

Tantra and Yoga: an *egg and the hen* problem.

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Tantra has been most exhaustively defined by Georg Feuerstein in his book *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Feuerstein, "Tantra. the Great Spiritual Synthesis" 1-19). Feuerstein's definition of Tantra is relevant because he had an equal command of Yoga. He is one of only a few Western scholars who does not distinguish between Tantra and Yoga. For instance, Edwin F. Bryant's understanding of Yoga is limited by his understanding of Yoga as derived from the various forms of Vedanta. In Bryant's corpus, there is a glaring absence of discussions on Tantra. But Feuerstein's works on Yoga's psychology and his monograph on Yoga's philosophy cross-refer to Tantra. Also, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra* by Feuerstein is a testimony to his expansive understanding of both Tantra and Yoga as one Leibniz's monad. This unified view of both Tantra and Yoga is what in fact is Tantra because without Tantra there would be no Hindu praxes. Hinduism is Tantric in essence.¹ That is why a scholar like Michael Comans does not understand the epistemology of early Advaita Vedanta. Comans fails to understand that the epistemic basis of Advaita is in fact, within Tantra. To put it in a different manner: unless one is adept in the precepts of say, of the sage Gheranda, one cannot understand Advaita Vedanta. Another analogy will help: if one reads Buddhists on Buddhism, one tends to think that the Buddha(s) had negated Hinduism and one accepts the view that Adi Shankaracharya had only reacted to Buddhist proselytization. But as Chandradhar Sharma has illustrated in his work on Advaita Vedanta, the Buddha(s) were

¹ Christopher D. Wallis's understanding of Shaivism is equal to Feuerstein's expansive epistemology. See *Works Cited* below.

not the arch- adversaries of Hinduism as Western scholars unschooled in praxes would want us to believe. The point here is that Tantra is (sic) Hinduism and Yoga in its various forms, arises out of Tantra. The two are one, and in praxes, there cannot be any separate definition of Tantra and Yoga. As Abhinavagupta would have it: Yoga is that which makes us realise “internal time” (Abhinavagupta 206). Tantra is that which makes possible Yoga or the experience of internal time.

The above is an academic discussion of Tantra. But Feuerstein in his book on Tantra referred above on page 3 has provided a pictorial sketch of the Mahavidya Chinnamasta. This is proof of the fact that Feuerstein was able to integrate Tantra and Yoga within the lineage of Abhinavagupta, unlike Wendy Doniger. Therefore, Feuerstein’s understanding of both Tantra and Yoga is authentic vis-à-vis someone who talks or practices either Tantra or Yoga as distinct disciplines and parses Sanskrit words² for academic credit.

Tantra is a living orthopraxy throughout the world, and it is occult and focused on the Siddhis. The Siddhis cannot be had without Yoga, the only exception being Guru Kripa. The Siddhis are not merely to be acquired through the practice of Hatha Yoga. Or even through other forms of Yoga or *Lectio Divina*. It can only be understood and practised through (sic) a living Tantric. The author of this paper had written of this aspect of Tantra in the only non-academic essay (Chattopadhyay 238-53) in this otherwise scholarly Special Issue on Tantra published in *Prabuddha Bharata* in January 2016. The discussion by other contributors in this Special Issue on Tantra had become so esoteric that this author was requested to contribute an experiential account of Tantra. So, to further define Tantra, this author posits for the purpose of this paper the following working definition of Tantra:

² The trope of the learned fool is cross-religious. Adi Shankaracharya’s *Bhaja Govindam* is one of the best Hindu examples of the uselessness of non-experiential learning. Christopher D. Wallis’s essay referred above points out the non-necessity of yogic practice (for the attainment of *moksha*) in the presence of a true Tantric.

Tantra is the path of obtaining the Siddhis through various occult and esoteric rituals which give to the practitioner results which cannot be obtained by following the various Yogas as commonly understood within Vedanta. It is the path of the Aghora³.

Tantra can be best understood as the rituals faintly grasped by Koichi Shinohara. This experiential aspect of Tantra must be incorporated in any definition of Tantra. Only a sense of Tantra can be had from intellectual discussions of Tantra. Tantra is so real and yet has to be guarded as a secret gnosis, not because it is esoteric but because it might feed psychosis in the weak mind. Mind here is used in a Freudian sense. The unevolved being in bondage (*pashu*) is attracted to Tantra because it can be used to take advantage of the gullible. Now we come to the discussion of the influence of Tantra on Yoga.

Yoga has been defined above in the light of Abhinavagupta.

Abhinavagupta's corpus is a testament to the power of Tantra as the sole force informing Yoga. Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theories for instance are informed by his over-arching understanding of Hindu theology as being at once Tantric and Yogic. To say that Tantra influenced Samkhya philosophy is to miss the point that Samkhya and Yoga are one in a need to reduce both Tantra and Yoga to the immature realms of comprehensibility. That which is comprehensible is reductionist and is an exercise in structural scrutiny which is disastrous to Indology. The corollary here is the scholarly work on the historical Jesus by John Meier. Meier has reduced Jesus to comprehensibility and therefore thrown the numinous out of his

³ It is erroneous to separate Buddhist and Hindu and even Islamic Tantra. Tantra is One, the ignorant see it as separate for academic credit. There cannot be any Tantric praxes without Virachara. Interpreting Virachara without practical knowledge which cannot be acquired except in crematoria is akin to know about symphonies from books on opera without ever hearing one. This author insists on the need for rejecting partly the need for structural scrutiny in religious studies. One cannot practice either Tantra or Yoga without accepting the realities represented in say, the various Yantras and Mandalas. One should never forget that Tantra is a throbbing, pulsating lived religion which cannot be understood by scholars who do not have their desires for money and eros rooted out. The aim of Tantra and Samkhya qua Yoga is the same: liberation from samsara. Anything else may sound academically rigorous but is in fact superficial and untrue.

own vocation as a Jesuit. Wendy Doniger is brilliant but not brilliant enough to be equal to Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas understood the mystery of Being; Doniger and Meier are archivists who fail to understand that religious studies as a domain is not the same as linguistics or anthropology. Saussure and Levi Strauss only help so much in understanding Tantra and Yoga. Thus, the question of Tantra influencing Yoga should be redefined: how did and in which ways did Tantra and Yoga become one? Let us take the instance of Patanjali. Patanjali's definitions of samadhi derive directly from Tantra. One weaves, as it were, the mind into silence and reduces the fluctuations of the mind to awake the kundalini from the anal region to the highest ganglion in the brain. This understanding of samadhi is Tantric. Another example from contemporary Yoga where Tantra plays a role is the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is a hotchpotch (sic) of Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita and his own ideas derived from Kashmiri Shaivism. It is interesting to note that works like *Yoga Vashishtha* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* all mention the awakening of the inner *Purusha*. This is the influence of Tantra within Yoga. But again, to the Hindu, all is Tantra. This fact is found in the fact that all Hindu deities have consorts. They are Yogis but nonetheless they are non-celibates. The story of Chudala in *Yoga Vashishtha* is important here because there Chudala experiences samadhi and yet she leads her holy but non-dualist husband to experiencing eros. This insistence on the detached experience of the *vrittis* is Tantric. Another instance of the tight integration of Tantra and Yoga is to be found in the interpretations of Hinduism published by the monks of the Bihar School of Yoga situated at Munger. Their books are explicitly Tantric. One subtle example of Tantra in an otherwise non-Tantric text can be given. In the Brihadaranyak *Upanishad*, women are shown desiring and goading their husbands into renouncing the world. This presence of women searching for the Brahman is itself Tantric. Without Shakti, without Hinduism, the knowledge of Brahman is incomplete. An exception to this kind of gross Tantric insistence on the feminine is not to

be found in the *Katha Upanishad*. This Upanishad betrays a Freudian anxiety with women as seductresses. Therefore, it cannot be Tantric.

In short, it seems that all Yoga is a preparation for the praxes of Tantra and not the other way around. Textual recensions as has been pointed out above should not be done in a mechanical imitation of Saussure and his acolytes but through a hermeneutics rooted in the lived experience of Tantra. No theology is valid unless tested in the here and the now. Hinduism and Tantra cannot afford to deny orthopraxy (Chattopadhyay 'Reflections on Hindu Theology' 664-72).

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