CHAPTER-I

CONCEPT, SIGNIFICANCE, MYTHOLOGY IN INDIAN TANTRIC CULTURE
CONCEPT, SIGNIFICANCE AND MYTHOLOGY IN INDIAN TANTRIC CULTURE

The word “Tantra” implies a process of weaving and expansion. The inner and outer worlds, microcosm and macrocosm, are like the two sides of a fabric, composed of all the elements and energies of the universe, may be consciously “woven” by the practice of Tantra yoga. Tantra is continuity, yoga means union. The joining is union of inner and outer brought about Tantric practice.

Reality is but a flow of ever changing forces. Elements, energies, phenomenon, events and actions interact continually. By means of conscious efforts in accordance with the innate principle of universal harmony, it is possible to create new conditions on the surface of reality. This is the message of Tantra.¹

According to M.M.H.P. Sastri, “The word Tantra means shortening abbreviations, i.e. reducing into something like algebra forms, mantras or formulae that would otherwise run to scores of syllables”. Tantra deals with the problem of tattva i.e. study of the absolute and the first principle. Tattva means pertaining to that ness [the cosmic entity]. The fundamental creed of the Tantras is worship. Hence, Tantra is that branch of esoteric cult, which brings the realization of tattva [absolute] with the help of Mantra Sadhana. Tantra Sadhana therefore means a spiritual path.

¹ Rowson, Philip, Tantra Art, Delhi, 1973, p. 110.
Plate - 4

Shiva with his consort, Parvati, popularly called Uma Maheshwara, Indian Museum, Calcutta
9th-10th century, A.D.

Ref. p. 10
which deals to the expansion of one's mental objectivity and with the expansion of mental objectivity the arena of mental projection is also increased.

According to Tantra-Vidya the stages of sadhana are three:

1. The realization of Atma tattva
2. Siva tattva
3. Sakti tattva

The origin of Tantra is rather obscure. It appears that magical practices influenced all the earlier civilization. On the Indian sub-continent religious-magical practices, rather similar to those throughout the ancient world, had developed since the very earliest times. All the earliest religious-magical practices are of an animist nature... the “worship” of natural energies, the elements, astronomical bodies, ancestors and spirits, mountains, rivers, trees, stones, great rocks, animals and birds, accompanied by shamanistic-type rituals centered around individuals who possessed various “magical” powers. These individuals later became popular as God, Goddesses, magicians or “High Priests” and in time their achievements and their practical techniques became a part of mythology.

The rather obscure origins of Tantra clear somewhat during the early Indus-Valley periods [circa 3500 B.C.]. Where at Harapa and Mohenjadaro

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3. Ibid., pp. 95-110.
Plate – 5
Ekamukha Siva-Linga, Gupta,
5th century A.D., Khok, Distt. Satna
Allahabad Museum, Allahabad

Ref. p. 11
the excavations have revealed images seated in traditional Yoga Postures, and exhibiting the signs of a well developed Yoga Philosophy. Other finds from the same region indicate that the worship of the Male Principle [the Linga: phallus] and the female principle [the Yoni: vulva].

The founder of Tantra is Lord Shiva. Shiva, lord of Yogis, lived in the Himalayan mountains in ancient times. A master-shaman, and supreme ascetic, he impressed his fellow Dravidians with the greatness of his Yogic Powers. That Shiva left a great impression on the minds of both his disciples and his opponents is evident from the many stories of his exploits, and in the later appearance of the Shiva Cults. The worship of the Linga was associated with the worship of Shiva. Shiva occupies a supreme position in Tantrica cosmology. He is the highest and the supreme godhead.4

When Aryans arrived in India they brought with them their own beliefs and practices. Their religious observances were very complex, and magic highly developed. As the Aryans mixed and intermarried with the Dravidians, so also the beliefs and practices became mixed, and Hinduism was the result. The whole continent underwent a great change, both of the communities having to compromise in the formation of religious and social strictures. The term Tantra implies system. No form of magical practice should be termed as Tantric if it is not systematic. The Aryans brought

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Plate – 6

Hastakara Yantra
Rajasthan, c. 18th century
Gouache on paper

Ref. p. 12
many practices of a Tantric nature with them, and these were incorporated in their religious practices both before and after their invasions of India.

The Tantric teachings were always closely guarded secrets given from master to disciple only when the time of preparation had been completed. The teachings, mostly the oral traditions, consist of yogic instructions for the inner purification and transformation of the body and spirit of the practices. Tantric instructions generally included the science of Alchemy, Medicine, Astronomy, Astrology, Chemistry, Meditation, Visualization, Astral Projection and other advanced practices. Tantra owes to Buddhism the first recorded outline of the ancient tantric methods. The first written Tantras were of Buddhist origin, coming from the Vajrana schools of Mahayana [Greater way] doctrine.5

These written Tantras described practices which made use of sound formulae [Mantra], diagrams [Yantra], magic circles [chackras] and [Mandala], visualization of elements and elementals, firms of Gods and Goddesses representing the manifestations of energies of natural principles. ritual postures [Asanas], gestures [Mudras] used as aids to meditative concentrations and many other processes of sadhana [Worship].

Hence, the whole of Tantra literature is symbolic. It consists of catch phrases, which were quite intelligible to the people when the science was in vogue.

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The early Tantric writings refer to four "holy places" or "holy centers" as being the original "seats" of Tantra. These were referred to as Pitths. The later medieval Tantras refer to many more than these four traditional homes of Tantra, and associate the eight, eighteen, forty two, sixty four, or one hundred and eight named places with the Mahabharata story of the dismemberment of the body of shakti, wife of shiva.... The pieces of her body [presently reckoned to be 51 in number according to orthodox Hindu tradition] being enshrined where they fell, becoming places of pilgrimage and seats of Tantra.6

Tantric practices flourished on a grand scale throughout eastern India until the beginning of the thirteenth century. From the thirteenth century to the present day, Tantrism has maintained a strong influence on religious practices throughout the east. Many Hindu temples house images, which trace their origin on the tantric visualization.

Tantra is still practiced in Assam, Orissa, and parts of south India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan as well as other parts of Indian Himalayas. Bengal has remained a stronghold of the Tantric tradition, strongly influenced by Shaivat, Shakta, Vaishnav and Baul cults. Moreover, it has produced a formidable line of Tantric-Gurus.

Tantra is the oldest and the most scientific religion of the world. The first spiritual faith laying down ethical norms to be strictly observed or the

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spiritual enlightens and integrated development of society, Tantra is the religion of householders. It does not encourage external renunciation \textit{sanyas} and accepts for initiation into \textit{Tantra sadhana} only those who have inner renunciation and it is the first expression of a healthy social order.  