

INTRODUCTION TO TANTRIC ŚHAIVISM

(© 2010-2011 by Christopher Tompkins, www.shaivayoga.com)

“The sādḥaka who becomes absorbed in *haṃsa* is a knower of the Highest Reality.”

-*Svacchanda Tantra* VII.55 (7th century)

“The luminous being of Universal Consciousness exists as this alone: the embodied wisdom that *is* the secret power of mantra.”

-Sage Kṣemarāja (11th century Kaśmir)

“Lord Bhairava, who consists of the One Consciousness which is without beginning or end, who expresses himself as all types of beings, moving and not moving, who is the refuge for the disheartened, embodies your thoughts as He roams in your heart.”

--‘Hymn to Bhairava’ verse one, by Sage Abhinavagupta (10th-11th centuries, Kaśmir)



ॐ **TANTRA.** from the Sanskrit root √ *tan*, to “weave.”

ॐ **Revolutionary Offerings of Tantric Śhaivism:**

A. Spiritual liberation (“Recognition”) in one lifetime through the ritual of ‘liberating initiation’ (*nirvāṇa dīkṣā*) and subsequent daily yoga practice called ‘daily worship’ (*antaryāga*)

B. Initiation open to both genders and to all social classes

C. Life/body affirming; the human body = a microcosm of Śhiva (= consciousness), powered by Śhakti (= *prāṇa*).

E. The source of all of the post-scriptural schools (see below) and the tradition of ‘haṭha yoga’ manuals (1300-1900 AD) + modern postural practice

ॐ **The Corpus of ‘Revealed’ Tantric Scriptures (ca. 400-800 AD)**

- Alternately called the *Mantramārga* (“Path of Mantras”) or ‘Tantric Śaivism’ (*śaivatāntra*);
- Based on divinely authored, prescriptive scriptures composed between 400-800 AD.
 - Comprised of ritual (*kriyā*), observances (*cārya*), practice (*yoga*), and knowledge (*jñāna*)
- Pan-south Asian (India, Nepal, Tibet, Southeast Asia)
- **Seven lineages**, comprising the ‘Mantra’ and the ‘Vidyā’ divisions of the *Mantramārga*
 - **‘Mantra’ lineages (2)**, which predominantly worshipped male mantra deities (‘Mantras’)—Śaiva Siddhānta, Cult of Svachchandabhairava
 - **‘Vidyā’ lineages (4)**, which predominantly worshipped female mantra deities (‘Vidyās’)—Vāma, Yāmala, Trika, Kālīkula; also known as the *śākta* lineages
 - **Cult of Amṛteśvara.** An eclectic system which offered specialized rituals applicable to both of the above divisions

ॐ The post-scriptural schools of *śhākta* (Goddess) based Kaśhmiri Śaivism (9th – 15th centuries)

Comprised of works authored by human masters, in contrast to the 'divinely revealed' Tantric corpus (*tantras, āgamas*)

- greatly inform our understanding of 'Tantrism' today
- interpretations of Tantric doctrine rendered into grand philosophies and refined yogic practices

- **Kaśhmiri Krama** ('sequence')
 - Est. ca. 875 AD by Jñānānētra (ca. late 9th century), who was initiated by the Yoginīs in the cremation ground of Oḍḍiyāṇa (north of Kaśhmir)
 - based on the Kālīkula branch of Tantric Śaivism
 - **Women Masters.** Consisting of 5 centuries of master to disciple transmission (*pāramparā*) including first female lineage masters (*rajñīs*) in Indian history (Keyūravatī, Īśānī, etc.)
 - **Yoga.** radical non-dualist approach to Yoga, which internalized ritual worship of Goddesses as the cyclical (*krama*) pulsations (*SPANDA*) of one's own awareness and life experiences
 - comprised mainly of ecstatic poetry (i.e. 'The Flowering Forth of One's Own Enlightenment,' 'Delighting in Awareness,' 'The Moonlight-Nectar of Consciousness')

- **Śivasūtras** of Vasugupta
 - Late 9th to early 10th century
 - Consisting of terse aphorisms denoting Śhiva as the Supreme Consciousness of the universe experienced as one's own awareness

- **Vijñāna Bhairava** ('The Awareness of Bhairava')
 - Late 9th to early 10th century
 - purports to be a tantric scripture

- comprised of cryptic yoga practices common to the *tantras*, encoded by the VB by its poetry
- generic, influenced by the Trika scriptures and the Kaśmiri Krama
- **Spanda school ('vibration')**
 - *Spandakārikās* ('Stanzas on Vibration')
 - Authored by Kallaṭa, early 10th century
 - *Spandakārikās* = a summary of the *Śivasūtras*, but now with an accent on the *dynamism* of consciousness
 - based directly on the non-dual philosophy of the Kaśmiri Krama¹
- **Recognition school (*pratyabhijñā*)**
 - *Śivadṛṣṭi* of Somānanda ('The Gaze of Śiva), early 10th century
 - *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* Utpaladeva ('Stanzas on the Recognition of God'), early 10th century
 - *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* ('Heart of Recognition') by Kṣemarāja, early 11th century
 - influenced by the Trika scriptures and the Kaśmiri Krama
- **Kaśmiri Trika school of Kaulism (Abhinavagupta)**
 - Originated by Abhinavagupta (950-1025 AD)
 - *Tantrāloka, Tantrasāra* ('Light on the Tantras,' 'The Essence of Tantra') of Abhinavagupta (950-1025 AD)
 - TĀ—a monumental encyclopedia of Tantrism
 - Originates a Kaula ritual that fuses together the Trika goddesses (Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā) with Kālī of the **Krama** lineage and adopts the latter's internalization of ritual
 - Kṣemarāja, disciple of Abhinavagupta

¹ Kṣemarāja explicitly identifies the *Spandakārika* as a Krama work in his commentary to *kārika* 3.19. That the *Śivasūtras* are also Krama-based is implicitly suggested by the fact that the *Spandakārikas* are a summarizing work on the former, and by Kṣemarāja's Krama interpretations of *Śivasūtra* 1.6, 1.11, and 1.22.

- further develops the fusion of the Kashmiri Trika with the Kashmiri Krama
 - Works include commentaries on the *Spandakārikās*, *Vijñānabhairava*, etc.
- **Kubjikā** ('Curved Goddess') school of Kaulism
 - Originated ca 1050 AD
 - pan-South Asian
 - A new system of deities and mantras based on the Trika tantras
 - *Matsyendra*, the purported founder of Kaulism, becomes strongly co-opted associated with this school.
 - Responsible for inventing the 7 chakra system that would become standardized
 - the corpus of Haṭha Yoga manuals largely draws from works representing branch of this school called the Śhāmbhara
 - **Tripurā** ('Goddess of the three realms') school of Kaulism
 - pan-South Asian;
 - originates as branch of the **Kubjikā cult** between 1050 and 100 AD; does not become an independent until the early 13th century²
 - later known by South Indian exegetes as the **Śrīvidyā**³
 - loosely based on an archaic, non-tantric love cult of the so-called 'Nityā goddesses'
 - originated no earlier than the mid 11th century with its core text, the *Vāmakeśvarī*

² All surviving works dating before Jayaratha's commentary on its core text, the *Vāmakeśvarī*, which he composed in the first half of the 13th century in Kashmir, depict the Tripurā cult as an extension of the Śāmbhava branch of the Kubjikā cult which was established no earlier than the second quarter of the 11th century.

³ This is a somewhat dubious epithet, as all of the *sākta* cults preceding that of Tripurā belonged to what was called the 'Vidyā' division of the tantric Mantramārga, wherein the term *vidyā* is generically used in reference to female (vs. male) mantra-deities (*mantradevatās*). Thus the four cults comprising the Vidyā division, including the Vāma, Yāmala, Trika, and Kālikula, worshipped with 'Śrīvidyā' mantras.

- Its *Yoginīhṛdaya* (14th century AD) clearly draws from the 11th century works of Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja
- Most successful of all Kaula systems, flourished especially in South India, where it become fused with Advaita Vedānta