

TĀNTRIC *KULADHARMA*: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES

Dr. Sujata Purkayastha
Guwahati, Assam
India

Abstract

The *Tantra* with its vast literature occupies a very important place in the religious life of India. Tāntricism in India has a great antiquity. From a very early age the Indian religion has developed in two currents: one Vedic, the other Tāntric. However many extant Tantras claim their Vedic origin. *Tantra* conventionally denotes a kind of scriptures which stand for a set of doctrines, both metaphysical and ethical, esoteric practices, mystic syllables, magic etc. There are different types of Tantras pertaining to different religious sects like Śaivism, Śāktism, Vaiṣṇavism, Buddhism etc.

According to the *Tantra*, the Ultimate Reality has two aspects: *Prakāśa* and *Vimarśa*. *Prakāśa* stands for the pure, changeless and actionless aspect of the Absolute, while *Vimarśa* stands for the power of the action and knowledge. *Śiva* and *Śakti* are the representations of these two aspects of the Absolute. *Śiva* is the static aspect, while *Śakti* is the dynamic aspect. Absolute Reality is *Śiva-Śakti*, i.e. *Śiva* and *Śakti* taken together. The mystic unification of *Śiva* and *Śakti* produces the highest state of spiritual bliss and beatitude. The world is the manifestation of this highest Reality.

However the special virtue of the *Tantra* lies in its mode of *Sādhanā* (practices). The Tantras deal extensively with rituals and practices prescribed for the attainment of the purity of mind and achievement of the highest goal, i.e. liberation.

According to the *Tantra*, there are seven ways of liberation. As enumerated in the *Kulārṇava Tantra*, these are *Vedācāra*, *Vaiṣṇavācāra*, *Śaivācāra*, *Dakṣiṇācāra*, *Vāmācāra*, *Siddhāntācāra* and *Kaulācāra*. The word *ācāra* here means the ways, customs and practices of a particular class of spiritual aspirants. The highest of all these is said to be the *Kaulācāra*, also called *Kuladharmā*. The word *Kaula* means the harmonious relation of *Śiva* and *Śakti* (*kulam śaktiriti ucyate, akulam śiva ucyate, kule akulasya sambandhaḥ kaulamityabhidhīyate*). *Kaula Mārga* is that which accepts and leads to the equipoise of *Śiva-Śakti*. This is the most secret and the most pre-eminent path of liberation. But this path is not for one and all. Only a very advanced *sādhaka* who is of purified consciousness is eligible to pursue this type of *sādhanā*.

In the present paper I propose to discuss the main tenets of Tāntric *Kuladharmā*. I shall here concentrate on such practices which form the special features of Tāntricism like *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*, *Pañca-makāra-sādhanā* etc. As both *Śaiva* and *Śākta* Tantras accept *Kuladharmā*, it is my intention to examine both these systems in this context in order to show their affinity and the difference.