NOTE TO USERS

Page(s) missing in number only; text follows. Page(s) were scanned as received.

96

This reproduction is the best copy available.

The Goddess and Her Powers:
The Tantric Identities of the *Saundarya Laharī*

Meera Kachroo
Faculty of Religious Studies
McGill University, Montreal

June 2005

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts

Canada

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the *Saundarya Laharī,* a Sanskrit poem associated with the Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantric tradition. It traces the movement of meaning between textual, ritual, and cultural spaces in order to understand the performed possibilities of the text. The Goddess as Śakti (power) both grants enjoyment and is the principle of that enjoyment: beauty, love, and worldly powers. These powers follow the movements of the text: its scanning of the Goddess from shining head to toe; the twinned movements of publicity (exoterism) and secrecy (esoterism); and the gestures and utterances of ritual performance. First the text is located among classical Sanskrit aesthetics, then as a devotional song (*stotra*), and finally as a manual for occult practice (*prayoga*). Situated in these contexts, the multivalence of the text comes to the foreground; mapping the tensions between these meanings is the starting point for the development of a Tantric hermeneutic.

Résumé

Ce mémoire se veut l'étude du *Saundarya Laharī,* un poème écrit en Sanskrit associé à la tradition Tantrique Śākta Śrīvidyā. Il retrace les significations du texte selon différents espaces textuels, rituels et culturels, dans le but d'en dégager toutes les performances possibles. La Déesse, aussi appelée Śakti (pouvoir), donne du plaisir; elle est en fait les plaisirs eux-mêmes: beauté, amour, et pouvoirs physiques. Ces plaisirs sont des pouvoirs dynamique interprétés ici d'après les mouvements du texte: l'image de la Déesse, décrite dans tout son rayonnement et sa splendeur dans une progression de sa tête jusqu'au pieds; les mouvements <<jumeaux>> de l'être en public (exotérisme) et de l'être en privé (ésotérisme); et le dynamisme provenant des gestes et des paroles de la performance rituelle. Le poème est d'abord situé dans la période classique de la littérature Sanskrit. Ensuite, il est abordé en tant que chant dévotionnel (*stotra*). Finalement, il est étudié sous sa forme de manuel de pratique occulte (*prayoga*).

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

After deceiving all the worlds by the sixty-four Tantras
Dependent on the perfections attributed to them
Paśupati rested,
But due to his connection with You
He once again brought down to earth Your Tantra
Which of its own accord
Accomplishes all human goals at once.
(*Saundarya Laharī* 31, trans. Clooney 2005)

Tantra can be said to work at both the centre and the periphery of Indian religious culture.[1] The centre indicates both the strictly traditional modes of engaging with Tantric texts and practices as a kind of stronghold of standardized interpretation and prescribed activity. The periphery indicates the popularization of Tantric images and practices into a kind of diffusion across multiple contexts that may not seem essentially Tantric – such as the popular use of the *Śrīyantra* outside of the tradition of initiation. This model captures a kind of gradation in the category: between what is more Tantric and what is less Tantric; between what is centrally and completely Tantric and what has diffused by various means to the margins.

Another model is proposed by Douglas Renfrew Brooks: Tantra as a *polythetic category*. This is a term that describes an event or tradition as Tantric not because there is some kind of definitive differentia by which the category can be defined, but based on a set of family resemblances (Brooks 1990, 52). Under Brooks' model, the appellation Tantric comes to mean a different thing for each event or artefact – it applies to a different set of criteria: practitioners, beliefs, rituals, implements, iconographies, etc. This model presents a kind of dynamism

---

[1] This point was the focus of a seminar led by Prof. Devesh Soneji on "Hindu Śākta Tantra", held at the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University (Winter 2005).

1

in the category, a shifting without gradation between various centres of Tantrism. In contrast to the centre-periphery model of Soneji, this model captures the dynamic of movement between multiple centres wherein Tantra resides.

In this paper I hope to affirm both of these theses, developing an understanding of Tantra as operating both hierarchically from the centre to the periphery, and also polythetically in a proliferation of centre-events. I will undertake this task by untangling the various strands of meaning in the text *Saundarya Laharī,* a text most appropriate because of its multiplicity of meanings that may seem to be more or less Tantric.

This project is in pursuit of a balance between *hermeneutics* and *hermetics* – between what Klaus Klostermaier has understood as the "art of understanding, explaining, illuminating… [and the] fact of closedness, hiddenness, incomprehensibility" (Klostermaier 6). Hermeneutics, which may take the text as stable, comprehensible and explicable in and for itself, only repeats and confirms pre-understandings, leading to a kind of hermeneutical circle: "(h)ermeneutics thus understood is like the building of ramparts around a historic monument, the re-possession of one's heritage with renewed confidence, feeling secure again and protected from outside attacks" (Klostermaier 2). There is no security or stability in this project, and no allegiance to the words on the page. By accepting the way that the text has been closed, hidden, and has meanings that don't rely strictly on the signifiers, a more balanced view of what is really going on with this text appears: one that accounts for what lies beyond the surface of the printed page.

Studying the *Saundarya Laharī*

The *Saundarya Laharī* has often been translated (see Clooney, Shastri and Ayyangar, Nataraja Guru, Subramanian, Tapasyananda, Woodroffe, and Brown). The translation used herein varies between contexts: Clooney's version is most appropriate for a discussion of the aesthetics of the text as it is smoothly readable; Subramanian's version is written with much emphasis on the poem's devotional aspects. The study of this text takes place in the milieu of contemporary Śākta Tantra studies, with prominent studies done by Brooks, Buhnemann, Goudrian, Gupta, McDaniel and Urban. Brooks' works (1992a especially) are useful as they focus on Śrīvidyā; however, they only briefly mention the *Saundarya Laharī*. Articles on this text in particular have been written by Madhu Khanna (2002) and Annette Wilke (1996), which focus on theological and historical aspects of the work respectively. Analytical work on the *Saundarya Laharī* is a noted lacuna in modern Tantric studies, an omission that this study seeks to address.

The *Saundarya Laharī* is clearly an important text: Sastri and Ayyangar indicate that more than 35 commentaries exist. All but one of these glosses attribute Śaõkara with its authorship (Shastri and Ayyangar *xi*). Modern Indian scholarship continues this tradition of attributing the poem to the eighth century Vedantic philosopher (see for example Sastri and Ramamurthy Garu, Sastri and Ayyangar, Tapasyananda). These traditions of authorship indicate two stories of composition: Śiva himself composed the hymn and passed it along to Śaõkara, who recomposed the latter half after it was lost; or, in another tradition, Śaõkara found the first half of the text written on a wall, and inspired by their beauty,

finished the composition (Clooney 2005 154). These stories are not left unquestioned by many of the text's commentators, who perform feats of historical juggling in order to re-confirm the authority of the text's authorship. Swami Pranavananda engages in a long discussion of the matter, finally to conclude that the text should not be attributed to Śaṅkara as it does not reveal the "lofty conception" of his Vedantic works, nor does it contain Śaṅkara's usual "hairsplitting accuracy" (Pranavananda 82). Although there are several such non-philosophical works attributed to Śaṅkara, Pranavananda concludes that these are falsely attributed for the authority and respect conferred on the composition (86).

Western scholarship is also sceptical of this story of quasi-divine origins. W. Norman Brown has treated this issue substantially in a chapter of his book in the Harvard Oriental Series (1958, 25-30). He points to the aforementioned inconsistency of the work's genre with Śaṅkara's other compositions. A host of other reasons are given to date the text later than than the eigth century (see Brown 1958).

The multiple traditions of authorship and the numerous commentaries on the text led Brown to write that "[f]ew other Sanskrit works have become so much encrusted with extraneous dogma, which its users defend as being unexpressed in the text because esoteric, but nevertheless implied and therefore valid" (Brown 1958, *vi*). Brown indicates the importance of the text and simultaneously dismisses emic interpretations of its meaning. These emic interpretations lead into ritual instructions, philosophical discussions, and "draw references not substantiated by the overt content of the text" (Brown 1958, *vi)*. Rather than

4

following Brown's lead in dismissing both the wide locus of meaning that emic

commentators draw from the text and also the validity of esoteric association.

This paper seeks to understand how the text can be seen as tied to so many

meanings that may at first seem to reside quite a distance from the poem's 'overt

content'. Instead of seeking security in a discussion of precise historical detail, it

is more valuable to understand how far this text reaches to find its meanings.

The *Saundarya Laharī* participates in what seem to be central features of

the Śrīvidyā tradition, identified by Brooks as specific "forms of initiation *dīkṣa*),

sound formulations (*mantra*), and complex diagrams (*yantras*, literally,

'machines')" (Brooks 1990 55). There is an initiation for the recitation of the

text, it encodes Śrīvidyā's eponymous *mantra*, and it describes the form of the

Śrīyantra. There are also various frames of references from which to draw

connections with the text, all of which may be seen as peripheral to the

commentarial tradition: courtly literary aesthetics, *bhakti* devotionalism, and the

tradition of the acquirement of *siddhis*. These strands of influence appear in the

introductory material of the edition of Sastri and Ayyangar. It states that the

Saundarya Laharī

> shares the characteristics of (*i*) a poem displaying the finest touches of
> poetical fancy, (*ii*) a Stotra, hymn, in praise of the Goddess
> Tripurasundari, (*iii*) a series of mantra-s, mystic formulae, to be used by
> the Upasaka along with the corresponding Yantra-s, diagrams, wherein the
> Devi is to be conceived as abiding, and (*iv*) an exposition of the Agama-s
> and Tantra-s, bearing on the worship of the Supreme Being in Its aspect of
> the Śakti, Creative Energy, known as the Śrīvidyā. (Sastri and Ayyangar,
> 1937, *v*)

These characteristics are not examined separately by the editors or commentators;

each *śloka*'s commentary may include remarks bearing upon any number of these

strands of influence. The cohabitation of the text in multiple genres and contexts is seen as a reflection of the Goddess' all-pervasive nature and influence – as Subramanian indicates, the *yantra*s associated with each verse are important only to "highlight...its over-all potency" (Subramanian 1977, 55). In this thesis, I will separate and examine the first of these three strands of influence and activity, focussing on those aspects of the poem that defy facile classification.

This thesis is built around the supposition that the category of Tantra operates in the same way as the Goddess' all pervasive powers; that even events like literary composition and devotion can be understood under the auspices of the all-encompassing worldview of the Tantras. More specifically, *this* Tantra (*idam Tantram*, from the *śloka* cited above) is special among Tantras because it is said to enable people to reach not just the goal of *mokṣa*, but also all of the other goals of life – without privileging liberation from worldly existence or the life of the householder. This is a special Tantra, one that affirms the reality and importance of engaging with the material world in all of its manifest forms. The Goddess, with her appellation as *śakti* (power) both grants material enjoyment and comes to be seen as the very principle of that enjoyment: beauty, love, and worldly powers. What becomes most interesting in this field of power, of the multiplicity of desires, are the *movements* associated with the text: its scanning of the Goddess from shining head to toe; the twinned movements of publicity (exoterism) and secrecy (esoterism); the gestures and utterances of ritual performance. It is these kinds of dynamisms I would most like to capture in this paper – a lack of stability

and singularity so that the text may speak its multiple meanings by shifting between contextual frames.

If we understood meaning as somehow directly tied to the signifiers, to the words of the text itself, we might also think of meaning as relatively stable. From such a position, a historical analysis might seem appropriate. However, I do not see this kind of an analysis as particularly useful, especially for a text like the *Saundarya Laharī*. In this case, the text cannot be considered only for its face value or only for its surface significance. Taking *śloka* 32 for only its signifiers, for example, one is left with a dislocated list of words:

> "Śiva," "power," "desire," "earth," and
> "sun," "cool-rayed moon," "memory," "swan," "Śakra," and
> "the higher," "death," and "Hari":
> when these syllables are joined together,
> and finished with the triple heart syllable,
> they become the parts of Your name,
> O Mother. (trans. Clooney 2005, 54)

Understanding this *śloka* with the commentarial associations of each word for a syllable of the *Pañcadaśākùarī mantra*, destabilizes the signifiers from their typical referents and begin to point instead towards traditional ritual interpretations. Under this position, the list of words are encoded formulae for transmitting the *mantra* of the tradition (the Śrīvidyā), the subtle name of the Goddess. Here, the seed-syllables of the Śrīvidyā are listed below the Sanskrit version of the same *śloka*:

> *Śivaḥ śaktiḥ kāmaḥ kṣitir atha raviḥ śītakiraṇaḥ*
> [Ka] [e] [i] [la]   [ha] [sa]
> *Smaro haṃsaḥ śakras tadanu ca parā-māra-gatita*
> [Ka] [ha] [la]   [sa] [ka] [la]
> *Amī hṛllekhābhis tisṛbhir avasāneṣu ghaṭitā*
>   [hrīṃ]

Bhajante varṇāṣ te tava janani nām 'āvayavatām (after Beck 1993, 137-8)

With the commentary, the meaning of the text becomes located in the tradition of

initiation and lineage, in a tradition that assigns subtle associations to

conventional words. Further, these subtle meanings are indicators of a kind of

ritual practice, in that each of the encoded syllables is a portion of the Śrīvidyā,

the full *mantra* of the tradition. The signifiers on the page are rooted firmly in

ritual practice – and the *Saundarya Laharī* can be seen as a kind of encoded ritual

manual. The meaning of the text moves from the gross understanding of words'

significations to subtle associations, and finally to the utterances of ritual practice.

Secrecy and the movement of esoterism are central factors in attempting to

understand the significance of the text. The charge of esoterism often seems to be

one of irrationality or of absurdity, of the complete separation of word and

significance. Studying esoteric meanings is the study of the text's connection to

its tradition; esoteric meanings are the property of a teaching lineage, and are

enacted in ritual performance.

A kind of linguistic form of esoterism is present in the association of

secret meanings with the syllables of various *śloka*s: the clearest example is *śloka*

32 (cited above). This kind of technical and linguistic esoterism is clarified by

commentaries and further discourse. However, there is also the social aspect of

esoterism to consider, the secret society of the *kula.* The existence of the *kula*

points to a more complicated situation of esoterism; in this case the meaning of

the text shifts depending on the social/ritual context. As Brooks notes, "Tantric

language, concepts, and specific prescriptions not only prevent the uninitiated

from gaining access but create an elitist community based on interpretation and practice" (Brooks 1990, 55). Shifting from the context of an initiate to that of a non-initiate, both the place of the text in the ritual context and the intentions with which it is used destabilize.

The text seem to have this destabilizing force built into it, as a central motif: the double meaning of the phrase "*Bhavāni tvam*" in *śloka* 22, creates an oscillation between its public face of devotional surrender ('O Goddess') and a Tantric injunction of self-divinization ('May I become you'). The meaning of the phrase shifts between contexts, depending on the authority, intention, and performative context of the use of the text. If the words are uttered by a devotee offering flowers to an image of the Goddess, the meaning of the phrase is laudatory; if accompanied by ritual movements inscribing the features of the Goddess onto the initiate's body (*nyāsa*) the meaning of the phrase is transformative.

A search for a historically grounded and *stable* meaning will always be defied by the vagaries of context and interpretation over the centuries; *singularity* of meaning is defied by the existence of meanings esoterically encoded even at the text's inception. The proliferation of various associated ritual traditions which may occur contemporaneously adds another element of esoteric associations aligned at an even greater remove from the words we see on the page. The *Saundarya Laharī* is thus not merely a text to be understood as a set of words: it is and has never been stable or singular. In this thesis, I will trace the movement of meaning between textual, ritual, and historical spaces, in order to understand the

performed possibilities of this text; further, I will attempt to understand the meaning of those multiple possibilities as a kind of Tantric hermeneutic.

Text, Ritual, Identity, Hermeneutic

Understanding meaning to be revealed only when a text is situated in its context, the multiple contexts in which we find this poem (literary, devotional, *prayoga*) demand a unique process of finding/constructing meaning. I would like to frame this problem as one of finding the identity of the text, or better, locating the identities of the text: the *Saundarya Laharī* is simultaneously *kāvya*, stotra, and a *prayoga* manual. Rather than looking for historical or compositional 'facts' about the text to characterize it and accepting its defiance of etic genratic categorization, we can only see the fullness of the multiple meanings of the text as it is used in and understood through ritual performance.

Ritual constructs a world of meaning for the practitioner, including one of self-identity. The text itself can be (and has been) categorized variously; the identities of the persons who engage with the text can be (among others) that of aesthete, devotee, or empowered practitioner. In the context of the initiate, all of these identities are held simultaneously in a creative tension. The way the initiates understand their multiple identities is a model upon which to locate multiple readings of the text in relation to each other. I will seek to understand how the various contexts of the *Saundarya Laharī* construct multiple valences of meaning. As Sarah Caldwell argues, these personal and textual identities could be understood as incommensurable. In her argument, a Tantric hermeneutic is one

wherein multiple "perspectives must remain—for some time at least—in a dialectic of extreme tension" (Caldwell 2001, 45).

This tension, under Caldwell's interpretation, is left unexamined – the same sort of "bow and withdraw" attitude to multiplicity that is also mentioned by Robert Thurman (1988, 121). There is a way out of the bind of incommensurable textual identities, a way that follows the suggestions of hermeneutical scholars of South Asian texts and their relations with orality. What we find is that the text cannot be understood only as text; it must be understood with an eye to its "dynamism and relationships" (Timm 1992, 3). The approaches of performance theory present a new way of understanding where meaning is located. When meaning takes up a position in its ritual enactments and thereby into the formation and affirmation of personal identity, the circle of hermeneutics destabilizes and finds a new centre in the consciousness of the ritual performer. Following this lead, I will pursue the more nuanced approach favoured by Sanderson in his examination of personal identity among Kashmiri Śaivas. Following this method, the endeavour is not to simply recognize multiple identities, but also to "make comprehensible their coexistence in awareness of each other" (Sanderson 1985, 191). In this manner, I hope to demonstrate the relations between multiple personal identities in order to shed light on multiple textual identities.

Finally, this process of uncovering the relations between the multiple identities of the Tantric practitioner will also reveal a new strategy for revealing the relations between the multiple identities of the text *Saundarya Laharī* in particular. This exercise will not only make clear the wide range of possible

interpretations of the *Saundarya Laharī*, but will also reveal something of the dynamics of personal identities and their cultivation, the Tantric approach to the person, and to the methodology of interpretation of Tantric texts in general.

Text in Performance

The importance of taking a performance approach to ritual is that is does not offer a definitive (or singular) approach to understanding the meaning and dynamics of ritual actions. The performance approach, according to Catherine Bell, can "undermine reliance on concepts like ritual, especially the notion of ritual as a universal phenomenon with a persistent, coherent structure" (Bell 1998, 218). Extending this from an understanding of ritual to an understanding of text, we must pursue an approach that does not assume a work to have a stable and persistent meaning, or a single appropriate mode of interpretation. Structuralist methods that seek to align the category of text in South Asia with western understandings of scripture fail to see the fundamental differences in the relation of the written work with the individual, with the ritual context, and with society at large. As Miriam Levering has pointed out, "[c]learly there are problems in defining the category [scripture or sacred text] by trying to arrive at lists of characterizing features. If instead we attend principally to the dynamics of the relations that people have had with texts, their ways of receiving texts in the context of their religious projects, then the whole matter becomes more hopeful" (cited in Timm 1992, 3). This problem of matching the category of 'scripture' across cultural contexts is reduplicated on a smaller scale when attempting to file

on particular text in the given array of constructed (etic) genres of Sanskrit Literature.

The classifications of Goudriaan and Gupta (1981) and Gonda (1981) in the *History of Indian Literature* series assort the various meanings of the *Saundarya Laharī* separately as *stotra*, as a Tantric work, and we can also see it as falling into their category of a 'Tantra of magic'. The cohabitation of one text in various genres is a problem left unexamined in their analysis. Jeffrey R. Timm supports abandoning the project of "generic definition" of sacred texts, and to follow I would suggest a similar scepticism to the process of *genratic definition*, in favour of pursuing an emphasis on "scriptural dynamism and relationship" (Timm 1992, 3). Although this thesis is divided into three chapters based loosly on the divisions suggested by Gonda, and Goudriaan and Gupta above, the division is only a heuristic starting point for seeking connections in various contexts.

Saskia Kersenboom in her investigation of the nature of the text in a specifically Tamil context has also noted the problem of centring one's approach around a text out of context: "[w]hereas it is a quite self-evident move to the Western scholar to accept the manuscript as a point of departure, this attitude lands us in deep trouble when followed in a Tamil context" (Kersenboom 1995, 27). She draws out the meaning of this kind of emic defiance of the Western art/literature (performance/text) dichotomy (Kersenboom 1995, 27). While Timm makes the somewhat facile alignment of *performance* of a text and *orality* (Timm 1992, 3), when we consider the work of Kersenboom on the category of

performance in the South Indian context, we find that the distinction between oral

and textual cultures is not so simple as to be overcome by 'extending' textuality to

the oral tradition. Rather, orality and textuality interact in a complex partnership

in which one cannot be taken as preceding the other; rather text is understood as a

shifting combination of word, music, and dance. Kersenboom's work on emic

Tamil understandings of the nature of the text consistently brings up the question,

enta prayogam ('which application?'); rather than taking the written text as

definitive and stable, the emic perspective seems to take the application or

performance of the text as fundamental. In her analysis of the *bhairavi varnam*,

for example, the written words are considered under the Tamil model to be a kind

of "meaningful action" (Kersenboom 1995, 31). What her thesis comes to is

understanding the text not as a document, but as a kind of event: as an activity of

"composing, connecting, tying" (Kersenboom 1995, 35).

The *Saundarya Laharī* becomes located in its context of use when its

meaning is drawn from its use, from understanding the text as a kind of performed

event. In this way, ritual movements tie the words, the 'overt content' of the text

to a culture of use. Hermeneutics becomes a kind of ritual studies; a holistic view

of the text's meanings comes to the foreground. An analysis of this material (the

text, the ritual) eventually reveals how it can create "culture, authority,

transcendence, and whatever forms of holistic ordering are required for people to

act in meaningful and effective ways" (Bell 1998, 206).

This kind of holistic ordering will be understood as cultivation of personal

identity, one in which we can see that "ceremony is how the self is constituted"

(Grimes 2004, 112). Catherine Bell uses the rhetoric of the construction of a ritualized body:

> We can speak of the natural logic of ritual, a logic embodied in the physical movements of the body and thereby lodged in beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation. ...[T]he act of kneeling does not so much communicate a message about subordination as it generates a body identified with subordination. In other words, the molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather it primarily acts to restructure the bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves...[R]equired kneeling does not merely *communicate* subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself. (Bell 1992, 98-99)

Ronald Grimes sees this as involving a problematic mind/body dualism that seems to consider the participant not as a ritual agent but rather as a ritual automaton (Grimes 2004, 134). This is not what Bell is articulating. The distinction she emphasizes is between the *communication* of the ritual's meaning (in her example, subordination) and the embodiment of that meaning; between a dualistic understanding of the person as a participant in something external, and as the person as the *constituent* of the ritual and its meaning. The difference here is between a 'participant' in a ritual *receiving* the message of the ritual, and an integrated understanding wherein the person *becomes* the message of the ritual activities.

Further, the enactment of ritual *constitutes* the world. Following the work of Richard Davis in his study on Śaiva Siddhānta ritual, we see that ritual agents "construct a microcosm reflecting a particular macrocosmic conception of the way things are" (Davis 1991, 73). The ritual creates an instantiation of an entire worldview; the ritual practitioner comes to embody the cosmic structure. In this

moment of re-creation, the dialogue between the individual and divinity becomes so close that "in his final supplication, the worshipper even gives up his own self to Śiva" (Davis 1991, 160). In this way individual identity is offered up and re-written in the ritual space: resonating into the structures of other ritual domains, authority, society, and culture.

Jonathan Z. Smith has outlined a twofold typology of models for the characteristic tendencies of these ritual domains and how they relate to the world outside of ritual: the two types of maps (worldview) that he sees them to operate with. Smith has described the disjunctive type of ritual as one which is concerned with the liminal or chaotic, "in which the disjunctive ... . will be overcome through recreation" (Smith 1978, 309). Brooks understands the Tantric rituals as following a disjunctive and utopic map which seeks not to "describe the world of ordinary activity and discourse but rather inverts or ignores the values and concepts on which the ordinary world is based" (Brooks 1992a, 168). The *kula* ritual structure explicitly forces the practitioner to manipulate social dualities like purity and pollution in order to harness the power of those social subversions. This kind of disjunction is the source of the transformative power that the rituals of the *kula* are primarily concerned with.

Smith's description of the disjunctive points again to the re-creation of the world, also suggested by Davis' discussion of Siddhānta ritual (cited above). This movement from the ritual space out into the world at large leads to what Davis suggests may be a misconception with respect to Siddhānta: "[i]t implies that the world constructed and acted upon within ritual is a representation of a larger and

distinct world, and that the ritual world, as a symbolic construct or a reflection, exists at a lower order of ontological reality...Other metaphors of mimesis implying a separation of real and ritual domains, such as 'play,' 'theatre,' and the like, are equally misleading" (Davis 1991, 73).

In the context of the Tantric ritual, however, these metaphors are not misleading. The *kula* ritual is definitely separate from the domain of the outside world, but I would suggest that this does not mean it has a 'lower ontological status'. Separation here does not imply subordination. Neither does the structural and symbolic inversion of social norms or the use of the metaphors of drama, imply a strict separation of the real and the ritual. A mimesis is never *totally* independent or separate; it always exists in cooperation with the original; under the Tantric understanding, the 'real' world is also no more (or less) real than a play (see Baumer 1995). In this way, the ontological status of the *kula* activities are not subordinated to the 'real' world, nor is separation of the ritual domain compromised.

In contrast to the disjunctive map, Smith identifies a locative map of the world as one that feeds the "labor to overcome all incongruity by assuming the interconnectedness of all things, the adequacy of symbolization (usually expressed as a belief in the correspondence of macro- and microcosm) and the power and possibility of repetition" (Smith 1978, 308-9). Similarly, Brooks understands non-Tantric brahmanical ritual as using a "convergent map" of the world,which seems to correspond with Smith's locative map:

> a convergent map is one that seeks to establish harmony with the mundane
> world, revels in ritual's power of repetition, and structures itself in terms

of the relationships between *all* sections of Hindu society. The object of the convergent map is to overcome periods of disjunction by restating the normative values that give meaning to relationships; these rituals of convergence reestablish the primordial and dissolvable relationships that are thought to bind the universe together. (Brooks 1992a, 168)

It is very clear that there are different worldviews that are created by the *Saundarya Laharī* in its different contexts: different ways of conceiving of the Goddess and how one can interact with Her. What varies is the place of the person in relation to divinity and to the world at large – the entire worldview that is constructed by the movement of the text into its fullness of performative meanings. Bell seems to agree that there are at least two divergent movements with respect to the ritual's relation to society: "strategic differences in ritual traditions can differentiate particular communities, [and] ritualization can also work to integrate communities" (Bell 1992, 125). The twofold model is somewhat limited – for each ritual context operates in a different cultural context and will effect social relations in different ways. Different rituals involve the practitioner locating personal identity in a different cultural territory, and re-mapping that territory through the rewriting of the self.

Further, Smith does not consider the coexistence of these different tendencies within one practitioner (thereby causing them to participate in more than one worldview), or the possibility of more than two movements (creating more than just dual but truly multiple identities). Unique to the Tantric context, we find a great multiplicity of movements. All of these identities are different: that is, they have their own sets of priorities, images of society and its values, ritual complexes, and (in)formal "theologies" or modes of speculation. However,

these identities coexist in the identity of the initiate -- being necessarily drawn into conflict with each other in some contexts, and resting easily alongside each other in other situations. Mapping these tensions marks the starting point for investigating both Tantric identities and the multiple meanings of the *Saundarya Laharī*.

Chapter 1

The Goddess' Rescue of Desire:
Kāvya and the *Saundarya Laharī*

The first half of the *Saundarya Laharī*, called *Ānandalaharī*, is full of the images

we might expect of a Tantric text: as a kind of meditation upon the form of the

Goddess, it focuses on the *cakras* of her subtle body, her manifestation in sonic

form as *mantra* and describes her as *yantra* or cosmic diagram. In contrast, the

second half of this text, whose title translates as "Flood of Beauty" envisions the

Goddess' body in a more strictly classical aesthetic mode, beginning with her

"golden crown"(42) and the "flood of beauty from her face" (44). Over the course

of some 40 *ślokas* each part of her body is exalted – down to her feet which are

said to "outdo the lotus" (*śloka* 87).

    This Goddess is not only beautiful, but is also a also master of the arts: her

singing voice silences even Sarasvatī's (66); there is a milk-ocean of poetry

flowing from her breast (75); and the three lines on her neck are said to shine,

marking off the positions of the musical scales (69). These *śloka*s are rich with

the kind of *alaïkāra* (ornamentation) that Sanskrit poetry is known for -- figures

of speech playing upon her form. So the full text of the *Saundarya Laharī* is a

combination of what we might think of as typically Tantric images in the first

half, followed by an overtly aestheticized vision of the Goddess in the latter. In

this paper, I will explore the relation between these two orientations, between the

categories of 'Tantra' and 'classical aesthetics'.

In doing so I will highlight both the borrowings and the innovations from

the *kāvya* tradition as they may be read in the *Saundarya Laharī*. Borrowing

images from Purāōic mythology, especially the story of Śiva's burning of

Kāmadeva, the *Saundarya Laharī* also shares the sophisticated style and use of

compositional embellishments (*alaṅkāra*) found in *kāvya* literature; the latter half

of the work especially closely parallels Kālidāsa's *mahākāvya* [2]

Kumārasaübhava. Although this kind of incorporation of literary tradition may be

seen in many examples of the stotra literature, the literary heritage of the

Saundarya Laharī is of special note because of Śrīvidyā 's distinct theological

emphasis on the role of aesthetic desire. The lyrical mode of the literary tradition

has been incorporated by Abhinavagupta into what would become Śrīvidyā's

aestheticized theology, creating theological justification for the incorporation of a

literary work like the *Saundarya Laharī* into the Tantric corpus. I will then

attempt to understand the theological valorization of the aesthetic impulse as it is

connected to the shifting contexts of influence in the *Saundarya Laharī*: the court,

and the Brahmanic household.

The *Saundarya Laharī* occupies a shared space between literature and

scripture, and shows evidence of spaciousness in its composition – drawing on a

wide range of references. The demands that Narasimhaiah asks of the reader of

the Indian novel are needed to decipher the complexity of "words becoming

images, images fusing into myths, myths manifesting as symbols" (cited in

---

[2] A *mahākāvya* is an example of classical Sanskrit literature that, like the *Saundarya Laharī*, is "a poem composed entirely of quatrain-like *kāvya* stanzas, the majority of which are grammatically and syntactically independent of their neighbours" (Peterson 2003, 9). There are generally agreed to be five exemplary works of *mahākāvya*, including the *Kumārasaṃbhava*.

Lehmann 1995, 93). This tendency is true also for the *Saundarya Lahari* as the descriptions of the Goddess shift to references to Purāṇic narratives, and which can be further interpreted as manifestations of theological points.[3]

In the *Saundarya Lahari* the Goddess' beauty is made noticeable by the mapping of the most breathtaking elements of the natural world (the śiriṣa flower, the bimba fruit, bamboo staffs, and pearls etc.) onto various parts of her body. The text uses the motif of detailed description of her figure from head to toe, and relies on the common standards of comparison for beautiful women that are found everywhere in *kāvya*: she has plantain-tree legs and the gait of a swan; teeth of pearls resting on coral lips. These standards of comparison or identification are one type of the classical trope of *alaṅkāra,* embellishment. There is a common hoard of metaphors thought suitable for the beautiful women, which are used by the *kavi* (poet) in a fresh ways each poem.

It is not only flora and fauna that are mapped onto the Goddess' body; in the *Saundarya Lahari* the imaging of the Goddess' physical form also recalls her mythology. Her body becomes the site whereon the myth of Śiva's battle with Kāma, desire incarnate, is played out. For example, in this *śloka* 83 we find her legs being compared with the arsenal of Kāma:

> [Kāma] has indeed made Your calves into quivers,
> encasing a double set of arrows:
> at their crests ten arrowheads are visible,
> the nails of Your feet,
> sharpened on just one whetstone, the crowns of the gods.
> (trans. Clooney 2005, 64)

---

[3] This trend of interweaving physical descriptions of the Goddess with mythological narratives and theological speculation is quite common in Śākta texts, such as the *Devī Gītā, Lalitā Māhātmya,* and *Devī Māhātmya.*

The same narrative is played out in Kālidāsa's *mahākāvya Kumārasambhava*, in which a similar mapping of narrative takes place on Pārvatī's body. In a description of her eyebrows, Kālidāsa says,

> Lightly moving and black as if painted in by pencil,
> the long lines of her eyebrows drew desire,
> and when he saw her, the God of Love lost
> all his pride in the curved beauty of his bow. (trans. Heifetz 1990, 47)

Most appropriately, the myth of Kāma is one that revolves around the tension between the movements towards liberation and desire, the destructive and the productive, transcendence and manifestation, the type of activities of the cremation-ground and those of the court. The story of the conflict between Śiva the great *yogi* and Kāma, desire incarnate, is a central theme of the Śaiva Purānas (Doniger 1973, 141) and the narrative of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava.*

In the beginning of the story Śiva is imaged as the great yogi who attains unparalleled *tapas* with his self-control and chastity:

> with his vision turned down, eyes fixed on his nose,
> the wild pupils stilled and slightly shining,
> his eyebrows free of any habit of change,
> no quivering in the long, thick lashes,
>
> like a cloud holding back the fury of its rains
> or a body of water without any wave,
> the movement within him of his vital breaths blocked,
> like a lamp not trembling where no wind blows.
> (trans. Heifetz 1990, 47-8)

It is this ascetic heat that the gods entrusted with the sustenance of the world wish to bring into service of the cosmic order. The Gods in charge of that order, variously Indra or Brahmā, have the idea that Śiva should be tempted out of his austerity and out of his restrained stillness. He should be caused to marry, to move

into the householder's realm of desire. Thus married to Pārvatī, he will eventually beget a son who is powerful enough to restore order to the world.

The temptation of the *yogi* is in the hands of Kāma. He is charged with the job of swaying Śiva's concentration from a kind of destructive ferocity to erotic desire. Using his weapons of sugarcane bow and a certain unfailing flower arrow named Fascination, Kāma causes Śiva to suffer from a kind of delusive arousal. Once under attack, however, Śiva becomes enraged and retaliates with a fiery beam from his third eye, alighting Kāma and, in most stories, burning him to ashes. In many Purāṇic versions, and the poetic version of Kālidāsa, we find that at this point the Goddess's role is to lament and petition Śiva to revive Kāma. Śiva does so, and Desire is revived, albeit without a body -- from whence comes Kāma's epithets Anaṅga (formless one) and Manoratha (mind-borne-one). The Goddess' intervention is not direct, but successful, as Śiva responds to her petition. However, the result is that Kāma lives on only dependent upon Śiva's concession for rebirth (Anderson 1993, 136). In most versions of this story, desire should be understood as a kind of subordinate to yogic transcendence and liberation, and the Goddess' role is but to ask Śiva to intervene.

I suggest that a large part of the second half of the *Saundarya Laharī* owes a very specific debt to one of the *mahākāvya*: Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhava*. As we have seen there is a similarity in narrative mapping (see the calves and eyebrows above), and many similes are used in a remarkably analogous way. For example in both *Saundarya Laharī 82,* and *Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.36, the Goddess'

legs exceeding the beauty of elephant trunks and the stems of banana trees

(*kadalī*):

> Oh Lady, with your two thighs you surpass
> The trunks of lordly elephants and clusters of golden plantain trunks too;
> By Your perfectly rounded knees,
> Hardened by prostration before Your Lord,
> O daughter of the mountain,
> You surpass the two frontal globes of the wise elephant.
> (*Saundarya Laharī* trans. Clooney 2005, 63)

> Since the trunk of an elephant has too harsh a skin/
> and the plaintain stalk is always cold, /
> those similes the world offers to express flowing,/
> ample curves were useless for those thighs.
> (*Kumārasaṃbhava* 1.36 trans. Heifetz 1990, 26)

In both texts, a similar use of the same metaphor takes place in the larger context of a head to toe description of the Goddesses. The description of Parvatī in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhava* exalts each part of her body over the course of 15 *ślokas* (1.33-1.48). Shared are the subject and sequence of the latter movement of the *Saundarya Laharī* and many similar *upamā* (simile).

Can this similarity of movement be explained as merely one of the conventions of Sanskrit literature in general? Jan Gonda indicates that the head to toe description is a common trope that can be found both in the Āḷvār poetry and many examples of the *stotra* class of literature (Gonda 1981, 241). Medieval *stotra* literature is also "full of descriptions of the deities' outward appearance – among them those of a god's body from head to heel... emblems, attributes, weapons, and ornaments; being in harmony with the iconography of the cult images these passages enhance the value of the poems for meditative purposes" (Gonda 1981, 241). Although the sources of many of this class of literature may

25

be from Āčvār poetry, Purāṇic narratives, and iconographic sources, the similarity

in the progressive description of the Goddess in the latter half of *Saundarya*

Laharī and these *śloka s* in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* is striking, and seems not to be

merely coincidental. Another example further illustrates the same extended trope

being used in both works, in a description of the Goddess exceeding the qualities

of the ideal beautiful woman. Although beautiful women may commonly be said

to walk with the gait of a swan, the Goddess far exceeds that standard:

> She could have learned her sloping walk
> With the movements all a play of grace,
> From the imperial geese, who themselves were
> Eager to learn the rhythms of her anklets.
> (*Kumārasaṃbhava* 34 trans. Heifetz 1990, 26)

> As if their minds engaged practicing steps;
> Your household swans walk, they never stop imitating Your stately step,
> While Your lotus feet impart instruction by their every movement,
> By the tinkling of beautiful anklets filled with gems,
> O Goddess of fine bearing.
> (*Saundarya Laharī* 91 trans. Clooney 2005, 65)

We also find, in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* (5.7-5.11), the image of Parvatī as mother,

holding her child Kārttikeya on her lap. Just as in the *Saundarya Laharī*, wherein

the children imaged are Gaṇapati and Skanda, she feeds her child with perfect

motherly affection.

The resonance of the descriptions found in the *Kumārasaṃbhava* with

those of the *Saundarya Laharī* need not be unintentional or meaningless:

> among the curiosities of the ornate Sanskrit literature are attempts to
> compose poems by the combination of the words quoted from an existing
> text and original supplements of the author... [thus] creating the
> impression that the latter is an explanation and an uninterrupted
> continuation of the former. (Gonda 1981, 241)

Of course the courtly tradition can in no way be understood as completely secular in orientation, it participates in multiple mythical and religious orientations without ascribing to a particular sectarian tradition. Following this, we can understand the *Saundarya Laharī* as a continuation of the literary tradition of Kālidāsa: a Śākta sectarian version of the courtly literary tradition.

In the *Saundarya Laharī*, like we find in the borrowings of *stotra* literature, "the almost obligatory occurrence of symbols, metaphores, and references to myths… as a rule are liable to different – and fresh – interpretations" (Gonda 1981, 235). Returning to the myth of Śiva's conflict with Kāma, I would like to suggest that in the *Saundarya Laharī* the bodily rescue of Kāma from the wrath of Śiva is a kind of reinterpretation, especially in the light of Śākta theology. In the *Saundarya Laharī* we see that the Goddess' body acts directly to rescue Kāma from the flames. The rescue takes place in one of the *śloka*s in praise of her navel:

> O daughter of the mountain,
> the mind-born one plunged himself into the deep pool of Your navel,
> his body enveloped by the flames of Hara's anger,
> and from there rose a creeper of smoke:
> people say it is Your line of down,
> O Mother. (trans. Clooney 2005, 76)

I'd like to suggest that her direct bodily rescue of Kāma is a defiance of Śiva's agency in the act. Rather than petitioning Śiva to revive Kāma, the Goddess does it for herself. Further, as we have seen, the rescue of Kāma is accompanied with the identification of Kāma's iconographic retinue and mythological powers with her body. If she rescues desire from subordination, then, she is rescuing *herself* from subordination to Śiva.

This is not really surprising; the *Saundarya Laharī* is, after all, a Śākta text. In Śākta theology, the Goddess is dominant and independently powerful, and desire too should reign since the whole world of manifestation is seen as the product of desire. Most centrally for this discussion, carrying the iconographic retinue of Kāma is wielding his power: his arrows of attraction, fascination, and delusion. The Goddess of the *Saundarya Laharī* doesn't just carry the myth of Kāma on her body: the relationship is much closer than that. The physical merging of Kāmadeva and the Goddess is not without precedent: in the *BȲhaddharma 2.53.44,* "when Kāma was burnt and became bodiless, his essence entered the limbs of Devī" (Doniger 1973, 157). The revival of Kāmadeva *by* the female body and, in some way, *as* the female body, is pushed further by understanding him through one of his epithets: "the bodiless" (Anaṅga*).* In this way, his nature as formless desire is understood to arise from any contact with the feminine, even women who are not explicitly Goddesses. Doniger cites several examples from the interactions between Śiva and the ascetic's wives in the Pine forest:

> A woman who flirts with Śiva … is described as 'the flower-bow of Kāma, which had assumed another form when it was frightened by the eye in [Śiva's] forehead. Another woman teases Śiva, saying, 'Did you open the fiery eye in your forehead and burn Kāma?' to which Śiva replies, 'I am indeed made a laughing stock when he is reborn in your gaze, lovely one' (Doniger 1973, 158)

In a way, Kāmadeva strikes in the form of beautiful women everywhere:

> The mind-born god [Kāma], as he was about to perish,
> Burned by the flame of Gauri's lord,
> Looked first upon his useless shaft of flowers
> And then in anger made an all-compelling weapon,
> This weapon, whence the fame of fair-browed women,

28

Has conquered all the world.
(*Subhāṣitaratnakośa* 441, cited in Doniger 1973, 159)

The implication here is clear. After he is burnt, Kāmadeva loses his own body but becomes embodied by beautiful women. In the case of the *Saundarya Laharī*, the Goddess is indeed imaged as united in some way with Kāmadeva, and his arsenal manifests as a glance from the Goddess' face:

> Daughter of the king of the unmoving mountain,
> To whom would the ridges between Your eye and ear no convey
> The eagerness of the bow of that god whose arrows are flowers?
> Your passionate glance travels sideways
> From the corner of Your eye and along the path of hearing,
> And there it gleams,
> Suggesting the mounting of an arrow. (trans Clooney 2005, 59)

The Goddess Tripurasundarī, who is identified by Śrīvidyā traditions as the Goddess of the *Saundarya Laharī*, is iconographically depicted as sharing the retinue of Kāmadeva (elephant goad, flower arrows, sugarcane bow etc), furthering the argument that her body is Kāma made manifest. We may now recall the outset of this discussion: "images fusing into myths, myths manifesting as symbols" (cited above). In the *Saundarya Laharī*, the image of the Goddess' body is depicted using the myth of the burning of Kāmadeva, which may be further understood as a kind of identity between the Goddess and Kāmadeva's form as Anaṅga.

The bodilessness of Kāma is thus not a sublimation or transcendence; we should not understand that Śiva subordinates and controls Desire. The bodilessness is not that Desire has no form entirely, but that he ceases to have a form of his own. Instead, Kāma lives on in the body of the Goddess, in the material forms of the manifest world, and in the form of desire whereever it is

located. In the *Saundarya Laharī*, the aesthetic has a kind of power—and it is not a transcendent power but one carried by those particular manifest objects of the material world, the natural linguistic ornaments that compose the Goddess' body. The entirety of the manifest world of desire is crystallized onto her body, and the beautifully ornamented woman becomes the bearer of a cosmos worth of attraction. If Śakti is Kāma, and she marries Śiva, liberation and desire may no longer be taken separately, but rather must always coincide.

Ornamentation and its Powers

Saroj Narang writes that poetry

> should not only be useful but (Primarily) attractive too. This very sense gave rise to the conception of ornament (figure) in the mind of the people, for a complex situation or an anxiety for clearer or more effective expression necessitates figures. According to Dr. Raghavan, 'a thought that is too simple, too ordinary, or too small to impress or get admiration by itself needs figurative embellishment.' (Narang 2000, 49)

This implies that the thing to be ornamented is somehow lacking ('too simple...ordinary'), and that only ornamentation makes it worthy of attention (it '*needs*...embellishment'). However, the verbal root of the word *alaṅkāra* indicates that the ornament is not necessitated by some kind of insufficiency on the part of the ornamented. Rather, it acts in the same way as worship of the gods. Narang identifies the word as derived from the root *Aram*+√k□, which signifies in the ṚgVeda "to do the fit, or the right thing, to treat in an appropriate manner (i.e. to worship and even to serve the gods)" (Narang 2000, 50).

Thus we may understand the ornament as an addition that perhaps *makes apparent or noticeable* the complete and inner worthiness of the subject.

Ornaments can be seen as a kind of concretized praise; *alaṅkāra* too can then be understood as an accessory that exalts the thematic of the composition. Indeed, Narang makes the connection here with the beautification of a "lady by ornamenting her[self, *sic*] with different types of ornaments to enhance her beauty" (Narang 2000, 54). This may be carried further to suggest a reason for the composition of elaborate and beautiful poetry in praise of a divinity: "the authors, whilst illustrating the ambiguities of which the Sanskrit language is capable, nevertheless felt that, just as human connoisseurs delight in these stylistic refinements, the offering of such a poem to a god will evoke his [sic] pleasure" (Gonda 1981, 235).

This trend is especially apparent in Śākta devotional literature – the *Saundarya Laharī* aside, even the *sahasranāma* associated with the Goddess is remarkably ornate and complex in composition compared with the Vaiṣṇava version: "in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* we find mainly short names and compounds and a strong tendency towards soft and light syllables, whereas the *Lalitāsahasranāma* partly prefers very long and ornamented compounds" (Wilke 2002, 120-1). In a way, these ornate poems may be considered ornaments to the Goddess: things that do not necessarily add to her already complete beauty, but that make it noticeable and apparent to the audience of the composition, and that may also please her by their perfection. The mapping of mythology onto the Goddess' body may also be understood as an extended *alaṅkāra*, one in which narrative can be seen to embellish both the body of the Goddess and also the composition. The two kinds of embellishment (of the body and of the

composition) may function in the same way; first the relationship between the ornament and the ornamented must be explored.

Understanding the place of ornamentation in the life of an image is an important step in coming to understand the place of what may seem like extraneous flourish of language or of physical decoration. The centre of an identity may be considered, especially under outsider's scrutiny, to be the physical form of the image itself; however, gazing with what Richard Davis calls 'the devotional eye', the clothing and ornaments that may seem to be peripheral to the outsider gain a central importance to the devotee. The ornaments are the signifiers of the lived manifestation of the deity, they are what makes the image accessible and comprehensible (Davis 1997, 29). This is not an ornament that distracts or detracts; rather, it is a necessary element of the God's power and the relationship with the devotee.

The idea of ornamenting the Goddess with a poem finds resonance in the traditional narrative that suggests that Ādi Śaṅkara bestowed earrings upon the Goddess. These earrings (tāṭaṅka), in the shape of the śrīcakra , are mentioned in the Saundarya Laharī śloka 28:

> All the sky-dwellers,
> Vidhi, Śatamakha and the rest,
> Came to a bad end even after they drank the nectar
> That confers immunity to fearsome old age and death, and
> If there is no time limit on Śambhu who swallowed virulent poison,
> It is due entirely to the great power of Your earrings,
> O Mother. (trans. Clooney 2005, 54)

Wilke discusses these tāṭaṅka as connected to the taming, domestication, and conversion of the localized Goddess Akhilāṇḍeśvarī of Tiruchirappalli (Wilke

1996, 143). To this day the bestowal of these earrings (*śrīcakrapratiṣṭha*) is ritually re-enacted by the Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñcī, based on the precedent set by Ādi Śaṅkara on one of his *digvijayas* (tours of victory), in which he is said to have subdued many local Goddesses. In this case, the earrings were bestowed to tame the ferocious Goddess from *ugra* (fierce*)* to *saumya (*gentle*): "*Śaṅkara... prepared two *śrīcakras* in the shape of two *tāṭaṅkas* (ear ornaments) and drew forth all of the *ugrakalā* of the goddess into these golden *tāṭaṅkas* which he fixed on her ears. Thenceforth she became *saumya*" (cited in Wilke 1996, 144).

Wilke correctly suggests that in the Śrīvidyā tradition, the earrings along with the other marriage ornaments constitute a symbolic marriage, domestication, and concomitant empowerment of the Goddess (Wilke 1996, 145). As Miller notes, in the literary tradition, the ornamentation of the heroine (*nāyikā*) transform her "from a nubile creature whose sexual power invites violence and threatens to produce chaos into a fecund vessel for the production of offspring" (Miller 1984, 30). The ornaments here denote and effect the shift from a dangerous unbounded feminine sexuality to a domesticated feminine fertility.

We know from other contexts that the ornamentation of the woman with the marriage thread and the many enclosing rings of bangles on her wrist signify her boundedness to her husband and her confinement to a place in the domestic sphere. We see this clearly in Holly Baker Reynolds' study of the ornaments of the South Indian *sumaṅgalī* (married woman) signifying both her empowerment and her boundedness to her husband and the domestic sphere (Reynolds 1980). Marriage and its ornaments enhance a woman's power, as her eroticism is

converted to a productive fertility. These two dynamics of the ferocious-erotic

and the loving-mother are also seen in the style of ornamentation of the

Lalitāsahasranāma:

> in some sequences, harsh sounds and heavy syllables along side to the
> dominating soft sounds...Aesthetic theories...associate long compounds
> and harsh and heavy syllables with the dynamic and the fearsome and
> short words and light and soft sounds with love and sweetness...the
> features of the *Lalitāsahasranāma* evoke a deity whose beauty and
> majesty, mild sweetness and fearful dynamism exist in contrastful
> harmony (Wilke 2002, 121)

The heroine of this poem, the Goddess as *nāyikā,* thus becomes "the

vehicle for transforming erotic passion *(rati)* into the aesthetic experience of love

(śṛngārarasa), which incorporates the erotic and transcends the limitations of its

particularity" (Miller 1984, 30). I would like to suggest that this transformation of

the Goddess by ornamentation is wholly resonant with a re-evaluation of the role

of physicality and desire in general. The movement towards an aestheticized

gentle Goddess replete with earrings and myths written over her body is parallel

to the movement in Śākta theology that revalorizes the role of beauty and desire

through engaging with the corporeality of human embodiment.[4]

We must also read the text as located in a particular kind of cultural

milieu. It is here that we must interpret Śiva and Kāma as representing not only

the coming together of the theological movements of liberation and desire, but

also the influence of courtly culture in the development of the *Saundarya Laharī*

in the Śrīvidyā tradition. The court was the world of the classical aesthetic, of

---

[4] The earrings may also have a yogic significance: note the *kānphaṭa* yogic practice of splitting the ear lobe to open the *nāḍī* in the ear and harness the subtle powers contained within. Here we see that bodily transformative practices are aestheticized. This aestheticization by ornamentation indicates the shift from early Tantric rituals based on power-substances of the body to a formalized and sanitized kind of aesthetic vision of the body.

kāvya – the complex composition and structure of this literature points to its place in a world of leisure and sophistication. Many works of *kāvya* were used for the glorification of kingship and kingly exploits. As Indira Peterson indicates, "drama and court epic, the two poetic forms with themes and imagery closest to the lives of kings, are especially charged with the auspicious function of reflecting, augmenting, and ensuring the prosperity and royal glory (śrī) of the king, under whose protection the community of patrons and poets flourished" (Peterson 2003, 11).

Unlike the Purāðic mode in which the narrative is foregrounded, in the style of the *Saundarya Laharī* it is not the myth of Kāmadeva that seems to be the central focus of the *ślokas*. The style of the long-format *kāvya* is similarly often focused on narrative continuity. In the *Saundarya Laharī*, the central motif is how the story of Kāmadeva's conflict with Śiva might be mapped onto the Goddess and how it accentuates her beauty. This indicates the lyricism of the work, for it lays "emphasis on exhibiting subtle emotional nuances rather than on weaving the story-line" (Rajan 1989, 38). Unlike the epic poem, in which there is a narrative thread to connect the stanzas in a more or less linear way, in shorter format *kāvya* "the single stanza comes into its own to possess its autonomy…each stanza is exquisitely crafted round one image, one feeling, one instant of experience" (Rajan 1989, 38).

By no means does the *Saundarya Laharī* act as a re-telling of the burning of Kāma, although much of the medieval *stotra* literature can be seen to reduplicate themes from other (especially Purāṇic) texts: "much of the contents of

these eulogies is common property and... the authors often reproduced or varied mode is which they had retained" (Gonda 1981, 240). The short imbedded references to mythology do not connect the *ślokas* into a dramatic arch; they refer to the mythology and draw on the common understandings in order to add complexity to the images and emotions evoked by the *śloka*. Members of this class of literature "portray in a concise fashion the most essential mythological and iconographic features of their subjects" (Beck 1995, 133). The references to mythology and multiple invocations of the Goddess' epithets make the *stotra* "an effective aid to meditation and the development of devotional sentiments" (Beck 1995, 133).

Gonda notes that the development of the medieval *stotra* literature may be partially attributed to the popularization of sophisticated poetics in the educated and aristocratic circles and a concomitant change in the religious hymns of the time: "[they] underwent the influence of poetical customs, subtleties, theories, classifications and conventionalities; there was a tendency to adapt the style of the hymns and eulogies to the conventions of *kāvya* literature" (Gonda 1981, 235). The aestheticization of regal power and political exploits was not only bid for royal favour by the court poets. The apotheosis of kingship had a political role to play in that it turned the exploits of the king (warring, conquering, plundering and the like) into a divine play, understanding play both literally as a theatrical production, and also with the connotation of lightness and frivolity. This kind of poetic rhetoric has the role of sanctioning belligerence on the part of the king and turning it into a kind of game.

The divinization of the activities of the king is twinned with the feudalization of divinity. It is in this period that the Śaiva Purāṇas celebrate the marriage of the great ascetic Śiva to the Goddess. Śiva becomes a king, father, and husband. Like making light the heaviness of war in the context of the court, the Goddess can "conceal the earth but also make it light" (*śloka* 81, trans. Clooney 2005, 63). In the *Saundarya Laharī*, poetic rhetoric and ornamentation act to justify the transition of Śākta ritual culture from the domain of the ascetic to that of the householder. In the context of the Śiva-Kāma battle, the impassioned *yogi* ends up as a husband; the aestheticization of the Tantric Goddess carries the rhetoric of empowerment and parallels her domestication.

Harvey Alper credits Abhinavagupta with synthesizing myth, devotion, meditation, and perhaps most importantly aesthetic speculation into Kashmir Śaivism (Alper 1979, 347). Abhinavagupta is known for proposing a Śaivatheology of what Alper calls "polyvocal monism" (Alper 1979, 384) – a system that has a place for all manners of human experience and religious expression, including a central place for aesthetics. Alper expresses the sum of the Śaiva's work with metaphors: a vision of a reality of "spiritual and emotional liquidity" (385); a "tidal theology" (385). This theology is revised and refined in the Śrīvidyā tradition.

The nineteenth century composer Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar[5] has stated that figurative language is *always* required to express this kind of monism (te

---

[5] Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar (1775-1835) was an initiate into Śrīvidyā and composed a cycle of hymns in praise of the *navāvaraṇa* deities of the *śrīcakra.* . He was "profoundly influenced" by the *Saundarya Laharī* (te Nijenhuis 1987,4).

Nijenhuis 1987, 12), because figurative language conjures up an image, a specific

form of the Goddess, in an aesthetic insight into reality -- and this insight is prized

by Abhinavagupta. From Abhinavagupta's standpoint, insight into reality is a

kind of poetic vision, *pratibhā*, which is seen in the creative person, from the

poet, to the yogi, to (on the grandest scale) Śiva himself.

The exact place Abhinavagupta assigns this aesthetic experience is

difficult to ascertain – in a theology of liquidity and motion, it is difficult to find a

place of conclusive rest. Gerald Larson (1976) has forwarded a study of the

aesthetic (*rasasvāda*) and religious experiences (*brahmasvāda*) in

Abhinavagupta's work, and has found that "although there is a striking family

similarity between *rasasvāda* and *brahmasvāda* , there appears to be no doubt in

Abhinavagupta's mind that they cannot be reduced to one another" (Larson 1976,

376). This is not surprising, considering the nature of his theology. It is not in

Abhinavagupta's interest to conflate categories into one another – to conflate

distinctions in the pursuit of some kind of transcendent monism. Rather, he seeks

to preserve difference and multiplicity as the expression of the freedom

(*svatantrya*) of the ultimate.

Much of Abhinavagupta's work is in response to Advaita. He explicitly

calls his work an "assimilation and correction" (Larson 1976, 379) of, among

other preceding philosophical trends, Śaṅkara's Advaita. Śaṅkara's claim to the

deceptive conspiracy of language (Alper 1979, 367) is an extension of the second

order dualism of Śaṅkara's two truths (373). When the ultimate is seen as

transcendent of distinctions and conventional activities, and that multiplicity is

known for its illusory and obscurative power, the world of distinctions (including linguistic ones) is negatively valued. This second order dualism (and concomitant philosophical denigration of especially literary, non-specialized use of language) must be overcome in order to have a true form of monism, according to Abhinavagupta. His approach towards the world of multiplicity, literary forms of language and to the monistic project differ significantly from Śaṅkara, and has contributed to the aestheticized theology of Śrīvidyā. Devotionalism and aesthetics are so embedded in the ritual life of Śrīvidyā and in the identity of the initiate who practices both *pūjā* and *sādhanā* that we must attempt to juxtapose these two ways of approaching the world to examine the areas of overlap.

Abhinavagupta advocated the creative agent (the actor or performer) as participant in (and creator of) the cosmic play. This revalorization of sensual enjoyment was based on a linguistic theory that found the literary use of language to be one that "opens, enriches and expands our awareness, not in the direction of abstraction but rather in the direction of a resonant fullness wherein ordinary differentiations of time, space, ego, and so on, are sublimated" (Larson 1976, 384). This aesthetic fullness finds its expression only in the realm of duality and dualistic imagings. As we see in the *Saundarya Laharī*'s imaging of the Goddess in a vast multitude of material ornaments, in a flood of metaphors that encircle her body with all the beauty contained in the cosmos. With Abhinavagupta's idea of the poetic vision of the world as a fundamentally creative and religious event, envisioning the Goddess through metaphorical embellishment becomes a way of recreating and participating in Her ultimacy.

Abhinavagupta's model thus provides a way of understanding aesthetic activity as a Tantric pursuit – one that affirms the multiplicity of expressive language, the concrete forms of poetic vision, and the value of sensual enjoyment. As we have seen, in the *Saundarya Laharī* there is a resolution to the opposition between Śiva and Kāma, between liberation and desire, in the intervention of the Goddess' body. This body becomes identified with desire itself, and the act of aesthetic ornamentation takes on a new kind of power in the Śākta context: beyond merely being a kind of decoration, *alaṅkāra* becomes the demonstration of the Goddess' all-pervasive nature. Mapping the elements of the natural world onto her body mirrors the mapping of her body onto the entire cosmos, demonstrating the Śākta conception of an ultimate Deity who is not transcendent, but ultimate in her manifestation and pervasiveness. Like Desire, she is not limited to one particular manifestation, but her presence is everywhere there is beauty and attraction. Ornamentation carries this valence of theological empowerment, but also carries the valence of marking the shift in the place of the practice of Tantric ritual culture, by idealizing the beauty of the *sumaṅgalī*, and as we will see in the next chapter, creating a space and a text within a Tantric context for exoteric practices of devotion.

Chapter 2

Enjoying the Goddess:
Saundarya Laharī **and Tantric** *Bhakti*

The *Saundarya Laharī* contains references to the subtle body, *mantra*, and

yantra that are certainly 'Tantric'; to contextualize these references and

understand their meaning we must understand them by the way they are used in

ritual practice. In many cases, they appear not in a Tantric symbolic mode but in

an aesthetic devotional mode. The systematic head-to-toe motif of the Goddess'

description is not understood for its meditative significance, but rather for its

beauty in conjuring up an image of the deity for which to cultivate feelings of

devotion. Recall *śloka* 22's invocation of the Goddess, oscillating between

laudatory and transformative meanings: *"Bhavāni tvam"* as "O Goddess" and

"May I become you". For the purposes of this chapter, the words' inherent

dynamism will be calmed for a moment to privilege the laudatory, the devotional,

and the public.

The *Saundarya Laharī* can be classified as one of the class of medieval

stotra or *stava* literature (Gonda 1981, 247). This is a kind of literature that

praises the physical attributes and extols the virtues of a certain deity. They "stand

out by their specific form," first appearing embedded in *kāvya*, Purāṇic narratives,

mahātmyas, etc., but later coming to "[emerge] as an independent genre of

poetry", somewhere around the seventh century C.E. (Gonda 1981, 234).

Gonda's discussion of the literature of this class primarily focuses on the ways

that it repeats and borrows the narratives, images, tropes, and themes of those

earlier Sanskrit works. The tradition of *bhakti* worship is of central importance in understanding the text's movement into devotional performance. In this chapter I will demonstrate the relations between literature and ritual, aesthetics and devotion, and material enjoyment and the Goddess, as they pertain to the context of Śākta *bhakti*.

The *Saundarya Laharī* has been said to play an "integrative role" (Wilke 1996 136) in South India. Wilke outlines these as follows: "[the *Saundarya Laharī*] establishes a link between the three goddesses [i.e. Akhilāṇḍeśvarī of Trichy, Kāmākṣī of Kāñcī, and Śāradā of Sringeri] and other female deities of South India. Local goddesses are equated to the supreme deity" (1996, 136). Further, Wilke notes that the text integrates the erotic aspects of the deity with more benign aspects (1996, 136). The text indeed is at the confluence of multiple imagings of the deity, and the integration of multiple traditions makes itself evident in the references made to meditative symbols, philosophical metaphors, *bhakti* sentiments and saints, and various mythologies. In this chapter, I will examine these references with respect to the period of the text's supposed composition: a period which encompasses the transition of the philosophical centre of the Lalitā cult from Kashmir to the far south; the progression from a Śaiva-oriented philosophical and ritual system made most popular by Abhinavagupta to the south Indian monastic centres (*maṭhas*). This integrative movement operates on several levels. The text itself incorporates references and images from various textual sources and traditions including *kāvya*, *bhakti*, Śākta Vedānta, and siddhi meditative practices. The mode of its use as a devotional text

and the imagery of domesticity carry the rhetoric of equalizing and homogenizing all devotees regardless of caste and gender. This rhetoric exists alongside the affirmation of extant Smārta social hierarchies; it is a movement parallel to the domestication discussed in Chapter 1. The text's integrative role can also be further imagined as the performed combination of *bhakti* and Tantric ritual practices.

I hope to come to some conclusions about the place(s) of *bhakti* in a monistic Tantric tradition, and to clarify how an identity as both devotee and initiate relates to the individual's ritual agency and personal identity across the spectrum of Śrīvidyā ritual practices. While there are traditional esoteric interpretations of the text that fall more neatly into what we might expect of the category of 'Tantra', it seems that at least for this Goddess, devotional worship is a kind of Tantric practice that follows from the Śākta theological understandings of the value of desire. Devotion becomes the ornate face of exoteric Tantric ritual – as if only an entertaining and pleasant exterior will sufficiently shift attention from the subversive practices hidden in secrecy.

Śrīvidyā and *bhakti* texts

There are many devotional texts in the Śrīvidyā canon whose use in a devotional context is similar to that of the *Saundarya Laharī*, including the *Lalitāsahasranāma* and the *Śrī Lalitā Triśati*. Performed as a song, these evocations of her many names and attributes arouse desire in the devotee. The textual foundations of *bhakti* are the poetic works and hagiographies of the *bhakti*

saints, which may be used as inspiration for and exemplification of a devoted life.

Textual sources for South Indian Tantric *bhakti* traditions include the poetry and

hagiographies of the *siddha*s, as well as *stotra* literature, and works hard to

classify like the *Saundarya Laharī*. These texts are used in the ritual context of

devotion, wherein recitation and repetition of the Goddess's many names, is a

mode of praise and a way of cultivating a strong connection of love with the

Goddess.

Both Tantric and non-Tantric streams of *bhakti* involve the use of poetry,

music, and images of the Goddess in the context of worship. Typical activities

involved in this type of ritual are offerings of flowers, praise and song, repetition

of the deity's names (*nāmajapa*), waving of a lamp, etc. This takes place in front

of an image of the chosen deity: in the case of Śākta *bhakti*, the image of the

Goddess may be a comely anthropomorphic one, or the *śrīcakra* itself may be

used as object of devotion. Both the iconic and aniconic forms are described in the

Saundarya Laharī, and both are used in the context of Smārta *pūjā*.

The text is treated as a whole in its use in *pūjā*, but there are significant

stylistic and tonal differences between the first 41 *ślokas* and the latter section of

the *Saundarya Laharī*. The first section more explicitly uses the evocations of the

cakras (e.g. *śloka* 9, where all the 7 *cakras* are mentioned in order). It also

mentions the worship of *kāmakalā yantra* (19), describes the *śrīyantra* (11), the

encoded śrīvidyā *mantra* (32), and uses a common Advaita metaphor (38) of the

swan (*haṃ* and *saḥ*). The former part reflects a less aesthetic tone overall than the

44

content of the second half, which almost entirely dwells on the Goddess' beautiful features.

In attempting to locate the *Saundarya Laharī* among the various streams of devotional literature and practice, it will be useful to understand the nature of the devotional view of the world, the imaging of the Goddess in her association with that world. *Bhakti* is a domestic tradition, one which places emphasis on the sacralization of mundane activities. A typical *bhakti* sentiment of surrender is found in *śloka* 27:

> Through the sight of self-surrender, let my prattle become recitation of your name, the movement of my limbs gestures of worship, my walk perambulation around you, my food sacrificial offering, to you, my lying down prostration to you; whatever I do for my pleasure, let it become transformed into an act of worship to you. (trans. Subramanian 1977, 15)

Bhakti devotionalism is not primarily about the technicality of the circumstances of worship, but rather about the cultivation of an attitude of daily living that is pervaded by an emotional connection to the chosen deity. Even things like correct pronunciation of the text are not emphasized as they would be in a more typically Tantric context: although Śrīvidyā specialists warn against the recitation of the text by non-initiates, "the non-initiate devotees who *do* recite it, often do not even know that such fears and supposed dangers exist" (Wilke 2002, 127). Use by devotees is not easily classified as a Tantric practice – it more clearly falls into the general category of Śākta devotionalism.

Subramanian indicates this kind of *bhakti* sentiment in his appended comments introducing the associated *yantras* of the text – in this we can see very

clearly the way that even what may be thought of as typically Tantric is glossed

over with *bhakti* sentimentality:

> The pictorial symbolism of the *Yantra*, together with the constant
> repetition of the *Mantra* enables the mind to concentrate on the object of
> devotion... As the devotee concentrates with faith, sincerity and surrender,
> he feels the presence of the Divine Power in him and gets fortified against
> the perils and pitfalls, the fears and dangers of life. Earthly
> accomplishments are of little consequence to the one, whose surrender to
> the Divine Grace is complete (Subramanian 1977, 55).

Subramanian glosses over the desired worldly ends of the *yantra*, indicating that

"the true spiritual aspirant should...not attach too much importance to the material

benefits indicated to accrue" (Subramanian 1977, 55). However, the aims of even

bhakti worship are multiple, and include the cultivation of a mood of devotion as

an end in itself, or may include concrete material rewards that are seen to come

from the Goddess *as boons*.

In devotional practice, a fullness of desire is stimulated aesthetically.

Śrīvidyā theology understands that worldly enjoyment and liberation are not

mutually exclusive, but rather that the rewards of practice (e.g. fulfillment of

desires) are gained in this very lifetime and result from sensory and emotional

experiences. This responds to and resolves the disjunction between ritual

performance and achieving results in some transcendent realm, or achieving

metaphysical results (i.e. *puṇya, maṅgala*) that do not necessarily or immediately

translate into material prosperity. Rather than being held separate from the goal

of liberation (*mukti*), enjoyment (*bhukti*) is an extension of ritual praxis.

Giving of boons in the *bhakti* context is limited to a reward-system.

Although the achievement of special powers and gifts is explicitly understood to

stem from the recitation of devotional texts like the *Saundarya Laharī*, *Lalitāsahasranāma* and *Śrī Lalitā Triśati*, the mode of acquirement permits the Goddess to retain her individuality. What happens here is not the empowerment of the devotee, but rather complete surrender. The Goddess freely rewards this surrender with gifts like poesy, physical powers, etc.[6] In this context, poetic skill is granted as a boon, flowing from the Goddess into the mouth of the devotee as would a mother's milk. Although the exoteric imaging is of a material result (here, milk), devotees do not necessarily *expect* specific results for their devotion. The degree of the devotee's ritual empowerment is quite limited; it is important to note that these material rewards are seen to come not because of the power that the devotee accrues through his own ritual agency, but rather that these come as a freely given gift of the Goddess for her dedicated and surrendered devotee. The rewards of devotion to this Goddess are manifold; many devotees directly attribute their worldly success to their devotional practices – "She distributes her blessings lavishly on her devotees, without being asked for this favour" (Wilke 2002, 127). Rather than petitioning the Goddess, as Buhnemann suggests "[t]he devotee offers to his god and thereby *adds to the god's power* that he may be able to give" (emphasis added, Buhnemann 1988, 84).

Tantric *Bhakti*

It seems that a resolution to the persistent Goddess-devotee separation cannot be sought within the frame of reference of devotionalism, for this duality

---

[6] This is completely different from the mode of rewards in the case of the *prayoga*, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

describes the very boundaries of *pūjā*. For the devotee who is not initiated into the monistic framework of *sādhanā*, reading reality through the map of devotionalism alone is not problematic. However, for the Śrīvidyā initiate there are a host of other associated practices, where the duality of Goddess and ritual agent is systematically overcome. We see hints of this in the introduction to the *Lalitāsahasranāma* and the *Śrī Lalitā Triśati*, where the devotees are exhorted to further map the Goddess-realm onto their own bodies (*nyāsa*), completing another stage of unification. This unification is also intimated in the final *śloka* of the *Saundarya Laharī*, where the composer suggests his own insufficiency in offering up the Goddess' own words in her honour:

> Illuminating the sun with small flames,
> Bathing the moon whence nectar flows with drops from moonstones,
> Satisfying the ocean with its own drops of water –
> And me too,
> Praising You with Your own words,
> O Mother of all words. (trans. Clooney 2005, 66)

I would like to argue that despite these textual hints, the separation between Goddess and devotee is not satisfactorily resolved in the domain of devotionalism. *Bhakti* and *pūjā*, are inscribed in the domain of dualistic imagings and ideology. Although there is some degree of overlap with the practices of the initiates, there is only the suggestion or intimation of possible union, rather than the transformative and empowering rituals of the monistic domain of *sādhanā*. As we have seen in the context of aesthetics, this dualistic orientation does not pose a problem for the type of monistic theology forwarded in the Śrīvidyā tradition.

In the context of *bhakti*, the objective of the ritual is to express devotion; even when a text laden with Tantric imagery is used, the context of *bhakti* does

not create what may be thought of as a typically 'Tantric' ritual mode of transformation or empowerment. In the devotional context, the identity-as-initiate is bracketed off and ignored completely: the person is considered as an integrated singular whose entire identity is commanded by the spirit of devotion. Although Brooks identifies the modern form of Śrīvidyā Tantrism in the hands of Smārta Brāhma□as as a kind of "anti-*bhakti* and anti-ascetic movement (,) …Tantrics imagine their tradition to be a reaffirmation of the religious rights of the few over the many and the importance of ritual for living a truly meaningful life without renouncing the mundane" (Brooks 1992a, 183). The kind of self-identity cultivated by the Tantric ritualist with regard to the sphere of Vedic and devotional rites maintains the adept's position at the top of his own imagined ritual hierarchy.

This hierarchy is confirmed by Brooks' research in the contemporary situation of the Cidānanda Maṇḍalī, a Śrīvidyā group in Madras City. In this instance, public rites which contain varying degrees of 'Tantric' content are explained as "as extension of the mandate to provide an example for others and as a means by which to extend the grace of the goddess to which Śrīvidyā adepts claim privileged access" (Brooks 1992b, 421). Although these exoteric rites contain elements which are distinctly Tantric, the officiants use a kind of coded ritual language, leaving the text of the ritual open to individual interpretation, or lack thereof: "[they] would keep 'secret' elements concealed, make them inaccessible to those without initiate knowledge by using ritual language, or leave certain controversial matters unexplained" (Brooks 1992b, 422).

In the case of a text like the *Saundarya Laharī*, in exoteric ritual the text is also left open to individual interpretation, away from the tradition of interpretation by the guru in the initiate context. Typically Tantric elements like the encoding of the *Pañcadaśākùarī mantra* in *śloka* 32 remain the bastion of the esoteric transmission – "its forms are mentioned only rarely in privately circulated ritual manuals without attention to its symbolic interpretation" (Brooks 1992a, 108). In the *Bhakti* context, words are taken at face value, not for their subtle signification. In this way also, the *Saundarya Laharī*'s imaging of the Goddess with the typically Tantric emphasis on energetic centres *(cakra)* of her body is not of particular importance when it is considered as a piece of *stotra* literature. These descriptions may be taken as a kind of aesthetic flourish or aid to visualization rather than meditative tools. These elements, when used in exoteric context, do not carry the extra valence of transformative signification that is instrumental to the commentarial and *sādhanā* perspectives.

I would like to suggest that the inclusion of these extra, increasingly subtle *(sūkùma)*, and progressively less literal interpretations constitute the division between the exoteric and the esoteric. The deviation of the signifier from the signified in progressive hierarchy parallels the deviation of the ritual world from the 'real' world in the formation of the secret society. While in the exoteric ritual contexts, participants may "sit at a distance from the altar in groups gossiping, laughing, and enjoying themselves" (Brooks 1992b, 426). Although under a Tantric interpretation, this is understood as a gathering of *sumaṅgalīs* or *suvāsinīs* (married women) engaged in the practice of the Goddess worshipping herself

(427). However, the participants themselves seemed to ignore any kind of Tantric elements in what under one participant's description seems to be a gathering understood as *bhakti*: "Everyone here is treated like a guest. Few understand the rituals or what we say. That is no matter. The goddess shares her blessings" (Brooks 1992b, 427). Without the Tantric approach of re-reading the *suma☐galīs* as goddesses, what is happening for most participants is an act of sharing the grace of the Goddess.

Understanding the place of this text in the aggregation of various ritual types found in the complex system of Śrīvidyā, I will follow Douglas Renfrew Brooks' analysis of Tantric and brahmanical ritual, negotiating the place of *bhakti* devotionalism in the schema of Smārta ritual practices. Each ritual system can be understood to operate by creating and following a different kind of map of reality. These maps may overlay in complex ways for the multiple ritual identities of the initiate. As discussed in the Introduction, Brooks (1992a) and Smith (1978) have outlined two kinds of maps by which the Vedic and Tantric worlds operate: disjunctive and convergent. Following Brooks' analysis of how these two maps may exist alongside each other, I will pursue an analysis of how the *bhakti* worldview may fit into the monistic schema of *sādhanā*.

How can devotion (which is explicitly and persistently dualistic in orientation) contribute to a monistic project? From Gudrun Buhnemann's understanding, fitting *bhakti* into a monistic 'Tantric' schema may well be impossible: "from the strict monistic position the performance of *pūjā*, which is conditioned by dualism, appears as an act that is finally meaningless"

(Buhnemann 1988, 92). Buhnemann's understanding reveals a position that strips dualities of meaning, a kind of transcendent monism: a position that takes only processes of unification as meaningful. But it is telling that she indicates that the meaninglessness stems from the viewpoint of this kind of transcendence. The devotee must operate under a different understanding of the place of devotional activities than what we may think of as a strictly monistic viewpoint.

This kind of transcendent understanding of the ultimate is reflected in Saõkara's view of the importance of devotion: "from the point of view of ultimate Reality, it is true that there is no distinction between God and the individual, or between one soul and another. But from the point of view of worldly experience, one cannot ignore the oblations of religion and devotion" (Vyas 1977, 86). For Śaṅkara, *bhakti* cannot fit into the same schema as monism: from the true perspective, that of the absolute, there is no coherent place for *bhakti* to occupy. What follows is the development of a schema of 'two truths', conventional dualistic truth, and ultimate non-dual truth. While *bhakti* may find some meaning in the former, it is seen as useless in the pursuit of the second because of its dualistic orientation.

Looking beyond this textual view, Śaṅkara's position seems more complex. While he may have denied the value of *bhakti* in the ultimate *mokùa*-oriented sense, both his hagiography and the lineage that he has founded may be seen to support *bhakti* practice. In his investigation of the hagiographical tradition of Ādi Śaṅkara, Lorenzen finds that the devotional hymns of the teacher reflect something of a "practical concern for the continued existence of the monastic

organization set up to preserve that [i.e. Śaṅkara's] doctrine" (Lorenzen 1983, 160), as he thought that the metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta are "too complex to provide religious consolation for the common man" (160). These hagiographies "reflect a response to the needs and demands of popular religious taste as well as efforts from above to disseminate on a popular level a more learned tradition" (155). Śaṅkara is attributed authorship of devotional hymns to multiple and various specific Gods and Goddesses: Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta (including the *Saundarya Laharī)*. As Lorenzen notes, trying to reconcile the devotional hymns with the rigorous and technical philosophical works of Advaita provides something of a "logical conflict" (Lorenzen 1983, 160). The attributed composition by Śaṅkara (or any authority at the Śaṅkara *maṭhas*) indicates a desire to win over the common people's religious support from the the inroads of unorthodox schools like Buddhism, and also to mark authority over many diverse localized religious orientations including some of Śākta orientation. In these hagiographical accounts, during his *digvijayas* (tours of victory), Śaṅkara "meets and defeats some Śāktas in Rāmeśvaram... [and] Tantric worshippers of Bhagavatī in Kāñcī" (Lorenzen 1983, 163).

This discussion has pointed to the possibility of the historical or pragmatic compatibility of monistic metaphysics and *bhakti* devotionalism. However, we must hope for more compatibility than just historical coexistence and pragmatic or political strategizing. Śaṅkara's monism of transcendence is insufficient in this regard, but I will cling to the hope that is kindled by the perspective of Sen Sharma in his examination of the place of devotion in the philosophies of Trika

system of Kashmir and the Nirankari movement in Sikhism. He writes that "it is generally believed that Bhakti and pure monism are incompatible, and, as such, Bhakti can have no place in a purely monistic system of thought. Such a conclusion is unwarranted and without any foundation" (Sen Sharma 1970, 42). He points to the creation of theological space by Abhinavagupta, among others, in the synthesis of aesthetics and metaphysics. In this synthesis, the persistence of duality in the devotional framework does not render the world of multiplicity meaningless, but rather describes it as a necessary freedom (*svātantrya*) of creative expression. This theology of desire was transmitted and refined in the Śrīvidyā tradition

The case for the Śrīvidyā monism is different because it has an entirely different conception of the value of worldly experience, and of the possibility of the coextensivity of the absolute and the world of differentiation. In Śrīvidyā, duality is not seen as something separate from the one (Goddess), but rather as something resulting from her inherent dynamism and potency. Linguistically duality is not seen as a reversal of the unitary; multiplicity is not seen as the opposite of the Goddess, but rather as coextensive with her. For example, the *Lalitāsahasranāma* is understood in the Tantric mode as a kind of "diffuse mantra" (Brooks 1990 104), the recitation of which can ostensibly lead to the same type of rewards as the Śrīvidyā *mantra*, which is composed of seed (*bīja)* syllables. Regular language (that is, literary language) is not something that is diametrically different from the esoteric language of the *mantra*. Rather, we may understand them as two ends of a Tantric spectrum from crystallized to diffuse. In

the same way as the multiplicity of linguistic and aesthetic expression is affirmed, the dualistic mode of devotional imagings and ritual practices is affirmed.

Distraction and Domestification

The *Saundarya Laharī* makes literary and aesthetic the esoteric, the erotic, and also the meditative. This is a transformation from images interpreted by the initiate as instructional, progressive, and encoded, coming to a use where they are stripped of 'Tantric' significance and are understood as delights or entertainments. This transformation is a complete one: 'Tantric' references are not understood as practical injunctions in the devotional context. They exist for two reasons: (1) to add to the overall lushness of the literary landscape of the work; and (2) to distract and satisfy any urge to break into the esoteric realm of the poem. The hints at meditative and *sādhanā* practice can be seen as the gentle mainstreaming of these meditative ideas and images, rendering them relatively known and harmless to the general public. They cease to belong only to the highly charged esoteric ritual space, and enter lightly into the realm of discourse and exoteric ritual practices. They are stripped of their prescriptive weight and are understood in this context as literary tropes and embellishment.

These Tantric references are the connection between the devotional and esoteric readings of the text and the literary aspect of the text. They literally form the basis for readings of the *Saundarya Laharī* as either an open (exoteric) or closed (esoteric) text. Following Kamil Zvelebil's (1973, 220) distinction between *bhakti* texts as "open", and Tantric texts, or those which require a teacher

for interpretation of significance as "closed", the *Saundarya Laharī* is compellingly both open and closed, *bhakti* context. The *bhakta* may interpret the text without following explicit rules or patterns of interpretation. In the Tantric context, the *Saundarya Laharī* is closed: the meaning is unchangeable, and unpredictable (i.e. not necessarily literal) until provided by the guru in the commentarial tradition.

The typology of closed and open texts finds resonance with Nabokov's characterization of two types of Tamil ritual:

> some... are 'prescriptive,' others are 'performative'... The former follows explicit rules about who may do what and with whom; in the latter people seem to be making up the rules as they go along. So with Tamil rituals: some give participants no other option but to comply with stated procedures and aims; others permit everyone to make their own performative and interpretative choices. (Nabokov 2000,10)

Here we see that a closed interpretation of the text (i.e. esoteric) follows strict rule governed ritual actions, and is located within the structure of the *kula* which prescribes antinomian ritual actions that are available only to those who strictly follow these rules. Nabokov sees this type of ritual as demanding a transformative engagement on the part of the participant, forcing them to cause "deep and irreversible mutations in [their] physical persons"; to change their "'sensory' senses of self"; to cause them to "adopt 'public' identities" (Nabokov 2000, 10).

In the open interpretation of the text (i.e. *bhakti*), although the associated ritual may seem to follow a traditional sequence of actions, the performative mode of ritual is revealed: "the imposition of a relatively consistent frame of reference does not enforce uniform interpretations or transformations on all the participants" (Nabokov 2000, 10). The effect of engaging in a prescriptive ritual,

Nabokov argues, is to make possible the performance of "a disengagement from social roles and personal relationships" (Nabokov 2000, 10-11). This disengagement is not understood as a physical rejection, but rather as a form of temporal evasion of the physical world and its obligations: a temporary kind of freedom found in the context of ritual.

What then is the place of *bhakti*, of devotional worship, in the context of Tantric ritual and traditions? The antinomian activities of early Tantric cremation ground culture confronted Brahmanical ideas of purity - the ascetics involved with these rituals challenged societal norms in order to gain a kind of transformative power. Around the time of the composition of the *Saundarya Laharī*, these transformative rituals came to be practiced by an entirely different set of ritual specialists, the ones most intimately involved in upholding the orthodoxy: the Brāhmaṇas. Instead of challenging social norms, the antinomian rituals became personally subversive, in that the very foundations of the orthodox public identity would be exploded by the subversive practices of the secret *kula* identity. Pitting these two identities against each other necessitates keeping them strictly defined from each other, using the strategy of secrecy and esoterism. Esoterism is the movement of keeping secret; it is tied to the movement of exoterism, of offering up and making public. Maintaining a domesticated Tantric identity not only to accommodates, but necessitates *bhakti* and other similar exoteric ritual frames. Domesticated Tantra necessitates aestheticization; it necessitates an opening of the text to individual interpretation; it necessitates the development of a public exterior to enclose the *kula*.

We can understand the intimations of Tantric images and practices to the
non-initiates in much the same way as Michael D. Rabe and David Gordon White
have outlined in their discussions of *kāmakalā yantras* appearing in disguised
form (i.e. as erotic sculptures) on temple architecture. In many tenth and eleventh
century temples, there is a marked increase in the "prominence given to erotic
sculpture" (Rabe 2000, 434). Rabe indicates that these erotic images are
presented partially in the orthodox acceptance of *kāma* as one of the fundamental
aims of human activity (i.e. as one of the *puruṣārtha*), along with the Tantric
understanding that "harnessing the *kāma* impulse itself, albeit under the most
rigorous if not pleasure-subverting ritual conditions, can also be empowering and
effective in the pursuit of moksa – not to mention many lesser achievements along
the way" (Rabe 2000, 435). In this interpretation, desire is seen as a means to the
ultimate end of *mokṣa* – in a hierarchical relationship wherein desire is
subordinate to liberation or transcendence. As noted in chapter one, this hierarchy
is not necessarily the case in Śākta forms of monistic theology, wherein *kāma* is
taken as an end in itself. Theological discussions aside, what seems to be going
on here is a kind of strategic manoeuvre wherein erotic displays are used as
distractions from an underlying esoteric *yantra*.

A Tantric work on temple construction, the *Śilpa Prakāśa* (*circa* eleventh
century), discusses the erotic imagery not as a valorization of sexual activity in
transformative or empowering acts, or as a legitimate end in itself, but rather as a
kind of 'divertissement' (Rabe 2000, 434). The *Śilpa Prakāśa* describes the
esoteric *kāmakalā yantra* as follows: "This *yantra* is utterly secret, it should not

58

be shown to everyone. For this reason a love scene [*mithuna-mūrti*] has to be carved on the lines of the *yantra*... The *kāmabandha* [i.e. love scene] is placed there to give delight to people" (quoted in White 187). Devagana Desai refers to these arts as another kind of coded language (Desai 1984, 41) – reminiscent of the use of coded language in *śloka* 32 that keeps the Śrīvidyā *mantra* secret.

In a similar way, aesthetics can be successfully enlisted to distract and delight people from investigation of hidden secrets, much as the graceful musical rhythms and the ornate description of the Goddess' outward appearances in the *Saundarya Laharī* may act as distractions from the encoded *mantra*s and the instructions for meditation also found in the text. To the commentarial tradition, these encoded secrets are the most precious gems of the text. I would like to suggest that the cohabitation of multiple ritual identities for Śrīvidyā initiates has much of the same dynamic of publicity and secrecy: to the initiate, the esoteric exists only through the exoteric.

It is in that final pursuit of understanding and the multiplicity of identities under the auspices of Tantric studies, that we should take the lead of Sanderson and see not just the existence of the different imagings as a "catalogue of unlocated and unrelated theories of the referent of the 'I'-cognition...[rather] we must seek those principles implicit in social life which gave soteriological sense to these idealizations and make comprehensible their coexistence in awareness of each other" (Sanderson 1985, 191). The introduction of *kula* esoterism to householders has been attributed to the synthesis of Abhinavagupta, wherein "certain groups were brought in from the visionary fringe to accommodate areas

of orthodox self-representation.... The visionary power of the heterodox self is recoded in order to be inscribed *within* the orthodox social identity and in such a way that it reveals the latter as a lower nature within the one person" (Sanderson 1985, 191).

To understand this in Sanderson's frame, we can take the example of the Vedic and Kaula identities. The two identities have different conceptions of the category of purity. In the Vedic context, purity was considered to be "an inalienable property of the body" (Sanderson 1985, 192), to be absolutely respected and preserved by his conformity with the traditional injunctions. The Kaula re-coding of purity takes place under its overriding concern for power as primary. These two identities are closely interdependent; for the Brāhmaṇas of Kashmir, the Tantric identity plays off of the strict pure/impure duality of the Vedic identity, so that within the secret society of the *kula*, that very duality "could be obliterated through the experience of a violent, duality-devouring expansion of consciousness beyond the narrow confines of orthodox control into the domain of excluded possibilities" (Sanderson 1985, 199). Here we see that the practices of the Kaula identity actually obliterate the primordial values of the Vedic identity.

The dual identities of the Kashmiri Brāhmaṇas are thus far from being unlocated or unrelated – we cannot say that the *kula* domain of ritual brackets off or ignores the orthodox identity. In this context, the identities are held together with the relationship of subversion and, as Sanderson notes, the relation between them is hierarchical. The layering of identities takes place under the auspices of

esoterism; here we may see that the dynamic of the esoteric identity is to admit (nay, necessitate) multiple identities and to hierarchize them with the *kula* identity taking precedence. The Tantric traditions keep orthodox codes of conduct and ritual on an "outer level of a concentric hierarchy of ritual and discipline" in which the practitioner was bound "at the lower, more public, level of his practice" (Sanderson 1988, 661).

This movement towards hierarchy is also found in the commentaries on the *Saundarya Laharī*. The commentary on *śloka* 27, which is cited above as containing a typical *bhakti* sentiment ("through the sight of self surrender..."), establishes the precedence of esoteric forms of practice over exoteric:

> The worship of the Devi is of a twofold character, namely exoteric (the lower form) and esoteric (the higher form). The former contains all the elements of prayer, gesture, circumambulation, oblation and prostration, as practised by the ordinary worshipper. The latter, which does not attach any importance to ceremonial forms, is referred to here as practiced by the Jivanmukta-s. (Sastri and Ayyangar 1937, 106)

The commentary establishes the precedence of the initiate over the non-initiate, in that the practices of the 'ordinary' devotee are a kind of empty formalism. The commentary indicates that while the initiate who has attained liberation on the esoteric path (the Jīvanmukta) is not attached to things like devotional activities, he still practices them. Although there is the rhetoric of the initiate's transcendence of devotion, the initiate still goes through the motions of *bhakti*.

In the contemporary context, this devotion may be to a Tantric goddess like Tripurasundarī, or using elements like the *śrīyantra* that also have esoteric uses. As Sanderson notes, the domestication of the tradition is followed by processes of exoterization of certain elements (Sanderson 1988, 662). Even when

some formerly esoteric elements of a Tantric text or practice become exoteric, they are left open to interpretation through strategies of omission (as in the case of the Cidānanda Maṇḍalī), or through a strategy of encoding (as seen in erotic temple art and in the symbolic language of the *Saundarya Laharī*). Both of these strategies act to preserve the authority of the guru to fix and identify subtle valences of meanings to the signifiers in a context of initiation. The connotation and activity of the 'esoteric' has changed over time as the text comes into various valences of meaning in its contexts of use. The movements between secrecy and publicity are facilitated by a text that seems to simultaneously contain multiple meanings. The *Saundarya Laharī* can be understood as a boundary between the multiple ritual frames and identities.

Chapter 3

Worldly Means, Worldly Ends:
***Prayoga* and Esoterisms**

Each *śloka* of the *Saundarya Laharī* is associated with different seed-

syllable *mantra*s that may be used, after appropriate initiation, to gain rewards

such as "advancement in career" (*śloka* 77), "power to enter other bodies" (*śloka*

84), and "control over serpents" (*śloka* 87). For the initiates, the *Saundarya*

Laharī is a manual for attaining creative control over their immediate

circumstances. This is effected through the Tantric understanding of ritual as

fundamentally world-transformative: "the effects of ritual persist and carry into

the ordinary world even if the ritual, and the rules by which it is governed, does

not" (Brooks 1992a, 185). These practitioners are liberating themselves by

gaining power over disagreeable elements and using incantations to devise better

circumstances. This section will examine the place of occult practice with respect

to Śrīvidyā *sādhanā* (liberative practice), to reveal how the aim of magical world-

transformation traditionally cohabits with the aim of *sādhanā,* which is self-

transformation.

In this chapter, I will analyze the *prayoga* formulae, situating them in the

context of other systems that make use of *mantra, yantra,* and/or have similar

desired results (e.g. medicine, *aṣṭa siddhi*). The *prayoga* formulae reflect aspects

of alchemical and medical traditions in maintaining a scientifically instrumental

approach (something shared also shared by early Tantric traditions like alchemy),

while foregrounding a domesticity and simplicity of methodology that resonates

with the non-ascetic concerns of the modern Śrīvidyā tantrika. The *Saundarya*

Lahari's relation to other *prayoga* manuals of similar genre (Khanna 1979 calls

these texts 'occult'; while Goudriaan and Gupta 1981 call them 'magic') will then

be assessed. These other manuals appear late in the development of the Tantric

corpus: texts with 'magical' elements including the *Yantracintāmaõi*, and the

Kāmaratna Tantra may point to a time when *prayoga* manuals were being

popularized and codified. A *prayoga* tradition may have similarly become

associated in a unique way with the *Saundarya Laharī*.

Finally, the *prayoga* will be placed in the context of Śrīvidyā philosophy

and *sādhanā* – in the context of esoteric Śākta Tantric practice. The *prayoga*

manual has been accommodated within the Śrīvidyā corpus because it is resonant

with the use of *yantras* to harness power and with the ritual instrumentality of

sādhanā. It seems that some interesting manoeuvres in the commentarial tradition

must have accompanied this alliance, especially with respect to the use of *yantras*

and *mantras* other than the full Śrīcakra and Śrīvidyā-as-*mantra*. When ritual

tradition is codified as ritual manual, it can be seen as a new mode of theological

speculation: ritual manual as the unpacking of the discursive aspect of ritual

performance. However, the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* formulae have not been

the focus of further speculation or commentary, implying that there is a different

understanding from the ritual actions of *sādhanā*. The instructions for the use of

yantra and *mantra* in the *prayoga* manual contain elements of scientific precision

and instrumentality that can also be seen in *sādhanā*, but these *yantras* and

mantras have not sparked the specific arraying of macro- and micro-cosmic

correspondences that are found in the *sādhanā* manuals' discussion of the

complete embodiments of the Goddess-as-*Śrīcakra* and *Śrīvidyā mantra*. Rather,

the *yantras* themselves may communicate most appropriately by means of a

commentarial silence that emphasizes the distinction between the traditions of

sādhanā and *prayoga*. The interplay of text, speculation, and praxis has provided

the space for expanding the valence of meaning of the *Saundarya Laharī* to

include at least two distinct modes of esoteric practice.

Two versions of the *prayoga* manual associated with the *Saundarya*

Laharī are available for our use: the first is found in Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy

(1957, 17-117) in which the *yantra* and instructions are provided alongside each

śloka's translation and commentary. The second comes from Subramanian (1977,

55-106) in which they are appended separately. Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru

indicate their familiarity with "only three or four versions treating of Prayoga"

and have followed only one for print: "the most prominent and important

[version]" (12-13). This text, which they received "from an ancient family in

Conjeevaram [Kāñcīpuram]," reportedly contains *yantra*, *bīja* , "the different

postures of the worshipper, and similar prescriptions . . . [that are] described in it

to the minutest detail" (Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru 13). They also indicate that

they consider the *prayoga* manual "very rare and important" (15).

In the other version, Subramanian gives no indication of his source of the

manual, introducing them only with a warning that "the true spiritual aspirant

should not ... attach too much importance to the material benefits indicated to

accrue in the succeeding pages," and indicating that they should be used only to

enable "the mind to concentrate on the object of devotion" (1977, 55). This is a

curious attitude: one that first discredits the pursuit of material ends, and then intimates that the use of the *mantra* and *yantra* are merely tools to facilitate devotion. Considering this dismissive orientation towards the use of the *prayoga* instructions as an activity in itself, it is not surprising that Subramanian has both separated them into an appendix and curtailed the instructions to a few words per *śloka*.

The *yantra*s, *bīja mantra*s and instructions in Subramanian differ in only a few relatively minor ways from Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru: variance in *anusvāra* of *bīja*; difference in prescribed number of repetitions (*japa*); and rotation of several curved-line *yantras* (35, 50, and 81). Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru relay more variety of materials on which to inscribe the *yantras* and greater detail of procedure in general than Subramanian. Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru still restrict themselves to what must be a brief summary of the 'minutest' detail that they report to have found in the source text, but they are more detailed than Subramanian; this is not surprising considering Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru's relative esteem for the *prayoga* manual. I will take their version of the *prayoga* as the more 'prominent and important' version of the two, as the details present therein may prove useful for the present purpose of situating the text with respect to other texts and traditions.

Mantra, Means and Ends: Ritual Instruments and the World

Medicine and alchemy share a materiality of means and end: both use scientifically precise methodologies using products of the natural world for the

end of bodily health (immortality is here understood as the most extreme form of physical health: complete avoidance of not only illness but also death). Comparing the *Saundarya Laharī* manual to other traditions with similarly this-worldly ends and material, scientific means will help to determine the modality of effect and methodology of the practice.

The desired effects of the majority of the *prayoga-yantra* involve medical concerns, such as immunity and healing. For example, the instructions for *śloka* four are: "[t]he worship of the Yantra drawn on a gold plate should be continued for 36 days and this Verse [*dum*] repeated three thousand times a day. All diseases will be cured, and immunity from the misery of sickness secured" (Śāstri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru 1957, 23). In fact, almost one-third of the desired effects listed in the text have to do with health and fertility. Such health concerns as possession from evil spirits may also be included, as they would be in the Atharvavedic context: "'*Ghora vidhi*' are undertaken to chase away the demons of diseases" (Karambelkar 1961, 139).

Where does *mantra* fit in the schema of ritual means and ends? The use of *mantras* as a mode of wielding power over reality is a pan-Indic phenomenon. *Mantra* and *yantra* come to special prominence in the Tantric traditions, where they gain centrality in philosophy and specificity in ritual practice. However, both are always used in the context of power and action, as a kind of incantation: "the emphasis in both Vedic and Tantric usages is on the mantra as an *effective* word, a word of action, not just of thought" (Wheelock 1989, 96). Wade Wheelock observes both the relative simplicity and lack of variety of Tantric *mantras* as

67

compared to Vedic *mantra*s. This distinction is apparent from first glance: the Tantric *bīja* syllable is not a word, while Vedic *mantra*s are composed in configurations that *also* have meaning outside the ritual context. This is a significant difference. Wheelock classifies the Vedic understanding of *mantra*s as "means to an end", and the Tantric understanding of *mantra* as "a manifestation of the goal itself" (Wheelock 1989, 97).

This kind of stark delineation of Vedic *mantra*s as 'means' and Tantric *mantra*s as 'ends' is (not surprisingly) problematic especially in light of the *prayoga* manual, which is a Tantric text that seems to use *mantra* and *yantra* as ritual implements towards wordly ends. Here, *bīja* syllables seem to be used as means, rather than an end in themselves. In response to Wheelock's assessment, Frits Staal writes that these "certain alleged differences between the two kinds of mantras [i.e. Vedic and Tantric], in fact, do not exist" (Staal 1989, 59). His argument is based on the use of the Vedic verse in the ritual context where literally meaningful verses are treated as if they are meaningless (Staal 1989, 63). If Vedic verses can have this kind of polyvalence as both ends and means, does the same hold true for *bīja* syllables?

In the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* manual this certainly seems to be the case. We also see this use of *bīja*s as means resonated in a late medical text, the *Hārītasaṁhita*. This text diverges from the tradition of the long *mantra*s of the *Caraka* and *Suśrūta Saṁhitas*, using what seems to be a series of *bīja*-syllables to aid in parturition. This late development shows the influence from seed-form Tantric *mantra*s, to be used in the treatment of childbirth injuries: "Sur le lit on

deposera un diagramme portant inscrits plusiers germes phoniques *(aiü hrāü hrīṃ hrūṃ hraiṃ hroṃ hrauṃ hraḥ)* sur un feuille d'āḍhaka(-ī), que la parturiente *(gurviṇī)* aura vue au préalable" (Rosu 1986, 242). The *Hārītasaṃhita* also prescribes similar *mantras* for use in protections from ghosts *(bhūta)* , for antidotes to poison, and to quell fever (Rosu 1986, 242). Thus we cannot make the simple equation of mantric-verse and means, *bīja* and ends.

Understanding the *mantra* as an end-in-itself seems possible if one looks at it philosophically, but becomes problematic when one attempts to understand ritual practice. Within Tantric *Mantraśāstra*, a use *(viniyoga)* is always assigned to the *mantra* (Padoux 1989, 307). The *mantra* may be seen as a ritual implement with a specific mode of use and effect, but this specificity on a ritual level opens up to another philosophical ambiguity:

> such an intentionality is not that of the mantra but of its user. It can be attributed only metaphorically to the mantra itself. An ambiguity as to where the intentionality lies, however, is kept up in such systems as the Śaiva nondualist ones, which treat consciousness and mantra as identical at their highest levels. (Padoux 1989, 307)

The ambiguity also remains in the context of Śrīvidyā: in the case of *sādhanā*, the *mantra* may be treated as full of intentionality and specific desire, just as the Goddess is full of her *śakti* (power, dynamism). In the case of the *prayoga-mantras,* the same *bījākṣaras* are used for several different ends. For example, *ślokas* 27 and 78 have the same *bījākṣaras (hriṃ)* and *yantra,* but are used for *ātmajñāna* (Self-knowledge) and royal favour respectively. This indicates that the intentionality of use of the *prayoga-mantras* belongs to the practitioners themselves rather than to the *mantra* or *yantra.* In the context of *sādhanā* they are

imbued with their own fullness of intentionality. The *bīja mantra* can thus be understood both as a means (in *prayoga*), and as an end (in *sādhanā*).

Meditation, Siddhi, and Magic: *Prayoga* and the *Tantras*

The second most frequently sought after effects in the *prayoga* manual are those of what we might call "supernatural" effects, such as mastery over the elements, subjugation of others, etc; here we can see a similarity with the acquisition of *siddhis*. In fact, *śloka* 30 is to be performed for the acquisition of the *aṣṭa siddhi* (eight achievements). As enumerated by the *Prapañcasāra*, these are: *aṇimā* (atomisation), *laghimā* (levitation), *mahimā* (magnification), *garimā* (greatness), *prāpti* (power of getting anything), *prākāmya* (fulfillment of desire), *vaśitva* (charm), and *iśitva* (sovereignty over all things) (Bhattacharyya 1992, 150).

Comparing the *siddhis* with the ends of the *prayoga* instructions is problematic: although they are mentioned in *śloka* 30, the orientation of the majority of the *ślokas* is towards ends that are more 'natural'. Another problem is that *siddhis* are often een as by-products of *sādhanā*, not as ends in themselves. This points to the emic difference between ritual for the purpose of liberation (*mukti*) and ritual for the achievement of worldly prosperity (*bhukti*).

Commentarially *bhukti* is considered appropriate only as a by-product of more legitimate other-worldly ends. In Śrīvidyā, the acquisition of *siddhis* is associated with the outer rings of the *Śrīcakra*: "the *yoginīs* of the *manvarśa* sub-cakra are specifically referred to as powers (*śakti*), and each *yoginī*'s name

specifies the accomplishment (*siddhi*) associated with its worship. ... this entails

an extraordinary kind of power and influence over natural and social events"

(Brooks 1992a 133). It is here on the outer enclosures of the cakra that "the

plane of mundane existence is reached, that is, the substantive emanations

emerging from the subtle aspects of Śakti and the reflective forms of those aspects

directly preceding it" (Brooks 1992a 133). The *siddhis* have been incorporated

into the ritual significance of the *śrīcakra*. However, the acquisition of these

powers would not be sought independently of *sādhanā*, but is rather subordinated

to a low stratum that is held in much secrecy by the tradition. Pranavananda

criticizes even one of the great commentators of the Śrīvidyā tradition,

Bhāskararāya, for revealing his 'supernatural' powers: "Bhāskararāya had a

superiority complex of possessing siddhi-s by virtue of his Śrīvidyā -upāsana,

which he used to exhibit sometimes. It is not in consonance with a realized or an

attained person" (Pranavananda 106).

Early 'magical' texts include texts like the *Ḍāmara* groups of Tantras;

these texts are composed in the dialogical style of many Tantras, and the group is

one of four distinct types of Tantric Śāstra (*Āgama, Yāmala, Tantra*, and *ḍāmara*)

(Goudriaan 1981, 118 n.28). The characteristic feature of this class is an

orientation towards magic and exorcism. These must be quite early: one Buddhist

member of this class, the *Bhūtāḍāmara*, has been dated back to the seventh

century by Bhattacharyya; the Hindu *Tridaśaḍāmara* is found even in Nepal by

the twelfth century, and contains reference to the deity "Sundarī" (Goudriaan 1981 118-119)[7].

Ends of the ōāmara group of texts include the ṣaṭ karmāṇī ('six acts' of magic) are: śānti (pacification), vaśīkaraṇa (subjugation), stambhana (immobilization), uccāṭana (eradication), vidveṣaṇa (sowing dissension) and māra□a (liquidation, i.e. destruction of an enemy) (Goudriaan 1981, 116 n.17). They seem to be the magical equivalents of the meditative aṣṭasiddhi. Goudriaan characterizes these texts as of a "simple and popular character" (1981 119), but simplicity is always relative. Compared to the Saundarya Laharī's prayoga, the procedures and mantras used are quite complicated, such as this one for the "captivation of a wicked lady":

> Kākajaṅghā, Vaca, and Kuṣṭa [various herbs] should be mixed
> with one's own semen and blood. Then, if all these things
> together are given in the hands of a woman or she is made to
> drink them with water along with the recitation of the mantra,
> "Auü namo bhagavate rudrāya aum cāmuṇḍe amukīm (substitute
> the word amukīm for the name of the person to be captivated) me
> vasamānaya svāhā," then that woman will become a life-long
> slave of her husband, and even after the death of the husband will
> lament and keep roaming in the cremation ground in search of
> her deceased husband. (trans. Rai 1988, 15)

This is, of course, a relatively complex procedure compared to even the most complicated procedure found in the Saundarya Laharī (śloka 49):

> the Yantra is to be drawn on turmeric and the śloka recited 1,000 times for
> 10 days; the turmeric should thereafter be charred, mixed with sesamum
> oil and used as a coryllium caused to be applied to the eye by a lady under
> 25 years of age and with blue eyes; the devotee will discover a treasure.
> (Śāṣtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru 195, 82-3)

---

[7] Although Śrīvidyā is known to be practiced in Nepal, this appellation ("beautiful one") is not necessarily specific to Śrīvidyā.

In contrast, most of the *prayoga* instructions require a very simple procedure, often with no more than reciting the *mantra* over a *yantra* inscribed on gold plate. This simplicity is unheard of in the *Ḍāmara Tantra*. The form of the *mantra* is also different from that of the *prayoga* manual. These *mantra*s are long, often require substituting the name of the 'victim' of the magical act, invoke deities, etc., in contrast with the short *bīja* syllables of the *prayoga* manual.

Also involving complicated procedures are the *Uḍḍiśi Tantras*. Shared are the uses of substitution and symbol in the transference of the power of the *mantra* and *yantra* to inanimate objects. Included are instructions like adding the name of the person to be affected to the *mantra* and/or *yantra* used in the ritual (Khanna 1979, 159). We can see a progression from methods of full-time ritual specialists like the alchemists and *siddhas* who performed for their own benefit, to the court context wherein magical rites were performed for entertainment and security of the king. We can see this kind of royal concern being carried over in much of Tantric ritual and iconography, but in the case of the *Saundarya Laharī* manual, the connection is a concern with the obtainment of royal favour (e.g. *śloka* 68, 78).

Although Khanna states it to be the case (Khanna 1979, 154), the manual does do not date from the eighth century. It is unlikely that the *Saundarya Laharī* itself dates back that far (see, among others, Brooks 1992a, 46, and for an interesting list of reasons why, Pranavananda 82-86). We can be sure only that it was composed before Lakṣmīdhara's commentary. Lakṣmīdhara's did not, however, comment on the *prayoga* manual associated with text when he produced

his commentary; neither do any of the other eight commentaries Brooks has consulted contain reference to the *prayoga* instructions. Śāstri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru give a list of thirty-two known commentaries on the *Saundarya Laharī* but do not mention if they deal with the *prayoga* instructions. We may assume that they would have mentioned if they did, especially considering the importance they assign to the *prayoga* manual. Brooks interprets this lacuna to suggest that "(1) the *prayoga yantras* and *mantras* were not known to the historical commentators, or (2) did not warrant mention, and (3) are of recent origin" (Brooks 1992a, 46). The small degree of divergence between the two versions of the manual in this discussion also indicates a recent date of composition for the written version.

The *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* manual is but one of several such texts designed to aid the practitioners to gain power over their immediate surroundings using *yantra* and *mantra* as means. Now we will consider similar manuals to the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* that involve practices by which healing, longevity, material gains, etc. may be sought. By looking at the contents and format of texts like the *Yantracintāmaṇi* and *Kāmaratna Tantra*, we can develop a possible framework for the development of *prayoga* manuals.

The *Yantracintāmaõi* is a seventeenth century text by Dāmodara (see Türstig 1998, Rosu 1986, Riviere 1976) and "is solely devoted to 80 occult yantras, which it is claimed grant all desires, conscious or unconscious" (Khanna 1979, 154). Rosu reproduces one diagram from the "littérature tantrique" of the *Yantracintāmaṇi* that seems to resemble the simple lines of the *Saundarya Laharī*

yantra and also contains seed syllables in lieu of long *mantra*s: *yaḥ raḥ*

reproduced four times inside the four sides of a double rectangle:
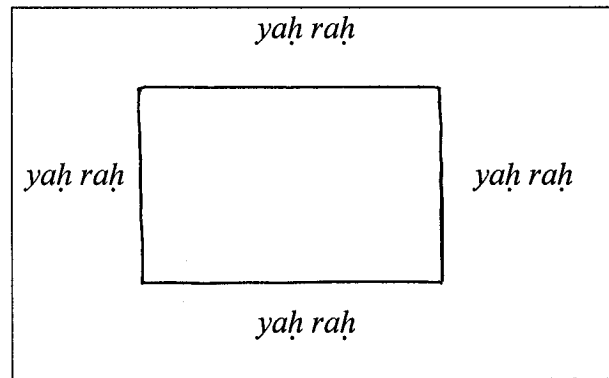
(after Rosu 1986, 248)

Superficially, this closely resembles the simplicity of the type of *mantra* and

yantra used in the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* manual.

> According to the *Yantracintāmaṇi*,
>
> to consecrate...a yantra the officiant would, with a pure mind, draw
> the yantra in a lonely spot. He should then consecrate it with the
> appropriate mystic incantations for three days, during which he is
> to remain celibate and sleep on the ground. The efficacy of the
> yantra can be gauged if during these three days he dreams: certain
> dreams are said to be premonitory of the accomplishment of the
> yantra's desired end. (Khanna 1979, 159)

This procedure shares a low degree of difficulty with the procedures we find in

the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga*: empowerment of a *yantra* through recitation of

mantra a prescribed number of times over a course of days. This is a method that

may be carried out by a householder, requiring few implements other than

mantra, *yantra*, and a store of faith.

The *Kāmaratna Tantra* is a text of similar 'magical' orientation. There are

at least sixteen extant versions of this text originating from Assam to Rajasthan

(Goudriaan 1981, 122). The multiple versions of the *Kāmaratna Tantra* are all

long works, with between 800 and 1200 *ślokas* in about 15 *upadeśas* (chapters).

Khanna dates one to the eighteenth century, and reproduces several leafs of the

text (Khanna 1979 ,162-3). Although this version of the text does not seem to be

Śrīvidyā in orientation (no South Indian editions are mentioned by Goudriaan, nor

do the *mantras* include the typical *bījākùaras* like *hrīṃ, śrīṃ,* etc.), it is another

manual solely dedicated to occult *mantras* and *yantras*, with some instructions

detailing the procedure of empowering the *yantra* and the suitable ends of the

ritual. These suitable ends include the *ṣaṭ karmāṇī.* In addition to the *ṣaṭ*

karmāṇī, ends include: luck; averting curses and evil spirits; erotic powers; curing

venereal disease; easing childbirth; detection of hidden treasures, etc (Khanna

1979, 162-3; Goudriaan 1981, 123). In other words, a very similar range of

effects can be seen as in the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* manual, which does not

explicitly mention the *ṣaṭ karmāṇī* as a group, but contains several thematically

related effects.

The *yantras* of the *Kāmaratna Tantra* seem generally more varied than

those in the *Saundarya Laharī,* including bird and lamp-shaped drawings,

partitioned circles and batons, etc. Goudriaan indicates that the *Kāmaratna*

Tantra can be "safely assumed" to be the source text, a kind of encyclopedia

borrowing from which led to the creation of many smaller occult manuals that

sought to fulfill supernaturally the basic needs of the "common man" (Goudriaan

1981, 123). He uses the term *indrajāla* (Indra's net, here a net of magic and illusion) to refer to this type of content.

Interestingly the *Kāmaratna Tantra* also features a magic square which can be used to attract the opposite sex. The magic square can also be found in the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* (see *śloka* 24, 49), wherein the numbers are replaced by syllables that 'add up' in any direction. The syllables found in the *Saundarya Laharī* version add up to form the *pañcākṣara* mantra, *oṃ namaḥ Śivāya*:

| *Kāmaratna Tantra (Khanna 1979)* | *Saundarya Laharī śloka* 24 |

The magic square was introduced to India from China and there is no evidence of its use in India prior to the eleventh or twelfth century C.E. (Cammann 1969, 273).[8] The square in the *Kāmaratna Tantra* adds up to the same number in every direction but is crudely conceived from a mathematical perspective.[9] The magic square may have been incorporated for its special additive (and therefore 'magical') properties, and modified in the *Saundarya Laharī*'s version to use syllables instead of numbers.

---

[8] Although Cammann hypothesizes that they were brought to India by Buddhist traders earlier than this date. Nārāyana's 1356 C.E. mathematical work *Gaṇita-kaumudī* contains a chapter on magic squares (Cammann 1969, 274).

[9] "Crude" as it does not mimic any of the sophisticated mathematical manoeuvres (i.e. continuity and combination) of other magic squares.

Differences between this strata of Tantric magic and the earlier alchemical and magical texts are noted by Goudriaan: the *prayoga* instructions of the *Kāmaratna Tantra* are brief; the ritual implements are simple and they are "almost stripped of ... intricate herb-lore"; and, the *mantra*s do not contain the names of deities nor do the texts themselves give any details of deity worship (Goudriaan 1981, 123). These are some of the same differences that can be seen between that earlier stratum of magical texts and the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga*.

The rise of *prayoga* manuals as independent works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seems like the right milieu in which the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga* may have been first codified. One difference in genre is apparent: the *Yantracintāmaõi* and the *Kāmaratna Tantra* are works solely composed of *prayoga* formulae. Only in the *Saundarya Laharī* do we find the occult *prayoga yantra*s being esoterically associated with poetry. Unlike other handbooks of *indrajāla* that may be deemed "generally of small size and value" (Goudriaan 1981, 123), this *prayoga* manual is magnified by its curious connection to a (far older) Sanskrit text. Associating the *bīja mantra* of the *prayoga* and the *Saundarya Laharī* is some "mystical connection... But it is not intelligible; nor has any of the Prayoga Kartas explained the same" (Śāùtri and Rāmamūrthy Gāru 1957, 13). Indeed, this esoteric quality seems to be a unique element. It is the textual link with what appears superficially to be a devotional text that really sets the *Saundarya Laharī*'s *prayoga* apart from other occult works. How then does this valence of the *Saundarya Laharī* work as a Śrīvidyā framework of ritual praxis?

Prayoga and Śrīvidyā: Ritual text and Speculation

The traditions of both *sādhanā* and *prayoga* seem to use the *mantra* and *yantra* as powerful instruments that must be used with precision, accuracy, and under the instruction of the guru. But *sādhanā* use seems to resonate more completely with performance of *mantra* as an end in itself, and the *prayoga* use with *mantra* as means. Although we have no commentary that addresses the *prayoga* manual directly, this section will seek to find some kind of philosophical accommodation of the use of simple *yantra* and *mantra* for worldly ends. This endeavour itself seems to carve out a niche for these kinds of activities in Śrīvidyā, taking the *prayoga* formulae as seeds for the beginning of academic discourse about the nature of line and form in *yantra* and the cosmos. The problems with this kind of approach will be addressed at the end of the section: the crux is the using the discourse associated with *sādhanā* to apply to the worldview of *prayoga* may elide the emic distinction between them.

Triangles predominate in the design of the *yantra*s to be used in the *prayoga* of the *Saundarya Laharī*. These triangles physically resonate with the Kashmiri trika system's emphasis on triads, which are associated with trinities on all levels from the supreme Goddess (Parā, Aparā, Parāparā) to epistemological triangulation (subject-object-cognitive process), and also with the Goddess' name Tri-pura ('three-cities'). This triangulation of the self, cosmos, and Goddess finds resonance in the structure of the *śrīcakra*'s *navayoni*. In Śrīvidyā ritual these triangles are loaded with significance in the ritual 'reading' of the cakra, with the sets of triangles formed in the interference pattern created when the *navayoni* are

superimposed in the central area of the *śrīcakra*. For each 'concentric' set of triangles, associated deities, *bījas*, *mudras*, *rasas*, etc., are assigned in the sets of ritual correspondences that form the worldview of *sādhanā*.

Several features are prominent in a first glance at the *yantra*s used in the *Saundarya Laharī prayoga*. Simple designs predominate, usually with one or a few seed (*bīja*) syllables. The simple line drawings are usually triangles, squares, or circles: all designs that also occur in the *śrīcakra* (and, not surprisingly, in most other *yantra*s and Buddhist *mandalas*). The triangles that are used are all Śākta triangles, this referring to the orientation of the triangle to form a yoni-like shape with the base of the triangle furthest from the practitioner when it is inscribed on a horizontal surface. These triangles are usually prescribed with a single Śākta *mantra* (often *hrim, srim, klim*) or less frequently the Śaiva *mantra* (*sauḥ*).

Significantly the instructions for the *prayoga* do not include any instructions of visualizations, and intimation that the lines of the *yantra*s have titular deities, or any intimation that the practitioners must in some way identify themselves with the designs or the *mantra*. In contrast, as part of *sādhanā*,

> the aspirant consistently and systematically rebuilds and
> reconstructs in his of her inner contemplations the image of
> the goddess and her *parivāra devatās* on the static image of
> the Śrī cakra. This process of reconfiguration is not simple
> but complex in nature as it involves a continuous
> reinforcement or a rebuilding of an internal image of the
> goddess on an external image of the goddess. . .
> Simultaneously, it draws in the sonic theology and her
> mantras. (Khanna 2002, 138-9)

This is an attempt to overcome dualism of the ritual implements and the practitioner, to 'reconfigure' reality in the process of matching up the internal

with the external. The system of correspondences of *sādhanā* is an attempt to realize (in both the term's valences as 'know' and 'make real') the unity of the cosmos. This is done in the frame of ritual by realizing the unity of the practitioner, the Goddess, and the ritual implements. This is an endeavour that requires systematic precision in the hierarchy of correspondences.

If we expect the *prayoga* to be in accord with the Śrīvidyā *system* of ritual correspondences, then the thoroughness of correspondence rules as found in the *sādhanā* should also apply to the *prayoga yantra* and *mantra*. For example, male and female forms of *yantra* and *mantra* should correspond. For example, in a ritual handbook we find that male *koṇa* are inscribed with *sauḥ,* and female *koṇa* with *hriṃ:*
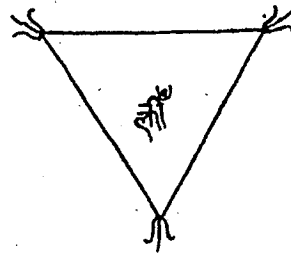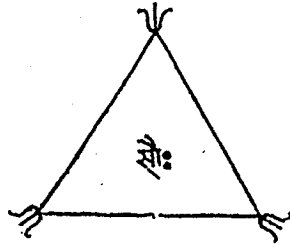
(Rao 1990, 208)

It is significant that there is a lack of coherence of correspondence rules in the *prayoga*. In this case, all of the *koṇa* are female, but they are sometimes used with male *bījas* like *sauḥ*. The disjunction here indicates some degree of lack of consistency in the overall coherence of the *prayoga* formulae with the commentarial system of correspondences.

Worship of the 'retinue' of deities associated with modified forms of the *śrīcakra* and *Pañcadaśākṣarī mantra* seems to indicates the fluid overlap of this type of ritual manual of *prayoga* with other non-occult oriented ritual activities.

Investigating the case of the *Bālā-yantra* will reveal if there is a justification for derivation of simplified *yantras* and *mantras* from the full versions used in *sādhanā*. We have seen a couple of these possible derived forms just above. These simple triangles are given by Rao as types of *Bālā-yantra* (youthful or virginal *yantra*). Rao indicates that "there are many derivative deities from the S*ri-vidya*. Each of the deities presiding over the nine fields of the Sri-cakra (*cakra-nāyikā*), as well as the union deities in the fields (*yoginī*), is given an iconographic form, a specific seed-syllable, and a ritual-placement" (Rao 1990, 202-3). Four of these deities are mentioned in particular: Bāla-tripurā, Mantriṇī, Daõõa-nāthā, and Pratyaṅgirā. He indicates that the worship of Bālātripurā is "in vogue among numerous *sādhakas*" (Rao, 209). Curiously, one of these deities in particular, Pratyaṅgirā, is associated "mainly with magic and sorcery; she is considered as a powerful repellent of the influences generated by witch-craft. In the Sri-chakra worship, she protects the devotee against all odds, and guides him [sic] along the right path" (Rao, 208). Is this the goddess presiding over *prayoga-yantras*?

First, Brooks contests the popularity of this kind of worship:

> living traditions in south India have almost entirely
> forsaken initiation into the Bālātripurasundarī mantra. The
> use of the Bālātripurasundarī mantra receives only a
> cursory mention in most ritual handbooks and has drawn
> little attention from adepts either with respect to its esoteric
> meaning or its role in Śrīvidyā's spiritual discipline....It is
> possible that the mantra is a late historical development,
> part of a larger effort to elaborate and complete the
> theoretical aspect of Śrīvidyā *sādhanā*. (Brooks 1992a 240
> n.124)

He also insists that the enumeration of various deities that preside over the sub-cakras is a kind of theological speculation. It seems that with the flourishing of ritual manual-as-theology, the ritual syntax of the *śrīcakra* leads to embodiment of the various types of correspondence: "such deities should be seen as part of Śrīvidyā's expanding catalogue of divinity which is designed, in part, to provide for certain types of ideological and ritual elaboration" (Brooks 1992a 62). This indicates that a dialectic of integration of *prayoga* praxis and ritual speculation takes place, with a ritual acting as the basis for the development of a ritual syntax that consistently follows the correspondence rules of *sādhanā*, even though the ritual itself may not follow these rules. The retinue of deities can be seen as the *embodiments of the subordination of praxis to theological speculation.* Oddly enough, this embodiment seems to take place in ritual manuals. Being only place holders in an enumerated list of correspondences, the deities are stripped of the possibility of independent worship; goddesses like Bālātripurasundarī do not warrant devotion:

> subordinate deities and lesser aspects of Lalitā are generally
> not important to historical commentators of Śrīkula
> Tantras. Rather they appear in ritual digests that do not
> usually function as practical liturgies but as the preferred
> medium through which to advance theological
> speculation... It is more important to consider
> Bālātripurasundarī's place in Lalitā's hierarchy of aspects
> than it is to worship her formally. (Brooks 1992a 62)

Indeed, in the *prayoga* instructions, initiates are not to ritually identify themselves with the simple lines of the triangles and circles or with the *bīja* syllables that may or may not be part of the *Pañcadaśākṣarī mantra*. No divinities whatsoever are mentioned in the *prayoga* text. While Brooks is

sceptical about the popularity of the worship of deities that are deemed

subordinate to Lalitā, there is a contemporary resurgence of interest in the

Goddess Pratyaṅgirā in South India.[10] While these deities may be no more than

placeholders in the commentarial hierarchy, they attain centrality in the context

of lived religious practice.

Khanna has attempted to explain use of *yantra* forms that do not seem to

be derived from *śrīcakra,* revealing an attempt to understand the *prayoga*

diagrams under a similar (but simplified and abstracted) rubric as the *śrīcakra* is

understood within the tradition:

> line in the yantra is generally employed to create absolute
> symmetry and a total organization of space. However there
> is another type of yantra, usually occult, in which soaring
> trajectories are created by the eccentric movement of linear
> impulses in space. Line (Riju-rekhā) is the product of
> 'cosmic stress' and implies movement, flux and growth.
> Most traditionally, these yantra appear as spirals around an
> invisible source, and are therefore to be associated with
> coiled Kundalini sakti, the energy of the subtle body.
> Others form eddies or curves, tracing wandering paths, or
> are intersecting ovoids, dissolving into space, mapping, as
> it were, the cosmic secrets. (Khanna 1979, 154)

Khanna's assessment is that even the *yantra*s that are not modified forms of the

śrīcakra can fulfill same quality of being mapped onto the cosmos and harnessing

the power of those spaces (Khanna's 'cosmic stress').

This kind of understanding defies the significance and orthodoxy of the

śrīcakra -- and that is the *full śrīcakra* -- as Lalitā embodied. Khanna does not

give any textual source for this kind of interpretation, and superficially these

---

[10] Personal Communication, Davesh Soneji, June 2005.

curved line *yantra* resemble more closely abstractly curved *kōlam*[11] drawings than

any *yantra*, which are mostly geometric and only sometimes contain petals. This

kind of speculation may serve to provide a satisfying sense of correspondence

between the *prayoga yantra* and ideas of Kuṇḍalinī, subtle body, and the

macrocosm, but they do not provide any sense of the origin of the relation

between the *prayoga* and the *Saundarya Laharī*, a hint about how internal

commentarial traditions would treat this type of *yantra*, or how they are actually

used in ritual praxis.

Worshipping the *śrīcakra* can be seen as an act of "reading the cakra",

indicating the language-like precision with which every line, curve, triangle, set of

triangles, etc. is loaded with significance. As the practitioner worships, the

śrīcakra indeed comes to encompass the whole world through this kind of

extension, embodying the macrocosm. The ritual syntax that prevails in texts like

Rao (1990) and Pranavananda is another form of the *śrīcakra*'s extension into

discursive mode: these texts take ritual as a kind of seed for the development of

theological speculation. The internal lack of a theoretical aspect of or

commentarial tradition for *prayoga* indicates the lack of articulacy of the simple

lines and *bījas* of this text. They are not symbolically loaded in the same way as

the lines of *sādhanā yantra*s; they are not theologically significant.

Perhaps instead of creating a theological or philosophical discourse for the

prayoga yantra, in the vein of Khanna's description cited above, we should

instead let the commentarial silence signify their nature. *Yantras* and *mantras*

---

[11] The designing of *kōlam* is a women's ritual art of decorating the threshold of the house with powder designs that are understood to foster a close relationship with the Goddess Lakṣmī or Bhūdevī (Nagarajan 2001).

used in *sādhanā* effloresce with commentaries, and are assigned retinues of deities; they are part of the system of ritual universal correspondence that finally leads the practitioner to a realization of the essential non-duality of his/her identity and that of the Goddess. *Sādhanā yantras* and *mantras* are (and are used as) instantiations of the sought after non-duality.

The *prayoga* manuals, in contrast, have sparked very little internal dialogue. This silence may be seen as a function of their instrumentality and worldliness, as reaffirmation of the reality of the practitioner and his/her unfulfilled worldly desires, and of the persistent distinction between the identity of the practitioner and the Goddess. Perhaps the lines and syllables of the *prayoga* manual are kept in a parallel domain of commentarial silence because this what allows the sādhaka to both maintain his status in the world-as-*bhukti*, and also to participate in the re-evolution of that world in the discourse of *mukti*. The formulae are used instrumentally in the *prayoga* manual to re-emphasize the dualism of what is to be ultimately overcome in *sādhanā*. This indicates a categorical difference between *sādhanā* and *prayoga* in the type of ritual, *yantra* and *mantra* involved. Echoing one of Brooks' explanations for the lack of commentaries (see above, the *prayoga* instructions "did not warrant mention"), because of their more worldly orientation even the very lines and syllables used in the manual are not significant in theological speculation. If as per Brooks' other suggestion, the *prayoga* instructions were unknown to the commentators, then this also indicates that another line of esoteric transmission exists alongside the commentators lineages.

Esotericity and *Prayoga*

Although both *prayoga* and *sādhanā* may be superficially classified as 'esoteric' practices, esotericity seems to function in different ways in the two contexts. The type of esoteric interpretation of the text that is usually called upon is the encoding of things like the Śrīvidyā *mantra* in *śloka* 32 of the *Saundarya Laharī*; it is a textual and linguistic kind of secrecy which involves a system of symbolic matching up of *bīja* with conventionally meaningful words. This symbolic order of interpretation, a linguistic esoterism, fits into the system of ritual correspondences that prescribe fixed associations between the exoteric and esoteric significations of the text. It is the bastion of theological commentaries and philosophical speculation. In the case of the *prayoga* tradition, the esoterism is not linguistic but remains traditional; the secrecy is not in a symbolic and systematic interpretation of language, but rather the preservation of a separate lineage of traditional assignations of *yantra* and *mantra* to the various *ślokas* of the text.

Commentarially, *bhukti* (worldly enjoyment) is only seen a suitable end if it is simultaneous with *mukti*-oriented (liberative, soteriological) practices, but this does not mean that the practice of the two may be conflated under the same heirarchical system of ritual correspondences. In his introduction to the *Yantracintāmaṇiḥ*, Hans-Georg Türstig notes that this kind of Tantric *prayoga* manual is ususually written in a loose style: in an admixture of languages (Sanskrit and Hindi, for example); full of grammatical faults; often incoherent;

and often omits points of doctrine or instructions for the ritual actions (Türstig 1988, 10). In addition,

> texts or portions of them were transcribed under other titles, the *ślokas* (almost always of mediocre style) were freely changed or replaced; mantras were transposed hither and thither... the scribes were among the most ignorant; *many people cared about mystical incomprehensibility of such spells and invocations rather than about their meaning*; in short, we have an almost complete rule of 'the law of the jungle' in this literary field'. (emphasis added; Goudriaan cited in Türstig 1988, 10)

Far from operating under the strict system of linguistic correspondences that characterize the commentarial tradition, this kind of esoterism is more about 'mystical incomprehensibility' than encoding meaning to the signifiers of a text.

Even within the tradition of *prayoga*, "becoming the Goddess" is not the discursive framework under which ritual activities operate. Rather, it is firmly entrenched in an instrumental mode that necessarily does not participate under the same ritual system of identification as we find in *sādhanā*. The tradition of *prayoga* does not necessarily follow the same correspondence rules, or any system of correspondence rules (recall the 'law of the jungle' cited above), however comfortable it may be to seek that kind of resonance. Also, we cannot make the facile distinction between dual/exoteric and non-dual/esoteric. Although the *prayoga* formulae are kept in an esoteric tradition and context, they can be seen to preserve the duality of practitioner and ritual implement, thereby completely reaffirming the reality of the world of duality and desires.

The *prayoga* manual of the *Saundarya Laharī* is unique among Tantric and magical texts because of its association with another text, as one form of the esoteric use of the *Saundarya Laharī*. The *prayoga* formulae appended are most

similar in genre to independent *prayoga* manuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that have simple procedures and domestic kinds of ends, with some echoes but an overall shift in orientation compared to the supernatural feats accomplished by the earlier Tantric traditions like those of the *siddhas*. Another facet of the domestication of the tradition is this movement towards simplification of the tradition of the attainment of *siddhis* and making this tradition accessible to householders through a parallel esoteric lineage to that of the commentarial tradition.

Because of the lack of commentarial tradition related to the *prayoga* formulae trying to situate the text in Śrīvidyā and in relation to *sādhanā* is a very complicated task, not without the temptation of creating some kind of imagined consistency between the ritual practice of *prayoga* and that of *sādhanā*. Creating our own interpretation is a comforting activity: one that soothes through emphasis on philosophical harmony and correspondence across multiple frames of reference. This kind of harmony and correspondence seems like a tool that we have received from Śrīvidyā itself, with its own emphasis on resonance across difference levels of experience. However, explaining the use of the *prayoga yantras* in this way this ignores the fact that the commentators within the tradition have overlooked the *prayoga yantras* as the seed for further commentary: the text's silence signifies more accurately its place in the tradition than if we cover it up with discourse. This silence points to resituating the meaning of the *prayoga-yantra* in their ritual movements.

Ritual implements (*yantra* and *mantra*, in this case) are the seeds of discourse in theological speculation, but are also the tools of ritual performance. The existence of these two parallel ritual traditions provides a model for understanding the way that the Goddess, like the use of the *mantra*s in *sādhanā* and *prayoga* traditions, is both differentiated and primordial, both utterly physical and transcendent, both possessing power to effect change in physical reality and embodying power directly. In his discussion of Vedic and Tantric ritual Brooks has noted that "the process of maintaining both Tantric and non-Tantric worlds involves two different ways of mapping oneself onto the world" (Brooks 1992a, 166). As we have seen in this chapter, there are more than just the Vedic (orthodox, exoteric) and *sādhanā* (heterodox, esoteric) maps that Brooks refers to. There are at least two distinct maps of esoteric practice here, as shown in the differences in the use of *mantra* and the system of ritual correspondences. Different also is the mapping of the material world, understood either as the locus of desires to be fulfilled by the ritual, the very means of their fulfillment. In this case, the distinction between the traditions of *sādhanā* and *prayoga* is upheld as an emic category. Academic discourse glosses over the difference in the use of line and syllable in the two traditions, but this in effect *designifies the absence* of commentary, and elides the emic difference between two traditions: a difference of ends and means.

Conclusion

Tantric Hermeneutics

At first glance, this project may appear to succumb to the flaw of taking

the text itself as the first principle, falling for that very Western tendency of

prioritizing the text over its contexts. However, in a way the general

categorization of the text into these three categories of performance is also

resonant with Kersenboom's threefold description of the life of a Tamil text --

"the formula of natural word, musical rendering and mimetic rendering"

(Kersenboom 1995, 7). These three modes of the *Saundarya Lahari*'s use follow

this threefold nature as a literary composition, as a devotional song, and as manual

for the utterances and gestures of the tradition of *prayoga*. I would like to

suggest that the text of the *Saundarya Lahari* has been a key to drawing out

resonances and exploring connections. These connections lead not only to the

consideration of textual identities, but also into the relation between multiple

personal identities. The *Saundarya Lahari* is a lens through which to see more

clearly the dynamics of esoterism and the ambiguous and problematic category of

'Tantra'.

The discussion of methodology in the Introduction ("Text in

Performance") brought up several movements by which to understand text, ritual,

and identity: seeking resonance and connectivity as meaning; taking ritual as that

which develops personal identity with respect to society and the world; and

understanding ritual to be fundamentally involved with a broad conception of

power. We see the multiple resonances with emic Tantric strategies: commentary

as the drawing out of connections within the hierarchy of correspondences; ritual as a mapping of the cosmos and goddess onto the self; and ritual conception and manipulation of the world as *śakti*, power. However, these concepts drawn from Śākta theology arise only in specific ritual and theological contexts; merely re-affirming the theses of practice and performance theory with a list of unlocated concepts from the general category of 'Tantric' worldview is not a productive pursuit. By taking the text *Saundarya Laharī* and tying its multivalent strands to various social, cultural, and ritual contexts, I have sought out a balance between the unpredictability of multiple possible significations and the stability and persistence of lived performances. What has come to the foreground in this study are multiple conceptions of what is happening in the ritual movements of the text: aesthetic enjoyment as a kind of religious pursuit; devotional worship as a Tantric activity; and finally to the pursuit of worldly powers as an alternate form of esoteric practice.

Caldwell argues that "[d]eveloping tolerance of extreme ambiguity through the deliberate contemplation of absolutely irreconcilable dualities is characteristic of many forms of mature spirituality, and an essential feature of Tantrism. The dual, unresolved nature of the argument presented in this article is thus exemplary of a kind of new scholarly spiritual practice, a *Tantric hermeneutic"* (Caldwell 2001, 44). Contrary to this argument, recognizing and retreating from the coincidence of opposites is not a typically Tantric manoeuvre – rather, these opposites should be invoked, addressed, and manipulated to attain some kind of transformation. In the context of the commentarial tradition, what

appear to be opposites are assorted hierarchically; in the context of *kaula* ritual practice opposites are brought into direct conflict to overcome duality.

Multiple and divergent levels of significance of words, and in extension, of entire texts are likewise dealt with in various ways within the tradition. The Śrīvidyā tradition has a sophisticated understanding of signification and meaning of texts through its own commentarial hermeneutic strategies, such as that of de-/en-coding *mantra*s in the body of texts. Robert Thurman (albeit in a Tibetan Buddhist context) calls this a "systematic multivocality of meaning" (Thurman 1988, 133) that he attributes to the Tantric understanding of the "multilayered nature of the universe" (130). What are understood as different levels on a hierarchy of achievement or practice, are in the lower ranks populated by those who attend only exoteric rites and may experience them as rites of devotion.

As we have seen with the *Saundarya Laharī*, these different subjectivities are viewed hierarchically by the commentarial tradition. From those with the authority of emic interpretation, practices like devotion fall to the lowest levels of their imagined hierarchy, to the periphery of orthodox understandings of the text. This position seeks comprehensive resonant correspondences in the hierarchical mode, classifying exoteric identities as preliminary, limited, or peripheral; however, in the tradition the kind of layering and transformation of identities that takes place in the context of *sādhanā* necessitates esoterism's twinned movement of exoterism. While there may be different strategies of interpretation offered from a similar level on the hierarchy (like we see in the differing interpretations of initiated commentators like Bhāskararāya and Lakṣmīdhara), there are also the

perspectives of those on different levels of the hierarchy to consider – the

uninitiated devotee or the initiate to *prayoga* use. The text resonates differently

"within those with completely different subjectivities of persons" (Thurman 1988,

124). The commentators prioritize (their) esoteric tradition for its comprehensive

and systematic approach to the world of possible experiences. The privilege

always remains on *their* Tantric identity and practice; the top of the hierarchy is

their hermeneutical centre. The academic has no such privilege – and must see

that accommodation as a strategic manoeuvre.

Abhinavagupta expresses the polyvalence of the text under the auspices of

what Alper calls a "polyvocal monism" that accommodates the multiple realms of

experience of the Tantric practitioner (Alper 1979, 384). This is a type of

accommodation that does not conflate distinctions between different realms of

discourse, but for the large part delves into each one in its fullness – aesthetics,

epistemology, metaphysics, and ritual are all treated systematically and relatively

independently. Alper suggests that Abhinavagupta's goal is "to encompass –

without reconciling—contradictions, that is, to attempt to be faithful to the

confusion of experience, to be consistent to inconsistency" (Alper 1979, 383).

Understanding the *Saundarya Laharī* from this kind of standpoint is a way of

allowing for Abhinavagupta's valorization of both non-duality (as transcendence,

liberation, unification) and duality (as manifestation, boundedness, separation)

into that polyvocal monism.

Understanding the *Saundarya Laharī not* from the 'central' commentarial

perspective but from each of the multiple and arguably 'peripheral' perspectives

94

allows for the development of apparently contradictory domains of meaning. These contradictions are perhaps, as Caldwell has suggested, a hallmark of Tantra. A Tantric hermeneutic must then also allow for domains of meaning not to self-consciously include or explicitly relate to other meanings at all.

Multiple identities are accommodated and hierarchized from the perspective of the tantrika; but each of these ritual contexts demands that the practitioner calls upon the 'centre' of his being, in order to do the ritual properly. This central identity is imaged in different ways, and operates in a different way with respect to its periphery: the other uncalled upon identities. It is only in the more traditionally categorized 'Tantric' contexts that a strategy is offered for accommodating multiple identities. How can we understand the kind of shifting between identities that this necessitates? As a re-centralization and re-organization of identities to other perspectives, to different subjectivities. The movement from the inner-Tantric identity as initiate to the 'peripheral' identities as aesthete, devotee, or *prayoga-karta* should be understood as destabilization and a re-centring. This model preserves the whole-hearted ritual engagement that each of these frames of praxis demands, and also recalls the dynamism and flux of the Goddess herself.

Bibliography

I. Primary Sources: Versions of the *Saundarya Laharī*

Saundarya –Lahari of Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada.[incomplete Sanskrit text with Roman transliteration, Tamil, and illustrations]. Chennai: Sakthi Publication, 2002.

Brown, W. Norman trans, *The Saundaryalaharī or Flood of Beauty*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1958.

Clooney, Francis X. trans. "To Devī: The *Saundarya Laharī*". *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2005. 49-66

Nataraja Guru, trans. *Saundarya Laharī*. East-West University of Brahmavidya: Srinivasapuram, 1988.

Śaùtri, Pandit R. Anantakrisna and Śrī Karrā Rāmamūrthy Gāru, trans. *Saundarya- Laharī of Śrī Śankarācārya, with commentaries*. Madras: Ganesh, 1957.

Sastri, (Pandit) S. Subramanya and T.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar. *The Ocean of Beauty: Saundarya Laharī*. Chennai: Theosophical Publishing House, 1937.

Subramanian V.K., *Saundaryalaharī*. Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1977

Tapasyananda, Swami. *Saundarya- Laharī of Śrī Śankarācārya*. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987.

Woodroffe, John. *Iśopanīṣad, also Wave of Bliss, and Greatness of Śiva*. Madras: Ganesh, 1971.

II. Other Primary Sources

Brown, C. Mackenzie. *The Song of the Goddess, The Devī Gītā: Spiritual Counsel of the Great Goddess*. Albany: SUNY Press. 2002.

---. *The Devī Gītā, The Song of the Goddess: A Translation, Annotation, and Commentary*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998.

Joshi, L. M. *Lalitā-Sahasranāma*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1998.

Heifetz, Hank, trans. *The Origin of the Young God: Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990.

Menon, T.V.Narayana. *The Thousand Names of the Divine Mother: Sri Lalita Sahasranama*. K. V. Dev, ed. M.N. Namboodri, trans. San Ramon

California: Mata Amritanandamayi Center, 1996.

Murthy, Chaganti Suryanarayana, trans. *Śrī Lalitā Triśati Bhāṣya*. Madras: Ganesh and Co. Date Unknown.

---. *Sri Lalita Sahasranama*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1989.

Ram Kumar Rai, trans. and ed. *Ḍāmara Tantra*. Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1988.

Riviere, Jean M, intro and trans. *Rituel de Magie Tantrique Hindoue: Yantracintāmani, Le Joyau des Yantras*. Arche: Milano, 1976.

Tapasyananda, Swami. *Śrīlalitāsahasranāma*. Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002.

Türstig, Hans-Georg, ed. *Yantracintāmaṇiḥ of Ḍāmodara*. Heidelburg: Steiner Werlag Weisbaden, 1988.

III. Secondary Sources

Alper, Harvey P, ed. *Mantra*. SUNY: New York, 1989.

---. "Siva and the Ubiquity of Consciousness: The Spaciousness of an Artful Yogi" *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. Vol 7 (1979). 345-407.

Anderson, Leona M. *Vasantotsava: The Spring Festivals of India*. New Delhi: DK Printworld, 1993.

Apffel-Marglin, Frederique and Julia A Jean. "Weaving the Body and the Cosmos: *Yantric* Cosmologies at a Goddess Temple in Northeastern India" Unpublished MS, 2004.

Baumer, Bettina. "The Play of the Three Worlds: The Trika concept of *Lila*". *The Gods At Play*. William S.Sax, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. 35-49.

Beck, Guy. *Sonic Theology*. University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1993.

---. "Devotional Hymns from the Sanskrit" *Religions of India in Practice*. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Bell, Catherine. "Performance" in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Taylor, Mark C, ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. pp 205-224.

---. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bharati, Agehananda. *The Tantric Tradition.* London: Reider, 1965.

Bhattacharyya, N. N. *History of the Tantric Religion.* New Delhi: Manohar, 1992.

Brooks, Douglas Renfrew. *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India.* SUNY: New York, 1992a.

---. "Encountering the Hindu 'Other': Tantrism and the Brahmans of South India". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* LX/3. pp. 405-435. 1992b.

---. *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism.* University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1990.

Bouez, Serge. "Staying on the Goddess's Eyelid: Devotion and Reversal of Values in Hindu Bengal" in Sontheimer and Kulke, eds. 246-264.

Buhnemann, Gudrun. "Selecting and Perfecting Mantras in Hindu Tantrism". from Buhnemann's site: http://imp.lss.wisc.edu/%7Egbuhnema/select.pdf. Accessed June 23, 2004.

Buhnemann, Gudrun. *Pūjā: A Study in Smārta Ritual.* Vienna: Institute for Indology, 1988.

Buhnemann, Gudrun, et al. *Mandalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions.* Boston: Brill, 2003.

Caldwell, Sarah. "The Heart of the Secret: A Personal and Scholarly Encounter with Shakta Tantra in Siddha Yoga" *Nova Religio.* (5) 1. 2001. 9-51.

Cammann, Shuyler. "Islamic and Indian Magic Squares, Part II" *History of Religions.* n.8, 1969. 271-299.

Cenkner, William. "The Śaṅkarācārya of Kanci and the Kamaksi Temple as Ritual Center". *A Sacred Thread.* Raymond Brady Williams, ed. Chamersburg PA: Anima Publications, 1992.

Clooney, Francis X. *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary.* Oxford: Oxford UP. 2005.

Coward, Harold G, ed. "'Language' in Indian Philosophy and Religion" *SR Supplements.* n. 5, 1978.

Davidson. Ronald M. *Indian Esoteric Buddhism.* New York: Columbia, 2002.

Davis, Richard H. *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 1991.

---. "Living Images" *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton: Princeton UP. 15-50.

Desai, Devangana. "Shades of Eroticism in Temple Art". *Symbols and Manifestations of Indian Art*. Bombay: Marg Publications, 1984.

Dikshitar, V.R. Ramachandra. *The Lalita Cult*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991.

Doniger O'Flaherty. Wendy. *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973.

Eck, Diana. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. 2nd ed. Chambersberg, PA: Anima, 1981.

Flood, Gavin. "Techniques of Body and Desire in Kashmir Śaivism" *Religion*. 22. 1992. 47-62.

---. "Shared Realities and Symbolic Forms in Kashmir Śaivism" *Numen*. V. 36, Fasc 2. 225-247.

---, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Gatwood, Lynn E. *Devi and the Spouse Goddesses*. Riverdale, Maryland: Riverdale Company Inc. 1985.

Gonda, Jan. *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*. Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981.

Goudriaan, Teun, and Sanjukta Gupta. *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*. Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981.

Goudriaan, Teun. "Magic in South Asia". *The Encyclopedia of Religions*. Eliade, ed. 109-112.

Goudriaan, Teun, ed. *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

Grimes, Ronald L. "Performance Theory and the Study of Ritual" in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Vol. 1: Regional, Critical and Historical Approaches. Peter Antes et al, eds. New York: Walter de Gruyter. 2004. 109-138

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. "The Emergence of the Academic Science of the Magic: the Occult Philosophy in Tylor and Frazer". *Religion in the Making.* Arie L. Molendijk and Peter Pels, eds. Leiden: Brill, 1998. 253-276.

Heesterman, J.C. *The Inner Conflict of Tradition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Hogan, Patrick Colm and Lalita Pandit, eds. *Literary India: comparative studies in aesthetics, colonialism, and culture.* Albany : State University of New York Press, 1995.

Horstmann. "Bhakti and Monasticism" in G. Sontheimer and H. Kulke, eds. *Hinduism Reconsidered.* New Delhi: Manohar Pub, 1989. 228-245.

Isayeva, Natalia. *From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Śaivism.* New York: SUNY, 1995.

Joshi, M.C. "The Cult of Sri of Srividya and its association with temporal kingship" *Sraddhanjali: Studies in Ancient Indian History.* KK Dasgupta et al, eds. Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan. 22-28.

Karambelkar V.W. *The Atharvaveda and the Ayurveda.* Vidharba Samshodhana Mandala: Nagpur, 1961.

Kersenboom, Saskia. *Word, Sound, Image: The Life of a Tamil Text.*Washington D.C.: Berg Publishers, 1995.

Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity.* Thames and Hudson: London, 1979.

---. "The Philosophical Symbolism and Sonic Theology of the Śrīcakra" *Foundations of Indian Art.* Tamil Arts Academy: Chennai, 2002.

Kinsley, David. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: the Ten Mahāvidyās.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Klaustermeier, Klaus. *The Hermeneutic Centre.* Unpublished MS.

Larson, Gerald James. "The aesthetic (*rasasvada*) and the religious (*brahmasvada*) in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Saivism". *Philosophy East and West.* Vol 26 (4), October 1976, 371-388.

Lehmann, W. P. "The Yolk in the Pea-Hen's Egg: Language as the Ultimate Reality" in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit, eds. *Literary India: comparative studies in aesthetics, colonialism, and culture.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Lorenzen, David N. "The Life of Śaṅkarācārya" *Experiencing Śiva*. Fred W Clothey and J. Bruce Long, eds. Colombia Mo: South Asia Books, 1983. 155-175.

---, ed. *Bhakti Religion in North India*. SUNY: New York, 1994.

Madan, T. N. "The Householder Tradition in Hindu Society" in Flood, ed. pp 288-305.

McDaniel, June. *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Miller, Barbara Stoler. *The Plays of Kālidāsa: Theater of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

Mishra, T. N. "Siddhi, Siddha and the Nātha Cult". *Impact of Tantra on Religion and Art*. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1997. pp. 91-96.

Muller-Ortega, P. "The Power of the Secret Ritual: Theoretical Formulations from the Tantra" *Journal of Ritual Studies*. Vol 4, 1990. 41-59.

Nabokov, Isabelle. *Religion against the Self: An Ethnography of Tamil Rituals*. Chicago: Oxford UP, 2000.

Nagarajan, Vijaya. "Rituals of Embedded Ecologies: Drawing *Kōlams*, Marrying Trees, and Generating Auspiciousness" *Hinduism and Ecology*. ed. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Narang, Saroj. *Figures of Speech in the Atharvaveda*. Vidyanidhi Prakashan: Delhi, 2000.

Neusner, Jacob, Ernest S Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher, eds. *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

te Nijenhuis, Emme, and Sanjukta Gupta. *Sacred Songs of India*. Amadeus: Switzerland, 1987.

Olivelle, Patrick. "The Renouncer Tradition" in Gavin Flood, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. 271-287.

Padoux, Andre. *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*. Jacques Gontier, trans. SUNY: New York, 1990.

---. "Corps et Cosmos: L'image du corps du yogin tantrique". *Images du corps dans le monde hindou.* Véronique Bouillier and Gilles Tarabout, eds. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002.

---. "What is Mantra" in Harvey P. Alper, ed. *Mantra.* SUNY: New York, 1989. pp. 295-318

---. "Mantra". In Flood, ed. pp 478-492.

---. "Un *Japa* Tantrique" *Tantric and Taoist Studies, vol 1.* Michel Strickmann, ed. Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes etudes chinoises, 1981. 141-154.

Payne, Richard K. "The Tantric Transformation of Puja: interpretation and structure in the study of ritual". *India and Beyond.* London: Kegan Paul, 1997. 384-404.

Peterson, Indira Viswanathan. *Design and Rhetoric in a Sanskrit Court Epic.* Albany, SUNY Press 2003.

Pollock, Sheldon. "From Discourse of Ritual to Discourse of Power in Sanskrit Culture". *Journal of Ritual Studies.* n.4. 1990, pp 315-345.

(Swami) Pranavananda F.R.G.S. *A Treatise on Sricakra.* Yenugula Mahal, A.P.: Sri Swami Pranavananda Trust, no date.

Rabe, Michael D. "Secret Yantras and Erotic Display for Hindu Temples". *Tantra in Practice.* David Gordon White, ed. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. 434-446.

Rajan, Chandra, trans, and intro. *Kālidāsa: The Loom of Time.* New Delhi, Penguin, 1989.

Rao, S. K. Ramachandra. *The Tāntrik Practices in Śrīvidyā (with Śrī Śāradā-Chatuśatī).* Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1990.

Reynolds, Holly Baker. "The Auspicious Married Woman" *The Powers of Tamil Women.* Susan S. Wadley, ed. New York: Syracuse University, 1980.

Rosu, Arion. "*Mantra* et *Yantra* dans la médecine et l'alchemie indiennes". *Journal Asiatique.* 274 (3-4), 1986. pp. 203-268.

Samuel, Greggorey. "The Body in Buddhist and Hindu Tantra: Some Notes". *Religion.* 19: 1989. pp 197-210.

Sanderson, Alexis. "Purity and Power among the Brahmans of Kashmir".*The Category of the Person.* M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, eds.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1985. 190-216

---. "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions". *The World's Religions.* Stewart
Sutherland, et al. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. 660-704.

--. "Meaning in Tantric Ritual" *Essais sur le ritual III.* Blondeau and Schipper,
eds. Paris: 1998.

Sarangi, Artatrana. *A Treasury of Tantric Ideas: A Study of the
Samrajyalaksmipithika.* Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993.

Sen Sharma, D. B. "Bhakti Element in Certain Mystic Religious Philosophies of
India". *The Bhakti Cult and Ancient Indian Geography.* D. C. Sircar, ed.
Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970. 42-48

Singer, Milton. *When a Great Tradition Modernizes.* New York: Praeger
Publishers, 1972

Smith, David. "Aspects of the Interrelationship of Divine and Human Bodies in
Hinduism". *Religion.* 19: 1989. pp 211-219.

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Map is not Territory.* Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1978.

---. *To Take Place.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Sontheimer, G., and H. Kulke, eds. *Hinduism Reconsidered.* New Delhi:
Manohar Pub, 1989.

Staal, Frits. "Vedic Mantra". in Harvey P. Alper, ed. *Mantra.* SUNY: New York,
1989. 48-95.

---. "Ritual Syntax". *Sanskrit and Indian Studies.* M. Nagatomi et al, eds.
Dodrecht: D.Reidel Publishing, 1980. pp 119-142.

---. "The Science of Language". In Flood, ed. pp 348-359.

---. *The Science of Ritual.* Poona: Bhandarkar, 1982.

---. *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning.*Delhi: Motilal
Banarsidass, 1996.

Stork, Hélène. "Mothering Rituals in Tamilnadu: Some Magico-Religious
Beliefs". *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women.* Julia Leslie, ed. London:
Pinter,1991.

Tigunait, Rajamani. *The concept of Śakti in Lakùmīdhara's Commentary on the*

Saundarya Laharī in Relation to Abhnavagupta's Tantrāloka. Ph.D.
Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, 1997.

Timm, Jeffrey R., ed. *Texts in Context*. New Tork: SUNY, 1992.

Thurman, Robert A. "Vajra Hermeneutics" *Buddhist Hermeneutics*. Donald S.
Lopez, Jr.ed. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. pp 119-148.

Urban, Hugh B. *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion*.
University of California Press: Berkeley, 2003.

---. *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Vyas, Ramnarayan. *The Bhāgavata bhakti cult*. Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1977.

Wheelock, Wade T. "The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual". in Harvey P.
Alper, ed. *Mantra*. SUNY: New York, 1989. 96-122.

White, David Gordon. *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval
India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

---. "Transformations in the Art of Love: Kāmakalā Practices in Hindu Tantric
and Kaula Traditions". *History of Religions*. V. 38, n.2 November 1998.
172-198.

Wilke, Annette. "Beauty Personified: The Goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī and Her
Thousand Names". *Foundations of Indian Art*. Tamil Arts Academy:
Chennai, 2002.

---. "Śankara and the Taming of the Wild Goddesses". *Wild Goddesses in India
and Nepal*. Axel Michaels, Cornelia Vogelsanger, and Annette Wilke, eds.
New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Woodroffe, J. *The World as Power*. 6th Ed. Madras: Ganesh and Company, 1981.

Zvelebil, Kamil V. *The Siddha Quest for Immortality*. Oxford: Mandrake, 2003.

---. *The Smile of Murugan on Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: E.J. Brill,
1973.

Zysk, Kenneth G. "*Mantra in Āyurveda:* A Study of the Use of Magico-Religious
Speech in Ancient Indian Medicine". in Harvey P. Alper, ed. *Mantra*.
SUNY: New York, 1989. 123-143.