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# Compassionate Sacrifice:

# The Buddhist Incorporation of Vedic *Homa* Rituals

Marie Hana Kurfirtova

A Thesis in the Field of South Asian Studies

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

This thesis traces the origins and history of *homa* in India paying special attention to its Buddhist variations. It compares the Vedic, Hindu, and Buddhist tantric *homa* rituals and examines similarities and differences between them. Drawing on a wide range of Vedic and tantric scriptures, such as the *Ṛg Veda*, *Atharva Veda, Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads, Matsya and Vāyu Purāṇas, Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, *Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra Tantras*, this study attempts to establish how much Buddhism has in common with Vedic culture. As anticipated, tantric *homa* rituals in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions undeniably share the same roots that go back to India's Vedic and pre-Vedic past.

Acknowledgments

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The Reverence of the Fire

O Agni, the purifying, with thy light,
O god, with thy pleasant tongue,
Bring hither the gods and sacrifice.
Do thou, O shining and purifying one,
O Agni, bring hither the gods
To our sacrifice and our oblation.
Agni, of purest vows,
Pure sage, pure poet,
Shineth in purity when offering is made.
O Agni, thy pure,
Bright, flaming (rays) arise,
Thy lights, thy flames.
Thou art giver of life, O Agni; give me life.
Thou art giver of radiance, O Agni; give me radiance.
Thou art guardian of the body, O Agni; guard my body.
O Agni, whatever is deficient in my body, do thou make that good for me.
O thou of various splendour, in safety may I reach the end of thee.
Kindling thee may we kindle thee for a hundred winters, in radiance, strong the giver of strength, famous the giver of fame, with good heroes, the undeceived,
O Agni, the deceiver of foes in the highest firmament.
Thou, O Agni, hast attained the radiance of the sun, the praises of the Rsis, thy beloved abode.
Thou, O Agni, hast the radiance of the sun;
grant me life, radiance, and offspring.

(*The Yajur Veda (Taittirīya Saṃhitā)*: *kāṇḍa* I, *prapāṭhaka* V, hymn 5, i-s)



*Agni* and his consort *Svāhā*. Painted on paper. *Maharashtra,* c. 1800
Photographic reproduction of two-dimensional public domain work of art from the British Museum

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Abbreviations

*AN* *Aṅguttara Nikāya*

*AV* *Atharva Veda*

*AVP* *Atharva Veda Pariśiṣṭas*

*BAU* *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*

*MVS* *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*

*MVT* *Mahā-vairocana-uttara-tantra*

*PU* *Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad*

*ŚB* *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*

*Sn* *Sutta-nipāta*

*TU* *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*

# Introduction

The Vedas and Tantras, two major spiritual traditions of India, appear different at first glance but, essentially, they have a great deal in common. Sharing the same cultural setting, the Vedas and Tantras existed as oral traditions long before they were documented in writing. While Vedic texts date back to about 1500 BCE (Jamison and Witzel 2), the Tantras began to emerge around 200 CE and continued gaining popularity until around 1200 CE. A vast number of tantras have appeared and vanished over the course of time but only some of the *Śaiva*, *Vaiśnava, Śakta, Jain* and Buddhist ones endure as living religions to this day.

This study investigates the parallels between the Vedic religion and the Buddhist Tantras and considers causes and mechanisms of their convergences. In particular, it explores the features of Vedic *homas* that tantric Buddhism has adopted and examines the Buddhist incorporation of the Vedic fire god *Agni* into the non-theistic Buddhist belief system. It seeks to identify elements of brahmanical religion present in the Buddhist Tantras and, through that, it anticipates answering of the following questions: what aspects of Vedic *homas* has Buddhism assimilated, and how did it make them its own?

In addition to the performance of outer *homas*, Tantric Buddhism involves inner *homa* practices during which a practitioner produces inner wisdom fire that purifies his/her subtle body. This purification process leads to the attainment of a blissful state of unlimited awareness, which represents full enlightenment and the culmination of the

Buddhist tantric path. Little is known about the inner practices of the Vedic period, and this work also examines whether the yoga of inner fire (*caṇḍālī*) is unique to the Buddhist Tantra only or whether similar practices existed among ascetics and the priesthood of the Vedic era.

Tantric Buddhism centers itself on ritual action even though the Buddha initially rejected rituals and deity worship. I propose that Buddhism, in order to stay relevant and attract new followers for whom it had to compete with other religious trends of the times, permitted the inclusion of originally non-Buddhist elements of religious worship and made them its own by adapting them to the creeds of the Four Noble Truths as taught by the Buddha *Śākyamuni*, to the principles of *Abhidharma, Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* philosophical systems, and to the ideals of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*).

The origins of the Tantras are enigmatic. Some tantric practices, such as *liṅgaṃ* and *yoni* worship, are reminiscent of ancient fertility cults and some tantric subject matter may be as old as the Vedas or perhaps even precede them. Tantric traditions themselves trace their beginnings to the Vedas, though the orthodox Hindu schools reject these claims. While *Atimārga* category of Hindu Tantras requires celibacy and is restricted to *brahman* ascetics only, Buddhist Tantras and Hindu Tantras of the *Mantramārga* category encourage transgression of social taboos within the ritual context and welcome house-holders and lower castes into their midst. These Tantras defy the strict class division and rules of purity characteristic of brahmanism by permitting contact with lower castes, use of impure substances such as meat, alcohol and bodily excretions in their worship as well as assigning sexual significance to the ritual. Their followers venerate female manifestations of the divine, which has no parallel in patriarchal

brahmanism.

Over an extended period of time, the Tantras developed into complex systems which synthetized several elements of religious worship: Vedic sacrifices and offerings, philosophical views of the *Upaniṣads*, devotional methods (*bhakti*) of the *Purāṇas*, use of *mantras*, and *yogic* practices. The Hindu Tantras claim to originate directly with gods, actually with *brahman* who taught them to individual tantric deities who, in turn, passed them on to the mankind through an unbroken succession of lineage gurus. Similarly, the Buddhist Tantras, even though the Buddhist philosophical view is non-theistic, attribute their transcendent beginnings to the historical Buddha in a non-corporeal form.

The delicate topic of tantric studies has been particularly challenging namely because of the Tantras' secretive nature, sexual symbolism and inclusion of controversial practices. But contrary to oversimplified notions that associate them only with sex and magic, the Tantras express sublime spiritual truths and aim for the attainment of moral perfection and spiritual liberation. Rather than denying or suppressing human physical and psychological processes, the Tantras employ them towards complete mastery of senses and passions – a process that results in attainment of spiritual realization. The following quote from the *Hevajra Tantra* illustrates rationale behind this inclusion: "Those things by which men of evil conduct are bound, others turn into means and gain thereby release from the bonds of existence. By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released." (93; pt. II, chap. ii, par. f, lines 50-51)

Regarding the origins and development of Buddhist tantras, present-day scholarship holds several contrasting theories. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, one of the first western Buddhist scholars, stated that "Buddhist Tāntrism is practically Buddhist

Hinduism, Hinduism or Śaivism in Buddhist garb" (193: 12). But the complexity of interrelationships between the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras cannot be summed up in such a simplistic statement. De la Vallée Poussin's view represents a general position of western Buddhist scholars of his time, and it does not take into consideration the likelihood of tantric subject matter being inherent within Buddhism itself or the possibility of the subject matter of both, the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, deriving from entirely different common source.

Alexis Sanderson argues for an extensive Buddhist deriving from *Śaivas* and states that "[t]he Buddhist-Kāpālika Yoginī cult which gives these Tantras of Supreme Yoga their distinctive character and the greater part of their subject matter – indeed, they refer to themselves as Yoginī tantras on the whole – borrows much of its detail and textual material directly from parallel Śaiva sources" (*Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions* 678). R. E. Davidson acknowledges influences of *Kāpālikas* and other *Śaiva* cults on tantric Buddhism, but considers the influence to be mutual rather than "a simple process of imitation and appropriation" (218). D. L. Snellgrove, on the other hand, perceives an identical source of *Śaiva* and Buddhist tantras – the milieu of wandering *yogins* living outside of society's norms and conventions out of which tantrism arose as a single entity. In his work on Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Snellgrove writes:

> If we seek to know what kind of worship was practiced by these later yogins of eastern India or at least by their less advanced followers, the answer is clearly available in the relevant tantric texts at our disposal. They worshipped a divinity in terrible form, whether male or female, identifiable in Hindu tradition as a fierce form of Śiva or of his spouse the Great Goddess (Devī), using a variety of names, such as were adopted by the Buddhist practitioners who were associated with these groups. The Śaivite identification represented the continuing Indian tendency to bring all locally indigenous manifestations of religion into the Hindu fold, mainly by means of cross-identification of divinities, and thus in origin

> such fearful gods, being no more Hindu than Buddhist, could be interpreted in accordance with differing philosophical and religious traditions. (157)

In his introduction to the translation of the *MVS,* S. Hodge also takes a broader view on the subject when he states that Buddhism displays "a number of . . . elements, some of which were derived from earlier trends within Buddhism itself and others which were adopted and adapted from non-Buddhist sources" (4). On the subject of the rituals, T. Skorupski points out the possibility of certain rituals being present in Buddhism from the very beginning and some of which were introduced by the Buddha himself. He elaborates further:

> . . . as the Buddhist religion progressed, innovations were introduced as a part of new doctrinal and religious development and apt spiritual dispositions of particular periods. Surely the great variety of rituals introduced in the course of Buddhist history was not intended merely to induce 'deterioration' or to usher in Brahmanical practices but rather to sustain and enrich Buddhist practice. (389)

Setting de la Vallée Poussin's idea of 'Buddhist Hinduism' aside leaves four existing theories regarding the origins of the Buddhist Tantra: a) Buddhist tantric subject matter being derivative of *Śaivism*, b) Tantric Buddhism and *Śaivism* having mutual impacts on each other, c) Buddhist tantric subject matter being inherent within Buddhism itself, and, lastly, d) the influence of an entirely different common source on both the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. All of these theories have their merits, and while research continues to be inconclusive, it seems that the combination of all these factors played an important role in shaping Tantric Buddhism as we know it today.

The Tantra began to flourish during the early middle ages. The socio-political climate of early medieval India was unstable, unpredictable and lacked centralized authority. Brahmanical societies carried out military ventures in attempts to conquer

additional tribal areas. Feudal lords, engaging in intense struggles for dominance, relied on religious authorities for legitimization of power and, while maintaining brahmanical social order and disciplines, turned toward new religions – worship of *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu, Devī* as well as Buddhism or Jainism – as faiths. Royal patrons sponsored construction of large temple complexes as well as Buddhist monasteries, and it was not unusual for one ruler to support several religious traditions regardless what his personal affiliation might have been, and therefore religious traditions competed for royal patronage. *Śaivism* emerged as a dominant trend and a great number of wealthy patrons supported Buddhism along with it; those that converted to Buddhism continued to care for the Vedic and *Śaiva* priesthood as well. In addition to *brahman* priests, medieval rulers employed Buddhist tantric ritual masters (*vajrācāryas*) for performances of religious ceremonies and rituals such as fire-sacrifices (*homas*), initiations (*abhiṣekas*) into Buddhist deities' *maṇḍalas*, coronations, consecrations of temples and monasteries, image installations, sacred texts recitations etc., and rewarded them with land and wealth. The abundant royal support gave rise to important monastic institutions, such as the *Nālandā* or *Vikarmaśīla,* where *Mahāyāna* Buddhism developed and thrived. For example, A. Sanderson lists Taranātha's mention of Buddhajñāna, the tantric master at the *Vikarmaśīla* monastery and an expert on *Guhyasamāja Tantra,* who persuaded king Dharmapāla (c. 775 – 812) "to institute a regular fire-sacrifice (*homa*) to be performed under his guidance by the Tantric officiants of this monastery with the purpose of ensuring that the dynasty would be long-lived and consequently that Buddhism would be widely disseminated" (*The Śaiva Age* 93). Similarly, the life-story of the Indian *mahāsiddha Virūpa,* the legendary abbot of the *Nālandā* monastery and author of the *Vajra* Verses,

the root text of the tantric system that bases itself on the *Hevajra Tantra* and is known as the *Lamdre* (*Lam 'bras*),[1] illustrates the rivalry that existed between Buddhism and *Śaivism* at that time. *Virūpa* performed his monastic duties during the day, practiced *Hevajra Tantra* during the night in secret, and eventually attained enlightenment. After that, his behavior could not conform to monastic rules anymore so he decided to leave the monastery and continued living as a *yogin* in a forest near *Vārāṇasī*. He became famous for magical feats such as stopping the sun for two and half days while drinking beer in a tavern, for eating insects and butterflies and releasing them alive out of his mouth afterwards, for parting the waters of the river Ganges twice etc., and for establishing *Vajrayāna* Buddhism in *Vārāṇasī* and its surrounding areas. As his fame grew, he also travelled to other parts of India putting an end to animal and human sacrifices through display of his mystical powers (*siddhis*). There were many instances when he superimposed a Buddhist image over a *Śaiva* statue and converted followers of the god *Śiva* into Buddhists. On one such occasion, *Virūpa* was appointed a royal priest and resident teacher. He concealed himself as a *sādhu* priest, but while all the other *sādhus* made prostrations and offerings to the *Īśvara* image, *Virūpa* prostrated to the Buddhist scriptures hidden in his hair. When it was discovered, the king could not believe that an expert like that, one who has mastered the Vedas, would not make prostrations and offerings to *Īśvara*, and demanded that he prostrated in front of the *Īśvara* image. As *Virūpa* did so, the image split in half. At the king's request he then put the image together again, but established a black stone image of *Mahākāruṇikā* on the top of its head saying: "If this is removed the image will be destroyed." A large group of *sādhus*, appalled by wrong views and slaughter of tens of thousands of goats and buffaloes at

1. The Path and the Result.

each of the occasions of sacrifice, started to follow him (*Taking the Result as the Path* 145-146). Both of these accounts, one historical and the other originating from an oral tradition, testify to the co-existence and competitiveness concerning Buddhism and *Śaivism* throughout the medieval period.

Several important tantras known to us provide glimpses into the early period of development of Buddhist tantric ritual in India – the tantras such as the *Mañjuśrī-mūlakalpa*, proclaiming that some non-Buddhist mantras, such as the mantras of *Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇapati, Garuḍa* etc., were initially taught by the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa's* central figure – the *bodhisattva Mañjuśrī* – when he previously took their forms as a means of conversion of people and gently guiding them to the enlightenment, *Sarva-durgatipariśodhana-tantra*, establishing supremacy of the Buddha *Śākyamuni* over Hindu gods, *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra* that contains descriptions of mature *homa* rituals, and the *Sarvatathāgatatattva-saṃgraha Sūtra,* which is often mentioned because it tells a story about the bodhisattva *Vajrapāṇi*'s subjugation of the Hindu god *Śiva* out of compassion. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra* is of significance because it replaces the Buddha *Vairocana* with the Buddha *Akṣobhya* as a central deity of its *maṇḍala* and depicts the five *dhyāni* Buddhas in a sexual union with their female consorts for the first time. The *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra Tantras,* also called *Yoginī Tantras* as well as the *Kālachakra Tantra*, emerged during the later period of development of Indian tantric Buddhism. Deities of the *Yoginī Tantras* are of wrathful or semi-wrathful appearance and their *maṇḍalas* include female figures called *yoginīs* or *ḍakiṇīs.* While the deities of the earlier *Guhyasamāja Tantra* display characteristics that emulate royalty, the fierce looking deities of the *Yoginī Tantras*, whose angry appearances symbolize the

manifestation of Buddha's compassion, bear resemblances to the deities and related practices of *yogins* of the cremation grounds as well as those of tantric *Śaivism* enjoying popularity in India at that time.

Followers of the *Theravāda* tradition, the earliest form of Buddhism, put emphasis on renunciation of negative actions and on meditative practices. They abstain from rituals, cultivate direct insight into the true nature of reality and, through that, they hope to alleviate mundane suffering and attain final liberation (*nirvāṇa)*. The Buddha discouraged the practice of spells and charms stating: "He [*bhikkhu*] would not practice Atharva charms or [interpretation of] dreams, or signs, or even astrology" (Sn, *Sutta* 927). But according to several other discourses found throughout the *Pāli* Canon, the monks were allowed to use protective (*paritta*) charms in order to protect themselves and their community from harm. Thus the chanting of protective (*paritta*) *sūtras* has been a part of Buddhist practices since early on.

During centuries of subsequent development, *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism infused the Buddha with transcendent universal status, adopted some Vedic, Hindu and other non-Buddhist local deities, and began to rely on ritual activities. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, also known as a Sanskrit tradition, puts emphasis on the *bodhisattva* ideal, introduces the concept of the four bodies (*kāyas*) of the Buddha, places mental discipline above the physical or verbal, and highlights the value of compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) and altruism (*bodhicitta*). The development of six perfections (*pāramitās*) – generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), diligence (*vīrya*), meditative concentration (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) realizing emptiness (*śūnyatā*) becomes the focus of *Mahāyāna* practices. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, also called *Tantrayāna* or

*Mantrayāna,* evolved within the context of the *Mahāyāna* tradition and represents its enhancement rather than a contradiction. The *Vajrayāna* period brought along an even greater proliferation in the number of *buddhas* and an emphasis on the view that everyone possesses the *buddha* nature and therefore everyone has a potential to become a *buddha.* The *Vajrayāna* path promises the attainment of Buddhahood in one lifetime and introduces rituals, sacred utterances (*mantras*), secret hand gestures (*mudrās*), visualization techniques and esoteric *yoga* practices as means for its realization; the transformation of the ordinary mind and emotions into the mind of a *buddha* becomes the main focus of Buddhist practice.

Due to their complexity and vast number, Buddhist tantric scriptures were, in retrospect, divided into five classes: *kriyā, caryā, yoga, mahāyoga* (also referred to as *yogottāra*) and *yoginī* (also referred to as *yoganiruttara*) tantras. *Kriyā* tantras favor external ritual activities and aim their ritual actions at worldly purposes, such as rainmaking, protection from disease, long life, safety, increase of benefit and wealth, subjugation of evil etc.; they include texts that are generally considered to be of earlier origin. *Caryā* tantras feature inner practices of meditative visualization in addition to ritual activity. The *Yoga Tantra* category lays emphasis on inner yoga meditations on skillful means (*upāya)* and wisdom (*prajñā)* in relation to the doctrine of the Two Truths and their non-duality, and continues to develop the system of five *dhyāni* Buddha families. In the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra,* the Buddha *Vairocana* occupies the center of its *maṇḍala* with the other four meditational (*dhyāni*) buddhas (*Akṣobhya, Amoghasiddhi, Ratnasambhava* and *Amithāba*) placed in the four cardinal directions. The goal of a tantric practitioner here is to identify himself/herself with the Buddha

*Vairocana* by means of meditative practices. *Yogottāra* (Higher Yoga) tantras replace the Buddha *Vairocana* with *Akṣobhya* as a central deity of their *maṇḍalas* and depict the five *dhyāni* Buddhas in a sexual union with their consorts. Their sexual union is symbolic of the union of wisdom (*prajñā*) and means (*upāya*) and stands for the non-duality of ultimate reality. The *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, belonging to this category, also establishes correlations between the five Buddha families and five aggregates (*skandhas*) – consciousness, form, sensations/feelings, perceptions and volition – and introduces methods for their transformation into the corresponding five wisdoms (*vijñāna*). Tantras of the *Yoganiruttara* (the Highest Yoga) class into which the *Yoginī Tantras* belong, form the fifth category that emerged around the ninth or tenth centuries. Fierce looking deities of the *Yoginī Tantras* are depicted as drinking blood from human skulls, wearing clothes made from human or animal skin, and displaying ornaments of human bones, skulls and freshly severed heads. In addition to their associations with five aggregates, the five *dhyāni* Buddhas became linked to the five afflictive emotions (*kleśas*) - ignorance, anger, envy, desire and pride - and their associated practices became the means of transforming the five *kleśas* into five wisdoms.[2] The five categories of tantras are arranged in ascending order according to their importance that also loosely reflects their chronological development. As attention gradually shifted from external ritual activities towards internal meditative practices and attainment of enlightenment, the *Yoginī* class of tantras came to represent the final evolutionary stage of Indian tantric Buddhism.

The absence of dates and often uncertain authorship of tantric texts prevent the establishment of a reliable chronology for tantric literature. The exact origins of Hindu

2. *Pañca jñānas*: wisdom of suchness, mirror-like wisdom, all-accomplishing wisdom, discriminative wisdom, and wisdom of equanimity respectively.

and Buddhist Tantras are unclear and therefore we do not know which of the two, the Hindu or Buddhist Tantra, came first and how these two spiritual traditions influenced each other. But, undoubtedly, both of them share many common features regarding their practices and iconographies.

This work utilizes relevant passages from the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra,* and *Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra Tantras* relating to tantric *homas* and worship of *Agni* within the Buddhist tantric belief system and compares them to the functions of *Agni* and the *homas* in the Vedas and *Brāhmaṇas*. In addition, I will also investigate sections of tantric texts relating to practices of the Buddhist tantric yoga of inner fire (*caṇḍālī*) in order to understand how they may relate to the internal *homa* of the *Upaniṣads.*

The next chapters will address topics related to the development of Buddhist *homas* in the following sequence: i) Vedic origins, ii) *upaniṣadic* period, iii) ascetic practices and *yogas*, iv) sacrificial rituals according to the *Pāli Suttas*, v) *homas* of the *MVS*, vi) *homas* of the *Yoginī Tantras*, vii) inner *homas*, and the conclusion based on textual evidence. A closer examination of the meanings of *Agni* and fire rituals in the Buddhist Tantra and comparison to the roles they play in the Vedic setting will provide valuable insights into similarities and differences between the Vedic and Buddhist tantric traditions, and enrich our understanding of the historical development of the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras.

# Chapter I

## Vedic Origins

When about four thousand years ago the ancient Aryans, central Asian seminomadic pastoralists, arrived on the Indian subcontinent they brought along with them their deities and religious practices that differed from those of the population indigenous to the area. A reciprocal interaction between Aryan and local belief systems resulted in a complex synthesis that characterizes Indian spirituality to this day.

The four *Vedas*, the *Ṛg Veda*, the *Sāma Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the later *Atharva Veda* together with their associated *Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* form the basis of Indian spirituality. Palm leaf and birch bark manuscripts containing Vedic texts written in Sanskrit language document ancient Indian oral traditions that have been handed down with unparalleled precision by generations of the Vedic priesthood, and represent one of the oldest sacred traditions.

*Ṛṣis*, Vedic poets-seers endowed with intuitive vision (*dhī*) and ability to express it through their poetry represent Vedic religious authority whose words had power to invoke gods. Vedic gods embody natural phenomena, social and ethical ideals and some abstractions; they inhabit the earth, intermediate regions, the sky and celestial realms and Vedic priests summoned them on behalf of people wishing for health, long life, sons, cattle, prosperity, victory in battles and a place in heaven after departing from this world.

The four *Vedas*, also called *saṃhitās*, contain liturgical verses (*ṛc*) and melodies (*sāman*) with which the ancient *ṛṣis* used to address Vedic gods, mantras that accompany

ritual offerings as well as magical and healing formulas (*yajus*). The *Brāhmaṇas* serve as ritual manuals for Vedic priests, the *Āraṇyakas* depict secret and dangerous rituals performed in the wilderness, and the *Upaniṣads* feature underlying philosophical reflections behind Veda-based oral traditions. Altogether, Vedic literature is a compilation of materials belonging to different time periods and geographical locations. Composed over an extended period of time and transmitted orally before it was committed to writing, this vast literary corpus also includes mythologies, folklore, magical rites and allusions to prehistory. Treasured by all Hindus to this day, the Vedic scriptures form the fundamental part of the Hindu canon. They are referred to as *śrūti* (what has been heard),[3] and to a Hindu believer they stand for the eternal divine law (*Sanatāna Dharma*) that has always existed and has been revealed to the Vedic seers.

Vedic religion is based on the belief in efficacy of the sacrifice (*yajña*). The sacrifice functioned as a principal form of worship among the ancient Aryans; it was the most effective means of relating with their gods and obtaining from them all they needed for their wellbeing. While the four *Vedas* contain liturgical material, the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads* explain sacrificial symbolism and beliefs behind sacrificial rituals. For example, the opening verse of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the oldest among the *Upaniṣads*, identifies a sacrificial horse with the universe: "The head of sacrificial horse, clearly, is the dawn – its sight is the sun; its breath is the wind; and its gaping mouth is the fire common to all men. The body (*ātman*) of the sacrificial horse is the year – its back is the sky; its abdomen is intermediate region; its underbelly is the earth; its flanks are the quarters; its limbs are seasons . . ." (Olivelle 37). Because of

3. Vs. *smṛti* (what has been remembered) that is accepted as a manmade portion of the Hindu canon.

correlations such as these, any action performed during the ritual would have an effect on the entire universe. Only *brahman* priests who had knowledge of the sacrifice and its symbolic correlations knew how to control the potency (*brahman*) inherent in words uttered at sacrificial rituals from which they derived their name, and therefore only they possessed the self-proclaimed power to influence natural occurrences and events. The outcome of a ritual depended on the precision of its execution, and only the expert priests had the authority to perform it. Vedic priests, each specializing in one of the four *Vedas,* were assigned a specific function during a ritual: *hotṛ,* well-versed in recitation of *ṛgvedic* hymns, invited gods to a sacrificial ceremony, *udgātṛ* chanted *sāmavedic* melodies, *adhvaryu* uttered *yajurvedic* formulae and performed manual activities, and *brahman,* acquainted with all aspects of sacrifice, oversaw the ritual and compensated for any errors that might have occurred. During larger ceremonies, each of the four chief priests would have three assistants – that is altogether sixteen participating priests. More affluent households also employed a *purohita* – professional chief priest who conducted lengthy and laborious sacrifices on behalf of a sponsor (*yajamāna*). A sponsor rewarded priests with customary gifts (*dakṣiṇā*) while he would be the one to receive spiritual benefits of a ritual. Sacrifices ranged from daily household rituals to large scale communal ceremonies sponsored by rulers; sacrificial offerings varied from milk, ghee, grain and the *soma* plant to small animals, horses and even humans. The ritual specialization would eventually lead to the development of a great number of Vedic schools (*śākhās*), many of which have perished but a handful of which survived either in a written form, or in the memory of current priests-practitioners.

*Homa* forms the core of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) and consists of making

offerings into a sacred fire that is personified by the Vedic fire god *Agni*. Vedic *ṛṣis* as well as *brahmanical* and Hindu priests have been performing *homa* for over four millennia, and it continues to be an important religious practice also in Buddhism and Jainism to the present day.

*Agni*, together with *Indra*, is a foremost Vedic deity – the very first hymn in the *Ṛg Veda* is addressed to him, and he is the first god invoked at the beginning of every sacrificial ritual. Vedic *Agni* inhabits the heavens, earth and atmosphere where he fulfills a great variety of roles and functions. The earthly *Agni* hides in plants out of which he can be produced by rubbing two pieces of a dry wood (*araṇīs*) against each other. He also lives in terrestrial waters and in the navel (*nābha*) of the earth. Besides that, he is born from celestial waters and, as such, he comes down to earth in the form of lightening. In addition to his personifying the natural element of fire, *Agni* represents an embodiment of the sacrificial and domestic fires. During sacrifice, *Agni* functions as an intermediary between men and the pantheon of Vedic gods – he consumes sacrificial oblations and then, thus purified, delivers them to other gods and, at the same time, he brings gods down to earth in order to partake in the offerings. When identified with sacrifice, *Agni* is celebrated as the priest of gods and given the title of the *purohita* of gods as well as *hotṛ*, *ṛtvij*, *adhvaryu* and *brahman*. When identified with the domestic fire, *Agni* fulfills the role of a welcomed guest in the house (*atithi*) and, at the same time, of a kind and generous householder (*gṛhapati*), giver of domestic happiness, healthy progeny, prosperity and immortality. On the whole, *Agni* is revered as the omnipresent Vedic god, an immortal who has taken up his abode among mortals and who resides not only on the earth but also in the sun, moon, stars, waters, clouds, lightening etc. Celebrated by many

epithets, he is at the center of Vedic poetry: he is a great *ṛṣi* (seer)*, vipra* (sage), *kavī* (poet), *Vaiśvānara* (belonging to all men), *Jātavedas* (knower of all beings), *Viśvavedas* (omniscient) etc. He is called butter-haired, tawny-haired, smoke-bannered and having seven tongues; compared to a bull, steed, elephant, eagle of the sky and raging serpent, and admired for his brilliant luster and golden form. During the *upaniṣadic* period, Vedic sacrifices became associated with fire oblations taking place within the human body and *Agni* came to be identified with the ultimate *brahman* as well as with the fire that abides in living beings.

In addition to detailed descriptions of ritual actions, the *Brāhmaṇas* also provide explanations of their esoteric meanings and feature foundational myths concerning various sacrifices. For example, one version explains the mythical origins of the *agnihotra* as follows: *Prajāpati* emitted *Agni* from himself and then, concerned that *Agni* would consume him and the rest of the creation, he offered an oblation to *Agni* while uttering *svāhā*. *Agnihotra,* a twice-daily ritual consisting of oblations of heated milk into the fire is mandatory for any follower of the *Śrauta* tradition; the sun, in the form of hot milk, is transferred into *Agni* at the sunset, assisted by the evening oblation throughout the night, and strengthened again by hot milk at the sunrise. Thus performance of *agnihotra* maintains the proper functioning of the universe and secures benefits and wellbeing for a sacrificer. H. Oldenberg considers the possibility of *agnihotra* having its origins in the regular maintenance of domestic fire (Bodewitz, *The Daily Evening and Morning Offering (Agnihotra)* [1]). In addition to the twice-daily *agnihotra*, *homas* were also regularly performed at the full and new moons (*darśapūrṇamāsa*) and during seasonal changes (*cāturmāsya*). The *Brāhmaṇas* also describe in detail many other

important ancient *homas*, such as *somayajña, agniṣṭoma, agnicayana, aśvamedha*, and *puruṣamedha* – complex large-scale expensive ceremonies performed on behalf of kings and nobility on special occasions. While some *homas* consisted of oblations (*havis*) of milk, ghee, grains or vegetables, many rituals required blood sacrifices (*paśubandha*). According to the *ŚB*, the greater the sacrifice – the greater was the reward; a man was thought of as the most prized offering, followed by a horse, then a bull, a ram and finally a hornless goat. Sacrificial victims were strangled and immolated at the fire altars. As time went on, the ritual repertoire kept expanding. The *Sanskrit sūtra* literature documents additional ritual practices in the *gṛhyasūtras* – collections of domestic rituals, *śulbasūtras* – records of the sacred geometry relating to the construction of fire altars, and *dharmasūtras* – sets of communal customs, responsibilities and laws.

The major part of early Vedic worship took place in people's houses rather than at temples and represented a sacred duty that is defined[4] in the general rules of sacrifice of Apastamba's *Yagna-Paribhasa-Sutras* in the following way:

> A Brahmana should without fail place his fires, and offer the Darsapurnamasa, the Agrayanesti, the Katurmasyas, the P a s u, and the Soma sacrifices . . . [let] a man offer the Pakyagnas always, always also the Haviryagnas, and the Soma sacrifices, according to the rule, if he wishes for eternal merit. The object of sacrifices is aparimitanihsreyasarupamoksha, eternal happiness, and hence they have to be performed during life at certain seasons, without any special occasion (nimitta), and without any special object (kama). According to the most authorities, however, they have to be performed during thirty years only. After that Agnihotra only has to be kept up … [a] Brahmana shall always offer the Agnihotra at the beginning or at the end of the day and of the night, and the Darsa and Purnamasa (isthis) sacrifices; at the solstices an animal (sacrifice); at the end of the year the Soma offerings; [a] Brahmana who keeps sacred fires, shall, if he desires to live long, not eat new grain or meat, without having offered the (Agrayana) Ishti with new grain and an animal (sacrifice). (*The Grihya-Sutras* 307)

4. Quoting sages *Vasiṣṭha* and *Hārīta.*

The same *sūtra* also provides a definition of sacrifice as "an act by which we surrender something for the sake of gods" and states that "the sacrifice is for the three colours or castes (varnas), for Brahmanas, and Raganyas, also for the Vaisyas" (285). Women are allowed to participate in the sacrifices only if they are properly married and *śūdras* are always excluded. In addition to these regular obligatory rites, the *gṛhyasūtras* describe rites performed on special occasions, such as the ones relating to marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, name-giving, rites of passage, studies of the Vedas, house-building, ploughing, disease, death and burial, rites for the obtainment of special wishes and for averting misfortunes regarding disputes, going out on business, crossing a river, dangerous ways, crossroads, mounting a chariot, battles, penances etc..

*Yajñas* of the Vedic era had a nature of piety and functioned as a reciprocal interchange between men and gods. But throughout the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, which extended from c. 800 to 200 BCE (Keith 42-50), rituals began to acquire an entirely different meaning. Ritual expertise led to the establishment of the dominant priestly caste (*brahmans)*, who asserted themselves as the ultimate authority over rituals and elevated themselves to the level of gods. At that time, the *brahman* caste became more powerful than gods themselves and the sacrifice acquired a status of the only action worthy to be considered as the fundamental creative principle. Ritual performances turned out to be increasingly more obligatory and mechanical and the amount of *dakṣiṇā* became the measure of a desired result - with gold, cows, horses and clothes being the ideal form of payment. As a result of growing resistance to the increased number of senseless sacrifices and dominance of the priestly caste, new religious trends began gaining popularity and gradually made their way to the forefront of the early Indian society.

Not much is known about the native population of the Indian subcontinent. We can only assume that Aryans, skilled fighters with weapons and chariots driven by horses, encountered local substrate languages speaking tribes, which may have included, in the southern Indus area, some proto-Dravidians. In general, most of the native population lived as peace-loving farmers possessing a sophisticated civilization of their own. Their religions did not require blood sacrifices; they worshipped all forms of life including herbs, plants, trees and stones, which they sprinkled with water, anointed with potions and lit lights next to. Aryans called them *dasyus* (enemies) and, as they initially fought Aryan domination, many of them were killed. The rest of them were forced to accept the Aryan lifestyle, serve the conquerors, and, in the course of time, became integrated into the caste system. They taught the Aryans how to irrigate the land and cultivate various plants, such as millet, oats, flax, rice and sesame. The religious beliefs and customs of the pre-Aryan native population would exert influence on the Vedic religion of their conquerors and, in a course of time, penetrated Vedic society and alter its structure. While Aryans imported to India the old Indo-Iranian tradition of sacrifice, some scholars credit the pre-Aryan indigenous religious customs and beliefs with being the source of renunciate ascetic traditions, vegetarianism, the non-violent code of conduct and yogic practices.

# Chapter II

## *Upaniṣads*

> 'Yājñavalkya,' said he, 'explain to me the Brahman that is immediate and direct – the self that is within all.' 'This is your self that is within all.' Which is within all, Yājñavalkya?' 'That, which transcends hunger and thirst, grief, delusion, decay and death. Knowing this very Self the Brahmanas renounce desire for sons, for wealth and for the world and lead a mendicant's life.
>
> (*BAU* [474]-475; ch. III, sec. v, stanza 1)

The thirteen principal *Upaniṣads* are rooted in the Vedic tradition but at the same time, they document a gradual departure from the spiritual supremacy of the brahmanical orthodoxy and archaic ritualism. The *upaniṣadic* sages explored the contemplative potency of mind (*manas*) and revealed the inner meaning behind the external ritual. They equated inhalation, exhalation and other vital functions and organs of the human body to the workings of sacrificial fires and, eventually, the internal sacrifice began to replace the actual one. For example, the *Kauṣītāki Upaniṣad* declares that breath and speech are the ". . . two endless and deathless offerings . . . [a]ll other offerings, on the other hand, are limited, for they consist of ritual activities. It is because they knew this that people in ancient times refrained from offering the daily fire sacrifice" (Olivelle 337). Moreover, the fundamental concepts common to all religions of India today, such as the notion of an individual soul (*ātman*) and its relationship to the universal principle (*brahman*), the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth, the idea of liberation (*mokṣa*) from cyclical existence (*saṃsāra*), the importance of an asceticism, renunciation of sex, wealth and family life,

descriptions of a subtle body together with explanations of its psychic energy centers (*cakras*), channels (*nāḍīs*), vital energy winds (*prāṇas*) and vital energy drops (*bindus*) are all introduced already in the early *Upaniṣads* and developed further throughout the *upaniṣadic* phase. The *Upaniṣads* seek answers to questions about the meaning of life and life after death; as such, they disclose the evolution of Indian spiritual and philosophical thought and provide an important link between archaic and new modes of religious expression. In addition to the gradual process of interiorization of sacrifice, the *upaniṣadic* period witnessed an increasing tendency towards non-violence (*ahimsā)* that continued and strengthened throughout the post-Vedic era.

# Chapter III

## Asceticism

The ancient *ṛṣis* employed spiritual disciplines involving chastity, observation of silence, fasting, subjugation of the senses and breath control in preparation for sacrificial ceremonies. They also performed ascetic practices (*tapas*) in the hope of obtaining favors from gods. The word *tapas*, derived from the Sanskrit root *tap*, to burn, came to stand for a psychic heat generated by practices of austerities and self-imposed disciplines through which their practitioners (*tapasvins*) could develop a great inner strengths and supernatural powers. Vedic literature and Indian epics tell many stories about *tapas*-practicing *ṛṣis* in forests and along riverbanks who performed heroic and magical acts displaying supernatural powers (*siddhis*) that rivaled those of gods.

In addition to *tapasvins*, who focused their attention on the accomplishment of *siddhis* and attainment of happiness in the present lifetime as well as in life after death, the *Ṛg Veda* makes references to various other types of ascetics and extra-societal practitioners who renounced all worldly attachments and strived for direct insight into the absolute. Instead of focusing on performances of sacrifice and accomplishments of *siddhis*, which they viewed as a byproduct of a spiritual practice, the renouncers (*saṃnyāsins*) sought transcendence of the human condition through the mastery of their body and mind. Employing the same spiritual techniques as *tapasvins*, *saṃnyāsins* turned their attention inward and, in addition to the external disciplines involving physical body, they developed a whole range of internalized ascetic and contemplative

practices. The renouncers lived a life of solitude dedicating their efforts to the penetration of mysteries behind mundane existence and to realization of the union with *brahman*, the mysterious power behind all. Likewise, groups of wandering ascetics (*śramaṇas*) who did not conform to Vedic values and who renounced a conventional way of life gave rise to new religious and philosophical movements of India including those of Jainism and Buddhism.

### *Yogas*

The term *Yoga* encompasses spiritual disciplines that seek self-realization through the direct insight into the transcendental ground out of which the conditioned realities of the external universe as well as those of our inner world arise. The word *yoga*, derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* (to yoke), implies yoking the body, senses and mind onto the object of concentration. A *yogin*/*yoginī* views this world and human existence as transient and therefore illusory, and thus he/she actively seeks to gain control over his/her senses and mental states in order to attain *samādhi*, the insight into the reality beyond the mind and senses, the realization of which represents lasting happiness. Common *yogic* techniques include bodily postures (*āsanas*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), withdrawal of senses from external objects (*pratyādhāra*), concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and devotion (*bhakti*) to a chosen deity. Originating as freestanding experimental practices, *yogas* evolved into sophisticated metaphysical systems that found their full expression in the "*Bhagavad-Gītā*" and the "*Yoga-Sūtras*" of Patañjali composed about 2000 years ago. Patañjali recorded and systematized some of the *yogic* practices, principles and rules of conduct existing in his time, and his version of *Yoga*,

together with *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Vaiśeṣika* and *Nyāya*, became one of the six orthodox philosophical systems (*darśanas*) of India. As an assemblage of spiritual disciplines and not a religion *per se*, *yogas* easily combine not only with orthodox (*āstika*) schools of Hinduism but with heterodox (*nāstika*) Indian religions as well. Thus various types of *yoga* are also found at the heart of Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and the Tantras.

## Chapter IV

## Sacrifice According to the *Pāli Suttas*

The dominant *brahman* priesthood learned in the Vedas and proficient in sacrificial rituals was not able to assert full control over all of many religious groups existing on the Indian subcontinent at that time, and a great number of them rejected the *brahmans*' claim to religious authority. The founder of one such group was *Siddhārtha Gautama*, a prince born to a chief of the *Śākya* clan and therefore *kṣatriya* by birth. As it is well known, *Siddhārtha* abandoned the sheltered life of his father's palace and joined a group of wandering ascetics (*śramaṇas*) with whom he practiced meditation and carried out austerities. Realizing that neither self-mortification nor a life of indulgence in sensual pleasures leads to the true understanding of the nature of reality, *Siddhārtha* gave up his efforts and sat down under a *bodhi* tree to meditate. There he attained full enlightenment and, based on his new insights, formulated his teachings and became known as the Buddha *Śākyamuni.*

The *Sutta Piṭaka* portion of the *Pāli* Canon contains several discourses attributed to the Buddha that document his thoughts on the sacrifice. Preceded by his reputation as a fully enlightened ascetic, the Buddha is approached by various *brahmans* and nobles who seek his advice on the correct performance of sacrifice. For example, when asked by the *brahman Ujjaya* whether he praises sacrifice, Buddha replies:

> The horse sacrifice, human sacrifice, / *sammāpāsa, vājapeyya, niraggaḷa*:
> the grand sacrifices, fraught with violence, / do not bring great fruit.
>
> The great seers of right conduct / do not attend sacrifice

where goats, rams, cattle, / and various creatures are slain.

But when they regularly offer by family custom / sacrifices free from violence, no goats, sheep and cattle, / and various creatures are slain.

That sacrifice of the great seers / of right conduct attend.
The wise person should offer this; this sacrifice is very fruitful.

For one who makes such sacrifice / it is indeed better, never worse.
Such a sacrifice is truly vast and deities too are pleased.

(*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* 429 – 430; *Cattukanipāta: Sutta 39*)

The same verses are also cited in the *Kosalasaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* in the *sutta* 9 when the Buddha is approached on the occasion of a great sacrifice of "five hundred bulls, five hundred bullocks, five hundred heifers, five hundred goats, and five hundred rams" beings set up for the king *Pasendi* of *Kosala* (171).

The similar theme is also found in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*; here the Buddha is approached by the wealthy *brahman Kūṭadanta* who plans to perform a great sacrifice of "seven hundred bulls, seven hundred heifers, seven hundred he-goats and seven hundred rams and [who] had them tied up to the sacrificial posts (133). In response to *Kūṭadanta*'s request for instructions on "how to conduct successfully the triple sacrifice with its sixteen requisites" (135), the Buddha delivers a discourse on the benefits and meaning of bloodless sacrifice – a kind of sacrifice in which no harm comes to living beings or vegetation. On that occasion, the Buddha also gives instructions on the proper accessories for the sacrifice that are based on generosity, morality and renunciation. He elaborates on the three modes of sacrifice regarding concerns about losing wealth during sacrifice and on sixteen requisites required for its successful performance: four groups that should be present at the sacrifice (*kṣatriyas,* councellors, *brahmans* and householders), eight qualities of a king himself (being well-born, of pure

descent, handsome, rich, generous, learned scholar, virtuous, wise and well spoken), and four desired qualities for a *purohita* (well-born, learned scholar versed in mantras, virtuous and wise). Then the *sutta* gives a list of fruitful and acceptable bloodless sacrifices: giving to virtuous ascetics, going for refuge to the Buddha, *Dharma* and *Saṅgha*, following the Buddhist precepts of "refrain[ing] from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual immorality, from lying speech and from taking strong drink and sloth-producing drugs" (140), as well as preaching the Buddhist *dharma* by a fully enlightened Buddha. In the *Sutta-nipāta*, when asked whether "brahmans now . . . live in conformity with the brahmanical lore of the brahmans of the old" (35), the Buddha offers his point of view on the very origins of sacrifices and states: "the brahmans of old . . . had no cattle, no gold, no wealth. They had study as their wealth and grain. They guarded holy life as their treasure" (36). He explains that the *brahmans* of the old were revered and respected because they possessed fully restrained selves, abandoned sensual pleasures, "praised holy life, and virtuous conduct, uprightness, mildness and austerity, meekness and non-violence, and forbearance" (36). They lived on handouts and performed sacrifice with rice, butter and oil and "when the sacrifice occurred, *they did not* kill cows" (37). However, motivated by covetousness and desire for wealth, *brahmans* devised a way to acquire it. They approached king *Okkāka* with hymns composed for that purpose and:

> . . . the king, lord of warriors, induced by brahmans, having performed these sacrifices, the assamedha, the purissamedha, the sammāpāsa, the vāccapeyya, [and] the niraggaḷa, gave wealth to the brahmans: . . . cows, and a bed, and clothes, and adorned women, and chariots yoked to thoroughbreds, well made, with variegated coverings. (37)

Longing for more, *brahmans* asked for gold, grain, earth and water and began to hoard it

up. And the king, "induced by brahmans, had many of hundreds of thousands cows killed in sacrifice" (38). The *Sn* further states that cows were being killed by a knife and "the devas, and the fathers, Inda, asuras and rakkhasas cried out "[This is] injustice," when the knife fell on cows" (38). It also claims that earlier there were only three diseases – desire, hunger and old age, "but from killing of cattle ninety-eight [diseases] came" (38).

As it becomes evident from the above-mentioned examples, the early Buddhist canon does not reject all sacrifices but only the ones involving violence and harm to living beings. The words of the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* sum it up in the following way: "I do not praise all sacrifice, nor do I withhold praise from all sacrifice" (429). Non-violent sacrifices, such as offerings to ancestors, holy people and Buddhist *saṅgha* were declared to be fruitful and beneficial. Buddhist ideas in the *Pāli suttas* thus echo the ones of the *Kauṣītāki Upaniṣad* that look up to the *brahmans* of the ancient times who lead virtuous lives and did not conduct sacrificial rituals.

The orthodox Vedic rituals themselves had undergone several centuries of evolution. It begins with what Eggeling defines as the progression "from a primitive worship of the powers of nature into a highly artificial system of sacrificial ceremonies" (*ŚB* ix), and continues further on to non-violent rituals in which animal sacrifices were gradually replaced by vegetable and symbolic offerings as well as offerings of mantras. The Buddha himself did not follow the orthodox religio-philosophical views but he must have been aware of some of the pre-*Vedāntic* ideas of his contemporaries and perhaps even influenced by them. Buddhism together with Jainism originated between the fifth and sixth centuries BCE. Both religions opposed rigid ritualistic approaches, revised the

understanding of the *Upaniṣads* and emphasized compassion and non-violence.

# Chapter V

## *Homas* of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*

The *MVS*, its full name being *Mahā-vairocanābhisaṃbodhi-vikurvitādhiṣṭhāna-vaipulya-sūtrendra-rāja nāma dharma-paryāya*, is illustrative of early tantras. Even though its title does not contain the word tantra, the *MVS* is often quoted as one of the first tantric texts, or perhaps the very first one known to us, that has all the elements of a fully developed tantra and that includes descriptions of complete *homa* rituals. Composed in the mid-seventh century CE (Hodge, *MVS* 14), the *MVS* represents an early link between the doctrines and practices of the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* traditions. This study relies on Hodge's translation of the *MVS* from Chinese.[5] Together with the *MVS*, Hodge also included three other texts in this volume, which he translated from Tibetan: the Buddhaguhya's commentary on the *MVS* that was written around the mid-eight century, Buddhaguhya's overall summary of the *MVS* entitled *Piṇḍārtha*, and the *Mahā-vairocana-uttara-tantra, MVS*'s auxiliary text.

The *MVS*'s commentator Buddhaguhya classified it as a dual (*ubhāya*) tantra; it belongs to the *yoga* tantra category because it emphasizes the inner yoga meditation on method (*upāya*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) based on the Buddhist doctrine of the "Two Truths"[6] and, at the same time, it can also be classified as a *kriyā* tantra because it contains ritual practices that correspond to the ones of the *kriyā* tantra category.

In a manner that is typical of expositions of tantric teachings, the *MVS* is

5. The Sanskrit text is no longer extant.
6. The relative and ultimate truths.

presented in the format of a dialogue between a being that narrates its subject matter in response to inquiries of another. In this case, the narrator is the *Bhagavat,* the fully enlightened Buddha *Vairocana* in the *saṃbhoga-kāya* form, surrounded by the retinue of *Vajradharas*[7] answering the questions of the *bodhisattva Vajrapāni*, who asks them on behalf of the entire gathering. Hodge's translation of the *MVS* consists of thirty chapters; the twenty-ninth chapter contains the exposition on *homa* rituals that begins with the explanation of the lineage of *Agni*. The *Bhagavat Vairocana* explains that at one time, when he was engaged in the *bodhisattva* practice, he "himself taught the virtuous instructions that appear in the Tirthika[8] scriptures, such as, '[you] should not kill creatures apart from doing so as offerings (*bali*) to the gods'" (381). Buddhaguhya comments further that "explanations about *Agni* in the Vedas of the Brahmins were also taught in order to reduce the amount of slaughter of creatures among the *tirthikas* and so forth, who being disposed to perversity, engage in such evil deeds" (381).

When the Buddha *Vairocana* was a *bodhisattva,* he resided in the *Brahmā* Heaven (*brahmā-loka*). There the *Brahmā* King, "who is the master over the three thousand great thousand world systems" (381), questioned him about the types of fire. The Buddha *Vairocana* replied:

> Abhimānin Agni was self-arisen;
> next born from him were the Brahmā sons.
> The mundane fire Pāvaka
> was the first Brahmā son.
> His son was Brahmodana,
> and his son was Bharata.
> His sons were Vaiśvanāra,
> Havana and Havya-vāhana.
> Parśva-saṃbhida was the son
> of Atharvan, famed in the ocean

7. A type of *bodhisattvas* who possess insight that destroys incorrect views.
8. Reference to the non-Buddhists.

[Thus were the fire deities
born from each other in succession]. (381)

Then the Buddha *Vairocana* proceeded to give names of various Vedic fires that arose from the mundane fire called *Pāvaka,* the first son of *Brahmā*:

The fire called Māruta / is prescribed for the ritual of conception.
The fire to wash one's wife / is the Pavamāna fire.
Maṅgala is for ceremonial hair-parting / Pragalbha is for the birth rites.
The fire for naming is Pārthiva. / Likewise for ritual feeding is Śuci.
Ṣaḍbhi is for the hair-shaving. / For receiving vows, Samudbhava.
Sūrya is for the presentation of a cow, / Yojaka is for marriage.
Agni is for setting up a new house. / For making the oblations, that same Fire.
The fire called Pāvaka is used / to offer to the various gods.
For the House-holder, the Brahmā Fire. / Likewise for the *dakṣiṇa* offering, Śānta.
Likewise for binding the sheep, the fire called Avahanika.
For transgressions, Viveci. / For sacrificing cooked foods, Sahasa.
For the Twilight Ritual, Haviṣya. / Likewise for the Soma-saṃsthā, Nidhi.
Mṛḍa is for the full-ladle offerings. / For pacifying, Dāruṇa is used.
Yama is the funerary rite. / Likewise for Enriching Balada.
Wrathful Fire is well-known / for all acts of destroying.
The fire called Kāmada / is prescribed for Mastery.
Dūta fire is for burning forests. / The stomach fire is Jaṭhara.
Bhakṣa is that for flash-eating. / Vaḍavā-mukha is in the ocean.
Yugānta is famed as the fire / which destroys at the end of time.
These Fires which have been explained to you in brief, Noble One,
are called Sons of Brahmā, / by those engaged in the Veda *śruti.*
These forty four were / taught by me at that time. (382 – 383)

This example illustrates that the author of the *MVS* was familiar with and acknowledged the Vedic origins of *Agni* as well as the forty-nine forms of Vedic fires. However, besides *Agni* being born of lightening or produced by friction, the *Ṛg Veda* mentions several other versions of *Agni*'s origins: he is said to be a son of *Dyaus* (Sky) and *Pṛthivī* (Earth), an offspring of *Tvaṣṭṛ*, born of *Āpas* (Waters), produced by Sun and Sacrifice or generated by *Uśas* (Dawn) and *Ratrī* (Night). In the *Śiva* and *Bhagavata Purāṇas, Agni* is the son of *Aditi* and *Kaśyapa.* According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, the *Agni* named *Abhimānin*

was the eldest son born of *Brahmā*. *Abhimānin* and *Svāhā* had together "three sons of surpassing brilliancy" – *Pāvaka*, *Pāvamāna* and *Śuci*. It is further stated that "[t]hey [in turn] had forty five sons, who, with the original son of Brahma, and his three descendants, constitute the forty-nine fires" (155-156; bk. I, ch. X). According to the *Vāyu Purāṇa, Agni* was the mental son of *Brahmā* who also had three sons – *Pāvaka*, *Pāvamāna* and *Śuci* – by *Svāhā*. It is then explained further that *Pāvamāna* is produced by friction and represents the *gārhapatya* fire – his son *Kavya-vāhana* carries *kavya* oblations to the ancestors (*pitṛs*). *Pāvaka* is produced from water or lightening and represents *dakṣiṇāgni* – his son *Saharakśa* is the fire of *Asuras*. *Śuci*'s source is the sun god and he represents the *āhavanīya* fire – his son *Havya-vāhana* belongs to the gods (*devas*). The *Vāyu Purāṇa* then states that the sons and grandsons of the three sons of *Brahmā – Pāvaka*, *Pāvamāna* and *Śuci* – are forty-nine in number, and explains the rest of *Agni'*s progeny in a great detail.

Most of the names and functions of the Vedic fires named in the *MVS* are reminiscent of but not fully identical with those listed in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, and even though the *MVS* references forty-nine Vedic fires it actually mentions only thirty-eight. The types of fires named in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* also do not easily amount to forty-nine, and many additional names and functions of fire can be found throughout the Vedic texts. For example, one of the oldest *Purāṇas,* the *Matsya Purāṇa,* describes performances of large *homas* involving ten thousand, one hundred thousand and ten million *homa* offerings, with each higher amount being considered more efficacious. Therefore it appears that the *Vāyu Purāṇa* makes an attempt at a systematization of a much larger number of Vedic fires, and that the number forty-nine may be figurative rather than

actual or, perhaps, derived from another, so far not identified, source. Even the *Purāṇas* themselves are filled with inconsistencies as they depict theogonies, cosmogonies, myths, legends and practices of various religious groups and of different historical periods. The author of the *MVS* was most likely accustomed to one of the many different traditions or perhaps provided the names of Vedic fires according to the extent of his familiarity with them, and therefore his list of the Vedic fires coincides only loosely with that of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*. More importantly, the *MVS*'s author demonstrates some knowledge of Vedic fires and explains motives for the incorporation of *homa* rituals by stating that they are included "so that those trainees who are oriented towards rituals may also be attracted" (43). For this reason it seems very likely that the *MVS* documents practices that were common at its time and that the inclusion of *homa* rituals represents an effort to accommodate *brahman* converts to the Tantra and/or to attract those *brahmans* who intended to became tantric practitioners.

Moreover, according to the legend in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* the *Abhimāni Agni,* the eldest son of *Brahmā*, leapt out from the mouth of the *Virāṭ Puruṣa*, the cosmic man by whose sacrifice gods created all life. The *MVS* accepts the *Abhimānin Agni* as the origin of all fires but makes *Pāvaka* to be the *Brahmā*'s first-born son. According to the *Vāyu Purāṇa, Agni* was the mental son of *Brahmā* and *Pāvaka*, in its function as a mundane fire, also the *Brahmā*'s first-born son. Thus, while *Agni* of the *Purāṇas* is the son of *Brahmā, Agni* of the *MVS* is self-arisen. The Buddhaguhya's commentary explains this further:

> [w]hen all the worlds arose spontaneously at the time of the first eon, not created by anyone and moving through space, consuming blissful food, Agni arose spontaneously in the Brahmā World. Since he was proud, thinking, 'I am self-arisen, not created by anyone', he is termed

> '*Abhimānin*, the self-arisen one', and in that way, Agni first arose . . .
> [a]fter the self-arisen Agni, the fire which is the chief of the mundane ones
> called *Pāvaka*, which burns, arose from Brahmā, and
> he was also the first of the Brahmā sons. (*MVS* 381-382)

The *MVS* is in agreement with the non-theistic Buddhist view that does not accept the concept of a creator god. According to the doctrine of the cause and effect as it is presented in the *Abhidharma Piṭaka*, our universe and all beings in it are uncreated. Each phenomenon manifests as a result of its own cause, and since a creator god would have to be causeless, according to the Buddhist philosophy his existence is not possible. Therefore the *Abhimānin Agni,* the origin of all consecutive fires of the *MVS*, is self-arisen and not created by anyone. This contrasts with the theistic *Sāṃkhya* philosophy of the *Purāṇas,* which considers god *Brahmā* to be the creator of the entire manifest universe, and where *Agni* is depicted as his first-born son.

After describing these fires, the *Bhagavat Vairocana* states that no *homa* can be carried out successfully without the knowledge of the nature of the fires. This implies that whether a *homa* is performed by a *brahman* priest or a *vajrācārya*, Buddhist tantric ritual master, if they do not know the nature of sacrificial fires, their performances of *homas* would be useless. Then he points out that the fires he taught while engaged in *bodhisattva* practices in the *brahmā-loka* appear in the Vedas of *brahmanas* and are used for mundane (*laukika)* purposes. After he became a fully enlightened Buddha, the *Bhagavat Vairocana* revealed twelve additional fires suitable for the performance of a supramundane (*lokottara*)[9] *homa*. These additional fires represent the types of fires employed during the performances of Buddhist tantric *homas* of the *MVS*:

> Having become perfectly / awakened to Enlightenment,

9. Done mentally, without a perceptual form.

> I have taught twelve kinds of Fire. / What are those twelve?
> The first is the Fire of Awareness / who is called Mahendra,
> with a golden complexion, / with blazing aura, in *samādhi*,
> who bestows fine features, / enrichment and strength,
> and is the perfecter of Awareness. / The second is called Sustainer,
> like the colour of the autumn moon, / noble, wearing white robes,
> he holds a rosary and a water pitcher. / The third is called Wind,
> his complexion is black and rough. / The fourth one is called the Red One
> (*rohita*), and is like the red dawn. / The fifth one is called the Gentle One
> (*mṛḍa*), he is hairy, tawny in colour, / he is long-necked and very brilliant;
> he brings benefit to all. / The sixth is called Wrathful, with crooked eyes,
> the colour of smoke, / his hair up-ended and emitting a great sound,
> he is four-fanged and most powerful. / The seventh is called Belly
> (*jaṭhara*), and is piercing, with all colours. / The eights is called
> Destruction (*kṣaya*) and seems like a mass of lightening shafts. / The ninth
> is called Mind-born (*manoja*), / he has virtuous forms and is very
> powerful. The tenth is called World-supporter. / Apart from that, there is
> Kravyāda, red-black and marked with *Oṃ*. / The twelfth is called
> Deluding (*mohana*), who is the deluder of all beings. (384-386)

Buddhaguhya's commentary clarifies that the Awareness Fire has the attributes of fire for the enriching *homa*, the Sustainer Fire has the attributes for the pacifying *homa*, the Red One is used in the subduing *homa* and the Wrathful Fire in the destruction *homa*. The fire called the Wind is summoned when lighting the hearth and the Gentle One is used for the full ladles of offerings in the *homa*. Each of the fires has its unique colors and qualities and, during a performance of external *homas* one needs to transform oneself, the fire and the offering substances into the colors of the fire that is being summoned; in that way the three elements of the external *homa* are made the same. During the internal *homa* practice, the three *homa* elements – oneself, the fire and the materials – are made one in their intrinsic nature of emptiness. The *MVS* also elaborates on the mental states and motivation necessary for the executions of these *homas*; for the pacifying *homa* one needs to generate great loving-kindness and compassion and for the enriching one compassion and joy. Wrathful Fire is used for fierce practices that should be done

forcefully but not with anger. At the end of this chapter, the *Bhagava*t *Vairocana* instructs on places where *homas* should be performed and explains how the hearth should be made, how the water that cleanses the fire should be sprinkled, how the *kuśa* grass should be spread, how the deity should be placed in the hearth and what substances should be offered at each occasion. Buddhaguhya also adds that a *homa* during which there is a focus on external things, such as the fire, hearth, materials or fulfillment of desires is called mundane (*laukika*). During the internal *homa*, a practitioner needs to dissolve the five psychophysical constituents, the material objects, such as hearth etc., his/her perceptual awareness of the six senses and even their arising into emptiness. Then preventing them from arising again, he/she should abide in non-conceptualizing *samādhi*. The concluding verse of the *MVS*'s chapter on *homa* rituals elaborates on the internal *homa* in the following way:

> Moreover, the internal *homa* / counter-acts karmic action and rebirth.
> It should be known by the *manas*, devoid of form, sound and so forth.
> The eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body / are all generated by the *manas*,
> and depend upon the mind king. / These things generated by thought:
> *bodhicitta*, the objects, the eyes and so on, / and also Wind Fire should be
> counteracted by non-arising insight, / and burnt in the mental fire.
> This is called the inner *homa*, which I have taught you, Noble One. (389)

Buddhaguhya, referring to the *yogic* practices of the *prāṇāyāma*, discloses that the Wind Fire is counteracted by controlling the breath and should be burned up in the motionless mind.

The similar types of *homas* – peaceful (*śāntika*), enriching (*pauṣṭika*), subjugating (*abhicārika*), subordinating (*vaśīkaraṇa*) and an additional one called *aṅkuśi* (obtaining) – are also mentioned in another text of that period, the *Tattvasaṃgraha Sūtra* transmitted to Japan by Kūkai (774-835 CE) together with the *Mahāvairocana* tantric practice. It

explains that the *śāntika homa* is appropriate for removing evil and calamities, *pauṣṭika* for increasing one's welfare, *abhicāraka* for subduing and overcoming enemies and evil persons, *vaśīkaraṇa* for bringing people together and making them fond of oneself, and *aṅkuśi* for attracting gods. Kūkai elaborates on these rites in his *Gobudarani mondō gesan shūshiron* saying that "the inner homa is performed in meditations, simultaneously with the outer rite, to insure the success of the latter," and clarifies that while performing the inner *homa* "the practitioner becomes the fire in the hearth, the latter now meaning the mind, and the mantras that are recited are the wood, etc. that does the burning. Waving the ax of insight and the kindling of compassion one burns indiscrimination so that the thought of enlightenment turns into a gem. Then there are no defilements and the mind becomes clear and tranquil like space" (Todaro 106-107). Another early Buddhist tantric text, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa,* belonging to the *kriyā* tantra category, also provides descriptions of *homa* rituals. Its thirteenth chapter contains instructions on how to perform them, how to make a lotus shaped fire pit (*agnikuṇḍa*), on proper places for their performances, on preliminary rituals of pacification and on type of wood to be burnt. This text prohibits *abhicārika* (subduing) and *raudrakarma* (fierce) rituals (Wallis 174). Also the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, in which the Lord *Śākyamuni* instructs the assembly of gods led by god *Śakra,*[10] the chief of gods, and elaborates on various initiations, consecrations, *maṇḍalas* as well as on four rites – pacifying, prosperity gaining, subjugation and destroying – together with a number of additional rites, performances of which are supposed to release beings from evil rebirths and eventually lead them to perfect enlightenment (68–72). The fact, that the *homas* of these early Buddhist tantric texts, such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, MVS*, *Tattvasaṃgraha Sūtra* and

10. Vedic god Indra.

*Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra,* do not differ much from each other indicates that their basic form and practice within the context of the Buddhist tantric ritual were already well established at the time of these texts' composition.

Before the Buddhist tantric ritual acquired its mature form, it had undergone a lengthy development process. In his "*Homa in East Asia,"* M. Strickmann identifies several texts included in the *Taishō* edition of the Sino-Japanese Buddhist Canon that contain examples of early Buddhist proto-*homas* – a number of rites involving use of fire for worldly purposes. One of them is a version of the *Mātaṅgisūtra* (c. 3rd century CE) that describes a rite performed by a *caṇḍālī* woman, whose daughter became infatuated with the Buddha's disciple *Ānanda.* In order to attract *Ānanda* to her daughter, the woman "smeared the floor of her house with cow dung, on which she spread white rushes. In this ritual area she proceeded to light a great, raging fire into which she threw 108 flowers, reciting her spell in its entirety with every flower she threw" (426). Another such text, the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārajñī*, the Peacock Spell *Sūtra* (c. 4th century CE), attributed to a *dhāraṇī* master *Śrīmitra*, contains instructions for demarcating the ritual area and burning up demons by throwing mustard seeds into the fire (429). During the fifth and sixth centuries, a gradual transformation from what Strickmann refers to as "pious fumigations" into an actual votive fire offering occurred: "[a] special fire began to be constructed for the transmission of an offering . . . the spell wood is to be dipped in oil before burning . . . [and] icons [that] serve as the support for visualization [came to represent] a higher power" (432). The *Miscellaneous Collection of Dhāraṇīs,* compiled in the mid-seventh century CE, contains a wide variety of random, more evolved but not yet systematized proto-Tantric rituals performed for the purposes of bringing relief from

various diseases, deliverance from demons, robbers and dangerous weather, attaining wishes, purging sins, etc. These texts contain descriptions of simple Buddhist *homas* that are similar in their fundamental structure to the later *homas* employed in the context of fully developed Buddhist tantric rituals:

> The god of fire is to be invoked and installed within the hearth, the kuṇḍa. Curds mixed with honey and various other substances are to be placed in the fire offering to him. Then Agni is to be moved to the hearth's rim, and all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Vajra-beings and devas are to be invited into the kuṇḍa. In addition to curds and honey, the offerings to them comprise the five grains, different varieties of flowers, fragrances, cakes, fruits, and perfumed water. When the offerings have been made, each divinity is to be installed in its place, in due order of precedence, by forming the appropriate mudra and reciting the proper mantra. When all this has been accomplished, the entire host is to be sent off again, using the mudra of dismissal. (434)

All advanced rituals seem to have their origins in the simple practices of reciting spells for the purpose of attaining benefits that were done either without any image or in front of an image of a deity. These practices became gradually more complex; various offerings to the deity's image, such as incense, flowers, food etc. in the form of oblations to fire were incorporated into the practice, the number of images increased from a single one to many, and elaborate visualizations became a part of the worship. This process eventually led to the formation of multi-deities' *maṇḍalas* and establishment of the *maṇḍala* initiation ceremony (*abhiṣeka)*. *Homa*, a tradition of making offerings into the fire, has always played a key role in the performance of these rituals, especially as a sought-after visionary appearance of a deity and/or a desired result could occur solely at the culmination of the practice consisting of a prescribed number of fire offerings combined with the recitation of a prescribed number of spells.

While the *MVS* acknowledges the origins and lineages of the Vedic fire-god *Agni*

together with his many names and roles and outlines his functions in the context of the *MVS*'s *homa* rituals, the *MVS*'s supplemental text entitled the *Mahā-Vairocana-uttara-tantra,* provides more detailed instructions for performances of each of the four individual *homas* of the *MVS*. The following example from the *MVT* illustrates the complex intricacy of a fully developed Buddhist tantric ritual complete with mantras, *mudrās* and deities' visualizations. Here the instructions are presented by the *bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi,* the Lord of the Secret Ones, who states that he explains them in order "to bind those [who endanger] this teaching [and] for the benefit and comfort of those who devote themselves to the *sādhana*" (395). In order to perform the *homa* for the pacifying rites, one should go to the north of a town and find a site with a white colored earth. Then one should transform oneself into *Vajrasattva*, do the anointing and purification of the ground and then begin the creation of the *maṇḍala* on the fifth day of the new moon or at the full moon under the influence of the planets of the moon and Venus. Changing oneself into the body of *Avalokiteśvara*, a practitioner draws the *maṇḍala* and begins placing symbols or seed syllables (*bījas*) of deities of the *maṇḍala* upon lotuses: sword or a letter A for *Vairocana,* to the north a triangular symbol of all the Buddhas or a seed syllable AṂ, to the west of the Buddhas a sword of *Ākāśa-garbha* or his seed syllable I, to the west of *Ākāśa-garbha* an *utpala* flower or the seed syllable MAṂ for *Mañjuśrī,* to his west a seed syllable GAṂ of *Gagana-locanā.* To the east of the Buddhas one should place a bowl symbol or a seed syllable BHAḤ for *Śākyamuni* and in front of him the wish-fulfilling gem or the seed syllable BHRUṂ of *Ūrṇā*. The instructions continue with the descriptions of the rest of the deities of the *maṇḍala* in the same manner, including the two *Nāga* kings, four guardians and five gods of the Pure Abodes.[11] In the end, a

11. Five highest heavens in the Form Realm.

practitioner should draw lotuses filling the whole interior of the outer lines of the *maṇḍala*. After that "the fire-pit should be made within the courtyard in the area of the right gate of the Mandala. It should be completely circular, measuring one cubit in size, and twelve inches in depth. The rim around it should be made four inches in size. In the center of the bottom [one] should make a wheel, one inch in height" (398). Then a practitioner should make the *Samaya Mudrā*, recite the *Samaya* Mantra and transform oneself into *Avalokiteśvara* with the letter SA and his Lotus *Mudrā*. Then, setting the letter A in its own *maṇḍala*, he/she should imagine it changing into the form of the body of *Mahāvairocana* and making the Sword *Mudrā* one should transform oneself into the body of *Mahāvairocana* from the letter A. At the same time, one needs to imagine that all the seed syllables in the *maṇḍala* change into the body images of their respective deities. Then one recites the mantra of the Noble *Acala,* makes the Action *Vajra Mudrā* and offers perfumes, flowers, incense, lamps, food etc. to all the deities who reside in their respective *maṇḍalas* saying to each one of them, "[p]lease accept this perfume and think of me!" (398), and continue in this manner until each of the substances are offered to each deity in the *maṇḍala*. The substances offered during the pacifying ritual should be white, such as white sandalwood mixed with camphor, sweet smelling and auspicious flowers such as white lotuses, roses, jasmine etc., food offerings should be white food stuffs such as yogurt, cooked rice etc. The oil for the lamps should be poured into white containers and offered. The oblations of water should be poured into conches and similar white receptacles, mixed with sandalwood, camphor and white flowers.

After offering of all the offering substances to all the deities of the *maṇḍala*, a practitioner should withdraw, transform oneself into *Avalokiteśvara* and perform the

cast-offerings with parched grain, oil, water, boiled rice, flowers, beans, etc., casting them in each of the ten directions reciting the appropriate mantras. These offerings are for *Rahu* and his entourage in the north-east, *Indra* in the east, *Agni* in the south-east, *Vāyu* in the north-west etc., including offerings to *nāgas, yakṣas, rākṣasas, piśācas*, flesh-eating ghosts and other types of beings, such as ones that dwell in trees and bushes. When done with the cast-offerings everywhere, a practitioner should wash and rinse his/her hands, pay *homages* to all the Buddhas, cleanse all the materials to be burned with the mantra of the Noble *Acala*, place them on his/her right and place the two oblation vessels filled with a mixture of perfume and water on his/her left. One should spread *kuśa* grass all around the hearth and the place where one sits as well as a long and short spoon made of *uḍumbara*[12] and *aśvattha*[13] woods in front of oneself together with the liquid butter. The hearth should be sprinkled with sandalwood and strewn with sweet smelling white flowers. The fire should be taken from the house of a *brahman* and purified with the mantra of the Wrathful King. One should sit facing the north and transform oneself into the exact form of the body of *Mahāvairocana* residing upon a water *maṇḍala*, using his mantra and *mudrā*. A practitioner should imagine a water mandala on the bottom of the hearth and the seed syllable RA placed in the fire changing into the body image of *Agni*. He is the color of conch, jasmine or the moon. He has his hair bound up upon his head and is three-eyed. He has four hands in which he holds a rosary, a water-jar and a club. With the other, he makes the *mudrā* of Bestowing Fearlessness. He is dressed in white robes, wears a white cord crossed over his chest and has a triangular design upon his heart, marked with the letter RA and emits white tongues

*12. Ficus glomerata.*
*13. Ficus religiosa.*

of fire. A practitioner should sprinkle *Agni* in a circular manner with water consecrated with the mantra of the Noble *Acala*, which has been previously prepared. Then one presents offerings of flowers, perfumes etc. to *Agni* with his own mantra, and after that also three measures of a mixture of sugar, ghee and honey, the three full measures of butter with a long spoon, then seven pieces of *aśvattha* and *uḍumbara* sticks dipped in butter and three full measures of butter again while reciting "*Om varadāgnaye śāntim kuru svāhā*." Then again, the offerings should be burned for each one of the deities in the same way while reciting the mantra of pacifying. Then a practitioner should imagine all the Buddhas and meditate on his/her inner self being pure, a state which equals to experiencing *bodhicitta* as it is. Then he/she visualizes the body image of his/her tutelary deity, offers three full measures of butter and sprinkles it in a circular manner. One should burn offerings of the materials till one becomes tired. After offering oblations and paying homage to the deities, a practitioner should ask them to depart. A *mantrin* engaging in the ritual of pacification should wear white clothes, remain clean and calm cleaving to *bodhicitta*, should sleep on a bed of *kuśa,* drink *ghee* or milk and set his/her mind on *homa.* If he/she knows the ritual and performs it without laziness, he/she will attain pacification; "if done for a fortnight, without a doubt, a whole realm will be pacified. For a king, twelve days, and ten days for a region" (401).

The rituals for the enriching, subduing and fierce *homas* follow the same arrangement as the pacifying one but with some variations according to a desired result. The enriching *homa* is performed in the eastern area of a town, its *maṇḍala* is made up of a different set of deities, its hearth is situated on the right side of a *maṇḍala*, flowers and all other offering substances are yellow. The fire should come from the house of a

*kṣatrīya* or from a king's palace; the hearth is square with the earth *maṇḍala* visualized at the bottom. *Agni,* when summoned, appears from the seed syllable *YAṂ* within the hearth, resembles gold in color and has his hair bound up upon his head. He is three-eyed and has four hands in which he holds a rosary, a water jar and makes the *mudrā* of Bestowing Fearlessness. He is dressed in yellow robes etc. The practitioner should also dress himself/herself in yellow robes and delight in *bodhicitta.* The subduing *homa* ritual needs to take place in the south-east of a town. An ideal place for its performance is an uninhabited house, a solitary tree, a cemetery or a shrine to *Śiva* on a site that has red colored earth. The *maṇḍala* should be drawn with a red pigment and the hearth should be triangular in shape. *Agni*, when summoned, has the color of the rising sun, three eyes and his tawny hair is bound up upon his head. He has four hands, which hold a mace, a noose, a rosary and a water jar. He is dressed in red robes etc. The rituals utensils and offering substances are red, a practitioner should also wear red robes and "know the special features of *bodhicitta*" (407). The text states that "[w]hoever has undertaken the rite, in this manner, knowing the ritual, will gain control after one month of his beloved or her daughter, if he does the *homa* for two months, the *mantrin* will quickly draw to himself *yakṣiṇīs* and likewise girls of the subterranean realm" (408). The fierce *homa* is performed in order to control *yakṣas, mahoragas* or fierce ghosts, *asuras, gandharvas, kinnaras,* wrathful beings who delight in harming, obstructors, gremlins, ghosts, witches, *rākṣasas, ḍākiṇīs,* goblins or wrathful, arrogant humans who are powerful and do cruel deeds; this ritual should never be used against those whose faults are small. It should be performed to the south of a town on a site with black soil, *maṇḍala* should be drawn with a black pigment, the offering substances are black, such as black perfume, red

sandalwood mixed with juniper charcoal, blue flowers, pungent mustard oil in black receptacles, and salty and bitter black foods as well as meat and fish. The fire should be obtained from a house of an outcast or from a cemetery. *Agni*, when summoned, arises from the seed syllable HŪṂ at the center of a wind *maṇḍala* placed at the bottom of a triangular hearth. *Agni* is smoky, three-eyed and four-faced, black in color and very wrathful. He is difficult to look at and his tawny hair is bound up on his head. His radiance is smoky like blue rain clouds and he wears blue robes etc. A practitioner should also wear blue robes, always adhere firmly to *bodhicitta,* be pure and endowed with the highest morality.

When we compare a simple proto-Tantric *homa* rite that accompanies the recitation of *dhāraṇīs* to a complex *homa* ritual as it is described in the *MVT*, we can see that they both follow the same basic pattern. This pattern remains constant while other elements of a *homa* ritual, such as the place, time, shape of the hearth, deities in the *maṇḍalas*, colors and offering substances etc. change according to the deity that is being addressed and according to the desired result. This pattern is as follows: a) a ritual area is consecrated and purified, b) a fire-pit is constructed, c) *Agni* is summoned, placed in the hearth, made offerings to, and then requested to take his place within the *maṇḍala*, d) deity/deities are invoked e) oblations to the deities are offered into the fire, and f) deities are asked to depart in the end.

The patterns of the *homas*, as they are described in the *MVT*, are also strikingly similar to those found in the *Matsya Purāṇa,* where *Vaiśampāyana* explains to *Śaunaka*[14] the performances of the *śānti* and *puṣṭi* rites within the framework of the propitiation of the planets. In brief, an appropriate time and place are chosen, the fire altar (*vedi*) is built

14. Ancient Indian sages.

and positioned according to the specific instructions, then the thirty-two deities *maṇḍala* is drawn with an uncooked rice powder, the fire is lit and deities invoked in that fire. Each planet has its proper place within the *maṇḍala* and a deity presiding over it (*adhidevatā*). The sun and *Śiva* are in the center, Mars and *Skanda* in the south, Mercury and *Hari* in the north-east, Jupiter and *Brahmā* in the north, Venus and *Indra* in the east, Moon and *Pārvatī* in the south-east, Saturn and *Yama* in the west, *Rāhu* and *Kāla* in the south-west, *Kētu* and *Chitragupta* in the north-west; the rest are the secondary presiding deities (*pratyadhidevatā*) – *Agni,* Water, Earth, *Viṣṇu, Indra, Aindrī,*[15] *Prajāpati, Sarpa, Brahmā, Gaṇeśa, Durgā, Vāyu, Ākāśa* and the twin *Aśvinīkumāras.* Each of the planets and deities has a specific color associated with it and their forms, dresses and flower offerings should correspond to the those colors. Then various offerings, altar decorations, measurements of a fire pit, types of wood to be burned in the fire, manners of sprinkling with water, mantras to be recited while propitiating deities as well as sacrificial offerings of animals are described in a great detail. Performances of these rites are said to assure fulfillment of all desires, such as wealth, peace, longevity, freedom from malignant influences and elimination of obstacles caused by past karmas. The "Ten Million *Homas*" sacrifice is said to have benefits similar to those obtained by eighteen thousand *Aśvamedha* sacrifices and its performance purifies all sins as severe as abortions and killing of *brahmanas.* The sacrifice of "Ten Thousand *Homas*" is required as a preliminary before the rites of magic and sorcery, such as *abhicāra, vaśīkarana,* and *uccāṭana*, can be performed. The *Matsya Purāṇa* has a brief description of these rites that can be done to dispel ills and obstacles, obtain a loved one, cause frictions among people, and subdue enemies. But it specifically points out that consecrated waters that are

15. Wife of *Indra.*

normally used for sprinkling of devotees (*abhiṣeka*) during the other ceremonies are not used here, and that such rites bear fruit only in the present life. They do not bring any good result for the next life, and it is recommended not to indulge in them (245–257).

Going further back in time, even more detailed and precise descriptions of similar rites are found in the *Atharva Veda Pariśiṣṭas,* the ancillary texts of the *AV* that are about 2000 years old. The *AVP* literature treats rituals, magic, religious observances, astrology, omens, royal ceremonies and other subjects relevant to the life of people in ancient India. It contains rules on what kind of places need to be chosen for performances of the sacrifice, sizes and kinds of wood to be used for churning the fire, the instructions for the construction of the altar and the fire pit (*kuṇḍa)*, the fuel, sacrificial grasses, implements, objects of offering, number of priests that need to be present, *mantras* to be employed on each occasion, etc. The following excerpt describing the preparation of a fire-pit (*kuṇḍa*) demonstrates the correspondence between the Buddhist tantric rites and those practiced according to the *AV*:

> The *kuṇḍa*, as described in *Pariśiṣṭa* 25, is to be prepared in different forms, according to the quarter of the *pandal* in which it is prepared and the purpose for which it is used. In the east, it should be square in shape and should be used for rites performed in honour of Indra. In the south-east, it should be of the shape of a hoof and should be used for the rites for Agni. In the south, it should be semicircular (*ardha-candra*) in shape and should be used for the rites for Yama. In the south-west, it should be triangular in shape and should be used for the rites Varuṇa. In the north-west, it should be pentagonal in shape and should be used for the rites of Vāyu. In the north, it should be of the form of a lotus and should be used for the rites of Soma. In the north-east, it should be heptagonal in shape and should be used for rites in honour of Rudra. // A *kuṇḍa* of the form of a lotus may be used for all rites. It is especially meant for attaining peace. A square one brings victory and such a *kuṇḍa* is necessary for a pacificatory ceremony. For a rite of prosperity (*pauṣṭika*), a circular one is required; for sorcery, a triangular one; for *vaśīkaraṇa*, semi-circular; for killing the enemy, hexagonal; and for *vidveśa*, an octagonal *kuṇḍa* is necessary. (Modak 261)

Another type of an ancillary text associated with the *AV*, the *Aṇgirasakalpa*, mentions ten classes of rites, most of which can be found in the tantric *homa* ritual manuals as well: "that are to appease or avert evil (*śāntika)*, that are to promote welfare (*pauśtika)*, to bring others into subjection by means of charms (*vaśa*), to hinder or paralyse (*stambhana*), to bewilder (*mohana*), to bring about hatred (*dveśana*), to eradicate (*uccataṇa*), to kill (*marana*), to seduce (*akarśana*), and to scare away (*vidravana*)" (Gonda 277).

The ancient origins of fire-charms and fire worship go as far back as the pre-Vedic period and beyond, into early human history when people began to use and control fire. The early Buddhist tantric fire rituals resemble the rites centered around domestic fire where protective spells are pronounced while oblations are being poured or thrown into the fire. These customs reflect the everyday concerns of householders and lay people in general and are very much like the rites and customs documented in the *Atharva Veda* and *Gṛhyasūtras*. As the tantric rituals grew in complexity, Buddhist Tantras incorporated patterns of non-Buddhist *homas* into its practices and populated them with the *buddha*s and *bodhisattvas* while assigning subordinate roles to Vedic and other non-Buddhist deities within its *maṇḍalas*. The *homas* of the *MVS*, *Atharva Veda* as well as the *Matsya Purāṇa* follow the same patterns, use identical shapes of fire-pits, same types offerings, such as incense, perfumes, flowers, honey, butter, cooked rice etc., same kinds of fire wood, sacrificial grasses to sit on, consecrated water for sprinkling, mantras, *mudrās*, and visualizations. The same types of *homas* – peaceful (*śāntika*), enriching (*pauṣṭika*), subjugating (*abhicārika*), subordinating (*vaśīkaraṇa*) – are utilized by both, the Vedic and Hindu traditions for the same purposes, they both promise

attainment of identical results and claim unfailing efficacy. In accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhist Tantras would exclude the rituals involving animal sacrifice, but otherwise they seem to be able to adapt all the other practices to the Buddhist creeds and philosophies.

The original Sanskrit text of the *MVS* is lost; the *MVS* remains available in Chinese and Tibetan translations. The *MVS*'s lineage was brought to China from India by an Indian monk *Śubhakarasiṃha,* who translated the *MVS*'s text from Sanskrit to Chinese in the early eighth century (Hodge, *MVS* 14). *Śubhakarasiṃha* is believed to be a direct disciple of *Dharmagupta* (c. 615-735), who is considered to be the *MVS*'s first human preceptor. A Japanese monk Kūkai (775-834), the founder of the *Shingon* order of Japanese tantric Buddhism, brought the *MVS*'s lineage from China to Japan in the early ninth century, where its practice is alive to this day. The *MVS*'s *homas* are still performed regularly by the monks of the *Shingon* and *Tendai* schools of Japanese Buddhism as well as by *Yamabushi* ascetics living in the mountains of Japan.

# Chapter VI

## *Homas* of the *Yoginī Tantras*

The great Buddhist monastic universities in the north of India, such as the *Nālandā* and *Vikramaśīla,* prospered under royal patronage and functioned as important centers of learning throughout the entire medieval period. Building upon the philosophical investigation of the earlier Buddhist schools of the *Abhidharma*, they began to propagate new ideas and concepts that came to be known as *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. These monastic centers introduced and refined the traditions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) *Sūtras,* the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras*, the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* schools of thought as well as the *Dignāgas's* (c. 480 – 540 CE) and *Dharmakīrti's* (7th century) schools of Buddhist epistemology and logic. *Mahāyāna* scriptures focus on the philosophies of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), non-self (*anātman*), interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), potential for enlightenment (Buddha-nature) being inherent in every sentient being, and on the *bodhisattva* ideal of altruism and compassion for everyone.

The *Yoginī Tantras* originated in the regions of northeastern India and in the Swat and Chitral areas of today's Pakistan. Emerging during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the later phase of Indian Tantric Buddhism, they were taught in secret and passed on orally for about three or four hundred years, or perhaps even longer, before being written down. At first, various esoteric traditions developed and enjoyed widespread popularity outside of monastic settings, in an environment where many

religious communities lived in a close proximity. In addition to the *Mahāyāna* Buddhists, there were local sorcerers, tribal shamans, followers of *Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti,* and a variety of other groups of spiritual practitioners that would interrelate with each other under circumstances that account for the similarities of their ideas and practices. Being more easily accessible to common people, the Tantras provided an alternative to a highly intellectualized system of monastic learning. As they grew in popularity, they were gradually incorporated into mainstream religions – namely *Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism*, *Śaktism*, and Buddhism.

Influenced by the marginal religious currents, the *Yoginī Tantras* absorbed a number of non-Buddhist beliefs and practices, which they re-interpreted in a way that allowed for their Buddhist core to remain intact. These *tantras* took shape among the *yogins* and *yoginīs* of cremation grounds, whose deities – *herukas, yoginīs* and *ḍākiṇīs* – wear human skulls, skin, bones and ash as ornaments, who practice sexual *yogas*, consume impure substances, such as meat, menstrual blood and semen during initiation rituals, and who observe unusual customs, such as the means of obtaining a zombie (*vetāla*), or the extraction and consumption of power substances from human corpses. The *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra Tantras*, two major and popular *Yoginī Tantras*, adopted many of these features – sexual *yoga* practices with a consort, deities that resemble those of the *Śaiva Kāpālika* sect, local tribal deities, and some deities of Hindu origin. The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* even mentions the kinds of sacrificial victims required for some of the fierce rituals, which would include the donkey, man, tortoise, camel, jackal, horse etc. But before the Buddhist Tantras could be accepted into the Buddhist monastic system, controversial elements had to be modified and integrated into Buddhist doctrine in a way

that would not contradict monastic vows. Thus, monks would internalize practices involving sexual union and violence, and engage in them through meditative visualizations rather than actually performing them. However, lay practitioners and married couples were allowed, after reaching a certain stage of their practice and after receiving specific instructions from their *guru,* to perform the consort practices in actuality.

The Buddhist Tantras entered mainstream monastic Buddhism during the ninth century and formed the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist path. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism puts emphasis on profound meditative practices and promises its practitioners to attain enlightenment in one lifetime, or seven lifetimes at the most, if practiced properly and diligently. Since the tantric path seeks to transform the emotions and energies of the body, it presents itself as a dangerous path that needs to be learned directly from a *guru*, and the initiation (*dīkṣā*) is necessary in order to receive its teachings and practice instructions. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism flourished from about the seventh century on until its complete disappearance from India, which coincided with Muslim conquests and destruction of several Buddhist monastic centers of higher learning, including the *Nālandā* and *Vikramaśīla* monasteries, around 1200 CE.

Again, a tale from the life of the *mahāsiddha Virupa* belonging to the *Lamdre* (*Lam 'bras*) oral tradition documents the early relationship between monastic Buddhism and the Buddhist Tantra. *Virūpa* practiced the *Hevajra* Tantra secretly during the night while he served as an abbot of the *Nālandā* monastery under the name *Śrī Dharmapāla*. When he reached about seventy years of age, he had a series of bad dreams. That made him so disillusioned that he threw his meditation beads into a toilet and stopped his

tantric practices. That very night, the goddess *Nairātmyā* (Goddess of Non-Substantiality), the consort of the deity *Hevajra*, appeared in front of him and explained how his disturbing dreams were in fact the signs of *yogic* accomplishment. She gave him further instructions and asked him to retrieve his rosary from the toilet, to wash them, and to continue his efforts. Following the meditational deity's secret instructions, *Virūpa* quickly attained many realizations and progressed through six *bodhisattva* grounds within a few days' time. Out of gratitude, he prepared a ritual feast (*gaṇapujā*) during which he made offerings of traditional substances that included meat and beer to his teacher and to his deity. The monks began to notice *Virūpa's* unusual behavior, which did not comply with monastic rules. His meditative concentrations appeared to them as if he would be enjoying the meat, alcohol and company of women in his room. *Virūpa*, aware of their misconception, gave up his monastic robes out of consideration for them. He put on a cotton loincloth and a garland of flowers and, as he was leaving the monastery, he robbed a lower caste turnip seller of some turnips, stuck them under his armpits and in his mouths and gave himself the name *Virūpa,* the Formless One. He lived the rest of his days as a *yogin* in a forest near *Vārāṇasī*, instructed his disciples in the art of the Buddhist tantric *yogas,* and travelled throughout India performing magical acts in order to put a stop to animal and human sacrifices (*Taking the Result as the Path* 145-146).

*Virūpa* belongs among the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*, legendary *yogins* who lived on the outskirts of mainstream society, in places such as the jungle, forests and cremation grounds. They devoted themselves to *yogic* practices, realized the goals of the Buddhist Tantra and became known as accomplished *yogic* adepts (*siddhas*). These highly realized individuals, who included famous Indian figures such as *Nāropa, Saraha, Nāgārjuna,*

*Ghantapa*, *Tilopa, Kṛṣṇācārya* and others in their midst, synthesized many non-Buddhist methods and religious concepts of their times with Buddhist principles. They are credited with beginnings of several important lineages of the Buddhist Tantras that would eventually enter the Buddhist monastic system. Coming from diverse social strata that ranged from *brahmans,* kings, ministers, artists, farmers and housewives to prostitutes and outcasts, the *mahāsiddhas* chose the way of life of mendicant *yogins* and *yoginīs* outside the formal institutions of religious authority. They came to represent the ideals of free and spontaneous existence against the backdrop of empty ritualism, strict and intellectualized monasticism, India's internal conflicts, and destructive assaults of Islamic armies on Indian civilization.

At the height of their popularity, the Buddhist Tantras were sought after by monarchs and Buddhist monks/scholars from countries outside of India, namely China and Tibet; the rulers invited Indian tantric masters to come and transmit tantric teachings to them or, they would send monks to India to learn tantric teachings there. Thus, after the original Sanskrit tantric manuscripts were destroyed or vanished, many tantric texts survived in their Chinese translations in the case of the early Tantras, and in Tibetan translations in the case of the later Tantras. The Tibetans, in particular, embraced tantric teachings with a great reverence; Tibetan scholars and tantric masters composed many additional commentaries, ancillary tantras and ritual manuals that document and preserve valuable instructions that would have been otherwise lost. All tantric systems place utmost importance on the uninterrupted transmission of tantric texts, teachings, instructions and practices from a person to person. Only the Tantras that are accepted as the genuine word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*) are recorded in the Tibetan Buddhist

Canon; they are claimed to be taught by the Buddha and transmitted uninterruptedly from a teacher to teacher until the present-day master. In Tibet, the *Anuttarayoga* (the Highest Yoga) Tantras are further divided into the Father Tantras, where the *Guhyasamāja*, otherwise classified as *Yogottara* (the Higher Yoga) Tantra, is placed together with the *Yamāntaka* Tantra, the Mother Tantras, also called *Yoginī Tantras* that include the *Hevajra* and *Cakrasaṃvara* Tantras, and non-dual Tantras, such as the *Kālacakra*.

Going back to the *homa* rituals, the *Anuttarayoga* Tantras employ the same *homas* as the earlier tantras. The *Hevajra Tantra* mentions rites of propitiation, bestowing prosperity, subduing and slaying, and recommends the use of sesame oil for the peaceful rites, curds for the enriching ones, thorns for causing hatred and slaying, and blue lotus flowers for subduing and summoning. The *Śrī-mahāsaṃvarodaya-tantrarāja*, one of the texts belonging to the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* literary cycle, contains descriptions of pacifying rites, rites performed for the purposes of increasing welfare, subduing, and attracting and killing the enemy. This text also elaborates more extensively on fierce rituals, such as expelling and exorcising, causing hostility, paralyzing, bewildering and burning with fever. The procedures, shapes of fire-pits, colors suitable for particular kinds of actions, types of firewood, types of offerings to *Agni* and deities of the *maṇḍalas*, and all the other characteristics of these rituals are identical with those of the previously mentioned Tantra categories. The round hearth, the color white and a tranquil mind are used for the *śāntika* (pacifying) rituals; square hearth, the color yellow and a contended mind for the *pauśtika* (welfare increasing) rituals; triangular hearth, the color red and a passionate mind for the *vaśīkaraṇa* (subduing) rituals; and triangular or crescent hearths, the color black and a wrathful mind for the *abhicārika* (hostility causing

and killing) rituals. A hostile and fierce mind is recommended for the expelling and exorcising rituals. This *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* text also explains observances of good and bad omens of the fire based on its color, smell, noise and shape of flames, and reveals the significance of individual offering substances and results obtained through them in the following way:

> Clarified butter brings about every (kind of) prosperity; fuel increases splendour; firewood increases heroism; *kuśa*-grass protects everything. White mustard pacifies (calamities); grains of rice are considered to increase welfare. Sesamum seed is known to destroy evil; corn brings grain and wealth. Beans produce great power; barley causes the velocity of the wind. *Durvā*-grass increases the duration of life; wheat removes sickness. Honey and milk bring about *prajñā*-wisdom; coagulated milk and boiled rice grant all kinds of happinesses. Fire makes the desired objects fulfilled; one's own guardian-deity grants liberation. Other things are known to effect the rites of pacifying and so on according to the (nature of) the rite. The *pātri*-ladle is *prajñā*-wisdom; the *sruva*-ladle is the means of (*upāya*); the union of them is the practice of non-duality. Clarified butter poured from them is considered to be *amṛta* of the great wisdom; with it (the practiser) should satisfy *Agni*, whose essence is the whole world. (Tsuda 313)

While other tantras focus more on descriptions of the peaceful types of rituals, the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra's* root text (*mulātantra*) entitled *Śrīherukābhidhāna*, its full title being *Śrīcakrasaṃvara-nāma-mahāyoginī-tantra-rāja,* gives us a glimpse into the fierce practices. It states:

> Next, I will explain the ritual procedure of the fire sacrifice which accomplishes dominion, through mere knowledge of which there is a rapid engagement of power. Should one mix beef with liquor and immolate it with one's left hand, even the Buddha will be subjugated. What need is there to mention petty humans? The triple world will be subjugated [through a fire sacrifice] with saliva, tooth picks, and thus also that which delight's one's body, and liquor, along with [the victim's] name. [The victim] will be summoned immediately with uterine blood, moistened food which has been eaten, along with human hair. Should the wise one employ that which is regurgitated from his own body along with his own hair and Nimba wood,[16] [the victim] will be cleaved in an instant. Should

16. *Azadirachta Indica.*

> the well equipoised one immolate mustard oil with crows' wings and [the victim's] name in a *datura*[17] fire, he will be immediately expelled or killed. // If the mantrin always repeat [the mantra], while awake, asleep, or arising, eating, or engaging in sexual intercourse, there will be no fixed limit [to his lifespan]. Should one offer one hundred oblations with jackal flesh, after three months the poverty of one's clan will be destroyed. Should the adept offer great flesh[18] together with liquor up to one hundred and eight times over three watches [of the night], all of the ground over which he ranges for six months will be subdued. Have no doubt that the satisfied dakini will give him a kingdom. // Should one visualize all deities, and make oblations over two watches, then one will attain flight with one's very own body. Should one make oblations, internally and externally, with jackal meat and liquor, then engagement with the powers will quickly be at hand. One who has repeated the mantra at night will overthrow countries. Doing thus every day, one will become a king. There is nothing whatsoever in the triple world more excellent than this. The great yogin dies as he wishes, and plays, assuming various forms. // If one immolates a hundred thousand [times] with wood-apple, palasa,[19] and udumbara wood, one will quickly become a lord of great wealth. Mixing beef with liquor, it should be immolated by one who desires to be a king. Encountering the lady of yogins, who is deprived of a name? [All desired things] are easily obtained by means of the jackal immolation. Should one immolate jackal [flesh], one will quickly become equal to a benefactor. Even he who lacks purity in the practice of the observances will attain power through this instruction. // [For] abundant life, binding the mouth with wax gourd,[20] mung bean, gram, hemp, beeswax, Indian mustard, and leaves of a household tamala tree,[21] one will become a yogin who does what he pleases and stays anywhere whatsoever. (370 – 374)

These kinds of rituals contain practices that are far from the sentiment expressed in the *Pāli* Canon. It seems that tantric practitioners have them at their disposal and could potentially apply them as skillful means (*upāya*) in order to control malevolent forces that could cause harm or create obstacles to a tantric ritual or tantric practice. However, the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist path observes a strict set of rules. Leaving aside the ordained monks and nuns who have to keep even more elaborate sets of monastic vows, a

17. Thorn-apple plant wood.
18. *Mahāmāṃsa* (human flash).
19. *Butea frondosa.*
20. *Beninkasa cerifera.*
21. *Xanthochymus pictorius.*

lay person, before he/she can embark on the tantric path, has to take the *bodhisattva* as well as the tantric vows. Taking the *bodhisattva* vows, one is required to honor the *prātimokṣa* vows, which means to refrain from killing, stealing, false speech, sexual misconduct and the use of intoxicants. In addition to these, the *bodhisattva* vows require followers to strive after the enlightenment not just for oneself, but for the sake of all sentient beings. The *Vajrayāna* honors both, the *prātimokṣa* and *bodhisattva* vows, and adds to them its own set of vows that include not transgressing the rules laid down by the Buddha, not abandoning love for sentient beings, not disparaging women etc. Therefore, even if rites of such an extreme nature would be exercised, the practitioners could not violate the Buddhist precepts (*samayas*), and their performance would have to be motivated by compassion for all sentient beings and a desire to benefit them. While the *Theravāda* tradition requires renunciation of unwholesome actions, the *Mahāyāna* tradition teaches that the motivation behind the action supersedes the nature of the action itself. The *Vajrayāna* tradition calls itself the path of transformation; it does not renounce anything and allows both, the wholesome and unwholesome actions, to be brought into the path and subsequently transformed into wisdom. Allowing for an expression of sexuality in the visualized form, rather than repressing it altogether, may actually be of benefit in the monastic setting. However, because of the secrecy surrounding tantric practices, the extent to which the sexual *yogas* and rituals involving violent means have been put to practice in Buddhist institutions remains an enigma.

All of the rituals that are featured in the Tantras appear in their more numerous variations throughout Vedic literature. The hearths, woods, offering substances, and colors associated with particular kinds of actions remain the same – round hearth and

white colors for the *śāntika,* square hearth and yellow colors for the *pauśtika,* triangular hearth and red colors for the *vaśīkaraṇa*, triangular or semicircular hearths and red/black or smoky colors for *abhicārika*. Local shamans, sorcerers, priests, *gurus*, *ācāryas* and *yogins* have, at all times, performed these *homas* for rulers, communities, and individuals in order to avert dangers, eliminate enemies, counteract witchcraft, cure illnesses and demon possessions, subjugate supernatural beings, obtain wealth, long life and heavenly status, win love of a woman, secure domestic happiness, healthy progeny and victory in battles etc. All of these rituals clearly have roots in India's Vedic past and in ancient Indian magic, and ritual experts did not shy away from using them as long as they were believed to produce desired results. The minute details of tantric *homa* rituals do not typically appear in the texts of the root tantras (*mūlatantras*). They can either be learned directly from a teacher or found in the ritual manuals and commentaries; tantric rituals are also taught in Buddhist monastic tantric colleges in India and Tibet. Nowadays, the peaceful version of the Buddhist tantric *homa* is typically performed for the purposes of purification, expiation of negative deeds, and compensation for errors committed while undertaking retreats and at various special occasions.

Another type of the fire worship that illustrates the fusion of the ancient Vedic and medieval tantric ritual features can be found in Nepal; it was documented and analyzed by M. Witzel. The ritual involves a contemporary daily *agnihotra* taking place in a temple that serves the local community in *Patan*, the city on the other side of the *Bāgmati* river, south of the city of *Kathmandu.* The altars inside of this temple (*Agniśālā*) are dedicated to the fire god *Agni.* The fire altars and deities inside of the *Agniśālā*, together with gods in its surrounding courtyard, combine elements that exemplify

traditions "both ancient and medieval, and both local and supraregional" (Witzel, *Meaningful Ritual* 785). The three traditional Vedic *agnihotra* fires – the square *āhavanīya* in the east, round *gārhapatya* in the west, and semi-circular *dakṣiṇāgni* in the middle – are present, but with paintings of the post-Vedic gods *Brahmā, Viṣṇu* and *Śiva/Rudra* correspondingly, superimposed on them. In addition, there are three more fire altars inside, along the eastern side of the temple, dedicated to the deities *Sūrya, Kumāra* and *Maṇināga* that do not exist in the traditional Vedic setting. Next to the *Viṣṇukuṇḍa,* the *āhavanīya* fire with a picture of *Viṣṇu* on it, stands a small figure of a deity *Mitrāvaruṇa*. The Nepalese gods *Bhairava, Kumāra, Gaṇeśa, Viśvakarmā, Siddhilakśmī* and *Nāga* are situated outside in the courtyard together with the *Varuṇa* tree. Thus this temple encompasses several layers of history and time; it combines elements of the c. 3000 years old Vedic *agnihotra* ritual, *Purānic homa* rituals, and newer medieval tantric as well as the local *Newār* traditions. M. Witzel explains:

> Summing up this brief comparison of the old and medieval ritual it can be stated:
> - The outward form of the Vedic Agnihotra has been retained (3/5 fires, preserving and rekindling fire, etc.).
> - A new (Tantristic) frame has been created to include the Vedic actions (albeit in a changed order and simplified).
> - This framework also includes many post-Vedic, and notably, Tantric additions: worship of new deities as found in medieval Hinduism as well as some very special deities and entities encountered only here, at the Patan Agnihotra, such as Mitrāvaruṇa, Maṇināga or the Varuṇa tree.
>
> In short, the elements of the great Brahmaṇical (and Vedic) tradition of Northern India are clearly in evidence, but there are quite a number of later and notably local developments as well. (785)

Regarding the historical development of the *Patan agnihotra,* M. Witzel points out that it had originally started as a popular ritual and underwent several changes over the course of time. He states:

> While the early Tantric rituals were performed by any initiated adept for himself or his group, the Patan Agnihotra is a typical Brahmanical ritual with Mantras in (Vedic) Sanskrit, and with an elaborate ritualistic system which only learned priests can understand. *The wheel has turned again,* and, as in so many cases, whatever has originated as a 'reformed' or popular ritual, was sooner or later taken over by the Brahmins and inserted into their framework of a highly specialized, difficult and Sanskritized ritual which is open only to members of the higher castes andwhich can only be performed by the priests themselves. (788 –789)

Eventually, when the political situation changed, the *Patan* people were allowed to take part in the ritual again, which lead to what M. Witzel identifies as the "trend to regionalization, one may even say, to communalism or tribalism . . . " (789) of this ritual. As to the purpose and antiquity of the *agnihotra* itself, he adds further:

> The original intentions of the priests who conceived the Agnihotra, as it is alluded to in the Ṛgveda and as it must have existed even much earlier, was apparently that of a sun charm. In another words, it was a rite that helped the sun through one of its critical points in "turning." As is well known, the sun is thought to disappear in the west below the earth in the evening, to travel underground eastwards, and to re-appear next morning from its underground passage at the eastern horizon; this is similar to Old Egyptian myth, where the sun has to fight 'the dragon of the deep' each night. Or, the sun is believed to have two sides, a dark and bright one; at night, the sun travels eastwards with its dark side turned downwards, towards the earth; in the morning, it reverses its course, now with its bright, shining side turned downwards. In both concepts of the nocturnal path of the sun danger looms up, either of no return, or of not turning back towards the earth, and therewith prospect of continuous darkness, which has to be warded off, for example by performing Agnihotra-like rites. (795)

The fire that is continuously burning in the *Patan Agniśālā* fulfills, in the words of M. Witzel, the "protective role . . . within a complicated *maṇḍala* of Tantric gods surrounding Agniśālā . . . [and] provides protection against the intrusion of all kinds of demons, unregulated powers that threatens persons and society, and the state, as well as a similar state of mind of the individual" (796).

Thus *homa*, having roots in prehistoric fire worship, became an integral part of

great Vedic *śrauta* rituals as well as Vedic rituals centered around domestic fire. As the manner of religious worship kept shifting – from Vedism to Brahmanism, from Brahmanism to Hinduism and Buddhism, and to Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism – *homa* has retained its importance and basic forms and maintained them throughout the antiquity and the medieval period to the present day. While deities, mantras, *maṇḍalas,* religious doctrines, and geographical locations may vary, the Vedic fire-god *Agni* still continues to fulfill his purificatory, expiatory, protective, sacrificial and mystic role. With the spread of Buddhism out of India, the Buddhist *homa* took hold throughout the countries of Central, East and South East Asia and, quite recently, it has also found its way to Russia, Europe and the Americas, where the Buddhist Tantras are becoming integrated into contemporary religious cultures.

# Chapter VII

## *Inner Homas*

Inner *homas* refer to internal practices involving inner fire or inner heat and the subtle anatomy. While the distant origins of such practices can be traced all the way to the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas,* and *Upaniṣads*, the *yogic* methods that make use of the energy of the inner fire reached their full expression in the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. Intriguingly, the *Anuttarayoga* Tantras that embrace the most controversial behaviors and fiercest iconographies are also the ones that contain the most advanced *yogic* practices. While the so-called outer Tantras – *kriyā, caryā* and *yoga* – highlight external actions and disciplines, the inner Tantras – the *Anuttarayoga* Tantras – focus on internal practices that manipulate the subtle anatomy systems and energies. The *Kriyā* Tantras (Action Tantras) place importance on external ritual activities, such as cleanliness, purification, and vegetarianism; the *Caryā* Tantras (Performance Tantras) place equal weight on external activities and internal meditative practices; and, finally, the *Yoga* Tantras emphasize internal practices over the external ones. When appropriate initiations (*dīkṣā)* and empowerments (*abhiṣeka*) are received from a qualified tantric master, a practitioner is allowed to visualize himself/herself as a tutelary deity, which he/she has been initiated into, recite related *mantras* and perform related *mudrās.* At first, a deity is visualized on the outside, and eventually merges with the practitioner. The *Anuttarayoga* Tantras*,* however, involve a self-generation method of visualizing a deity – rather than creating a deity outside of oneself first, one instantly arises in its form. In addition, each tantra in

the *Anuttarayoga* category holds its own system of profound inner meditations on the subtle body, also referred to as the *vajra*[22] body. A tantric *yogin*/*yoginī* employs meditative visualizations, physical postures (*āsanas*), fetters (*bandhas*), and breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*) to manipulate the subtle vital energy (*prāṇa*) flowing through the subtle energy channels (*nāḍīs*) in order to purify and eventually quiet all mental activities in an effort to attain a state beyond thoughts. Achieving such a state is believed to put a stop to creating further *karma* and to lead beyond birth and death to a blissful state of omniscience and peace.

Each of the *Anuttarayoga* Tantras claims to provide a complete roadmap all the way to enlightenment. An initiation (*abhiṣeka*) into a deity's abode (*maṇḍala*) by a qualified tantric master or *guru* is required in order to have permission to invoke a deity and to practice associated rituals. An initiate is sworn to secrecy, promising not to reveal any aspects of secret teachings to the uninitiated. He/she is also required to sustain unwavering devotion to his/her *guru* and uphold daily *sādhana* practice. Traditionally, the preliminaries would involve overcoming many hardships in a search of a *guru*. The disciple was typically turned away three times and asked to perform arduous tasks in order to demonstrate his abilities and sincerity of his commitment. Only after overcoming all the obstacles, which could take several years, a *guru* would agree to transmit initiations and practices of his tantric lineages to a worthy disciple. Nowadays, the preliminary practices involve a set number of recitations accompanied by meditative visualizations. A beginner has to recite and perform one hundred thousand each of the following: refuge prayers, thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) generations, *Vajrasattva mantras*, *guru* devotion practices, *maṇḍala* offerings, and one hundred

22. Indestructible, adamantine.

thousand prostrations. Only after completing these requirements, which are intended for a novice to accumulate wisdom and merit, and to prepare him/her for the further stages of the tantric path, a practitioner is initiated into a deity practice and starts practicing a *sādhana* of the generation stage. During this stage a practitioner self-generates him/herself into a deity through meditative visualizations. A typical tantric *sādhana* begins with taking a refuge in the *guru,* Buddha, *Dharma,* and S*aṅgha,* a promise of practicing the profound *yogas* for the benefit of all sentient beings, the purificatory *Vajrasattva* practice, and pledges of devotion to a *guru.* Then a practitioner meditates on the dissolution of all appearances into emptiness; out of the state of emptiness, starting with seed syllables (*bīja*) first, he/she arises in the imagined form of a deity together with the deity's *maṇḍala* and a circle of attendant deities, and then proceeds to perform associated practices accompanied by *mantra* recitation and hand gestures (*mudrās*). Countless multitudes of visualized *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* together with their retinues as well as wisdom beings (*jñānasattvas*) are invited to leave their pure abodes and merge into a practitioner (*samayasattva*)[23] during this stage of a practice session; they are all requested to depart before the session ends. When the generation stage is sufficiently mastered and a practitioner is able to hold the visualizations for some time, he/she can proceed to the practices of the completion stage. During the completion stage he/she employs yogic practices and uses the energies of the subtle body to bring about the most subtle awareness. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, the sublime meditative techniques of the completion stage are typically transmitted and explained orally by a *guru* directly to a disciple. They can then be inserted into the overall *sādhana* during the meditation beyond thought, when even visualized images dissolve into emptiness. At the

23. A pledge being.

conclusion of a practice session, a practitioner reappears again as a visualized deity and goes on with his/her daily activities maintaining the awareness of a deity's form. Thus a tantric practitioner (*sādhaka*) is required to maintain the pure appearance and pride of a deity at all times, cultivate detachment from worldly concerns and observe his/her inner emotional and mental processes in order to refine and purify them.

The advanced practices of the completion stage consist of meditations on the subtle anatomy. According to the tantric philosophy, every sentient being possesses a very subtle level of consciousness that is covered by mental obscurations and therefore it rarely manifests. The completion stage facilitates the manifestation of this very subtle level of mind that is referred to as the 'mind of clear light (*prabhāsvara*).' The tantric subtle body consists of the channels (*nāḍīs*), winds (*prāṇas*) and drops (*bindus*). There are seventy-two thousand channels that carry *prāṇas* (vital energies) within a human body. They are shaped and run throughout the body like veins, but they are not visible to human eyes; even if we would cut the body up we would not find them. They are also said to be pliable rather than solid, filled with pulsating energy and having an appearance of light. The left, right and central channels are the three principal channels. The left and right channels are located on the left and right sides of the body along the spine; the central channel runs in the center of the body between the left and right channels. The upper tips of all three are located between the eyebrows, the lower tips end at the female organ (*bhaga*) or male organ (*liṅgaṃ*) and at the tip of the anus. The three channels are known by various names; *piṅgala*, *rasanā, āli* or the sun channel are common names for the right channel, *iḍā, lalanā, kāli* or the moon channel for the left one; *avadhuti* or *suṣumṇā* are usual names that denote the central channel. The right channel has female

qualities and the nature of wisdom (*prajñā*), the left one has male qualities and the nature of skillful means (*upāya*); the *avadhuti* is beyond the subject and object and has the nature of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). The left and right channels intertwine themselves around the central channel and form a knot (*granthi*) at each of the subtle energy centers (*cakras*). Each tantric system has developed its own description of the *cakras* with a different number of channels branching out of them; these channels then separate further into thousands of subtle channels running throughout the whole body. The way *nāḍīs* emerge from a *cakra* is likened to the spokes of a wheel or to the lotus petals. The Hindu Tantras generally mention seven principal *cakras*: *mūlādhāra* at the base of the spine with four vein petals, *svādhiṣṭhāna* in the lower abdomen with six vein petals, *maṇipūra* at the navel with ten vein petals, *anāhata* at the heart with twelve vein petals, *viśuddha* at the base of the throat with sixteen vein petals, *ājñā* at the space between the eyes with two vein petals, and *sahasrāra* at the crown of the head with thousand vein petals. *Trika Śaivism* utilizes only six main *cakras* and gives slightly different names to some of them: *mūlādhāra* at the base of a spine, *nābhicakra* at the navel region, *hṛdayacakra* at the heart center, *kaṇṭha cakra* at the back of a throat, and *bhrūmadhya cakra* between the eyebrows. This system adds an additional *cakra* twelve finger's breadth above the slight indent at the top of the skull (*brahmarandhra*) referred to as the cosmic *dvādaśānta* or *sahasrāra* that is known only to the *yogins/yoginīs* who realize and identify with the all-pervading *Śiva.* The Buddhist *Kālacakra Tantra* also acknowledges six *cakras,* but the numbers of channel petals emerging out of them differ from those of the Hindu Tantras. This system locates the *cakras* at the secret place with thirty-two channel petals, at the navel area with sixty-four channel petals, at the heart with eight channel petals, at the

throat with thirty-two channel petals, at the forehead with sixteen channel petals, and at the crown with four channel petals. The *Hevajra Tantra* emphasizes only five *cakras* and, according to this system, the crown *cakra*, called the *mahāsukha cakra* (the wheel of great bliss), has thirty-two channel petals and the *cakra* at the throat has sixteen channel petals. Both, Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, associate each of the *nāḍīs* leading out of the *cakras* with a variety of colors and deities. At its junction with a *cakra*, each *nāḍī* is shaped as a seed syllable (*bīja*) of a particular deity; the shapes of the seed syllables are said to be formed by actual sounds. Even though discrepancies in descriptions of subtle bodies among different tantric systems can be noted, the underlying concept and functions of the *cakras, nāḍīs* and *prāṇas* remain the same.

The *prāṇas* (*prāṇāḥ*), also referred to as winds or airs, are typically divided into five main and five secondary types, and their representation may also slightly differ with each individual system. The *prāṇa* is considered to be the energy that is subtler than atoms and that pervades the whole universe. It manifests as gravity, magnetism, electricity, thunders, earthquakes, storms and hurricanes in the nature. It is also present in minerals, plants, animals and humans. The main *prāṇas* that are active in the human body are described as: the in-breath (*prāṇa*), also called the life-sustaining wind, the out-breath (*apāna*) or the downwardly expelling wind, up-breath (*udāna*) or the upwardly moving wind, mid-breath (*samāna*) or the coexisting wind, and through-breath (*vyāna*), also called the pervading wind. Each of these *prāṇas* fulfills a specific function within the body. For example, the life-sustaining wind moves through the right, left, and central channels and controls the functions of eyes, ears, nose and throat; the downward moving wind, located between the navel and the base of a spine, is responsible for excretion and

reproduction; the upward moving wind, moves along the spine, causes nutrition to rise up, and controls spiritual evolution; the coexisting wind facilitates digestion and elimination; the pervading wind circulates throughout the entire body and controls the basic voluntary and involuntary functions of the muscles and joints, etc. The five secondary *prāṇas* (*upa prāṇas*) are generally listed as: *nāga* (serpent) that causes vomiting, hiccups and belching, *kūrma* (tortoise) that controls the eyelids, *kṛkara* (*kṛ* maker) that causes sneezing, hunger and thirst, *devadatta* (god given) that effects yawning and sleep, and *dhanaṃjaya* (conqueror of wealth) that causes disintegration of body at death.

The red and white drops (*bindus*) can be found in every part of the body; they begin to form at the conception and conceal within them the very subtle mind and very subtle wind. According to the Buddhist Tantras, the white drop, obtained from a father, is primarily situated in the *mahāsukha cakra* at the crown of the head, and the red drop, obtained from a mother, predominates in the *cakras* of the navel and the secret place. The indestructible drop that enters the body at the time of a conception and leaves the body at the time of death resides at the heart. These drops carry male and female energies and contain *karmic* imprints; they are said to create various states of ordinary beings, such as waking states, dream states, states of deep sleep, bliss of orgasm states, etc. When purified by *yogic* meditative practices, these drops contain a potential to give rise to the four enlightened bodies (*kāyas*) of a *buddha* – the *nirmāṇakāya* (body of magical appearance), *sambhogakāya* (body of enjoyment), *dharmakāya* (body of realization), and *svābhāvikakāya*, the pure *buddha* form that is combination of all the three. When that is accomplished, a practitioner acquires ability to stop ordinary rebirths and emanate,

motivated by a wish to help countless sentient beings, *buddha* bodies at will.

The meditative concentrations and familiarization with the *vajra* body and its channels, winds and drops restrain and refine movements of the red and white elements throughout the body. The capacities of these drops to produce faults that arise in ordinary beings are being constantly purified through the generation and completion practices. The *prāṇas* that serve as a support of consciousness are gradually withdrawn from their ordinary activities, made to enter the central channel (*avadhuti*) and eventually dissolve into the indestructible drop at the heart, at which point a practitioner experiences the clear light. It is claimed that, through the various meditation techniques of the completion stage, a practitioner is able to purify his/her present life, the intermediate state between death and rebirth (*bardo*) and the future rebirth as well. The manifestation of the clear light serves as a base for putting an end to cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*), obtainment of the four bodies (*kāyas*) of a *buddha,* and the final enlightenment. In the Buddhist tantric terminology, the enlightenment itself is defined as the realization of the inseparability of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and bliss (*mahāsukha*).

Purification practices are important and indispensable components of the Tantras. Both tantric systems, the Hindu as well as the Buddhist one, contain methods that intend to purify elements that form our physical and mental aggregates and transform them into pure forms of deities. A tantric practitioner actually visualizes deities located within his/her own body, and the microcosmos of the body is made to correspond to the macrocosmos of the whole universe. Such correspondences are described for example in the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā,* one of the *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*, a text belonging to the *Vaiṣṇava* tantric tradition. G. Flood summarizes the process of such visualization in the following

way:

> We have here a constructed vision of the body in which the hierarchical universe pervades the practitioner's body from the genitals to the heart. First, the power of earth, the *ādhāra-śakti,* is mapped on to the penis; Rastelli notes that this power corresponds to the famous goddess Kuṇḍalinī, although she is not explicitly mentioned in the *Jayākhya.* Above her is the 'fire of time' (*kālāgni*), then the Tortoise (*kūrma*) bearing the insignia of Viṣṇu, the discus and club. Above him is the cosmic snake Ananta, upon which Viṣṇu is represented as lying, in traditional mythology; above him is the earth goddess and above her at the level of the navel is the ocean of milk. Out from this arises a white lotus which gives rise to sixteen supports of the throne. These comprise the eight dispositions (*bhāva*) of the *buddhi*, the four sacred scriptures or Vedas and the four ages of the world (*yugas*). They support a white lotus, upon which are the sun, moon, and fire. Above these, although not explicitly named in this sequence in the *Jayākhya*, is the 'throne of being' (*bhāvāsana*), upon which rests the vehicle of Viṣṇu, the great mythological bird Gāruḍa, and the boar incarnation Varāha. Viṣṇu is invoked in due course upon his mount. Each of these visions is in turn identified with one of the hierarchical categories of *tattvas* of the Sāṇkhya system, with the addition of two more *tattvas,* time (*kāla*) and lordship (*īśvaratva*), making the total of twenty-seven. (116-117)

The Buddhist Tantras apply the same transformational techniques utilizing their own cosmology and their own set of deities. The following passage from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* illustrates such a process of visualization within the Buddhist tantric system, which is performed during the generation (*utpattikrama*) stage of tantric practice session:

> The way to generate a complete body mandala is as follows: having fully generated ourselves into the principal deity, we then visualize white Vairochana at the crown, red Amitabha at the throat, blue Akshobhya is seen as inseparably one with the principal deity, yellow Ratnasambhava at the navel and green Amoghasiddhi at the groin. All of them arise from the purified factors of our physical and mental aggregates. Each of them has three faces and six arms. / Subsequently, we visualize the four consorts arising from the purified factors of our four elements at the various parts of our body as follows: green Tara at the crown embracing Vairochana, red Pandaravasini at the throat embracing Amitabha, blue Mamaki at the heart and the white Lochana at the navel embracing Ratnasambhava. Each of them also has three faces and six arms. / And then, we visualize at our two eyes white Kshitigarbhas, at the ears yellow Vajrapanis, at the nose yellow Akashagharba, at the tongue red

> Lokeshvara, at the heart red Manjushri, at the tip of the Vajra organ green Sarvanirvana-viskambini. If we can, visualize three hundred and sixty green Samantabhadras at the three hundred and sixty joints of our body or else just one green Samantabhadra at the chest. Then, visualize white Maitreya on the crown of our head but right in front of Vairochana embracing Tara. / Likewise, visualize at the eyes white Rupavajras embracing Kshitigarbhas, at the ears yellow Shabdavajras embracing Vajrapanis, at the nose red Gandhavajra embracing Khagharba, at the tongue green Rasavajra embracing Lokeshavara and at the vajra organ blue Sparshavajra embracing Sarvanirvana-viskambini. So far up to this point we have visualized the five Dhyana Buddhas, four consorts, eight Bodhisattvas and five Vajra females. / Subsequently, visualize black Yamantakrit at the base of the right thumb, white Aparajita/Prajnantakrit at the base of the left thumb, red Hayagriva at the mouth, blue Vignantakrit at the tip of the vajra organ, black Achala at the joint of the right shoulder, blue Takiraja at the joint of the left shoulder, blue Niladanda at the right knee, black Mahakala at the left knee, blue Ushnishchakravartin behind Vairochana on the crown of our head and black Sumbharajas at the two soles of our feet. All the deities of Guhysamaja have three faces and six arms.
>
> (*Path and Grounds of Guhyasamaja* 26-27)

While the *yogas* of the generation stage (*utpattikrama*) purify the mental aggregates and the elements of the physical body, the *yogas* of the completions stage (*niṣpannakrama*) purify the subtle mind and the subtle body. The *yoga* of inner fire, also referred to as *caṇḍālī* in Sanskrit and *tummo* (*gtum mo*)[24] in Tibetan, belongs among the advanced tantric practices of the completion stage. The *prāṇas* are made to enter the center channel (*avadhuti*) and retained there while the psychic heat is being generated in the navel *cakra.* As the inner fire blazes upward through the central channel it burns all impurities, and when it reaches the *mahāsukha cakra* at the crown of the head, it causes the white *bodhicitta* drop, the male element that resides there, to melt, drip down and collect at the bottom of the central channel. During the repetition of this process, gross elements of the body are burned up in the inner psychic fire and, as they eventually vanish, a practitioner acquires insight into emptiness accompanied by the experience of

24. The fierce goddess.

bliss produced by the downward flow of the molten *bodhicitta.*

The Hindu tantric systems focus attention on the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* (she who is coiled), the so-called serpent power that is envisioned to lie dormant at the root (*mūlādhāra*) *cakra*. *Kuṇḍalinī* represents a primordial energy within a human body that contains a great dynamic potential. Through the techniques of the *prāṇāyāma,* the *prāṇas* are withdrawn from the left and right channels and brought into the central channel where they "heat up" and awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*. Once awakened, the *kuṇḍalinī* travels up the *suṣumṇā*, piercing the knots at each of the *cakras* until it reaches the *sahasrāra cakra* at the crown. As the *kuṇḍalinī* travels upwards along the *suṣumṇā*, it dissolves and purifies five elements, associated with each *cakra* – earth (*mūlādhāra*), water (*svādhiṣṭhāna*), fire (*maṇipūra*), air (*anāhata*) and ether (*viśuddha*). When it reaches the *sahasrāra cakra* at the crown, it temporarily dissolves the ordinary mind (*manas*), and a *yogin/yoginī* rests in a blissful awareness of identity with the transcendental self.

In the *Śaiva* and *Śakta* Tantras, *kuṇḍalinī* represents a latent primordial energy personified as goddess *Śakti*. When it awakens, it is likened to a powerful electrical current that shoots up the central channel and pierces through the *cakras.* When it reaches the *brahmarandhra*, goddess *Śakti* unites with god *Śiva* and a *yogin*/*yoginī* experiences the absolute freedom of the universal consciousness. This moment is also described as goddess *Śakti* reaching the top of the Mount *Meru* within the microcosm of the human body and uniting with god *Śiva*, who resides there. The union of the male and female polar opposites releases enormous potential within an individual; it is experienced as a blissful ecstasy and represents the transcendental moment and attainment of a goal for a

Hindu tantric practitioner. The *yoga* of inner fire (*caṇḍalī*), developed by the Indian *mahāsiddhas*, is a Buddhist version of the *kuṇḍalinī* yoga of the *Śaiva* and *Śakta* tantric traditions. The Buddhist Tantras liken *caṇḍalī* to a blazing fire that has an ability to completely burn away all *karmic* imprints and thus renders the practitioner's mind clear and blissful.

But even though the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras employ similar methods, each system uses a different language when it comes to describing their ultimate goals. Buddhist Tantras, based in a non-theistic philosophical view, pursue the experiential realization of the union of emptiness and bliss that can be achieved when mind enters, abides and dissolves in the central channel through the power of meditation. There, within the blissful experience of emptiness lies an enormous potential for transcending ordinary human existence and becoming an enlightened being who can manifest at will and according to the needs of the sentient beings. Meditative practices of theistic systems of the Hindu Tantras accomplish liberation (*mokṣa*) from the bonds of the cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) through the unification of their practitioners' individual selves (*ātman*) with the divine universal self (*brahman*) *via* the identification with a chosen tantric deity (*iṣṭadevatā*).

The *prāṇa* as a vital force and its identification with breath is mentioned already in the late *Brāhmaṇas* and early *Upaniṣads*. The early *upaniṣadic* thinkers placed the human body, its vital powers and functions, such as breathing, speech, sight, hearing, movement, evacuation, ejaculation etc., mental activities as well as the search for the essential core of a human being at the forefront of their intellectual investigations. In addition, they explored cosmological and metaphysical subjects and introduced many

new ideas that included the doctrine of rebirth, *karma*, *dharma* (moral law), liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) etc.; thus the early *Upaniṣads* established bases for Hindu philosophical thought. For example, the *BAU* mentions the functions of the vital energy in connection with functions of the mind (*manas*) and speech (*vāc*) stating: "Prāna, Apāna, Vyāna, Udāna, Samāna and Āna – all these are but vital force. This body is identified with these – with the organ of speech, the mind and the vital force" (213; ch. I, sec. v, stanza 3). Furthermore, an early prototype of the subtle body is also referenced in the *BAU* during a conversation between *Janaka*, the emperor of *Videha*, and the sage *Yājñavalkya*, who explains the following:

> The being who is in the right eye is named Indha. Though he is Indha, he is indirectly called Indra, for the gods have a fondness, as it were, for indirect names, and hate to call it directly. The human form that is in the left eye is his wife, Virāj (matter). The space that is within the heart is their place of union. Their food is the lump of blood (the finest essence of what we eat) in the heart. Their wrap is net-like structure in the heart. Their road for moving is the nerve that goes upward from the heart; it is like a hair split into a thousand parts. In this body there are nerves called Hitā, which are placed in the heart. Through these the essence of our food passes as it moves on. Therefore the subtle body has finer food than the gross body. (586-588; ch. IV, sec. ii, stanzas 2-3)

Indra here represents the individual self (*ātman*), his wife *Virāj* the matter (feminine principle) and heart is the place of their union. The blood in the form of a lump in the heart represents "the finest essence of what we eat" that sustains the subtle body – also referred to as the body of *Indra* here. The gross part of what we eat nourishes the gross body made up of five elements. The net-like structure references the numerous openings and networks of extremely fine nerves through which the food passes and nourishes the subtle body. The individual self (*ātman*), however, is identified with the supreme self (*brahman*) and transcends both, the gross and subtle bodies. It is described as self-

effulgent light that resides in the heart.

The third chapter of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* associated with the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* presents the important concept of the five sheaths (*pañca kośas*) of the *ātman/brahman*, which forms the base of the *Vedāntic* notion of three bodies – gross, subtle and casual. In it, *Varuṇa* responds to questions of his son *Bhṛgu* who seeks the knowledge of *brahman*. *Varuṇa* describes *brahman* as "[t]hat out of which all creatures are born, being born by which they live, (and again) having departed into which they enter" (*TU* 101). He urges *Bhṛgu* to perform *tapas* and gradually, starting with the coarsest manifestation and progressing to the subtlest, reveals to him the five layers of *brahman* identifying them as a) the physical body and food that maintains it as gross aspects of existence, b) *prāṇa*, the vital energy that energizes physical being, representing the aggregate of physical and mental existence, c) the mind (*manas*), the instrument of cognition representing the volitional and perceptual aspect of mind, d) intelligence (*vijñāna*) that controls the mind, senses and body and relates the objects of cognizance to our consciousness, and d) bliss (*ānanda*) representing the *brahman* as the ultimate reality, realization of which is experienced as bliss.

*Yogic* and ascetic practices also have a long past within the history of Indian spirituality. The hymn X:136 of the *Ṛg Veda,* describing the hermits (*munis*) and the nude longhaired ascetics (*keśins*) that are not unlike the contemporary India's holy man (*sādhus*), reveals the presence of ascetic *yogins* already in the *ṛgvedic* times, and testifies to the ancient origins of ascetic lifestyles and practices:

> The longhaired ascetic bears the fire; the longhaired ascetic bears the toxic drink; the longhaired ascetic bears the two worlds; the longhaired ascetic is everything: the heavenly light to behold! The longhaired ascetic is called the light. / The hermits have the wind as their girdle. They wear

> soiled brown garments. They go along the path of the wind, when the gods have entered them. / 'Made ecstatic due to our hermit state, we have mounted upon the winds. Only our bodies do you as mortals perceive!' / Through the air he flies, looking down upon all forms. The hermit for every god's benefaction is established as a friend. (Maurer 316)

The early ascetics devoted their lives to the quest for the 'inner light' and knowledge of *brahman* – the Absolute. They adhered to religious disciplines and lived away from the society in the wilderness. They maintained vows of celibacy and silence, performed austerities, practiced meditation and some type of *yoga*. In efforts to transcend the mortal body and experience its immortal aspect directly, the *yogins* and ascetics would use their minds and bodies for experimentation with a great variety of *yogic* techniques, some of which can be quite extreme and dangerous. The subtle body hinted at in the *Upaniṣads* became a focal point of intense *yogic* investigation, which eventually resulted in the development of sophisticated systems of subtle anatomy and its related practices. The depictions of the energy centers and energy currents of the subtle anatomy are said to be based on the actual perceptions of them by advanced *yogins*.

The fusion of the *upaniṣadic* ideas and *yogic* techniques is apparent in the following passage from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the later date text belonging to the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*:

> When he keeps his body straight, with three sections erect, and draws the senses together with the mind into his heart, a wise man shall cross all the frightful rivers with the boat consisting of that formulation (*brahman*). / Compressing his breaths in here and curbing his movements, a man should exhale through when his breath is exhausted. A wise man should keep his mind vigilantly under control, just as he would that wagon yoked to unruly horses. / Level and clean; free of gravel, fire, and sand; near noiseless running waters and the like; pleasing to the mind but not offensive to the eye; provided with a cave or a nook sheltered from the wind – in such a spot should one engage in yogic practice. / Mist, smoke, sun, wind, fire, fireflies, lightening, crystal, moon – these are apparitions that, within yogic practice, precede and pave the way to the full manifestation in

> *brahman*. / When earth, water, fire, air, and ether have arisen together, and the body made up of these five becomes equipped with the attribute of yoga, that man, obtaining a body tempered by the fire of yoga, will no longer experience sickness, old age, or suffering. / Lightness, health, the absence of greed, a bright complexion, a pleasant voice, a sweet smell, and very little feces and urine – that, they say, is the first working of yogic practice. / Just as a disk smeared with clay, once it is cleaned well, shines brightly, so also an embodied person, once he has perceived the true nature of the self, becomes solitary, his goal attained and free from sorrow. / When, by means of the true nature of the self, which resembles a lamp, a man practicing yogic restraint sees here the true nature of *brahman*, he is freed from all fetters, because he has known God, unborn, unchanging, and unsullied by all objects. (Olivelle 419)

The synthesis of philosophical inquiries of the *upaniṣadic* thinkers with the experiential practices of the ancient ascetic *yogins* reached its maturity in the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. According to Tantric Hinduism, the true reality within is *brahman* – the abstract absolute principle approached through worship of personal deities, such as *Śiva, Viṣṇu* or *Śakti.* Buddhism, being an anthropocentric religion, refuses to depend on divine powers, and therefore Tantric Buddhism employs a rational approach in its quest for the realization of the true nature of reality and achievement of final liberation. Buddhist tutelary deities are not theistic deities, but vehicles that serve to transcend an ordinary perception into a pure perception. The ultimate goal is realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) – a state representing the direct insight into the reality as it is; the experience of which is not colored by any preconceived ideas. However, even though the ways each of the two systems refers to ultimate reality differ, both, the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras follow up on and develop ideas that were already hinted at in earlier Vedic literature, such as the correspondences between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of human body, male female polarities within human body, the body's divinization, and efforts towards the direct experience of absolute reality.

Another important feature of Indian religious expression is the interiorization of external rituals and practices. The tendency to identify *prāṇas* with the sacrificial fires is documented already in the *Brāhmaṇas.* For example, a *brahman* householder establishes the three sacred fires in his house through the *agnyādhana* ritual. During the *agnyādhana,* the immortal life-breaths are placed in him and the sacred fires become regarded as his *prāṇas* (breaths). From that moment on, a householder is responsible for maintaining the fires by performing *agnihotra* every morning and every evening. The three sacred fires remain connected to his *prāṇas* (vital breaths) throughout his entire life; when he passes away and his body is burned at the funeral pyre, he becomes immortal through his *prāṇas*. Therefore through the daily performance of the *agnihotra* ritual, its performer, an *agnihotrin,* is guaranteed immortality. This is explained in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I, verses 1-2:

> Now when the mind passes away, when the breath, sight, hearing, then it enters these fires. Thereupon they throw after (these life-breaths) also this body of his in these fires (reciting) "From him thou wert born, he should be born out of thee, *svāhā.*" He (arises) from this (fire) and becomes immortal in the form of an oblation, mind, breath, sight, hearing, speech, *ṛc, yajus, sāman, brahman* and immortal body here (i.e. in the agnyādhana and agnihotra ritual). He becomes immortal who knowing thus offers agnihotra. (Bodewitz, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 20)

The identification of fires and the *agnihotrin's prāṇas* is also mentioned several times in the *ŚB* in relation to the ceremony of placing the sacred fires on the householder's fireplace (*agnyādheya*), where it states, "that (fire) is the (sacrificer's) breath" (*ŚB: kānda* 2, *adhyāya* 1, *brāhmaṇa* 4, line 20). In circumstances when an *agnihotrin* is not able to perform the *agnihotra*, for example when he is travelling, he can perform it mentally, which is then considered a valid substitute for the actual ritual. When an *agnihotrin* becomes old and cannot perform his daily rituals, it is permissible that he transfers the

three sacred fires into himself and then consumes the two daily oblations, offering them to the fires within.

In some cases, which seem to concern mostly hermits, ascetics, or *saṃnyāsins* whose lifestyles do not require establishing and maintaining of the sacred fires, oblations of vital functions to the fires within replace external rituals, and breathing and eating come to be considered continuous fire sacrifices. The idea of food being the offering to the "self common to all men (*ātman vaiśvānara*)" appears already in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5:18-24*,* where the brightly shining self is represented as the self, the dazzling is the eye, the trunk is the ample, bladder is the wealth, the feet is the earth, the stomach is the sacrificial enclosure, the body hair is the sacrificial grass, the heart is the householder's fire, the mind is the southern fire, and the mouth is the offertorial fire (Olivelle 243). The offerings are made to the five *prāṇas*: satisfying the out-breath equals to satisfying the sight, sun, sky and whatever they oversee; offering to the inter-breath equals to satisfying hearing, the moon, quarters, and whatever they oversee; offering to the in-breath equals to satisfying the speech, the fire, the earth and whatever they oversee; offering to the link-breath equals to satisfying the mind, the rain, the lightening and whatever they oversee; offering to the up-breath equals to satisfying the wind, space and whatever they oversee. Satisfying all these equals to possessing children, livestock, a food supply, fame and the luster of sacred knowledge. It further states that should anyone offer the daily fire sacrifice with this knowledge, "all the bad things in him are burned up like the tip of the reed stuck into a fire" (Olivelle 243-245). Thus a person was able to obtain desired benefits by substituting external rituals with oblations of food and breaths to the self within (*ātman).*

The idea of attributing divine qualities to the human body as well as equating it with the elements of nature and universe reappears in the *Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad*, one of the later *upaniṣadic* scriptures. The *PU* describes the ritual of the *prāṇāgnihotra*, sacrifice made to the fire (*Agni*) of vital breath (*prāṇa*), and claims that one can achieve spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) by performing the sacrifice within one's body, without performing the *agnihotra* and without the knowledge of *Sāṃkhya*. One's individual self (*ātman*) is identified with the universal *brahman* that represents the divine within one's body, and offerings are made to it through the five *prāṇas* identified with five breaths-fires. The four sacrificial fires also exist within the body: the *gārhapatya* in the navel, *dakṣiṇāgni* in the heart, *āhavanīya* in the mouth, and solar seer (*ekaṛṣi*) fire in the crown. The all-atonement fire is located bellow the navel, which together with his three wives – *iḍā, piṅgala* and *suṣumṇā*, brings about procreation by the means of moon-light from the lunar disc situated in the forehead flowing down through them as semen, which is falling down into the fire-pot at the center of the navel (Deussen 649). The *PU* homologizes the whole human body with the external Vedic ritual in the following way:

> In the bodily sacrifice, unadorned by the cord of the sacrificial post, the sacrifice is the self; (his) wife is intellect. The great officiating priests are the Vedas. The ego is the Adhvaryu. The mind-stuff is the invoking priest. Prana is the assistant of the chief priest; Apana is the assistant of the Adhvaryu. Vyana is the first chanter. Udana is the loud Sama singer. Samana is the assistant of Hotir. The body is the altar. The nose is the interior of the altar. The crest is the wooden container. The foot is the chariot. The right hand is the ladle. The left hand is the container of the ghee. The ears are the two ghee offerings. The eyes are two parts of the ghee. The neck is the libation. The Tanmatras are the assistant of the Brahma Priest. The great elements are the attendants. Gunas are the supplementary offerings. The tongue is the final sacrifices. Teeth and lips are the final libation. The palate is the hymn-recitation. Memory is the Samyorvaka formula. [Memory], compassion, forbearance, non-violence are the four Ajya oblations (to Soma, etc.,). Om is the sacrificial post. Desire is the cord. Mind is the chariot. Lust is the sacrificial animal.

> Hair is the Darbha grass. The sense organs are the sacrificial vessels. The organs of action are the oblations. Non-violence is the ishtis. Renunciation is the sacrificial fee. The post-sacrificial bath (follows) from death. In this body are stationed all the divinities. (*PU:* stanza 22)

The *PU* is one of the minor *Upaniṣads* related to the *Kṛṣṇa Yajur Veda.* Similar *prāṇāgnihotra* rites can also be found in the *gṛhyasūtras* and other post-Vedic texts. They identify the universal self (*brahman*) with the individual self (*ātman*) within, replace external gods with internal ones, and make the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) analogous with the offerings to the *brahman*/*ātman* within. They uphold non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), patience (*kṣānti*) and memory (*smṛti*) as the four most important virtues.

The Hindu and Buddhist Tantras built up on the previous knowledge, and combined practices of *tapas* and interiorized breathing rituals of ancient *ṛṣis* with *yogas* of the subtle body. Tantric *yogins* created their own versions of interiorized rituals, which, just like the *Upaniṣads* do, homologize the breaths, the anatomy of the human body, and its psychophysical functions with nature, the universe, divinities, and external rituals. The *tapas* became the inner heat (*caṇḍalī, gtum-mo*) and the five *prāṇas* (*prāṇāḥ*) evolved into complex systems of *nāḍīs*. In the Buddhist Tantra, the inner heat came to represent the clear fire of the enlightened wisdom (*prajñā*), which blazes in the navel, at the confluence of the three principal channels (*rasanā, lalanā* and *avadhuti*). The psychophysical constituents of the human body (*skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas*) correspond to the firewood that is burned up in the fire of enlightened wisdom (*prajñā*); the navel *cakra* to the hearth that is blown by the winds of *karma; lalanā* to the ladle *(pātri)*; *rasanā* to the spout of the funnel (*sruva*); *vajra* (the male organ) to the handle of the funnel; skull to the vessel for oblation; *bodhicitta* (the white element, the semen) to

the oblation. When the inner heat, the nature of which is the fire of red *bodhicitta* (the red elemental essence, the blood (*rakta*)) purifies the central channel and reaches up to the head, it dissolves the white *bodhicitta* drop, which begins to descend through the left and right channels. As it reaches the throat, heart and navel *cakras*, yogin/yoginī experiences joys; when he/she is able to merge the winds and drops of the right and left channels and causes them to enter the central channel, he/she experiences the realization of non-duality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* together with ultimate bliss (*mahāsukha*).

The highest level of tantric realization can also be attained through sexual *yoga* practices with a consort, which can be visualized or actual. It has been said that a practitioner of highest faculties can attain enlightenment by his own body alone, a practitioner of middling faculties with the help of a visualized consort, and a practitioner of the lowest faculties with the help of an actual consort. The male and female organs are likened to the two fire sticks (*araṇīs*) for kindling fire, *vajra* (male organ) to a funnel, *lotus* (female organ) to a hearth, white *bodhicitta* (semen) to an oblation, and red *bodhicitta* (blood essence) to a fire of passion. The white drop is the male essence – the sperm, which transforms into the aspiration to achieve enlightenment through the tantric practice; the red drop is the female essence – the inner fire of passion, which transforms into the spiritual passion for enlightenment. The goal of the sexual *yoga* is to generate the non-dual great bliss (*mahāsukha*) that realizes emptiness (*śūnyatā*) by causing the white and red elements of one's body to unite by directing the winds and drops from the right and left channels into the central channel. Just like the *yoga* of inner fire, the *yoga* of sexual union with a consort employs the inner fire and inner heat as the key instruments of inner transformation and means for accomplishing the highest goal of

Buddhist tantric practice.

The powers of inner fire and inner heat have been recognized not only by the *yogins/yoginīs* but also by other spiritual practitioners and savants around the globe. Shamans and sorcerers, in particular, claim the mastery of fire. While shamans, mystical intermediaries between the physical and unseen world, use their supernatural powers to benefit their societies, sorcerers use their abilities to further their own selfish ends. In order to be able to follow their calling and establish contact with the spirit world, shamans have to undergo a rigorous training; they have to remain in isolation for a long period of time, perform rituals of purification, and endure bodily torments such as starvation, thirst, and exposure to cold. As is well known, the Siberian and Eskimo shamans are required to swim in freezing waters through nine holes made in ice from which they have to emerge dry – a feat that demonstrates their ability to resist severe cold. Likewise, the Tibetan *yogins/yoginīs* perfect their *tummo* (*gtum-mo*) practice in cold temperatures outdoors. They show their ability to produce the inner fire by drying sheets dipped in ice-cold water on their bodies. The similarity of these methods testifies to the link between the *yoga* of inner heat and shamanic practices. In his work entitled "*The Origins of the World's Mythologies*" M. Witzel points out that archaic and contemporary forms of shamanism, "share a unique perception of difficultly controlled heat that rises from the lower end of the spine upward – a feature that is still retained in some forms of Indian yoga" (382). He also observes that, "in Africa, the shamans of the San know of the difficult task of mastering the internal heat (*ntum*, correctly *n*/*um*, "medicine") that moves up from the base of the spine and use that power for healing" (385). Shamanism and sorcery are very old traditions with origins in the late

Paleolithic/early Mesolithic periods. Stone Age rock and cave art representing archaic shamanic figures, such as the cave painting of "a prostrate ithyphallic man, arms outstretched, with birdlike hands, and beak like-face [lying] below a wounded bison" (381) in Lascaux cave in Dordogne, France, or, the aboriginal rock painting of a male figure in Arnhem Land in North Australia, testifies to the existence of shamanic practices in distant prehistory. Some of the techniques that *yogins/yoginīs* employ, such as contemplation, purification, fasting, bodily disciplines, ecstasy and the manipulation of inner heat, are reminiscent of the practices of ancient sages, shamans, and magicians. Tantric *yogins/yoginīs* claim to develop supernatural powers (*siddhis*) such as clairvoyance, flying through the air, controlling the weather, communicating with spirits, plants and animals, etc. along with their *yogic* practices. But, pursuing their ultimate goal of liberation, they consider the *siddhis* merely mundane distractions.

# Conclusion

The preceding chapters follow the history of *homa* in India paying special attention to its Buddhist variations. They examine the Vedic origins of *homa* rituals, their transformations throughout the *upaniṣadic, purāṇic* and tantric periods, and compare them with the Buddhist *homas*. Early Buddhism discouraged ritual practices and did not approve of rituals that involve blood sacrifice; the Buddha was born into the Hindu culture, but revolted against the corruption taking place in the Vedic religion during his lifetime. He refused rigid ritualistic approaches and the cast system, revised the understanding of the *Upaniṣads,* emphasized non-violence and compassion, and advocated generosity as the highest form of sacrifice.

With its increasing popularity, the Buddhist religion opened itself up to new influences and gradually embraced many non-Buddhist elements. While competing for its position in the socio-religious landscape of India, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism declared the superiority of its doctrine over other religions. This competitive trend was particularly apparent throughout the medieval period, when Buddhism rivaled *Śaivism* for royal patronage. By this time, Buddhism was intent on disseminating itself, increasing its influence, and attracting new followers. *Homa*, which has always been at the heart of Vedic religious worship, entered Buddhism together with Buddhist tantric practice and became its indispensable component. Ample evidence, such as inscriptions on monuments or historical accounts of Chinese monks traveling to India, testifies to the coexistence of Vedic, Hindu and Buddhist clergy under the auspices of royal patrons

since the early medieval period, and *Agni*, the Vedic god of fire, has been invoked and worshipped by Vedic priests and Buddhist tantric practitioners alike.

The Hindu and Buddhist Tantras developed in parallel during the same time period in the history of Indian spirituality. While the Tantras were evolving into the fully mature systems, complete with sophisticated doctrines, rituals and esoteric practices, they absorbed many local beliefs, popular magic, superstitions, and many myths and legends that now accompany their core spiritual teachings. As the examples, drawn directly from the Vedic and Buddhist scriptures, have shown, Buddhism has a great deal in common with Vedic culture, from which it originated. As a matter of fact, the passages quoted from the *MVS* demonstrate that early tantric Buddhism has acknowledged the Vedic origins of the fire-god *Agni,* and assimilated bloodless Vedic *homa* rituals. Furthermore, the later Buddhist Tantras, the *Anuttarayoga Tantras*, continued employing the very same *homas* that originated in India's Vedic past and in ancient Indian magic. And nowadays, Hindu and Buddhist Tantric practitioners still perform *pūjās*, *gaṇacakras* (tantric feasts), and *homas* on special days and special occasions.

The esoteric *yogas* of inner fire are also common to both, the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. These *yogas* tapped into the same energy of inner heat that had been used by the ancient Vedic sages and combined it with exploration of subtle anatomy in order to produce powerful transformational techniques. Tantric *yogins* built upon the ancient knowledge that goes back to the *Vedas, Brahmaṇas,* and *Upaniṣads* and developed sophisticated interiorized rituals. Representing the pinnacle of Hindu and Buddhist tantric practice and their innermost secret teachings, these *yogas* have been transmitted orally and without interruption for many centuries.

Buddhism, being extremely adaptable, succeeded in adjusting itself to changing circumstances. It has always blended well with indigenous cultures and has been able to assimilate a wide spectrum of non-Buddhist practices by making them compliant with its philosophical views, its moral principles and its dedication to non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). Notably, it was not only able to absorb changes taking place in India's religio-political climate over the course of many centuries, but also to adapt itself effectively to the new geographical locations and cultures of the countries into which it had spread, namely Sri Lanka, Korea, China, Japan, Tibet, and South East Asia, including older Indonesia and even modern Bali, where Hindu and Buddhist Tantric *pujās* and *homas* are still practiced. The process of its assimilation is ongoing; as Tantric Buddhism is slowly taking hold in contemporary Western cultures, it exerts influence on our present-day world and, at the same time, our present-day world also exerts influence on it.

So far, western scholarship has not been able to satisfactorily answer many of the questions regarding the origins of the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, and of their mutual relationships. However, there is a great wealth of Hindu and Buddhist tantric texts that have not been translated to western languages yet. As their translations gradually become available, we should acquire a deeper insight into both of these traditions, which will hopefully bring answers to our inquiries.

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