

ANONYMOUS
MAHANIRVANA
TANTRA
OF THE GREAT
LIBERATION



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Mahanirvana Tantra of the Great Liberation

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Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Chapter I: Questions relating to the Liberation of Beings

Chapter II: Introduction to the Worship of Brahman

Chapter III: Description of the Worship of the Supreme Brahman

Chapter IV: Introduction of the Worship of the Supreme Prakriti

Chapter V: The Formation of the Mantras, Placing of the Jar, and Purification of the Elements of Worship

Chapter VI: Placing of the Shri-patra, Homa, Formation of the Chakra, and other Rites

Chapter VII: Hymn of Praise (Stotra), Amulet (Kavacha), and the description of the Kula-tattva

Chapter VIII: The Dharmma and Customs of the Castes and Ashramas

Chapter IX: The Ten Kinds of Purificatory Rites (Sangskara)

Chapter X: Rites relating to Vriddhi Shraddha, Funeral Rites, and Purnabhisheka

Chapter XI: The Account of Expiatory Rites

Chapter XII: An Account of the Eternal and Immutable Dharmma

Chapter XIII: Installation of the Devata

Chapter XIV: The Consecration of Shiva-linga and Description of the Four Classes of Avadhutas

Preface

[Table of Contents](#)

The Indian Tantras, which are numerous, constitute the Scripture (*Shastra*) of the Kaliyuga, and as such are the voluminous source of present and practical orthodox "Hinduism." The Tantra Shastra is, in fact, and whatever be its historical origin, a development of the *Vaidika Karmakanda*, promulgated to meet the needs of that age. Shiva says: "For the benefit of men of the Kali age, men bereft of energy and dependent for existence on the food they eat, the Kaula doctrine, O auspicious one! is given" (Chap. IX., verse 12). To the Tantra we must therefore look if we would understand aright both ritual, *yoga*, and *sadhana* of all kinds, as also the general principles of which these practices are but the objective expression.

Yet of all the forms of Hindu Shastra, the Tantra is that which is least known and understood, a circumstance in part due to the difficulties of its subject-matter and to the fact that the key to much of its terminology and method rest with the initiate. The present translation is, in fact, the first published in Europe of any Indian Tantra. An inaccurate version rendered in imperfect English was published in Calcutta by a Bengali editor some twelve years ago, preceded by an Introduction which displayed insufficient knowledge in respect of what it somewhat quaintly described as "the mystical and superficially technical passages" of this Tantra. A desire to attempt to do it greater justice has in part prompted its selection as the first for publication. This Tantra is, further, one which is well known and esteemed, though perhaps more highly so amongst that

portion of the Indian public which favours "reformed" Hinduism than amongst some Tantrikas, to whom, as I have been told, certain of its provisions appear to display unnecessary timidity. The former admire it on account of its noble exposition of the worship of the Supreme Brahman, and in the belief that certain of its passages absolutely discountenance the orthodox ritual. Nothing can be more mistaken than such belief, even though it be the fact that "for him who has faith in the root, of what use are the branches and leaves." This anyone will discover who reads the text. It is true that, as Chap. VII., verse 94, says: "In the purified heart knowledge of Brahman grows," and *Brahmajnane samutpanne krityakrityang na vidyate*. But the statement assumes the attainment of *Brahmajñāna*, and this, the Shastra says, can be attained, not by Vedantic discussions nor mere prayer, after the manner of Protestant systems of Christian worship; but by the *Sadhana* which is its main subject-matter. I have referred to Protestant systems, for the Catholic Church possesses an elaborate ritual and a *sadhana* of its own which is in many points strikingly analogous to the Hindu system. The section of Tantrikas to whom I have referred are, I believe, also in error. For the design of this Tantra appears to be, whilst conserving commonly-recognized Tantrik principles, to secure that, as has sometimes proved to be the case, they are not abused. Parvvati says (Chap. I., verse 67): "I fear, O Lord! that even that which Thou hast ordained for the good of men will, through them, turn out for evil." *Hitaya yane, karmani kathitani tvaya prabho Manyetani mahadeva viparitani manave*. It is significant, in connection with these observations, to note that this particular Tantra was chosen as the subject of commentary by Shrimad Hariharananda

Bharati, the Guru of the celebrated Hindu "reformer," Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

The Tantra has been assigned to the group of sixty-four known as those of the Rathakranta. It was first published by the Adi-Brahma-Samaja in 1798 Shakabda (A.D. 1876), and was printed in Bengali characters, with the notes of the Kulavadhuta Shrimad Hariharananda Bharati under the editorship of Anandachandra Vidyavagisha. The preface to this edition stated that three MSS. were consulted; one belonging to the library of the Samaja; the second supplied by Durgadasa Chandhuri, and the third taken from the library of Raja Ram Mohun Roy. This text appears to be the basis of subsequent publications. It was again printed in 1888 by Shri Krishna Gopala Bhakta, since when there have been several editions with Bengali translations, including that of Shri Prasanna Kumara Shastri. The late Pandit Jivananda Vidyasagara published an edition in Devanagari character, with the notes of Hariharananda; and the Venkateshvara Press at Bombay have issued another in similar character with a Hindi translation.

The translation published is that of the first part only. It is commonly thought (and was so stated by the author of the Calcutta edition in English to which I have referred) that the second portion is lost. This is, however, not so, though copies of the complete Tantra are rare enough. The full text exists in manuscript, and I hope at a later date to have an opportunity of publishing a translation of it. I came across a complete manuscript some two years ago in the possession of a Nepalese Pandit. He would, however, only permit me to make a copy of his manuscript on the condition that the *Shatkarmma* Mantras were not published. For, as he said, virtue not being a condition precedent for the acquisition of *siddhi* in such Mantras, their publication might enable the

evilily disposed to work harm against others, a crime which, he added, was, in his own country, where the Tantra was current, punishable by the civil power. I was unable to persuade him even with the observation that the mere publication of the Mantra without knowledge of what is called the *prayoga* (which cannot be learned of books) would in any case be ineffectual. I could not give an undertaking which would have involved the publication of a mutilated text, and the reader must therefore for the present be content with a translation of the first part of the Tantra, which is generally known, and has, as stated, been several times printed. The incident has further value than the direct purpose for which I have told it. There are some to whom the Tantra, though they may not have read a line of it, is "nothing but black magic," and all its followers are "black magicians." This is of course absurd. In this connection I cannot avoid interposing the observation that certain practices are described in Tantra which, though they are alleged to have the results described therein, yet exist "for delusion." The true attitude of the higher Tantrika is illustrated by the action of the Pandit who, if he disappointed my expectations, at any rate by his refusal afforded an answer to these too general allegations.

The second portion of the manuscript in his possession contained over double the number of Shlokas to be found in the first part here published.

The edition which has been used for the translation is that (now out of print) edited and published at Calcutta by Shri Krishna Gopala Bhakta in Chaitra 1295 Bengali era (April, 1888), with Commentary of Shrimad Hariharananda Bharati, and with additional notes by the learned and lately deceased Pandit Jaganmohana Tarkalangkara, called Vriddha in order to distinguish him from another celebrated

Pandit of the same name. A new edition of the same work is now, in course of publication, with further notes by the latter's son, Pandit Jnanendranatha Tantraratna.

This valuable Commentary is not, however, altogether suitable for the general reader, for it assumes a certain amount of knowledge on his part which he does not possess. I have accordingly, whilst availing myself of its aid, written my own commentary, and added an Introduction explaining certain matters and terms referred to or presupposed by the text which, as they require a somewhat more extended treatment, could not be conveniently dealt with in the footnotes. Some of the matters there explained are, though common and fundamental, seldom accurately defined. Nothing, therefore, is lost by a re-statement of them with an intention to serve such accuracy. Other matters are of a special character, and are either not generally known or are misunderstood. The Introduction, however, does not profess to be an exhaustive treatment of that with which it deals. On the contrary, it is but an extended note written to help some way towards a better understanding of the text by the ordinary reader. For a fuller exposition of general principles and practice the interested are referred to three works which I have in preparation, "Principles of Tantra" (*Tantratattva*), "Exposition of the Secret Worship" (*Rahasyapujapaddhati*), and "Description of the Six Centres" (*Shatchakranirupana*). There are, however, some matters in the *Shastra* or its accompanying oral tradition which he must, and if disposed thereto will, find out for himself. This, too, is implied by the saying in this Tantra that it is by merit acquired in previous births that the mind inclines to Kaula doctrine (Chapter VII., verse 99). However this may be, no one will understand the *Shastra* who starts his inquiry with a mind burdened with the current

prejudices against it, whatever be the colour of truth some of them may possess by reason of actual abuse of Shastric principles.

In conclusion, I wish to thank my Indian friends for the aid they have given me in the preparation of this and other kindred works, and to whom I am indebted for much information gathered during many pleasant hours which we have spent together in the study of a subject of common interest to them and myself. The Tantras generally are written in comparatively simple Sanskrit. For their rendering, however, a working knowledge of their terminology and ritual is required, which can be only fully found in those to whom it is familiar through race, upbringing, and environment, and in whom there is still some regard for their ancient inheritance. As for others, they must learn to see through the Indian eye of knowledge until their own have been trained to its lines of vision. In this way we shall be in the future spared some of the ridiculous presentments of Indian beliefs common in the past and even now too current.

ARTHUR AVALON.
January 7, 1913.

Introduction

[Table of Contents](#)

Mount Kailasa

The scene of the revelation of this Tantra is laid in Himalaya, the "Abode of Snow," a holy land weighted with the traditions of the Aryan race. Here in these lofty uplands, encircled with everlasting snows, rose the great mountain of the north, the Sapta Kula Parvata. Hence the race itself came, and there its early legends have their setting. There are still shown at Bhimudiyar the caves where the sons of Pandu and Draupadi rested, as did Rama and his faithful wife at the point where the Kosi joins the Sita in the grove of Asoka trees. In these mountains Munis and Rishis lived. Here also is the *Kshetra* of Shiva Mahadeva, where His Spouse Parvvati, the daughter of the Mountain King, was born, and where Mother Ganges also has her source. From time immemorial pilgrims have toiled through these mountains to visit the three great shrines of Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. At Kangri, further north, the pilgrims make the *parikrama* of Mount Kailasa (Kang Rinpoche), where Shiva is said to dwell. This nobly towering peak rises to the north-west of the sacred Mansarowar Lake (Mapham Yum-tso) from amidst the purple ranges of the lower Kangri Mountains. The paradise of Shiva is a summerland of both lasting sunshine and cool shade, musical with the song of birds and bright with undying flowers. The air, scented with the sweet fragrance of Mandara chaplets, resounds with the music and song of celestial singers and players. The Mount

is *Gana Parvata*, thronged with trains of Spirits (*devayoni*), of which the opening Chapter speaks.

And in the regions beyond rises Mount Meru, centre of the world-lotus. Its heights, peopled with spirits, are hung with clusters of stars as with wreaths of Malati flowers. In short, it is written: "He who thinks of Himachala, though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kashi (Benares). In a hundred ages of the Devas I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachala. As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of mankind by the sight of Himachala."

It is not, however, necessary to go to the Himalayan Kailasa to find Shiva. He dwells wheresoever his worshippers, versed in Kulatattva, abide, and His mystic mount is to be sought in the thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrara-padma*) in the body of every human *jiva*, hence called Shivasthana, to which all, wheresoever situate, may repair when they have learned how to achieve the way thither.

Shiva promulgates His teaching in the world below in the works known as Yamala, Damara, Shiva Sutra, and in the Tantras which exist in the form of Dialogues between the Devata and his Shakti, the Devi in Her form as Parvvati. According to the Gayatri Tantra, the Deva Ganesha first preached the Tantra to the *Devayoni* on Mount Kailasa, after he had himself received them from the mouth of Shiva.

After a description of the mountain, the Dialogue opens with a question from Parvvati in answer to which and those which succeed it, Shiva unfolds His doctrine on the subjects with which this particular Tantra deals.

Shiva and Shakti

That eternal immutable existence which transcends the *turiya* and all other states is the unconditioned Absolute, the supreme Brahman or Para-brahman, without Prakriti (*nishkala*) or Her attributes (*nir-guna*), which, as being the inner self and knowing subject, can never be the object of cognition, and is to be apprehended only through *yoga* by the realization of the Self (*atmajñana*), which It is. For as it is said, "Spirit can alone know Spirit." Being beyond mind, speech, and without name, the Brahman was called "*Tat*," "That," and then "*Tat Sat*," "That which is." For the sun, moon, and stars, and all visible things, what are they but a glimpse of light caught from "That" (*Tat*)?

Brahman is both *nishkala* and *sakala*. *Kala* is Prakriti. The *nishkala* Brahman or Para-brahman is the *Tat*, when thought of as without Prakriti (*prakriteranya*). It is called *sakala* when with Prakriti. As the substance of Prakriti is the three gunas It is then *su-guna*, as in the previous state It was *nir-guna*. Though in the latter state It is thought of as without Shakti, yet (making accommodation to human speech) in It potentially exists Shakti, Its power and the whole universe produced by It. To say, however, that the Shakti exists in the Brahman is but a form of speech, since It and Shakti are, in fact, one, and Shakti is eternal (*Anadi-rupa*). She is *Brahma-rupa* and both *vi-guna* (*nir-guna*) and *sa-guna*; the *Chaitanya-rupini-Devi*, who manifests all *bhuta*. She is the *Ananda-rupini-Devi*, by whom the Brahman manifests Itself, and who, to use the words of the Sarada, pervades the universe as does oil the sesamum seed.

In the beginning the *Nishkala* Brahman alone existed. In the beginning there was the One. It willed and became many. *Ahab bahu syam* - "may I be many." In such manifestation of Shakti the Brahman is known as the lower (*apara*) or manifested Brahman, who, as the subject of

worship, is meditated upon with attributes. And, in fact, to the mind and sense of the embodied spirit (*jiva*) the Brahman has body and form. It is embodied in the forms of all Devas and Devils, and in the worshipper himself. Its form is that of the universe, and of all things and beings therein.

As *Shruti* says: "He saw" (*Sa aikshata, aham bahu syam prajayeya*). "He thought to Himself may I be many." "*Sa aikshaya*" was itself a manifestation of Shakti, the *Para-mapurva-nirvana shakti*, or Brahman as Shakti. From the Brahman, with Shakti (*Para-shakti-maya*) issued Nada (Shiva-Shakti as the "Word" or "Sound"), and from Nada, Vindu appeared. Kalicharana in his commentary on the Shatchakra-nirupana says that Shiva and Nirvana Shakti bound by a mayik bond and covering, should be thought of as existing in the form of Parang Vindu.

The Sarada says: *Sachchidananda vibhavat sakalat parameshvarat asichchhaktistato nado, nadad vindu-samudbhavah* ("From Parameshvara vested with the wealth of sachchidananda and with Prakriti (*sakala*) issued Shakti; from Shakti came Nada and from Nada was born Vindu"). The state of subtle body which is known as Kama-kala is the *mula* of *mantra*. The term *mula-mantratmika*, when applied to the Devi, refers to this subtle body of Hers known as the Kama-kala. The Tantra also speaks of three Vindus, namely Shiva-maya, Shakti-maya, and Shiva-shakti-maya.

The Parang-vindu is represented as a circle, the centre of which is the *brahma-pada*, or place of Brahman, wherein are Prakriti-Purusha, the circumference of which is encircling *maya*. It is on the crescent of *nirvana-kala*, the seventeenth, which is again in that of *ama-kala*, the sixteenth digit (referred to in the text) of the moon-circle (*Chandramandala*), which circle is situate above the Sun-Circle (*Suryyamandala*), the *Guru* and the *hangsah*, which

are in the pericarp of the thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrarapadma*). Next to the Vindu is the fiery Bodhini, or Nibodhika (v. *post*). The Vindu, with the Nirvana-kala, Nibodhika, and Ama-kala, are situated in the lightning-like inverted triangle known as "A, Ka, Tha," and which is so called because at its apex is A; at its right base is Za; and at its left base Tha. It is made up of forty-eight letters (*matrika*): the sixteen vowels running from A to Ka; sixteen consonants of the *ka-varga* and other groups running from A to Ka; and the remaining sixteen from Ka to Tha. Inside are the remaining letters (*matrika*), ha, la(second), and ksha. As the substance of Devi is *matrika* (*matrika-mayi*) the triangle represents the "Word" of all that exists. The triangle is itself encircled by the *Chandramandala*. The Vindu is symbolically described as being like a grain of gram (*chanaka*), which under its encircling sheath contains a divided seed. This *Parang-vindu* is Prakriti-Purusha, Shiva-Shakti. It is known as the Shabda-Brahman (the Sound Brahman), or Aparabrahman. A polarization of the two Shiva and Shakti *Tattvas* then takes place in *Parashaktimaya*. The Devi becomes *Unmukhi*. Her face turns towards Shiva. There is an unfolding which bursts the encircling shell of Maya, and creation then takes place by division of Shiva and Shakti or of "Hang" and "Sah." The Sarada says: "The *Devataparashaktimaya* is again Itself divided, such divisions being known as Vindu, Vaja, and Nada. Vindu is of the nature of Nada or Shiva, and Vaja of Shakti, and Nada has been said to be the relation of these two by those who are versed in all the Agamas." The Sarada says that before the bursting of the shell enclosing the *brahma-pada*, which, together with its defining circumference, constitute the Shabda-brahman, an indistinct sound arose (*avyaktatmaravobhavat*). This *avyktanada* is both the first

and the last state of Nada, according as it is viewed from the standpoint of evolution or involution. For Nada, as Raghava-bhatta says, exists in three states. In Nada are the *guna* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*), which form the substance of Prakriti, which with Shiva It is. When *tamo-guna* predominates Nada is merely an indistinct or unmanifested (*dhvanyat - mako'vykta-nadah*) sound in the nature of *dhvani*. In this state, in which it is a phase of Avyaktanada, it is called Nibodhika, or Bodhini. It is Nada when *rajoguna* is in the ascendant, when there is a sound in which there is something like a connected or combined disposition of the letters. When the *sattva-guna* preponderates Nada assumes the form of Vindu. The action of *rajas* on *tamas* is to veil. Its own independent action effects an arrangement which is only perfected by the emergence of the essentially manifesting *sattvika guna* set into play by it. Nada, Vindu, and Nibodhika, and the Shakti, of which they are the specific manifestation, are said to be in the form of Sun, Moon, and Fire respectively. *Jñana* (spiritual wisdom) is spoken of as fire as it burns up all actions, and the *tamoguna* is associated with it. For when the effect of cause and effect of action are really known, then action ceases. *Ichchha* is the Moon. The Moon contains the sixteenth digit, the Ama-kala with its nectar, which neither increases nor decays, and *Ichchha*, or will, is the eternal precursor of creation. *Kriya* is like the Sun, for as the Sun by its light makes all things visible, so unless there is action and striving there cannot be realization or manifestation. As the Gita sways: "As one Sun makes manifest all the *loka*."

The Shabda-Brahman manifests itself in a triad of energies - knowledge (*jñanashakti*), will (*ichchha-shakti*), and action (*kriya-shakti*), associated with the three *gunas* of Prakriti, *tamas*, *sattva*, and *rajas*. From the Parang-Vindu,

who is both *vindvat-maka* and *kalatma* – i.e., Shakti – issued Raudri, Rudra, and his Shakti, whose forms are fire (*vahni*), and whose activity is knowledge (*jñana*); Vama, and Vishnu and his Shakti, whose form is the sun, and whose activity is *kriya* (action): and Jyeshtha and Brahma and his Shakti, whose form is the Moon and whose activity is desire. The Vamakeshvara Tantra says that Tri-pura is threefold, as Brahma, Vishnu, and Isha; and as the energies desire, wisdom, and action, the energy of will when Brahman would create; the energy of wisdom when She reminds Him, saying "Let this be thus" ; and when, thus knowing, He acts, She becomes the energy of action. The Devi is thus *Ichchha-shakti-jñana-shakti-kriya-shakti-svaru-pini*.

Para-shiva exists as a septenary under the form, firstly, of Shambhu, who is the associate of time (*kala-bandhu*). From Him issues Sada-shiva, Who pervades and manifests all things, and then come Ishana and the triad, Rudra, Vishnu, and Brahma, each with their respective Shakti (without whom they avail nothing) separately and particularly associated with the gunas, *tamas*, *sattva* and *rajas*. Of these Devas, the last triad, together with Ishana, and Sada-shiva, are the five Shivas who are collectively known as the *Maha-preta*, whose *vija* is "*Hsauh*." Of the Maha-preta, it is said that the last four form the support, and the fifth the seat, of the bed on which the Devi is united with Parama-shiva, in the room of *chintamani* stone, on the jewelled island clad with clumps of *kadamba* and heavenly trees set in the ocean of Ambrosia.

Shiva is variously addressed in this work as Shambhu, Sada-shiva, Shankara, Maheshvara, etc., names which indicate particular states, qualities, and manifestations of the One in its descent towards the many; for there are many Rudras. Thus Sada-shiva indicates the predominance of the

sattva-guna. His names are many, 1,008 being given in the sixty-ninth chapter of the Shiva Purana, and in the seventeenth chapter of the Anushasana Parvan of the Mahabharata.

Shakti is both *maya*, that by which the Brahman creating the universe is able to make Itself appear to be different from what It really is, and *mula-prakriti*, or the unmanifested (*avyakta*) state of that which, when manifest, is the universe of name and form. It is the primary so called "material cause," consisting of the equipoise of the triad of *guna* or "qualities" which are *sattva* (that which manifests) *rajas* (that which *acts*), *tamas* (that which veils and produces inertia). The three gunas represent Nature as the revelation of spirit, Nature as the passage of descent from spirit to matter, or of ascent from matter to spirit, and Nature as the dense veil of spirit. The Devi is thus *guna-nidhi* ("treasure-house of guna"). *Mula-prakriti* is the womb into which Brahman casts the seed from which all things are born. The womb thrills to the movement of the essentially active *rajo-guna*. The equilibrium of the triad is destroyed, and the *guna*, now in varied combinations, evolve under the illumination of Shiva (*chit*), the universe which is ruled by Maheshvara and Maheshvari. The dual principles of Shiva and Shakti, which are in such dual form the product of the polarity manifested in *Parashakti-maya*, pervade the whole universe, and are present in man in the Svayambhu-Linga of the *muladhara* and the Devi Kundalini, who, in serpent form, encircles it. The Shabda-Brahman assumes in the body of man the form of the Devi Kundalini, and as such is in all *prani* (breathing creatures), and in the shape of letters appears in prose and verse. *Kundala* means coiled. Hence Kundalini, whose form is that of a coiled serpent, means that which is coiled. She is the luminous vital energy (*jiva-shakti*)

which manifests as *prana*, She sleeps in the *muladhara*, and has three and a half coils corresponding in number with the three and a half *vindus* of which the Kujika Tantra speaks. When after closing the ears the sound of Her hissing is not heard death approaches.

From the first *avyakta* creation issued the second *mahat*, with its three guna distinctly manifested. Thence sprung the third creation *ahangkara* (selfhood), which is of threefold form – *vaikarika*, or pure *sattvika ahangkara*; the *taijasa*, or *rajasika ahangkara*; and the *tamasika*, or *bhutadika ahangkara*. The latter is the origin of the subtle essences (*tan-matra*) of the *Tattvas*, ether, air, fire, water, earth, associated with sound, touch, sight, taste and smell, and with the colours – pure transparency, shyama, red, white, and yellow. There is some difference in the schools as to that which each of the three forms produces, but from such threefold form of *Ahang-kara* issue the *indriya* ("senses"), and the Devas Dik, Vata, Arka, Prachetas, Vahni, Indra, Upendra, Mitra, and the Ashvins. The *vaikarika*, *taijasa*, and *bhutadika* are the fourth, fifth, and sixth creations, which are known as *prakrita*, or appertaining to Prakriti. The rest, which are products of these, such as the vegetable world with its upward life current, animals with horizontal life current, and *bhuta*, *preta* and the like, whose life current tends downward, constitute the *vaikrita* creation, the two being known as the *kaumara* creation.

The Goddess (Devi) is the great Shakti. She is *Maya*, for of Her the *maya* which produces the *sangsara* is. As Lord of *Maya* She is *Mahamaya*. Devi is *a-vidya* (nescience) because She binds and *vidya* (knowledge) because She liberates and destroys the *sangsara*. She is Prakriti, and as existing before creation is the *Adya* (primordial) Shakti. Devi is the *vachaka-shakti*, the manifestation of *chit* in Prakriti, and the *vachya-*

shakti, or *Chit* itself. The *Atma* should be contemplated as Devi. Shakti or Devi is thus the Brahman revealed in Its mother aspect (*shri-mata*) as Creatrix and Nourisher of the worlds. Kali says of Herself in Yogini Tantra "*Sachchidananda-rupaham brahmaivaham sphurat-prabham.*" So the Devi is described with attributes both of the qualified Brahman; and (since that Brahman is but the manifestation of the Absolute) She is also addressed with epithets, which denote the unconditioned Brahman. She is the great Mother (*Ambika*) sprung from the sacrificial hearth of the fire of the Grand Consciousness (*chit*); decked with the Sun and Moon; Lalita, "She who plays"; whose play is world-play; whose eyes playing like fish in the beauteous waters of her Divine face, open and shut with the appearance and disappearance of countless worlds now illuminated by her light now wrapped in her terrible darkness.

The Devi, as Para-brahman, is beyond all form and *guna*. The forms of the Mother of the Universe are threefold. There is first the Supreme (*para*) form, of which, as the Vishnu-yamala says, "none know." There is next her subtle (*sukshma*) form, which consists of *mantra*. But as the mind cannot easily settle itself upon that which is formless, She appears as the subject of contemplation in Her third, or gross (*sthula*), or physical form, with hands and feet and the like as celebrated in the *Devi-stotra* of the Puranas and Tantras. Devi, who as Prakriti is the source of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh-vara, has both male and female forms. But it is in Her female forms that She is chiefly contemplated. For though existing in all things, in a peculiar sense female beings are parts of Her. The Great Mother, who exists in the form of all Tantras and all Yantras, is, as the Lalita says, the "unsullied treasure-house of beauty" ;

the Sapphire Devi, whose slender waist, bending beneath the burden of the ripe fruit of her breasts, swells into jewelled hips heavy with the promise of infinite maternities.

As the Mahadevi She exists in all forms as Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Gayatri, Durga, Tripura-sundari, Anna-purna, and all the Devi who are *avatara* of the Brahman.

Devi, as Sati, Uma, Parvvati, and Gauri, is spouse of Shiva. It was as Sati prior to Daksha's sacrifice (*daksha-yajna*) that the Devi manifested Herself to Shiva in the ten celebrated forms known as the *dasha-mahavidya* referred to in the text – Kali, Bagala, Chhinnamasta, Bhuvaneshvari, Matangini, Shodashi, Dhumavati, Tripura-sundari, Tara, and Bhairavi. When, at the Daksha-yajna She yielded up her life in shame and sorrow at the treatment accorded by her father to Her Husband, Shiva took away the body, and, ever bearing it with Him, remained wholly distraught and spent with grief. To save the world from the forces of evil which arose and grew with the withdrawal of His Divine control, Vishnu with His discus (*chakra*) cut the dead body of Sati, which Shiva bore, into fifty-one fragments, which fell to earth at the places thereafter known as the fifty-one *maha-pitha-sthana* (referred to in the text), where Devi, with Her Bhairava, is worshipped under various names.

Besides the forms of the Devi in the *brahmanda* there is Her subtle form called Kundalini in the body (*pindanda*). These are but some only of Her endless forms. She is seen as one and as many, as it were, but one moon reflected in countless waters. She exists, too, in all animals and inorganic things, since the universe with all its beauties is, as the Devi Purana says, but a part of Her. All this diversity of form is but the infinite manifestations of the flowering beauty of the One Supreme Life, a doctrine which is nowhere else taught with greater wealth of illustration than

in the Shakta Shastras, and Tantras. The great Bharga in the bright Sun and all Devatas, and, indeed, all life and being, are wonderful, and are worshipful, but only as Her manifestations. And he who worships them otherwise is, in the words of the great Devi-bhagavata, "like unto a man who, with the light of a clear lamp in his hands, yet falls into some waterless and terrible well." The highest worship for which the *sadhaka* is qualified (*adhikari*) only after external worship and that internal form known as *sadhara*, is described as *niradhara*. Therein Pure Intelligence is the Supreme Shakti who is worshipped as the Very Self, the Witness freed of the glamour of the manifold Universe. By one's own direct experience of Maheshvari as the Self She is with reverence made the object of that worship which leads to liberation.

Guna

It cannot be said that current explanations give a clear understanding of this subject. Yet such is necessary, both as affording one of the chief keys to Indian philosophy and to the principles which govern *Sadhana*. The term *guna* is generally translated "quality," a word which is only accepted for default of a better. For it must not be overlooked that the three *guna* (*Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*), which are of Prakriti, constitute Her very substance. This being so, all Nature which issues from Her, the *Maha-karana-svarupa*., is called *tri-gunatmaka*, and is composed of the same *guna* in different states of relation to one another. The functions of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are to reveal, to make active, and to suppress respectively. *Rajas* is the dynamic, as *sattva* and *tamas* are static principles. That is to say, *sattva* and *tamas*

can neither reveal nor suppress without being first rendered active by *rajas*. These *gunas* work by mutual suppression.

The unrevealed Prakriti (*avyakta-prakriti*) or Devi is the state of stable equilibrium of these three *guna*. When this state is disturbed the manifested universe appears, in every object of which one or other of the three *guna* is in the ascendant. Thus in Devas, as in those who approach the *divya* state, *sattva* predominates, and *rajas* and *tamas* are very much reduced. That is, their independent manifestation is reduced. They are in one sense still there, for where *rajas* is not independently active it is operating on *sattva* to suppress *tamas*, which appears or disappears to the extent to which it is, or is not, subject to suppression by the revealing principle. In the ordinary human *jiva*, considered as a class, *tamas* is less reduced than in the case of the Deva, but very much reduced when comparison is made with the animal *jiva*. *Rajas* has great independent activity, and *sattva* is also considerably active. In the animal creation *sattva* has considerably less activity. *Rajas* has less independent activity than in man, but is much more active than in the vegetable world. *Tamas* is greatly less preponderant than in the latter. In the vegetable kingdom *tamas* is more preponderant than in the case of animals, and both *rajas* and *sattva* less so. In the inorganic creation *rajas* makes *tamas* active to suppress both *sattva* and its own independent activity. It will thus be seen that the "upward" or revealing movement from the predominance of *tamas* to that of *sattva* represents the spiritual progress of the *jivatma*.

Again, as between each member of these classes one or other of the three *guna* may be more or less in the ascendant.

Thus, in one man as compared with another, the *sattva guna* may predominate, in which case his temperament is sattvik, or, as the Tantra calls it, *divyabhava*. In another the *rajoguna* may prevail, and in the third the *tamoguna*, in which case the individual is described as rajasik, or tamasik, or, to use Tantrik phraseology, he is said to belong to *virabhava*, or is a *pashu* respectively. Again the vegetable creation is obviously less tamasik, and more rajasik and sattvik than the mineral, and even amongst these last there may be possibly some which are less tamasik than others.

Etymologically, *sattva* is derived from "*sat*," that which is eternally existent. The eternally existent is also *chit*, pure Intelligence or Spirit, and *ananda* or Bliss. In a secondary sense, *sat* is also used to denote the "good." And commonly (though such use obscures the original meaning), the word *sattva guna* is rendered "good quality." It is, however, "good" in the sense that it is productive of good and happiness. In such case, however, stress is laid rather on a necessary quality or effect (in the ethical sense) of "*sat*" than upon its original meaning. In the primary sense *sat* is that which *reveals*. Nature is a revelation of spirit (*sat*). Where Nature is such a revelation of spirit there it manifests as *sattva guna*. It is the shining forth from under the veil of the hidden spiritual substance (*sat*). And that equality in things which reveals this is *sattva guna*. So of a pregnant woman it is said that she is *antahsattva*, or instinct with *sattva*; she in whom *sattva* as *jiva* (whose characteristic guna is *sattva*) is living in an hidden state.

But Nature not only reveals, but is also a dense covering or veil of spirit, at times so dense that the ignorant fail to discern the spirit which it veils. Where Nature is a veil of spirit there it appears in its quality of *tamoguna*.

In this case the *tamoguna* is currently spoken of as representative of inertia, because that is the effect of the nature which veils. This quality, again, when translated into the moral sphere, becomes ignorance, sloth, etc.

In a third sense nature is a bridge between spirit which reveals and matter which veils. Where Nature is a bridge of descent from spirit to matter, or of ascent from matter to spirit, there it manifests itself as *rajoguna*. This is generally referred to as the quality of activity, and when transferred to the sphere of feeling it shows itself as passion. Each thing in Nature then contains that in which spirit is manifested or reflected as in a mirror or *sattvaguna*; that by which spirit is covered, as it were, by a veil of darkness or *tamoguna*, and that which is the vehicle for the descent into matter or the return to spirit or *rajoguna*. Thus *sattva* is the light of Nature, as *tamas* is its shade. *Rajas* is, as it were, a blended tint oscillating between each of the extremes constituted by the other guna.

The object of Tantrik *sadhana* is to bring out and make preponderant the *sattva guna* by the aid of *rajas*, which operates to make the former guna active. The subtle body (*lingasharira*) of the *jivatma* comprises in it *buddhi*, *ahankara*, *manas*, and the ten senses. This subtle body creates for itself gross bodies suited to the spiritual state of the *jivatma*. Under the influence of *prarabdha karma*, *buddhi* becomes *tamasik*, *rajasik*, or *sattvik*. In the first case the *jivatma* assumes inanimate bodies; in the second, active passionate bodies; and in the third, *sattvik* bodies of varying degrees of spiritual excellence, ranging from man to the Deva. The gross body is also *trigunatmaka*. This body conveys impressions to the *jivatma* through the subtle body and the *buddhi* in particular. When *sattva* is made active impressions of happiness result, and when *rajas* or *tamas*

are active the impressions are those of sorrow and delusion. These impressions are the result of the predominance of these respective guna. The action of *rajas* on *sattva* produces happiness, as its own independent activity or operation on *tamas* produce sorrow and delusion respectively. Where *sattva* or happiness is predominant, there sorrow and delusion are suppressed. Where *rajas* or sorrow is predominant, there happiness and delusion are suppressed. And where *tamas* or delusion predominates there, as in the case of the inorganic world, both happiness and sorrow are suppressed. All objects share these three states in different proportions. There is, however, always in the *jivatma* an admixture of sorrow with happiness, due to the operation of *rajas*. For happiness, which is the fruit of righteous acts done to attain happiness, is after all only a *vikara*. The natural state of the *jivatma* – that is, the state of its own true nature – is that bliss (*ananda*) which arises from the pure knowledge of the Self, in which both happiness and sorrow are equally objects of indifference. The worldly enjoyment of a person involves pain to self or others. This is the result of the pursuit of happiness, whether by righteous or unrighteous acts. As spiritual progress is made, the gross body becomes more and more refined. In inanimate bodies *karma* operates to the production of pure delusion. On the exhaustion of such *karma* the *jivatma* assumes animate bodies for the operation of such forms of *karma* as lead to sorrow and happiness mixed with delusion. In the vegetable world *sattva* is but little active, with a corresponding lack of discrimination, for discrimination is the effect of *sattva* in *buddhi*, and from discrimination arises the recognition of pleasure and pain, conceptions of right and wrong, of the transitory and intransitory, and so forth, which are the fruit of a high degree of discrimination, or of activity of *sattva*. In

the lower animal *sattva* in *buddhi* is not sufficiently active to lead to any degree of development of these conceptions. In man, however, the *sattva* in *buddhi* is considerably active, and in consequence these conceptions are natural in him. For this reason the human birth is, for spiritual purposes, so important. All men, however, are not capable of forming such conceptions in an equal degree. The degree of activity in an individual's *buddhi* depends on his *prarabdha karma*. However bad such *karma* may be in any particular case, the individual is yet gifted with that amount of discrimination which, if properly aroused and aided, will enable him to better his spiritual condition by inducing the *rajoguna* in him to give more and more activity to the *sattva guna* in his *buddhi*.

On this account proper guidance and spiritual direction are necessary. A good *guru*, by reason of his own nature and spiritual attainment and disinterested wisdom, will both mark out for the *sisya* the path which is proper for him, and aid him to follow it by the infusion of the *tejas* which is in the Guru himself. Whilst *sadhana* is, as stated, a process for the stimulation of the *sattva guna*, it is evident that one form of it is not suitable to all. It must be adapted to the spiritual condition of the *sisya*, otherwise it will cause injury instead of good. Therefore it is that the adoption of certain forms of *sadhana* by persons who are not competent (*adhikari*), may not only be fruitless of any good result, but may even lead to evils which *sadhana* as a general principle is designed to prevent. Therefore also is it said that it is better to follow one's own *dharma* than that, however exalted it be, of another.

The Worlds (Loka)

This earth, which is the object of the physical senses and of the knowledge based thereon, is but one of fourteen worlds or regions placed "above" and "below" it, of which (as the *sutra* says) knowledge may be obtained by meditation on the solar "nerve" (*nada*) *sushumna* in the *merudanda*. On this *nadi* six of the upper worlds are threaded, the seventh and highest overhanging it in the *Sahasrara Padma*, the thousand-petalled lotus. The sphere of earth (*Bhurloka*), with its continents, their mountains and rivers, and with its oceans, is the seventh or lowest of the upper worlds. Beneath it are the Hells and Nether Worlds, the names of which are given below. Above the terrestrial sphere is *Bhuvvarloka*, or the atmospheric sphere known as the *antariksha*, extending "from the earth to the sun," in which the Siddhas and other celestial beings (*devayoni*) of the upper air dwell. "From the sun to the pole star" *dhruva*) is *svarloka*, or the heavenly sphere. Heaven (*svarga*) is that which delights the mind, as hell (*naraka*) is that which gives it pain. In the former is the abode of the *Deva* and the blest.

These three spheres are the region of the consequences of work, and are termed transitory as compared with the three highest spheres, and the fourth, which is of a mixed character. When the *jiva* has received his reward he is reborn again on earth. For it is not good action, but the knowledge of the *atma* which procures Liberation (*moksha*). Above *Svarloka* is *Maharloka*, and above it the three ascending regions known as the *janarloka*, *tapoloka*, and *satyaloka*, each inhabited by various forms of celestial intelligence of higher and higher degree. Below the earth (*Bhuh*) and above the nether worlds are the Hells (commencing with *Avichi*), and of which, according to popular theology, there are thirty-four, though it is elsewhere said there are as many hells as there are offences

for which particular punishments are meted out. Of these, six are known as the great at hells. Hinduism, however, even when popular, knows nothing of a hell of eternal torment. To it nothing is eternal but the Brahman. Issuing from the Hells the *jiva* is again reborn to make its future. Below the Hells are the seven nether worlds, Sutala, Vitala, Talatala, Mahatala, Rasatala, Atala, and Patala, where, according to the Puranas, dwell the Naga serpent divinities, brilliant with jewels, and where, too, the lovely daughters of the Daityas and Danavas wander, fascinating even the most austere. Yet below Patala is the form of Vishnu proceeding from the dark quality (*tamogunah*), known as the Sesha serpent or Ananta, bearing the entire world as a diadem, attended by his Shakti Varuni, his own embodied radiance.

Inhabitants of the Worlds

The worlds are inhabited by countless grades of beings, ranging from the highest Devas (of whom there are many classes and degrees) to the lowest animal life. The scale of beings runs from the shining manifestations of Spirit to those in which it is so veiled that it would seem almost to have disappeared in its material covering. There is but one Light, one Spirit, whose manifestations are many. A flame enclosed in a clear glass loses but little of its brilliancy. If we substitute for the glass, paper, or some other more opaque yet transparent substance, the light is dimmer. A covering of metal may be so dense as to exclude from sight the rays of light which yet burns within with an equal brilliancy. As a fact, all such veiling forms are *maya*. They are none the less true for those who live in and are themselves part of the mayik world. Deva, or "heavenly and shining one" – for spirit is light and self-manifestation – is applicable to those

descending yet high manifestations of the Brahman, such as the seven Shivas, including the Trinity (*trimurti*), Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra. Devi, again, is the title of the Supreme Mother Herself, and is again applied to the manifold forms assumed by the one only Maya, such as Kali, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Gauri, Gayatri, Sandhya, and others. In the sense also in which it is said, "Verily, in the beginning there was the Brahman. It created the Devas," the latter term also includes lofty intelligencies belonging to the created world intermediate between Ishvara (Himself a *Purusha*) and man, who in the person of the Brahmana is known as Earth-deva (*bhudeva*). These spirits are of varying degrees. For there are no breaks in the creation which represents an apparent descent of the Brahman in gradually lowered forms. Throughout these forms play the divine currents of *pravritti* and *nivritti*, the latter drawing to Itself that which the former has sent forth.

Deva, *jiva* and *jara* (inorganic matter) are, in their real, as opposed to their phenomenal and illusory, being, the one Brahman, which appears thus to be other than Itself through its connection with the *upadhi* or limiting conditions with which ignorance (*avidya*) invests it. Therefore all beings which are the object of worship are each of them but the Brahman seen through the veil of *avidya*. Though the worshippers of Devas may not know it, their worship is in reality the worship of the Brahman, and hence the Mahanirvana Tantra says that, "as all streams flow to the ocean, so the worship given to any Deva is received by the Brahman." On the other hand, those who, knowing this, worship the Devas, do so as manifestations of the Brahman, and thus worship It mediately. The sun, the most glorious symbol in the physical world, is the mayik vesture of Her who is "clothed with the sun."

In the lower ranks of the celestial hierarchy are the Devayonis, some of whom are mentioned in the opening verses of the first chapter of the text. The Devas are of two classes: "unborn" (*ajata*) – that is, those which have not, and those which have (*sadhya*) evolved from humanity as in the case of King Nahusha, who became Indra. Opposed to the divine hosts are the Asura, Danava, Daitya, Rakshasa, who, with other spirits, represent the tamasik or demonic element in creation. All Devas, from the highest downwards, are subordinate to both time and *karma*. So it is said, "Salutation to Karma, over which not even Vidhi (Brahma) prevails" (*Namastat karmmabhyovidhirapi na yebhyah prabhavati*). The rendering of the term "Deva" by "God" has led to a misapprehension of Hindu thought. The use of the term "angel" may also mislead, for though the world of Devas has in some respects analogy to the angelic choirs, the Christian conception of these Beings, their origin and functions, does not include, but in fact excludes, other ideas connoted by the Sanskrit term.

The *pitris*, or "Fathers," are a creation (according to some) separate from the predecessors of humanity, and are, according to others, the lunar ancestry who are addressed in prayer with the Devas. From Brahma, who is known as the "Grandfather" Pita Maha of the human race, issued Marichi, Atri, and others, his "mental sons": the Agnishvattvah, Saumnyah, Havishmantah, Ushmapah, and other classes of *Pitris*, numbering, according to the Markandeya Purana, thirty-one. *Tarpanam*, or oblation, is daily offered to these pitris. The term is also applied to the human ancestors of the worshipper generally up to the seventh generation to whom in *shraddha* (the obsequial rites) *pinda* and water are offered with the mantra "*svadha*."