The Antiquity of Tantricism

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In order to understand tantra, its antiquity, significance etc. in the religious system of India, we have to touch upon the ancient civilisations, when the early men derived the magical power from the natural phenomena. A significant development of saktism took place when tantrism made its appearance from about 8th century A.D. and was amalgamated with saktism. In the Hindu Tantra, Siva-Sakti union is the essence of Tantra. But in Buddhist philosophy, prajna and upaja are important. Tara conceived in the Mahayana Buddhism became the primordial goddess. But it is really difficult to enumerate the nos. of Tantras. After the Muslim invasions, many tantra manuscripts have been destroyed. Some secret tantras were imported orally by the Gurus to Sishya. The Guru-sisya tradition is no longer in existence. The Sammohan tantra gives a list of tantras of different schools. Each tantra has its philosophy, own system of rituals, practice and deity etc. There are three trends of Tantras: Dakshina, Vama and Madhyama. Tantra has a vast mass of literature covering wide range of heterogenous systems.

Vedic Period:

Tantra and Vedas are two very important religious systems of India running parallel for centuries. In many cases both systems are antagonistic to each other but in fact both are complementary to each other and highly enriching the Indian culture. Archaeological remains particularly from Harappa and Mahenjodaro prove that tantric system is older than the Vedas. The hostile Brahmins looked down upon in the early Vedic period, the tantriks as heretics and tantras having irreligious and heterogenous elements and the tantric views are unacceptable to Vedas. But many scholars of Brahmanic lore like Vasistha, Kaundinya and Sankara accepted tantras. By the time Aryans entered the sub-continent of India. Their culture spread up to Iran. The scholar are of opinion that the vedic seers revealed three vedas in India-Samveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. Vedas were not written but were revealed by the Gurus to sisyas. Hence veda is sruti. However, veda is the earliest sastras of India. The tantrikas consider Tantra as the 5th Veda. Bhaskar Ray in his 'Setuvandha' describes the Chausuthi Mahamayavi tantras as veda. To him tantra is the last chapter of Upanisada. Raghava Bhatta includes tantra in the Karmakanda veda. Meru tantra describes tantra as vedanga. Niruttara tantra mentions tantra as the fifth veda. In the Srimad Bhagabata, Lord Krishna advised Uddhava for his emancipation he should practise Tantra. Whatever may it be, the aim of both vedic and tantric systems are similar, but the methods of practice are different. By the way, we may relate that the idealism of
vedic mantra is followed by the Tantrikas. In a sense, the Sanatan Dharma is the reflective integration of Veda and Tantra. In the Mahabhagavata Purana, Devi told to Lord Shiva "Agama and Veda are my two arms through which I hold and maintain the world." Lord Shiva replied, in Kaliyuga Agama marga is the best way for salvation. The peculiarity of Tantra Sadhana is that, people irrespective of castes, sex, creed and sects can resort to Agama practice.

**Puranic Period:**

The eighteen Mahapuranas and Upapuranas clearly state Tantric and Vedic religious system in simple and lucid language through interesting stories. The worship pattern of gods and goddesses, their iconographic features, astronomy, genealogies of different royal dynasties etc. are recorded. In one of the oldest, the Matsya Purana the Devi explains to Yaksha 108 Sakta Pithas and names of 108 goddesses spread in India. Markendeya Purana conceives the all powerful war goddess Durga; Garuda Purana prescribes the method of worship of 18 armed Mahisamardhini Durga. In this way the puranas mention all trends of tantric and vedic thoughts in a blended manner.

**Buddhist Period:**

It is well known that during the Gupta rule, the Brahmanical religion, which in the earlier centuries was greatly affected due to spread of Buddhism, revived the faith, carved images of Hindu deities, built temples for them and introduced new system of worship pattern. After the fall of the Guptas, the Huns attacked India causing irreparable damage to the Indian religions, particularly Buddhism. After Dharmakiti no great Buddhist Philosopher flourished resulting a trend of decadance. All these happened by 7th century A.D. The monastic institutions developed aristocratic life and secretly resorted to esoteric Tantric Sadhana. Mahayana was transformed to Tantrayana (Vajrayana) obliterating to a great extent the Mahayana Sunyavada and Prajnaparamita. In the Sadhana the tantric mudra, mandala, yantra, abhisekas, samadhi, marana, mohana, uchatana, vasikarana etc. were introduced. The Siddhacharyas popularised the tenets of vajrayana by composing numerous texts. Indrabhuti, disciple of the saint Kambalapada, created a sensation by composing his famous treatise 'yajnasidhi'. Numerous tantric deities were created with their complicated iconography. Buddha family born from Vajrasattva and Prajnaparamita was conceived. The main tenet of the new philosophy was the amalgamation of 'Prajna' and 'Upaya'. From Vajrasattva and Prajna were born Pancha Dhyani Buddha - Vairochana, Akshabhyya, Ratnasambhava, Amitava and Amoghosidhi. From their Saktis, were born numerous gods and goddesses. In the Buddhist tantras their iconographic features, the worship pattern etc. were prescribed.

In course of time Vajrayana was transformed into Sahajayana. This new faith does not believe in gods and goddesses. The body of human being is the symbol of Universe. Worship is fruitless. Laxmikara through her Sahajayana brought a revolution in Buddhism. The human being should not spoil the natural qualities rather he should develop it through aristocracy, enjoyment. Through sadhana he will realise everything. Service to one's own body is important. Chandali, Dombi, Sabari, Yogini, Sahajasundari represent women sakti. The Kayasadhana has four stages - Ananda, Paramananda, Viramananda and Sahajananda.

The Kalachakrayana was developed from Vajrayana. In the body of man lies the Kalachakra or the universe and all the natural phenomena. Yoga is the most important aspect of
Kalachakrajaya. Vinayatosh Bhattacharya states, the Kalachakrayana seems to be a later development of the Vajrayana. This concerns itself with the Yoga Tantra and Anuttoryayoga Tantra and incorporates the doctrines of Sahajayana also. According to Kalachakra tantra and its commentary Vimalaprabha, Kalachakra is a deity. It bespeaks of the monotheistic attitude and belief. It is the Union of Sunyata and Karuna. The deity is embraced by goddess Prajna or Sakti. The Mandala of the deity consists of all the planets and stars. The text book of Kalachakra deals with subjects like astronomy and astrology. The introduction of Kalachakra Tantra is attributed to Manjusri, and the commentary to Vimalaprabha who wrote one thousand and two hundred granthas. Kalachakra Tantra, the only text available in the form of Buddhist Tantra puts more emphasis on the control of vital winds - prana and upana. Control of these vital winds can cure many diseases. Pranayama is a Sadhananga. It is a process for keeping the mind in a state of Peace in which it comes into control with the stream of consciousness.

Through tantric practices the devotee gets direct result unlike veda, upanisad etc. It is a science like Chemistry, Biology and Physics. Mantra, Yantra and Mudra are the methods of tantric practices. The tantric satkarmas are best methods to attain siddhi. Although both vedic and tantric systems are different from each other they are complementary to each other. The veda is religio-philosophical system. Tantra is a science of religion and philosophy of science. Tantra does not believe in the life less vedic ritual. Tantra cannot be attained through the exercise of intellect. Tantra is sadhana. It is reduced esotericism and Siddhi or salvation attained as an experimentally verified facts. But it is very difficult to ascertain accurately which tantra appeared first in Orissa. It is said that, as a whole, in the beginning of 8th century A.D. tantrism as a flow was amalgamated in Buddhism, Saivism and Saktism.

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Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik inaugurating Zilla Sanskruti Bhawan at Khurda on 2.9.2007. Shri Surjya Narayana Patro, Minister, Energy, Information Technology and Culture, Dr. Prasanna Kumar Patasani, MP are also present.