It would take at least one hour.

SMITH: Well, we're running short of time. Let's have a final comment from Professor Prasad.

PRASAD: No, I don't think I need add anything except to thank all of you, and especially Dr. Bharati for his very very valuable suggestion and some of the other suggestions that have come.