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He dances, she shakes:

the possessed mood of nonduality in Buddhist tantric sex

by

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Abstract

My thesis explores the aesthetic theory and performative expectations of the male and female practitioners in tantric Buddhist sexual rites. My work examines the erotic context of later tantric Buddhist practice as found in Vanaratna's (1384 -1468) fifteenth century Tibetan meditation manual (*sadhana*) to the rare, erotic form of the goddess Vajravarahi (Adamantine Sow), called Vajravilasini (Adamantine Beauty), entitled *Vajravilasini namah Vajravarahi sadhana* (The *sadhana* of Vajravarahi named Vajravilasini). An eighth century poem is preserved in the consort practice section of this *sadhana*, attributed to the Indian *mahasiddha* (great accomplished one) Lakshminkara. My study examines this poem in terms of Indian aesthetic theory, *rasa* theory (lit. taste theory). I argue that antinomian *siddha* poets, such as Lakshminkara, both employed and transcended the poetic method of *rasa* theory, initially creating an erotic mood (*shrngara rasa*) in their poems, but ultimately transcending this *rasa*, to create a specific nondual Buddhist mood, *samarasa* (lit. one taste), a state of nondualism which is the goal of tantric Buddhism.

Beyond the textual analysis of Lakshminkara's poetry, my study examines the ethnographic findings of Syed Jamil Ahmed (2003) and David N. Gellner (1992) on Newar Buddhist tantric ritual in Nepal. In performative sexual contexts of Vajravarahi practice men are expected to dance to show that they have become the male deity, Vajravarahi's consort Cakrasamvara, whereas the women in the ritual, their wives, are required to shake with possession to show that they are Vajravarahi. *Samarasa* is expressed by the ritual participants through symbolically sexual performances of dance and shaking. Not only must the flavour of *samarasa* be maintained for correct performance, the presence of the deity must be held through a self-induced state of possession (*samavesha*), whereby the selves of the human and deity merge. The gendered divergence in performance shows that there are differing levels of agency expected in sexualized ritual settings by men and women. I argue that nonduality is expressed through dual, exaggerated gendered behavior of the dominant male and the passive female, which come together to express nonduality through ritualize union.

Abstrait

Ma thèse explore l'esthétique ainsi que les attentes performatives de ceux et celles qui pratiquent le tantra, un rite sexuel Bouddhiste. Ma recherche examine le cote erotique de ce rite récupérer dans le Vanaratna's (1384 -1468) un manuel de méditation Tibétain, examinant la déesse Vajravārāhī (Truie Adamantin), aussi connu sous le nom de Vajravilasini (Beauté Adamantin). Ce manuel est aussi connu en tant que le *Vajravilasini namah Vajravaraahi sadhana* (Le *sadhana* de Vajravaraahi connu en tant que Vajravilasini). Un poème datant du huitième siècle est préserver dans ce manuel dans la section de ce *sadhana*, qui est attribué a l'Indien *mahasiddha* (*celui qui a accompli bien des choses*) Lakshminkara. Ma recherche examine ce poème en relation avec la théorie esthétique Indienne, la théorie *rasa*. Mon argument consiste a expliquer que les poètes qui s'opposaient aux règles du temps, comme Lakshminkara, faisaient usures de (tout en étant au delà de) la théorie *rasa*. Ceci créa un ambiance erotique (*shrngara rasa*) dans leurs poèmes. En transcendant ce *rasa*, les poètes créaient une ambiance Bouddhiste, non duel *samarasa*, c'est-a-dire un état non duel qui est le but ultime du tantra.

De plus, ma recherche examine les données ethnographiques de Syed Jamil Ahmed (2003) et de David N. Gellner (1992) concernant les rituels tantriques Newar au Népal. Dans le contexte de la performance du Vajravaraahi, les homes sont attendues à danser pour démontrer leur transformation en Cakrasamvara, le consort de Vajravaraahi. Les femmes, pour leurs parts, elles doivent trembler violemment pour démontrer leur possession spirituel pour représenter qu'ils sont Vajravaraahi. *Samarasa* est exprimer dans les participants du rituel sexuel symbolique de la dance et du tremblement corporel. Pour que le rituel soit un succès, la présence du déité doit être maintenu à travers la possession corporel (*samavesha*) lors de l'osmose de l'être humain avec le déité. La divergence sexuelle lors des performances exprime l'existence de différentes niveau d'autorité entre home et femme. Je conclue que la non dualité est exprimé sous forme de performance masculine et féminine exagéré entre l'homme qui domine et la femme qui est passive, qui des lors leur convergence, forment la non dualité sous forme d'union ritualise.

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Introduction

Voyeurism: viewing nondual aesthetics and performance in Buddhist ritual sex

Upon completing my Bachelor's degree at the University of Calgary I received a mug inscribed with the following quotation by Susan Sontag: "Religion is probably, after sex, the second oldest resource which human beings have available to them for blowing their minds."¹ There is possibly no better area for the study of the confluence of religion and sex than tantra. Indeed, Hugh B. Urban observes that the "Tantric world reeks with the mingled perfume of sex and religion" (118), and Gavin D. Flood claims that it is "undoubtedly with Tantra that the idea of sexuality as a means of transforming or expanding consciousness is developed" (1992, 57).

Sex, or more specifically the erotic sentiment that is generation out of it (*śṛṅgāra rasa*), is integral to the highest yogic forms of Buddhist tantra, *anuttarayoga* tantras (Tib. *rnal 'byor bla med kyi rgyud*).² Ronald M. Davidson notes that highest yoga tantras are the "earliest solid evidence for the Buddhist espousal of erotic soteriology" (2002b, 58). The earliest texts which Davidson is referring to are from the eighth century, the *Guhyasamāja*, the *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*, and the *Laghusaṃvara*, which were eventually understood as establishing the path of "highest yoga" (*anuttarayoga*). This soteriology extends far beyond the eighth century into the latest periods of the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet in the fifteenth century, by such scholars as Vanaratna.

Vanaratna (Tib. Nags kyi rin chen) (1384 -1468) is often called the last *paṇḍita* as he was the last renowned Indian scholar to visit Tibet during the second phase of the spread of Buddhism (Ehrhard 246).³ Vanaratna's major contributions were in the field of tantric teachings and he is known to have contributed a variety of *sādhanas* (meditation manuals) (Shastri 135). While in Tibet he transmitted unique *anuttarayoga* tantric teachings on a rare, erotic form of the popular female Buddha Vajravārāhī "Adamantine Sow," called Vajravilāsinī "Adamantine

¹ This quote is taken from her *Styles of Radical Will*, pages 57-58.

² Alexis Sanderson has pointed out that no such term *anuttarayogatantra* appears in Sanskrit works, indicating that it is likely a poor translation of the Tibet category back into Sanskrit, which would be better translated back as *yoganiruttaratantra* (English 6). Because these tantras are the most female centered, the central deity being most often a solitary female figure, like in Vanaratna's Vajravilāsinī *sādhana*, in India *anuttarayoga* tantras are classified as Yoginī tantras.

³ Vanaratna is thought to have been born in Chittagong, in what is today Bangladesh (Diemberger 47).

Beauty,”⁴ in the *Vajravilāsinī namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana* (The *sādhana* of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī).⁵ The erotic sentiment is prominently tasted in the consort practice section of Vanaratna’s *sādhana*, where the *tāntrika* (tantric practitioner) envisioned themselves as a Buddha in sexual union with his or her partner.

A *sādhana* literally translates as a “means of attainment” and is the way that tantric practitioners can become their chosen deities (*iṣṭadevatā*). *Sādhana*s provide step-by-step guidelines to imagine oneself as a buddha, inside and out, at both a visual and aesthetic level. Instructions are given in both prose and poetic form, and the poems are often attributed to highly realized authors and establish the ritual and aesthetic mood through reiterating the goals of practice. In Vanaratna’s work the eighth century Indian princess Lakṣmīkarā, one of the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas* (great accomplished ones), is the author of this poem found in the most erotic section of the practice (consort practice):⁶

“The graceful [deity] possessed of the precious *vajra* [penis enters] into the tip [of] the
opening [of his] consort,
From binding [the legs] in the cross-legged posture, [he enters] into the *padma* [vagina]
treasure chest,
As long as there is flavour of the Buddha’s presence, the moon [nectar] in the drop (*bindu*)
coming forth,
For that long [one] attains the highest citadel [of] Lord Buddha.”

Lakṣmīkarā’s poem describes the posture taken by the male and female buddhas in sexual union. The penis, symbolically termed a *vajra*, meaning diamond or thunderbolt, must enter the tip of the vagina (San. *padma*, lotus) of the consort and the male must bind this with the *mudrā* (seal) of a cross-legged posture (*āsana*). This position is maintained for as long as the male partner can control the circulation of semen, called the moon, within his body. The goal of this practice is not only to create an erotic mood, but to experience the “flavour of the Buddha’s presence” that is the taste of nonduality and the possessed state of Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara within the practitioners’ respective gendered bodies. My thesis explores how the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) is transformed into the nondual taste of *samarasa*, which results in a state of possession (*āveśa*) by the deities and is expressed by gendered performance.

⁴ This translation is drawn from Hildegard Diemberger translation of Vajravilāsinī as “Vajra Beauty” (50).

⁵ See Appendix.

⁶ See Appendix page 104.

Previous studies have tended to examine tantric poetry as separate from its ritual context, although the aesthetic of religious poetry can only be understood within ritual performance, because it is not a conventional aesthetic mood that Buddhists wish to generate, but an awakened experience. This awakened mood is the nondual aesthetic termed *samarasa* “one taste,” where all experiences are met with the same level of equanimity. So although consort practice employs the bipolar symbolism of the male and female deities in divine conjugal union, the goal is not to achieve a duality, but a nonduality (Brooks 58-60, 66-69).⁷ In sexual yogas, instead of an erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) being generated, as in conventional sexual encounters, the mood that is formed is nonduality.

There is more than significant difficulty in making claims surrounding the nondual mood of *samarasa*, which can only be experienced by awakened beings, yet my work is aided by Davidson’s theoretical understandings of the place of other *rasas* in Buddhist aesthetic theory. He considers the Buddhist *siddhas* to have extended the *śṛṅgāra rasa* of medieval poetry into the domain of ritual, and through the Vajrayāna to have aestheticized their erotic scriptures (2002, 197). Additionally, he considers the blissful, innate state of *sahaja*, because it is called the *anupamaraśvādāna*, “taste of liberation,” to have had an important place in Buddhist aesthetic theory (2002 a, 72-73).

The tantric views of the famous tenth century aesthetician Abhinavagupta have also influence my understanding of *samarasa* as not only as a taste, but an experience which divinizes the senses. He describes *sāmarasya* “sameness of flavour” as being the resulting taste of possession (*saṃāveśa*) by Śiva in one’s own body (Flood 1992, 51). Abhinavagupta advocated a shift away from an “appetitive style of perception” in which things are seen as existing outside of your consciousness, to an “aesthetic mode of awareness” in which objects are perceived as existing inside your consciousness. This shift results in the senses and the body itself to become

⁷ In his study of Hindu Śākta tantrism, Douglas Renfrew Brooks uses the family theory to create an idea of what can be classified as tantra. Ten points, when found in a high enough frequency are sufficient to define a practice, person or group as tantric (72). A tantra: 1) is non-canonical, 2) contains yogic disciplines, 3) is theistic and nondual, 4) contains elaborate speculation of the nature of sound, and use of mantras, 5) has worship of less concrete, anthropomorphic forms of divinity, in diagram form, such as *maṇḍalas*, 6) place a high level of authority on the guru (teacher), 7) has bipolar symbolism, such as divine conjugal union, 8) is considered secret and dangerous, 9) promotes use of conventional prohibited substances and antinomian behavior, such as sex outside of the context of marriage, and 10) has *dīkṣā* (initiation), where caste and gender are not the primary qualifiers (Brooks 55-72).

divinized (Sanderson 1995, 87). For him the deity was the realization of nonduality by the devotee (Sanderson 1995, 47).

The erotic sentiment of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, expressed by Lakṣmīnkarā's poetry, is transformed in the space of Buddhist ritual into the nondual Buddhist *rasa* of *samarasa*. The experience of *samarasa* as a form of divine possession (*samāveśā*), in tantric Buddhism, is cultivated in the practice of deity yoga, when one visualizes oneself as having an awakened body, speech and mentality. In an effort to situate the transformation of *śṛṅgāra rasa* into *samarasa* in Buddhist ritual, my thesis analyzes Syed Jamil Ahmed and David N. Gellner's studies of the states of mutual possession (*samāveśā*) which occur in the course of the sexually charged current Newar Buddhist tantric initiation in Nepal. I argue that although the men in this ritual context dance and the women shake, they are both expressing the state of *samarasa*.

I consider the gendered duality of expression in Newar initiation to be due to divergent levels of *śakti*, understood as female power and the capacity of receptivity, within the male and female. While this term is more commonly employed within the Śaiva traditions of *tāntrikas*, such as Abhinavagupta, it is also a prominent term in Newar Buddhism for describing power and women. Women in tantra convey power like an electrical current, transferring *śakti* during sexual acts. Although women transfer this energy, as the sources of *śakti*, they naturally have more of this powerful receptive capacity, leading them to express *samarasa* in the more overtly possessed form of shaking.

This introduction serves to introduce the erotic and nondual tastes of *śṛṅgāra* and *samarasa*. The deity Vajravilāsinī embodies these sentiments and she is introduced along with her more common manifestation as Vajravārāhī, found with or without her consort Cakrasaṃvara. These sentiments are also found in the lives and works of Vajravārāhī's devotees, most importantly the poet Lakṣmīnkarā and the *sādhana* author Vanaratna as well as her first Tibetan reincarnation Chokyi Dronma. This introduction now turns to a review of Vajravilāsinī's texts and current literature, and ends with an outline of the thesis as a whole.

Voyeuristic lens: scholarship and methods for viewing tantric sex

My study draws on a range of scholarship covering the goddess Vajravilāsinī, the *siddha* poet Lakṣmīnkarā, the tantric lineage holder Vanaratna, classic and modern sources on the aesthetics of *rasa* theory, translations of Buddhist tantras,⁸ modern studies on South Asian possessions and research on Newar Buddhist tantric ritual. Beyond Vanaratna's Vajravilāsinī *sādhana*, found in the bsTan 'gyur collection of the Tibetan canon, my study looks at other tantric primary sources, including Vanaratna's composed and connected praises (*stotras*) to Vajravārāhī, the *Krama dvayaṃ Vajravārāhīstotraṃ*, also found in the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur and the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the *Vajravilāsinīsādhanāstavaḥ*, found in the *Vasantatilakā of Caryāvratī SrīKṛṣṇācārya*. I also draw from Vibhūticandra's Sanskrit *Vajravilāsinīstotra* made available by *Dhīh*, the rare Buddhist manuscripts section of the Central University of Tibetan Studies. Additional foundational texts are the *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*, the root tantra of Vajravārāhī's cycle of teachings, translated by David B. Gray, and Abhinavagupta's *Tantrālok*, translated by John R. Dupuche, which relates sex and erotic dance to possession.

Elizabeth English's recent work *Vajrayoginī: Her Visualizations, Rituals and Forms* discusses Vajravilāsinī's iconography as found in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanamālā*, but does not include her transmission by Vanaratna. Hildegard Diemberger's work on the reincarnation lineage (*tulkus*) of Vajravārāhī in Tibet, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, discusses the possibility that Vanaratna may have influenced the establishment of this lineage, but only mentions his Tibetan Vajravilāsinī *sādhana* in a footnote (333 ft. 32). Beyond Diemberger's scholarship, my information on Vanaratna is drawn from the *Blue Annals*, as well as work done on his journeys by Franz-Karl Ehrhard and his devotional guru literature by Klaus-Dieter Mathes.

Chinnamastā, like Vajravilāsinī, is a rarer form of Vajravārāhī, and is popular also in Hindu traditions. Elisabeth Anne Benard's work on her, *Chinnamastā: The Aweful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess*, examines various Buddhist *sādhana*s, and provides information on Lakṣmīnkarā's authorship that is also applicable to Vanaratna's *sādhana*. My bibliographical information on Lakṣmīnkarā is drawn from Keith Dowman's translation of the *Legends of the*

⁸ Specifically, the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvara* in Smith's study of South Asian possession allows me to theorize on the Buddhist relation of *rasa*, *āveśa* and dance.

Eighty-Four Mahāsiddhas, and information on her nondual poetic stance from her *Advayasiddhi*, translated by Ramprasad Mishra.

My method of study for tantric aesthetics is drawn from two indigenous Indian models: *rasa* theory and tantric Buddhist hermeneutical understanding of the semantic and linguistic category of *sandhābhāṣā*, “intentional language.” The erotic, esoteric vocabulary employed by Lakṣmīnkarā can be classified as *sandhābhāṣā*, because it simultaneously invokes *śṛṅgāra rasa* and its transcendent form, *samarasa*. Although *rasa* theory has not been previously related to Buddhist *siddha* poetry, I examine Lakṣmīnkarā’s work along with the poems (*dohās*) of Tilopa and Saraha, translated by Roger R. Jackson, in order to show that *siddha* poets understood Indian aesthetic theory, as outlined in Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Abhinavagupta’s commentary, but utilized this model to create their own taste, *samarasa*.

My method of studying tantric possessed performance draws also from indigenous understandings of modifying agency and increasing penetrability as explored by Frederick M. Smith, Gavin D. Flood and David Gordon White. Increased penetrability is understood in India to occur through the transference of *śakti* (female power). Through sexual intercourse, women can share with their husbands their *śakti*, their ability to be penetrated, that can allow men to become possessed during ritual also.

Once in a state of possession, the ritual participant cannot be said to have his or her own agency, but a modified form of power, which merges the identity of the human and divine together. In Buddhism these merged identities are referred to as the human commitment being (*samayasattva*) with the divine wisdom being (*jñānasattva*). During possession *śakti* acts as the electrical current making the divine and human beings together receptive to one another and ultimately merge.

Because women naturally possess more *śakti*, women and men’s possessions are expressed differently. This is seen from the ethnographic findings of Ahmed and Gellner on Newar Buddhism in Nepal. Gellner’s *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, explores dance and possession in tantric rites of initiation, and Ahmed’s “Caryā Nṛtya of Nepal” explores the aesthetically nondual and sexual components of tantric dance, *caryā nṛtya*. Newar priests are expected during possession to dance, while their wives should lose more agency and shake with possessed. Where men’s agency is compromised, women’s is overwhelmed. Men perform as

dominant divine males, and women as passive divine females, and through their duality of genders, and gender roles, are able through their union to show ultimate nonduality.

These performative expectations are also seen in the sexual dance of the buddhas. Although Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara have passed beyond dualities such as gender, they embody these dichotomies so that they can through their union show that it is possible to overcome all distinctions. They have transcended all distinctions of self and other. They can be said to be transsexual in their capacity to identify as much with the gendered experience of the other's body as their own.

Vajravilāsinī: the erotic embodiment of nonduality

Vajravilāsinī (Tib. rDorje sgeg ma) is a rare, erotic manifestation of the popular female buddha Vajravārāhī (Tib. rDorje phag mo). Although Vajravārāhī often appears as a solitary heroine, her erotic nature is especially obvious when she is in union with her male consort, Cakrasaṃvara. Vajravilāsinī seems to have had a variety of South Asian representations, but once re-envisioned in Tibet, she takes on a more common form and stance of Vajravārāhī.

By the time of the formation of Vajravilāsinī's iconography and ritual practices in the thirteenth century or perhaps earlier, Vajravārāhī was considered to be synonymous with female buddha Vajrayoginī (Tib. rDorje mal 'byor ma).⁹ It seems that the cult of Vajravārāhī arose shortly after the first proto-yoginī tantras, as Mallar Mitra has been unable to locate images of Vajravārāhī from before the tenth century in India, and therefore concludes that her cult emerged in the ninth or tenth century (103).

Vajravārāhī, “Adamantine Sow,” is usually portrayed in half-dancing posture (*ardhaparyanika*), with a sow face on one the right side of her head, as opposed to Vajrayoginī who is most commonly portrayed in a warrior lung stance (*ālīdhāsana*).¹⁰ The preface *vajra*, meaning diamond or thunderbolt, is unique to names of Buddhist deities, but the term *yoginī* comes from the larger Indian milieu, denoting fearsome female “apparitions who were both

⁹ In Newar Buddhism, Vajravārāhī is understood to be the esoteric form of exoteric Vajrayoginī (Gellner 330).

¹⁰ I should note here that the term *yoginī* in the context of Vajrayoginī's name has nothing to do with what is now understood to be yoga, as this practice was yet to be developed, as pointed out by David Gordon White (2006, 27). From a close reading of the Netra Tantra White concluded that as the term “yoginī” can be said to come from the root *yuj*, *yoginīs* could be said to be “joiners” (2006, 195).

wildly dangerous and a source of great boons” (Dupuche 13).¹¹ Although Vajravārāhī is often portrayed with violent or wrathful *kāpālīka*-like iconography, the erotic sentiment is always also prominent, because all manifestations are always naked with legs spread apart.¹²

Although Vajravārāhī is herself nonduality, when she is visualized as a solitary heroine the erotic sentiment is more overtly portrayed than *samarasa*. Conversely, the erotic and nondual sentiments are simultaneously expressed when Vajravārāhī is in sexual union with her consort, the wrathful Buddha Cakrasaṃvara “Wheel of Supreme Bliss” also known as Heruka “Drinker of Blood.”¹³ Tantric practitioners introduced a *yab yum* “father-mother” pose of sexual union for nearly every male Buddhist deity (Pfanft 1997, 25), to visually demonstrate the goal of nonduality. In tantric Buddhist art, nonduality is portrayed by the coming together of a male buddha and his divine consort in sexual union. This position captures the sentiment of *samarasa*, which is the goal of Buddhist practice, through representing a kind of union, beyond individual, dualistic conceptions that even unawakened beings can comprehend.

Many male buddhas who went tantric became almost exclusively portrayed in *yab yum* form. This is the case with Heruka, who only in extremely rare cases appears to dance alone.¹⁴ However, female deities, the other half of nonduality, can appear alone, as Vajravārāhī does. It is often justified that when alone the *khaṭvāṅga*, the skull-topped staff that rests in her armpit, is the phallic representation of Cakrasaṃvara (Gyatso 1999, 126), so that they are never really alone, but this is unconvincing because not all of Vajravārāhī’s solitary representations carry this

¹¹ The cults to these early *yoginī*s seem to have been the foundation for the later tantric Kula “Clan” traditions, which emphasized the necessities of females for bestowing consecration into the clan lineage (Dupuche 14).

¹² *Anuttarayoga* tantras contain violent elements, which they borrowed from the popular Śaivic group, the Kāpālīkas (skull holders) (Sanderson 1988, 678) and this borrowing reflects the way that tantric practices evolved in medieval India through the contact of various *tāntrikas* who were loosely or closely affiliated with Buddhist, Hindu or Jain institutions. The charnel ground practices of the Kāpālīkas centre upon displaying the mythic lifestyle of penance which Śiva, as Rudra, adopted upon murdering Brahmā. Their most defining implements are their skull bowl and *khaṭvāṅga*. This appropriation of Śaivic iconography is seen most obviously in Vajravārāhī’s five bone ornaments, the prostrate bodies of lesser worldly deities which she crushes underfoot, her skull-topped *khaṭvāṅga* staff which rests in her elbow, and her skull-bowl (*kapāla*) she holds in her left hand. Vajravārāhī’s five bone ornaments are: a tiara, earrings, necklace, bracelets and anklets, and girdle. The worldly deities she commonly stands upon are Kālarātrī “Black night” and Bhairava “Terrible,” the Śaivic deities to whom she and Heruka owe so much of their good looks.

¹³ As no male deity is named in Vanaratna’s text it is not possible to know who Vajravilāsini’s implied consort is, but in his other poetic works Vanaratna refers to Vajravārāhī’s consort as Cakrasaṃvara, so this most likely her implied partner. This is found in verse 14 and 18 of the *Krama dvayaṃ Vajravārāhīstotraṃ* (The second (completion) stage of praising Vajravārāhī) in Tibetan written as *rDo rje phag mo ’I bstod pa rim pa gnyis pa*.

¹⁴ I have observed two images of solitary Heruka in the dancing pose in India: one at the Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala and another at the Sarnath museum. I am informed from my Vajrayāna Buddhism class with Dr. James Apple in the Fall semester of 2008 at the University of Calgary that this imaging is extremely rare.

implement. Yet, her solitary representation leads to a challenging question: How can Vajravārāhī be said to symbolize nonduality, when she is without her other nondual half? The most convincing answer seems to be that Vajravārāhī is not a singular, unawakened being. She only appears, out of infinite compassion, to be like a human, to have a gender, to need to be in sexual union with another to experience bliss and nonduality. It is not possible to understand the negation of duality without first conceiving of duality. However, once nonduality is conceptualized this state too should be negated to avoid creating a duality between duality and nonduality.

Cakrasaṃvara is not the only consort of Vajravārāhī, she also take the less violent and more erotic partner, Padmanarteśvara, an erotic form of Avalokiteśvara, as her partner (Diemberger 50). He is the consort of Secret Vajravilāsinī in the *Guhyavajravilāsinī sādhanā* by Śabara, found in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanaṃālā*, a thirteenth century collection of texts focusing around Vajravārāhī and Vajrayogini.¹⁵ English has translated Padmanarteśvara’s name to mean “Lord of the Dance in the Lotus [Family]” (89), however, his name is better translated without the insertion of the term family (San. *kula*), as without this additional word his name better captures the overt sexual symbolism that is most likely meant to be conveyed, implying that he dances in his consort’s lotus (vagina).

Śabara’s ritual text is focused almost exclusively on sexual yogas, and portrays Vajravilāsinī in squatting (*utkuṭa*) posture, with her feet twelve finger-breadths apart, seated with her vagina clearly displayed on the peak of Padmanarteśvara’s “banner” (penis) (English 89, 418-419 ft. 176). In English’s translation Padmanarteśvara makes Vajravilāsinī dance with his penis (*guhyavajreṇa*) (89). Literally, this seems to read that “with [his] penis [he makes] secret,” thus implying that what is secret about Secret Vajravilāsinī is the lap dance she performs.

¹⁵ The Vajravilāsinī *sādhanā* by Śabara may have been composed by Vanaratna’s root guru. Vanaratna composed a devotional work to Śabara, entitled *Śrī Śabarapādastotratna*, meant to honor his guru (Mathes 245-267). In the colophon of Vanaratna’s Vajravilāsinī *sādhanā* he states that this form of ritual practice is “[i]n agreement with the method of the great Indian yogi Śavaripa” (See Appendix page 88). As Śavaripa is another name for Śabara, this passage clearly implying that Vanaratna received this method of Vajravārāhī practice from Śabara. The fact that this work contains distinct iconography, practices and format from Vanaratna’s *sādhanā* seems to makes it less likely that the author of this text was Vanaratna’s guru. However, regardless of whether the Śabara in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanaṃālā* was Vanaratna’s teacher, this Sanskrit author appears to have been an importance lineage holder of Vajravilāsinī’s transmission, and thereby provides insight into Vajravilāsinī’s practice in India, previously to its transmission into Tibet.

Śabara’s representation of Secret Vajravilāsinī is not the only representation of Vajravilāsinī in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanamālā*. In Vibhūticandra’s *Vajravilāsinīstotra* he portrays Vajravilāsinī as a peaceful, erotic form of Vajravārāhī. Verse fourteen describes her as in the pleasure of ardent love making, with her hair let down and clothes dishevelled. English notes that she holds a skull-cap and *vajra*, normal *kāpālika*-like adornments of Vajravārāhī, but otherwise there is nothing wrathful about her (85). She is to be visualized in union with Cakrasaṃvara, and the modern representation of the text, that English commissioned, drawn by Dharmacāri Āloka, has Vajravilāsinī prominently facing the devotee, uncharacteristic dominant in an imagined world where feminine deities take the backseat to their male counterparts (85). However, until further iconographical data is found it is uncertain whether this is an accurate depiction of Vibhūticandra’s goddess.

There is also Vanaratna’s imaging of Vajravilāsinī to consider. Vanaratna is thought to have made three trips to Tibet, and it is most likely that his Vajravilāsinī text was given on his second expedition to Tibet, from 1433 to 1436, as this is when a contract between the Phagmo gru family was created and Vanaratna assumed the role of tantric guru (Ehrhard 260).¹⁶ Vanaratna’s Vajravilāsinī appears as a solitary heroine, indeed no reference is made to her male counterpart outside of the consort practice. She appears as Vajravārāhī commonly does, dancing in *ardhaparyānika* posture, with a sow face emerging from the right side of her face, holding a skull bowl filled with blood, and a curved knife (Tib. *gri gug*).¹⁷ But in the consort section she is visualized as the secondary deity, squatting on the lap of her seated consort.¹⁸

Evidence is found in the *Blue Annals* that Vanaratna bestowed transmissions of Vajravārāhī and her consort Cakrasaṃvara. He bestowed “the blessings of [Vajra]vārāhī according to the six texts of the Vārāhī Cycle (*phag mo gzun drug*)” (800),¹⁹ and the *sampannakrama* (completion stage) level of the Vajravārāhī Cycle on some Tibetans (802). The *Blue Annals* describes Vanaratna, within the course of performing an initiation into the *maṇḍala* of Cakrasaṃvara, as “wearing a religious robe of golden color” (819) meaning the garb of a fully ordained monk (*bhikṣu*) and “being embraced by a nun (*bhikṣuṇī*) and indulging in secret

¹⁶ I am indebted to Dr. James Apple for this insight.

¹⁷ See Appendix pages 92-93.

¹⁸ See Appendix page 104.

¹⁹ The lineage of this teaching is said to begin with Vajradhāra, then moves to Vajrayoginī, and finished with Buddhagoṣa and Vanaratna (800-801).

enjoyment” (819) (Diemberger 137).²⁰ This description fits the highly sexual contexts of initiation ceremonies, where sex is a necessary component for the neophyte to be reborn outside of the human realm and into the Buddha’s family. If Vanaratna engaged in physical practices of consort union, he likely considered it possible for his sexual *sādhana* sections to also be practiced accordingly.

Various transmissions of Vajravārāhī and Vajrayoginī came to Tibet through the teachings of various Indian masters, and were adopted by all schools, but Vajravārāhī became particularly important within the Kagyu school (Diemberger 50, English xxii).²¹ Indeed, it is most likely the Kagyu school which preserved and transmitted Vanaratna’s teachings on Vajravilāsinī. There does not appear to be a diversity of Vajravilāsinī literature in Tibetan; although I am currently unaware of any other Tibetan *sādhana* on her practices, her practices may be currently preserved within a Geluk lineage.²²

Beyond texts, other representations of the goddess emerged in Tibetan, most distinctly, Vajravārāhī’s bSam sdings rDorje phag mo emanation lineage, begun in the fifteenth century, of which the princess Chos kyi sgron ma (henceforth Chodron), was the first emanation.²³ Diemberger guesses that Vanaratna probably played some role in the identification of Chodron as Vajravārāhī, as one of his disciples was the ruler of Yar ‘brog, who compiled the biography of Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal and influenced the development of the rDorje phag mo reincarnation lineage (50).²⁴ This is supported by Chodron’s identification as not only a form of Vajravārāhī, but Vajravilāsinī herself, as stated in her biography (Diemberger 50, 152):

Homage to Vajravārāhī!

²⁰ As Chodron is the only known Tibetan nun recorded to have received full ordination as a *bhikṣuṇī* (Diemberger 12, 60-61), if his practices were with a Tibetan woman than this strengthens the view that she taken as his consort.

²¹ Some of the prominent teachers on the practices of Vajravārāhī/Vajrayoginī within the Kagyu school which developed distinct lineages of her practice include: are Marpa (1012-1097), Ras chung pa (1084-1161) and Khyung po rnal ‘byor (eleventh-twelfth centuries).

²² I have been informed of a Geluk lama living in Germany who recently granted a Vajravilāsinī empowerment as part of a series of rare consecrations, meaning that her cycles are still being transmitted, it what can be assumed to be an unbroken line of oral transmission.

²³ This abbreviation follows standard Tibetan conventions of shortening names by adding the first syllables of the first and second name together.

²⁴ Vanaratna and Chodron are recorded to have met on two occasions during Vanaratna’s three trips to Tibet. They first met in 1436, when Vanaratna came to visit her father, the King of Gung thang, when Chodron was fourteen years old. They later met each other travelling at Rin spungs in the fall of 1454 (Diemberger 47). Vanaratna is described by Diemberger as being one of the great influences on Chodron, because when asked by her companion, bDe legs chos sgron, whether he or Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal was greater, she said she could not “judge such a high matter” (Diemberger 47).

Ultimate giver of pleasure to Heruka!
[...]
I write the biography of the Vajravilāsinī,
Who performs and enjoys the multiple dance.

Like the erotic goddess she is believed to be, Chodron is understood to have engaged in ritual sexual practices. She is considered by many scholars to have been the consort of her lama Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal. Some passages from her biography imply this:

“[They] had become the secret treasury of all Buddhas thanks to their extraordinary deeds of body, speech, mind, virtue and action for all living beings. The Female Buddha (*de bzhin gshegs ma*), Lady of the Universe (*'khor lo bdag ma*), dancing the dance of illusion, with its many forms of ritual offering, satisfied the innate bliss of being beyond duality (*gnyis med pa*). This was a symbol of excellence (*mchog gi rten*) and a supreme achievement of relatedness (*'brel bar byung ba bla na med pa*) (Diemberger 136).

In Diemberger’s opinion, Chodron “may well have acted as a divine partner for her spiritual master, which is suggested by the terms “innate bliss,” “dance,” and “ultimate relatedness beyond reality” ” (136). Her view is further reinforced by Cyrus Stearns who refers to Chodron as both Thang stong rgyal po (1361-1464) and Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal’s (1376-1451) consort (4, 12 and 52).²⁵

Sanskrit texts understand Vajravilāsinī to be a peaceful, erotic form of Vajravārāhī, in union with a sexual partner. Conversely, in her Tibetan practice, as transmitted by Vanaratna, Vajravilāsinī appears in Vajravārāhī’s common solitary *ardhaparyanika* posture, and during consort practice is certainly the secondary deity. Despite appearing to lose her distinctive characteristics, Vajravārāhī in Tibet took on what could be considered to be an even more unique form, that of a living line of Tibetan women, the Samding Dorje Phagmos, who like many great Tibetan masters, trace their origins back to India, and most specifically to the princess Lakṣmīnkārā.

²⁵ Thangtong Gyalpo is believed to have been an emanation of Avalokiteśvara (Stearns 21), which is of interest as Secret Vajravilāsinī’s consort is an erotic form of Avalokiteśvara. Secondly, he is said to have “actually met glorious Śavaripa, the lord of the yogins” (Stearns 143), tying him to Vanaratna’s guru and the attributed transmission of the Tibetan Vajravilāsinī practice. Stearns follows the views of contemporary Buddhist masters, Situ chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880-1925) and the editors of the biography of Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal (1991), [who mention] Chodron as the consort of either Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal or Thangtong Gyalpo or both (Diemberger 342 ft. 31).

The *siddha* poet Lakṣmīnkarā

The placement of Lakṣmīnkarā's erotic verse in a Vajravārāhī *sādhana* is apt considering she was a devotee of the goddess Vajravārāhī and herself engaged in consort practices. However, beyond Lakṣmīnkarā's ties to this erotic goddess and sexual practices transforming *śṛṅgāra rasa*, she was also a proponent of nondualism, linking her to the higher *rasa* of *samarasa*.²⁶ In this way she is reflective of many Buddhist *siddha* poets who focused on the expression of the innate (*sahaja*) awakening, which while drawing on worldly sentiments, such as *śṛṅgāra rasa*, ultimately express the flavour of *samarasa*, for those who can see beyond their erotic exterior.²⁷

In the *Legends of the Eighty-Four Mahāsiddhas* (*Grub thob brgyad cu rtsab zhi'i lo rgyus*)²⁸ Lakṣmīnkarā is said to have been the sister of the King Indrabhūti, who ruled the realm of Oḍḍiyāna (Dowman, 179). Oḍḍiyāna is often associated with *dākinīs*, fierce, transgressive female buddhas, including Vajravārāhī. Lakṣmīnkarā is said to have been married to the non-Buddhist son prince Sevola of King Jalandhara of Laṅkāpurī, although she feigned insanity in order to avoid consummating their union (Mishra, 17-19). “[S]he torn the clothes from her body, smeared herself with oil and lamp black, unbound her hair and covered it with filth until she looked like a wild woman” (Dowman 181). She escaped from his palace and went to live in a cremation ground. After attaining *siddhi* there, she initiated an untouchable latrine-sweeper from

²⁶ The strongest evidence that verse forty-nine in the Vajravilāsini *sādhana* is by Lakṣmīnkarā is from her main work left to us, her *Advayasiddhi* because this text is also attributed to Lakṣmīnkarā and refers to her as “the venerable Lakṣmī,” (Śrī Lakṣmī) (Mishra, 36). Elizabeth Anne Benard and Elizabeth English have both come across references to Lakṣmī in their work on Vajravārāhī. Benard, in her study of Vajravārāhī in her manifestation as Chinnamastā, “The goddess with a served head,” has found a *Lakṣmīsādhana*, which is almost identical to the *Chinnamuṅḍāvajravārāhīsādhana* she is studying. Benard infers that Lakṣmī must refer to the name of the author, because this *sādhana* is not about the goddess Lakṣmī (Benard, 66).²⁶ In English's study of the various manifestations of Vajravārāhī in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanamālā*, includes a *Lakṣmīsādhana*. English concludes that the Lakṣmīnkarā who was Indrabhūti's sister, is most likely to be the attributed author of her text (10). English concludes that all we can infer about Lakṣmīnkarā is that she lived no later than the Tibetan translator of her *sādhana* text, found in the *Guhyasamayāsādhanamālā*, who is known to have lived between 1059-1109 C.E. (10).

²⁷ This section on Lakṣmīnkarā relies upon my earlier work, entitled *Mood Music: The purpose of mahāsiddha poetry in the consort practice of a Tibetan sādhana*, for Dr. Lara Braitstein's Buddhist Poetry RELG 560 class at McGill University in Montreal, submitted April 19, 2010.

²⁸ The Sanskrit title in the Tibetan colophon is *Caturaśīsiddhapravṛtti*, and is attributed to Abhayadatta, said to have lived in the twelfth century. However, like most Tibetan texts, although a Sanskrit title is given Indian origins cannot be proven (English 389. ft. 29).

the King Jalendhara’s household into the *sādhana* of Vajravārāhī, and likely made him her consort (Dowman, 179-183).

Like Lakṣmīnkarā, Chodron entered into an unhappy royal marriage and was given permission to leave only by acting insane.²⁹ Diemberger claims that even though Lakṣmīnkarā is not mentioned in Chodron’s biography, “her history was clearly the source of some of the tropes that informed the writing, especially the episode of marriage and the dramatic renunciation of royal life” (99).³⁰ This view is strengthened by the tracing of the bSam sdings rDorje phag mo reincarnation lineage, which Chodron begun, mythically back to Lakṣmīnkarā (60).³¹ By claiming Lakṣmīnkarā as the origins of the line of reincarnations, she is granted the status of being an emanation of Vajravārāhī for the Tibetans who established her lineage.

Whether or not Vanaratna considered Lakṣmīnkarā to be Vajravārāhī herself, the placement of her poem within the consort practice shows that he considered her to be an authority on the goal of sexual yogas, which is the realization of nonduality, *samarasa*. Her main text, the *Advayasiddhi* also focuses on nonduality, containing systematic advice on how to realize “indefinable and non-dual supreme truth for a non-dual perfection” (Mishra, 37).³² The same nondual focus that is found in the *Advayasiddhi* is present in Lakṣmīnkarā’s poem

²⁹ According to her biography, Chodron (1422-1455) was born in the kingdom called Mang yul Gung thang in Tibet, as the eldest daughter of the King of Gung thang, Khri Lha dbang rgyal mtshan (1404-1464) (Diemberger 33-34, 51, 69 and 151).²⁹ Like many female Buddhist saints, although she wished to pursue a spiritual life she married due to her parents’ wishes. Around 1438, when she would have been sixteen it was arranged that she would be married to a prince of Southern Lato, Tshang dbyangs bkra shis (Diemberger 55 and 156). When she was nineteen, around 1440, she gave birth to a girl (Diemberger 58). When the child was one-years-old Chodron fell extremely ill, and almost died, making a miraculous recovery (Diemberger 59).²⁹ Shortly after this, while Chodron was away in Gung thang, her daughter died (Diemberger 59), which seems to have led to her resolute decision to leave her worldly life and begin her spiritual practice. When her request to receive ordination was not approved, she tried to escape from the castle, and when that failed “she unbound her hair and started to chop it with a knife, injuring herself in the process” (Diemberger 60). Throwing her hair at the feet of her father-in-law’s feet, she was finally given permission to receive ordination from Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal (Diemberger 62, 171).

³⁰ Furthermore, many epithets for Chodron contain the common word *palmo*, meaning “glory, magnificence, prosperity,” which is also used to translate the name Lakṣmī, further relating the two princesses (Diemberger 338 ft. 43).

³¹ In the biography of Bodong Phyogs las rnam rgyal, Chodron’s root lama, it is said: “In earlier times [Chodron] became Palmo (dPal mo) [i.e. Lakṣmīnkarā], the sister of Indrabhūti in the land of Urgyen (Oḍḍiyāna), then the divine princess Maṇḍārāvā, the consort of the great teacher Padmasambhava” (Diemberger 254-255).³¹ This trope is continued in the biography of the great iron bridge builder, Thangtong Gyalpo, claiming: “In ancient times, Vajravārāhī was born as Lakṣmīnkarā, sister of King Indrabhūti in Oḍḍiyāna. She was known as Bhiksunī Lakṣmī, and her deeds were beyond human imagination” (Diemberger 257).

³² Lakṣmīnkarā also wrote a commentary on her brother Indrabhūti’s text the *Sahajasiddhi*, “Innate attainment” (Shaw 54).

describing Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara in union. Lakṣmīkarā’s focus on nonduality leads Ramprasad Mishra to see her as having the views which are foundational to Sahajayāna “The Innate Path.”³³ This means that she negated the necessity of elaborate rituals or priestly or scriptural authority in her works, and instead stressed the necessity of having a guru, the human body as the seat of awakening, and an ultimate nondual reality (Braitstein 49-50).³⁴

Lakṣmīkarā is associated with *sahaja* by Mishra; it is not uncommon for *mahāsiddhas*, especially those who were poets, to be related to the concept of *sahaja* that pervades so much of Buddhist esoteric poetry. *Siddha* poets described the experience of awakening in terms that did not fit with conventional monastic understandings of Buddhism. Lakṣmīkarā was not alone in her employment of the sentiment of *śṛṅgāra*, popular at the time in courtly *kāvya* (poetry), to express spirituality in erotic terms. Although the *siddha* poets are seen as flouting the poetic expectations of the time, they could not have rebelled so thoroughly from the norm without proficient understanding of poetic expectations and theory. The sentiment of *samarasa* is built upon the solid understanding, and ultimate rebellion, against all conventional structures and expectations, which is especially viewable in *siddha* poets’ rebellion against the system and theory of *rasa*.

Mingling tantric sex with aesthetics and performance

My study is divided into two main chapters. The first explores how the erotic *śṛṅgāra rasa* is transformed into the nondual *samarasa* according to traditional understandings of Indian *rasa* “taste” theory, as expounded by the legendary aesthetic theorist Bharata. In *rasa* theory there are eight potential *rasas* that can be formed out of a variety of factoring *bhāvas*, feelings.³⁵ Yet, even after Abhinavagupta’s inclusion of *śānta* as the ninth *rasa*, *samarasa* was not

³³ According to Luis O. Gomez, there were three types of development of tantric Buddhism. The earliest of these he calls Vajrayāna, originating perhaps as early as the fourth century. He classifies the second as Sahajayāna, whose earlier documented form is from early ninth-century Bengal, and is traditionally attributed to the Kashmiri yogin Luipa (c. 780-800). Lastly, he considers the Kalacakra Tantra to be a third, distinct form of Buddhist tantra (Payne 7). This is drawn from *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “Indian Buddhism,” by Luis O. Gomez.

³⁴ The Brahmin Saraha, commonly considered to have lived around the eighth century, is the most famous *mahāsiddha* for promoting the goal of nondual realization, but Lakṣmīkarā also advocated nondual attainment. Yet, Lara Braitstein points out that being a proponent of the Sahajayāna could be claimed by any Buddhist *siddha*, and that some scholars even dismiss the idea of the Sahajayāna, including Per Kvaerne and Roger Jackson (49-50).

³⁵ The nine conventional *rasas* are: *śṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (compassionate), *raudra* (wrathful, terribleness), *vira* (heroic), *bhayānaka* (terrifying), *bibhatsa* (odious), *adbhuta* (marvellous) and *śānta* (tranquil).

considered to be one of *rasas* in Bharata's *rasa* model. Therefore, the Buddhist model of sentiments worked both with traditional models of Indian aesthetics and transcended these models, to create a distinctly nondual Buddhist ritual flavour. All aspects of tantric ritual, whether arousing, as in consort practice, or disgusting, as with the consumption of polluting bodily fluids, are meant to lead to the ultimate flavour of *samarasa*, as opposed to one of the nine conventional *rasas*. Although all tantric ritual is pervaded by the aesthetic wish to generate the mood of nonduality through the music, costumes, smells, tastes and ritual space (Ahmed 173), consort practice is perhaps the most obvious illustration of this goal.

According to *rasa* theory, sex, outside of tantric ritual, begins with the *bhāva* of *rati* (love), and lead to *śṛṅgāra* (erotic) *rasa*, but in Buddhist ritual *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* is transformed further into *samarasa*, nondualism. This understanding places consort practice within a larger context of ritual performance in which all sorts of *bhāvas* are established to created distinct *rasas*, with the specific intention of being transcended. I argue that Buddhists during consort practice have their minds blown (as Susan Sontag would say), through the power of the sensory pleasure of sex being transmuted into a mood of nonduality. This realization of nonduality is showcased through the dual performances of dancing and shaking, activated by the embodiment of the deities within the *tāntrikas*.

The second chapter examines the dual, gendered expression of possession caused by the sentiment of *samarasa*. Within sexual practices Buddhists are expected to become imbued with what Lakṣmīkarā refers to as “the flavour of the Buddha's presence,” meaning not just *samarasa*, but the deity Vajravilāsinī herself, as well as her consort Cakrasaṃvara. Although Buddhist practice claims to transcend the dichotomy of male and female through the experience of nonduality, the sexual performance of *samarasa* is gendered. Male and female consorts are expected to exhibit varying losses of agency during possession by the buddhas. This can be observed from ethnographic finding of Newar Buddhists in Nepal, where in sexualized ritual contexts women are expected to shake to demonstrate a high loss of agency, whereas the men should retain enough control to perform choreographed dances. Newar Cakrasaṃvara and

Vajravārāhī consecration, imbued with sexual symbolism, show how *tāntrikas* transform *śṛṅgāra rasa* to resonate with and actively express *samarasa*.³⁶

The divergence in agency while performing *samarasa* is linked to the degrees of *śakti*, female power, held by the performers. *Śakti* is an instrumental power of reception in possession, making women's ritual possessions more outwardly observable and overt. Although the term *śakti* is not found in Buddhist scriptures, Newar Buddhists employ this term to not only refer to a goddess who is male god's consort, as Hindu tantric traditions do, but also to sometimes reference their own wives (Gellner 130-131). This employment of the term *śakti* reflects the reality that the development of Newar Buddhism was influenced by different Hindu groups, including various Śaiva tantric cults (Sanderson 1988, 663).

My conclusion combines the challenges of transmuting *śṛṅgāra rasa* into *samarasa* and the further step of expressing this nondual state by becoming the deity through possession. The correct performance of gender roles allows for *samāveśa*, a mutual state of penetration by the deity to occur for both *tāntrikas*. In order for religious performance to lead to divine possession, the correct flow of energies through the bodies must occur. Women as *mudrās* bind, and as *śaktis* move, the subtle energies of the male partner's body, meaning that the female capacity for penetration must be possessed and controlled by both partners. If the complimentary ritual acts of dancing and shaking are correctly performed the dual performers can truly embody nonduality.

³⁶ Although sexual yogas between actual partners is still practiced by some sects of Tibetan Buddhism today (Gyatso 1998, 196), only the most privileged of scholars are in a position to glimpse these rites.

Chapter 1

The flavour of the Buddha's presence: *samarasa* in *rasa* theory

In the abode of emptiness, [where] all normal human activity has been abandoned, freely enjoying great bliss, Vajravārahī, you have experienced the most excellent *rasa*.

Verse 24 from Vanaratna's *Second Method of Praising Vajravārahī*

Lakṣmīnkārā's verse in Vanaratna's section on consort practice shows that *samarasa* is the aesthetic goal of sexual yogas. *Samarasa* is the "most excellent taste" the "flavour of the buddha's presence," the inseparable union of all phenomena, true reality. *Samarasa* is the aesthetic experience of the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena.³⁷ Tantric practice aims at not only realizing emptiness, but perceiving all experiences as "one taste with the essential emptiness of mind" (Powers 422). The goal of consort practice is to realize one's innate, nondual condition.

The ineffable experience of *samarasa* is linked to the concept of *sahaja* "the innate" in the poetry of the Buddhist *mahāsiddhas*. Their poetry is performed in ritual settings to bring about an awakened mood. The performance of poetry within the South Asian context is meant to invoke a particular *bhāva* (Tib. *nyams*) "feeling," through the wording of the poem, which leads to a *rasa* "mood," or "taste" (Tib. *ro*). Bharata, in his formative work on *rasa* theory, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, describes *rasa* as something which is worthy of being relished (73). What is more worthy of savouring than awakening?

Eight *rasas* were proposed by the legendary sage Bharata, but gradually a ninth *rasa*, *śānta* "peace," was added to this list, and was given special attention by the tantric theologian and aesthete Abhinavagupta (Gerow and Aklujar 81). Of the nine *rasas*, the erotic *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra* plays the most foundational roles in consort practice and yoginī literature. In tantric Buddhism, *śṛṅgāra rasa* is a religious sentiment, utilized to bring about the ultimate religious taste of *samarasa*. Davidson considers the *siddhas* to have extended the *śṛṅgāra rasa* of

³⁷ From a larger perspective of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist tantric literature, all Indian tantric traditions can be classified into two types: dualistic and nondualistic. According to Teun Goudriaan tantra is usually considered to be "a systematic quest for salvation or for spiritual excellence by realizing and fostering the bipolar, bisexual divinity within one's own body" (1) (Freeman 78). This explains what are considered to be dual tantras, but nondual tantric systems, such as some aspects of Vajrayāna Buddhism, seek to not only realize the dual systems of the body, but bring them into union.

medieval poetry into the domain of Buddhist ritual and claims that the Vajrayāna became “the vehicle” for the ritualization of the *śṛṅgāra rasa* (2002, 197).

Other Indian religious traditions were unsatisfied with *śṛṅgāra rasa*'s ability to express love for the divine, so they developed an aesthetic of religious love which is not necessarily erotic, termed *bhakti rasa* “devotional love.” In Buddhist practice, *śṛṅgāra* is divine love, similar to *bhakti*, but whereas *bhakti* emphasizes the capacity of love to bring two distinct beings together, Buddhists transform *śṛṅgāra* into *samarasa*, completely dissolving the distinction between the human and divine identities. Whereas *bhakti* offers a transcendence of the human condition through a connection with the divine, *samarasa* offers a transformation into a nondual state of being.

Bhakti and *samarasa* have in common the capacity to be formed out of an initially erotic sentiment. *Samarasa* also shares similarities in formation with the *rasa* of *śānta* “peace,” which some aestheticians argue can be formed out of any of the other *rasas* (Gerow and Aklujkar 82), just as *samarasa* seems to be. *Śānta* and *bhakti* were both added to Bharata's list because aestheticians sought to express religious experience in elevated artistic terms of *rasa*, thereby differentiating religious experience from the *bhāvas* or feelings of everyday life.

I am not proposing that Buddhist *siddha* poets considered *samarasa* to be an additional *rasa* within the traditional aesthetic scheme, but instead that they considered *samarasa* to exist on a completely different and superior plane of aesthetic comprehension. In this way their theory differs greatly from a simple expansion on the already existing *rasa* system, done with *bhakti* and *śānta*. The distinction between Hindu and Buddhist tantric poetry is that Buddhist *rasa* theory does not seek to add additional *rasas* which are understood to function on a parallel level of aesthetic experience, but to create poems which could, if practiced in the correct ritual setting, lead further, to *samarasa*.

Erotic *mahāsiddha* poetry creates the aesthetic flavour of *śṛṅgāra rasa* relying upon classical conceptions of *rasa* theory. However, it ultimately moves beyond the conventional aesthetic experience of *śṛṅgāra rasa* to the ultimate realization of the nondual sentiment of *samarasa*. The erotic emotive context is established through the use of sexually charged *sandhābhāṣā*, intentional language, which does not have conventional sexual bodies as its reference point, but the bodies and sexual experiences of awakened beings. The multifaceted,

erotic wording of Lakṣmīnārā's poetry creates the *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*, which through its performance in a nondual ritual context is transformed into *samarasa*. Through tasting this *rasa* which the buddhas savor the senses and selves of the ritual participants become awakened.

Double entendre: sexual and awakening meanings in intention speech

The words in Lakṣmīnārā's verse point to multiple understandings of awakening, and are deeply infused with sexual and esoteric symbolism. Buddhist hermeneutics considers every text to have multiple levels of meaning, so that a "well-composed verse should bear new fruit under each new form of analysis" (Gold 97).³⁸ The seven ornaments of interpretation, utilized by Indian and Tibetan Buddhists for both philosophical and tantric literature, exemplify this multifaceted approach. The seven are the: five preliminaries, four kinds of procedures, six parameters of elucidation, four kinds of interpretation, two types of teaching, five types of disciples, and two goals.³⁹ Robert A. Thurman considers the seven ornaments to not only encompass the entire hermeneutical context, but also to be the artistic means through which the text's beauty is brought out (135, 146 ft. 20).⁴⁰

The third ornament, the parameters of elucidation, *rgyas bshad* (San. *vistaravyākhyā*) provides the hermeneutic foundation for the yoginī tantras (Broido 97). Its three pairs are the means by which the multiple meanings of a text are revealed.⁴¹ The pairs are: provisional and ultimate meaning, literal and symbolic, and with and without intention. The first is interpreted according to semantic parameters, the second on linguistic parameters and the third depends on

³⁸ However, not just any interpretation can be validly given to a text, for "each category of Buddhist texts employs its own specialized well-known interpretive conventions, [so that] the scholar needs to have a comprehensive understanding of all contexts, or be in danger of misinterpreting one kind of term as another, that is, of mistakenly interpreting a term in one context through the conventions of another" (Gold 87).

³⁹ The five preliminaries establish the text's context, they are: the name of the tantra, its audience, the author, its size, and its purpose. The second ornament is: continuum, ground, definition and means. The third is listed on page 4. The fourth is linguistic, common, mystic and ultimate meaning. The fifth is public and private instruction. The sixth is disciples described in terms of jewels, sandalwood or lotuses, and the seventh is the goal of the process: "the two realities of the perfection-stage context of translucency and integration" (Thurman 136 and 141-143).

⁴⁰ By hermeneutical context Thurman refers to historical origin, hermeneutical method, level of application in practice, type and stage of development of recipient, programs of understanding relating to main experiential goals.

⁴¹ Thurman argues that this interpretation is in line with the explanation given by Je Tsongkhapa choosing to translate *koṭi* as "parameter" instead of "alternative" because of Tsongkhapa states in the *mChan 'grel* that *koṭi* could mean peak or door (147 ft. 24). Thurman translates elucidation as "parameters of explanation," because this ornament acknowledges the diversity of interpretation that does and should exist when studying tantric texts (135).

both. These pairs readily admit the subjectivity and the varying spiritual capacity of the hearer of tantric teachings. The more capable the student the more obliquely the material is presented, allowing for a richer subjective interpretation (Thurman 137-138). Vanaratna's text is classified as a supreme yoga tantra, meaning that it was written with a highly apt audience in mind who were intended to interpret the *sādhana* on a linguistic and semantic level, the level of intention.⁴²

For the study of both poetry and tantra it is vital to comprehend language with and without intention (*abhiprāya*), because language with intention, termed in Sanskrit *sandhābhāṣā* or *ābhiprāyika*, relies upon word choice which can appear to be intentional obscure to the uninitiated.⁴³ Many scholars still point to Mircea Eliade's description of intentional language as "a secret, dark, ambiguous language in which a state of consciousness is expressed by the erotic term and the vocabulary or cosmology is charged with hatha-yogic or sexual meanings" (249). While intentional language utilizes erotic and yogic terminology, what is of most importance is that these symbols function at a higher level of symbolic discourse, pointing the way to enlightenment, as finger points towards the moon.

Sandhābhāṣā is not unique to Buddhist traditions, it is one of the main methods found in Indic discourse. There has been long-term debates over whether the *sandhā* of *sandhābhāṣā*, is the shortened form of the word *sandhāya* "intentional" or *sandhyā* "twilight."⁴⁴ In 1928, Vidhushekar Bhattacharya first proposed that *sandhā* was as a shortened form of the word *sandhāya*, a gerund of the root *dhā* with the prefix *sam*, translated as "meaning" "intending" or "having in view" (289). Many current scholars continue to side with Bhattacharya,⁴⁵ although Shashibhusan Dasgupta points out that in the unique context of the Buddhist tantras, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Laṅkāvatāra*, the term is consistently spelt *sandhyā* (414)

⁴² This section on *sandhābhāṣā* draws upon my earlier work, entitled *The Attainment of Non-Duality through symbols of sex and enlightenment in the Vajravilāsini namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana*. Methods and Theory. RELG 645. Dr. Aitken, Dr. Soneji and Dr. Kirby. McGill University, Montreal, submitted December 17, 2009.

⁴³ The antonym to *ābhiprāyika* is *lakṣaṇika* meaning "technically definitional" or "definitive" (Ruegg 299).

⁴⁴ Max Muller first translated this term as "hidden sayings" and in 1916 Haraprasad Shastri proposed "twilight language" for the term (Eliade 250). It has also been translated as "enigmatic speech" by E. Burnouf in 1852, which is the term favoured by S.B. Dasgupta (Kvaerne 38).

⁴⁵ One such scholar is David N. Gellner who considers that *samdhābhāṣā* 'intentional' or 'non-literal' language has through a pervasive scribal error become *sandhyā* 'twilight' language in the Nepalese tradition (301). Additionally, Eliade and Bharati have accepted and moved forward with V. Shastri's proposed etymology of *sandhābhāṣā*, but some current Buddhist scholars, including David L. Snellgrove and Ronald M. Davidson, have chosen instead to work with H. Shastri's understanding of the term.

(Kvaerne 38) (Ruegg 309-310). Regardless, D. Seyfort Ruegg views the nominal forms *saṃdhā*, *saṃdhyā* and *saṃdhi* to all be closely connected in meaning as well as etymology to *saṃdhāya*, meaning “in connexion with, with reference to, having in mind, intending, alluding to” (311). Ruegg considers that this difficulty in comprehending the correct meaning of the word *saṃdhyābhāṣā* may have also been experienced by Tibetans *lotsāwas* (translators), because their translation of the *Hevajra tantra* provides two terms for *saṃdhyābhāṣā*: *dgongs pa’i skad* meaning “intentional or allusive language” and *gsang ba’i skad* “covert language” (314).

Within Buddhist tantras, the importance of *sandhābhāṣā* is clearly stated. The *Hevajra tantra* claims that if someone who is consecrated (*abhiṣikta*) in the Hevajra does not speak in the *sandhābhāṣā*, it is cause for one to die, even if one is a buddha (Ruegg 314) (Snellgrove II.iii.65 and 66).⁴⁶ Intentional language is found outside of Buddhist tantras in fourth century Mahāyāna works, which David Seyfort Ruegg has drawn attention to (Wedemeyer 392-393).⁴⁷ One such Mahāyāna text is the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, a text attributed to Maitreya with a commentary which is probably by Asaṅga, which gives four types of intentions (*abhiprāya*) (Ruegg 300-301).⁴⁸

Although intentional language is multifaceted and ambiguous the meaning it evokes is not manifold or vague, but instead the unified, nondual taste of *samarasa*. Within Lakṣmīnārā’s verse there are three clear examples of words which function as *sandhābhāṣā*:⁴⁹

“The graceful [deity] possessed of the precious *vajra* [penis enters] into the tip [of] the opening [of his] consort,
From binding [the legs] in the cross-legged posture, [he enters] into the *padma* [vagina] treasure chest,
As long as there is flavour of the Buddha’s presence, the **moon** [nectar] in the drop (*bindu*) coming forth,
For that long [one] attains the highest citadel [of] Lord Buddha.”
(Verse 49 from the *Vajravilāsinī namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana*)

In Lakṣmīnārā’s work, *śṛṅgāra rasa* is expressed in a way which references awakening, showing that the erotic mood can be ultimately transformed, through correct perception, into

⁴⁶ It is actually *sandhyābhāṣā* which appears in the text.

⁴⁷ This is the case in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, and the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, as pointed out in recent work done by David Seyfort Ruegg (Wedemeyer 392-393).

⁴⁸ Interestingly, the first of these types is intention pertaining to sameness (*samatā*). The other three are “to another not explicitly expressed meaning (*arthāntara*), to another (future) time (*kālāntara*), and to a person’s mental disposition (*pudgalāśaya*)” (Ruegg 300-301).

⁴⁹ These three terms are discussed in Eliade (252-253) with their symbolism largely drawn from the *Dohakoṣas*.

samarasa. The word *padma*, which is Sanskrit for lotus, symbolizes both the state of awakening and a divine vagina. When a *padma* is conjoined with the equivalent male symbol of a *vajra* (Tib. *rDo rje*), it comes to symbolize nondual union. A *vajra* is variously understood to mean a diamond, an indestructible royal sceptre, lightening or a penis. The *vajra* is the defining term of tantric Buddhism, symbolizing both its superiority and speed. The third overt example of *sandhābhāṣā* is the moon, which with its white, cool qualities is understood to symbolize a drop of semen, specifically semen that is held within the central channel of the body.⁵⁰

It is clear that of these three sexual symbols of awakening two reference the male body, the *vajra* and moon, and only one, the *padma*, refers to the female body. Additionally, this reference to the female body is in reference to placement of the male deity's body within the female's body, specifically her "*padma* treasure chest." There is clear preferencing of the male over the female, which is not out of place considering that the *sādhana* was compiled by a male author, the sage Vanaratna, even though this particular poem is attributed to a female *mahāsiddha*, the princess Lakṣmīnkarā, because the male view often superseded the female, especially in terms of practice.⁵¹

The erotic symbolism in Lakṣmīnkarā's passage conveys the message of awakening. Those reborn in pure lands are born from lotuses, the *vajra* is the emblem of Vajrayāna way, granting beings a quick way out of cyclic rebirth, and Buddhist art commonly depicts the Buddha pointing at the moon as the direction out of *saṃsāra*. The erotic is recast in spiritual terms. The language that Lakṣmīnkarā employs invites her audience to envision not only sexualized bodies, genitals and sexual fluids, but also awakening. "Non-intentional" terms could have instead been employed if sex at a conventional level, instead of as a vehicle for Buddhahood, was being discussed. One enters into a vagina, but through this one is reborn in a lotus in the pure land, one is possessed of a penis, but one also holds a *vajra*, which acts as instantaneous lightening-like awakening, and to control one's internal world through the retention of semen cycling within the body is to become free of the cycle of *saṃsāra*, as a moon encircles but is beyond this world.

⁵⁰ The practice of holding semen within the central channel will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁵¹ For further scholarship surrounding this issue see Liz Wilson's *Charming Cadavers*.

The power of these “intentional” words rests in their ability to confer simultaneously what keeps one trapped and what frees one from *saṃsāra*. Understood this way, Lakṣmīkarā’s word choice can be understood as clearly intentional, and not vague or secret. This is what is being pointed towards by R.S. Bucknell and Martin Stuart-Fox when they say that intentional language provides the writer with a means for describing supernormal experiences, for which ordinary language would not be adequate (13).⁵²

Linda Hess advises those who wish to study *sandhābhāṣā*, or as she terms it “upside-down language,” to not turn the words into a list of equivalents (314).⁵³ Beyond the obvious simplification and essentialization that such a categorization creates it is also an inaccurate way to view this language as Ruegg argues that each “correspondence-set” constitutes a type of sign formed from a signifier and a signified “that has no signification or semiotic force outside this yogic-ritual system” (314). One must therefore resist the tendency to understand *padma* only as a divine vagina, *vajra* as a deity’s penis, and moon as the semen that is withheld in the male body during this divine union. This warning applies not only to language with *sandhābhāṣā* but to poetry itself. As Raniero Gnoli states “a truly poetical word or expression is that which cannot be replaced with other words, without losing its value. Poetry knows no synonyms” (xxix).

Sandhābhāṣā allows awakened vocabulary to be both erotic and spiritual. The linguistic signs of the *padma*, *vajra* and moon found in Lakṣmīkarā’s verse invoke the image of awakened, but gendered bodies, in yogic-sexual union, creating the *bhāva* (feeling) of *rati* (love). Through ritual performance, Lakṣmīkarā’s words move beyond a feeling to create the erotic mood of *śṛṅgāra rasa*. Lakṣmīkarā’s poem has therefore not only an intended meaning, conveyed through its linguistic signs, but also an intended mood.⁵⁴ Kapil Kapoor claims that what constitutes the knowledge of a literary text is not only the understanding of *bhāva*, but the

⁵² However, Bucknell and Stuart-Fox would be skeptical of my analysis as they claim, quite rightly, that no amount of scholarly analysis or intuitive speculation can truly reveal what these sexual symbols represent (21).

⁵³ Hess also advises not to ignore traditional lore, attempt analysis without an intimate, immediate understanding of the passage, or an elevated view of your personal opinion (314).

⁵⁴ Ruegg has suggested that the concept of intention found in this hermeneutic approach is best paralleled to the suggestive force (*vyañjanā*) and poetic resonance (*dhvani*) or poetic theory (317). This inference is based on word usage such as *abhisam̐dhi* (used in the sense of intention) in Bhāmaha’s, who may have been a Buddhist, *Kāvyaḷam̐kāra* (i. 37-38) (Ruegg 318).

experience of *rasa* (103). The *bhāva* of *rati* leads to *śṛṅgāra rasa*, and through the semiotic power of *sandhābhāṣā* it alludes also to the mood of *samarasa* that is simultaneously created.

More than a feeling: an introduction to *rasa* theory

The cow in the form of speech gives a unique drink (*rasa*) out of love for her young. That (*rasa*) which is milked by the Yogins cannot be compared to it.

Bhaṭṭanāyaka, *Locana* I. 6 (p. 91 *Bālapriyā*)

The foundational components of *bhāvas* and *rasas* illuminate the aesthetic experience of a poetic text. *Kāvya* poetry was cultivated in Indian courts beginning in the first millennium (Peterson 1).⁵⁵ Originally, *kāvya* was understood as language made adequate through ornamentation (*alaṃkāras*), figures of speech (Peterson 10), but later on the central literary experience of *kāvya* was understood less in terms of its style of ornamentation and more through its *rasa* and emotional states of *bhāvas* (Wilke 110) (Kapoor 96). As early as the seventh century, in the writings of Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha, there is the idea that *mahākāvya* “great poetry” must have cantos “pervaded by *rasa* and *bhāva*” (Peterson 16).⁵⁶

The term *rasa* has many meanings, including “juice,” “fluid,” “taste,” “liking,” “beauty,” “feeling,” “essence” and “semen” (Apte 796). Yet *rasa* primarily means taste; V. M. Kulkarni points out that “like sweetness, there is no knowing of *rasa* apart from directly experiencing it” (14). Yet the concept of *rasa* is not meant to convey only the simile of simply oral taste, but also internal digestion of aesthetic experiences. Just as food goes through a process of digestion to become part of the body, so too are aesthetic experiences digested through layers of cognition to form a *rasa*. Balwant Gargi explains each *rasa* as having “the same relation to the *bhāva* as wine has to the grapes, sugar and herbs which compose it and which dissolve and blend completely” (12), to create an intoxicating drink which has a taste unique to any of the ingredients from which it is composed. A more tantric example is the imagined melting of the five nectars and five meats together in a skullcap to create mercurial nectar with the *rasa* of nonduality.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Mahākāvya* “connotes both a poem conceived on a large scale and a great poem” (Peterson 13). What appears to be the defining feature of *mahākāvya* “great poetry” in the *sargabandha* “composition in cantos” according to Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyaḍarśa* (Mirror for *kāvya*) (Peterson 8-9).

⁵⁶ As Peterson has noted, the finer points of *rasa* theory are keyed to structure of drama alone and therefore this framework has its limits when applied to poetry (16).

⁵⁷ The five nectars are: semen, menstrual blood, urine, feces and marrow, and the five meats come from a human, elephant, horse, dog and cow.

Rasas are formed out of the union of various *bhāvas*. Bharata states that “there is no *rasa* devoid of *bhāva* nor *bhāva* devoid of *rasa*” (74), and the goal of *rasa* becomes accessible first through emotion, as *bhāva*, and then refined into *rasa*, if the proper “emotional intensity is generated and processed” (Schwartz 23). *Rasas* are not simply human emotions, although they may appear to be emotional. Syed Jamil Ahmed makes this clear in stating that *rasas* are not like human emotions, which are always accompanied by an urge to act, they are “desireless emotions,” forming sensual impressions, without generating want (179 ft. 4) (George 1999, 32). Because *rasas* have both an emotive but detached quality, aestheticians, such as Abhinavagupta and Rūpa, often seek to describe their spiritual experiences in terms of *rasas*, not *bhāvas*.

The various *bhāvas* and *rasas* are most often listed in accordance, or as an expansion of, the theory purported by Bharata in his formative work the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E.).⁵⁸ Bharata is the preeminent word on *rasa* theory (Marglin 224). Indeed, Y.S. Walimbe states that “[t]he theory of *rasa* expounded by Bharata assumed so much importance in later times that it came to be regarded as the only theory explaining dramatic experience” (3) and later scholars variously built upon it.⁵⁹

<i>Bhāvas</i>	<i>Rasas</i>
1. <i>Rati</i> (love)	1. <i>Śṛṅgāra</i> (erotic)
2. <i>Hāsa</i> (laughter)	2. <i>Hāsyā</i> (comic)
3. <i>Śoka</i> (sorrow)	3. <i>Karuṇa</i> (compassionate)
4. <i>Krodha</i> (anger)	4. <i>Raudra</i> (wrathful, terribleness)
5. <i>Utsāha</i> (enthusiasm)	5. <i>Vira</i> (heroic)
6. <i>Bhaya</i> (fear)	6. <i>Bhayānaka</i> (terrifying)
7. <i>Jugupsā</i> (disgust)	7. <i>Bibhatsa</i> (odious)
8. <i>Vismaya</i> (astonishment)	8. <i>Adbhuta</i> (marvellous)
9. <i>Nirveda</i> (renunciation)	9. <i>Śānta</i> (peace)

FIGURE 1. THE NINE *BHĀVAS* AND *RASAS*

⁵⁸ The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is attributed to have Sanskritic/North Indian origins, although it permeated the subcontinent thoroughly (Schwartz, 16). It is not possible to know when the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was first written down, or when the mythic character of Bharata may have lived, but it seems that theatre in India formed around the first and second century B.C.E. (Richmond 27).

⁵⁹ Before Abhinavagupta’s commentaries and Bharata’s authoritative presentation of *rasa* theory, Ānandavardhana wrote the *Dhvanyāloka* on poetics in the ninth century (Walimbe 6). He declared *dhvani* “to be the very soul of poetry” and classified poetry into three categories: those which invoke an idea (*vastudhvani*), an image or figure of speech (*alaṅkāradhvani*) or an emotion (*rasadhvani*), and attached the highest importance to *rasadhvani* (Walimbe 6-7). This elevated opinion of *rasa* can be seen as the beginnings of the formation of *rasa* theory.

The *bhāvas* listed above are the *sthāyibhāvas*, from which the *rasas* directly precede. The *sthāyibhāvas* are the most traceable in their relation to the *rasas*; they are relatively stable in comparison to the other forms of *bhāvas*. For “[j]ust as a king is considered to be the greatest among men.... so also the *sthāyibhāvas* is the greatest among the *bhāvas*” (Bharata 88). The *sthāyibhāvas* are brought to “a relishable condition” (Bhaduri 377) which leads to the production of *rasa*, through the unification of the *vibhāvas*, the fundamental determinants which cause the emotions to arise, the *anubhāvas*, the consequents felt by the *samājika* (participant/observer), and the *vyabhicārībhāvas*, the transitory feelings which give the performance texture.⁶⁰ These *bhāvas* are not analogous to mundane cause and effect which give rise to experiences outside of art (De 192-193) (Bhaduri 378). The arts in India do not imitate life, but offer aesthetic experience.

As Bharata’s model of *rasa* theory came to be seen as the most formative, Abhinavagupta’s (ca. 950-1050) understanding of *rasa* theory came to be regarded as perhaps the last word on the *Rasasūtra* (Walimbe 5-6). His two main works on aesthetics are the *Abhinavabhāratī*, a commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and a commentary on Ānandavardhana’s ninth century *Dhvanyāloka*.⁶¹ Abhinavagupta, a great aesthete and tantric Śaiva theologian, tied together tantric perceptions of nonduality to classic aesthetics.⁶² Gerald James Larson points out that Abhinavagupta’s “corpus is so vast and difficult that there has been a tendency to focus on one or another aspect of his work, thereby creating the impression that these various areas of his interest were really quite separate” (373), when in fact for him art and religion were similarly experienced, and for him *rasa* was given primacy in interpreting religious experience (Wulff 1986, 674).⁶³

For Abhinavagupta, *rasa* is not only a mood, but a catalyst which alters the very condition of the self through contact with *sthāyibhāva* (Kapoor 109). Abhinavagupta’s

⁶⁰ From the point of conventional experience “there is never one single emotion or condition. What is more likely is that there is a dominant *bhāva* in the midst of a number of ancillary emotions” termed *sañcārībhāva* (Kapoor 106-107).

⁶¹ His commentary on his master Bhaṭṭa Tota’s *Kāvyakautuka* appears to be lost.

⁶² Indeed, the Kashmiri worship of the three goddesses, Parā, Parāparā and Aparā, known as the Trika, is known to us primarily through the works of Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, *Tantrasastra*, *Malinivijavartika* and *Parātriṃśīkāvīvaraṇa* (Sanderson 1988, 695).

⁶³ This is certainly the false impression that J.L Masson and M. V. Patwardhan developed, that “as a religious man, Abhinava must have been under a certain amount of at least internal pressure to justify his deep interest in purely secular literature” (viii).

transformative aesthetic experience is blissful (*ānanda*), self-luminous, self-conscious, nondual and without multiplicity. *Rasa* in its purist, most undifferentiated state was synonymous with *ānanda* (Schwartz 17). The word *ānanda* has strong religious connotations, unlike *prīti* “pleasure” or *vinoda* “enjoyment” (Wulff 1986, 678),⁶⁴ indicating that Abhinavagupta understood all experiences of *rasa* to be blissful, religious encounters. Abhinavagupta was not the first to use *rasa* in a religious sense, some fifteen centuries earlier the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* identified “*sat* (being), the ultimate reality in the universe, with *rasa*, adding further that when one attains this essence (*rasa*) one becomes blissful (*ānandi*)” (Wulff 1986, 675). Yet, his insistence that all *rasas* are not only blissful, but non-differentiable and nondual shows the unique merging of tantric perspective with *rasa* theory. Whereas the objective of Bharata’s work was to categories *bhāvas* and *rasas*, Abhinavagupta’s work examines the spiritual encounter underlying all aesthetic perceptions.

Although the *rasa* of *śānta* was added to Bharata’s list in the eighth century C.E. (Schwartz 15), it was only in the tenth century, when it was included by Abhinavagupta that it was considered to be the ninth *rasa* and an essential component of the schema. Abhinavagupta states that: “*Sarvarasānām śāntaprāya evāsvadaḥ*” meaning that all *rasas* (be they *śṛṅgāra* or *vira*) taste like *śānta* in essence (Bhaduri 400 and 408).⁶⁵ Abhinavagupta’s essentializing of tastes into the single flavour of *śānta* shows an aesthetic urge to find an essential flavour that was more foundational than the tastes proposed by Bharata. It is possible that this was also a theoretical goal for Buddhists who emphasized the primacy of *samarasa* in their poetic works.

Śānta rasa is usually considered to be formed from the *nirveda* “renunciation” *bhāva*. However, Edwin Gerow and Ashok Aklujkar point out that since the state of *śānta* involves the renunciation of emotional attachment, the *śānta rasa* “would appear to be capable of being focused on any *bhāva* whatsoever, but as purely negative content, and would in effect become the emotional awareness of the absence of emotion!” (82). Conversely, J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan consider the *rasatva* (*rasa*-ness) of *śānta* to consist of a “recognition of the *rasatva* of the other *rasas*. It is neither “a” *rasa* nor “the” *rasa*, but “any” *rasa*” (Gerow and Aklujkar

⁶⁴ This is drawn from Masson and Patwardhan, 1969: xvii.

⁶⁵ This is taken from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. R.N. Nagar, Delhi, 1981, p. 334.

83).⁶⁶ *Śānta*, in its ability to be formed from the full spectrum of *rasas*, may relate to Buddhist perspectives of *samarasa*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, *śānta* is described as not only a *rasa* but a *rasāsvāda*, an enjoyment of aesthetic tasting, which is a “a temporary aesthetic glimpse” into one’s pure divine self (*ātma-sva-rūpa*) (Gerow and Aklujkar 83). *Sahaja*, which is described as having one taste (*samarasa*) (Jackson 2004, 129) is also described as a *rasāsvāda*, as the *anupamarasāsvādāna*, literally “the most excellent experience of tasting” (Davidson 2002 a, 72-73).

The generation of moods in the arts is thought to rely upon emotions (*bhāvas*), but ultimately create a state that goes beyond them, a *rasa*. In its capacity to describe a pure experience which goes beyond conventional emotions *rasa* theory provides a model which is well adaptable to religious arts. Buddhist poets understood that conventional *rasas* could be transformed within the space of ritual into *samarasa*, and found the erotic sentiment of *śṛṅgāra* *rasa* well suited to this purpose.

Śṛṅgāra rasa in *siddha* poetry and yoginī tantras

The importance of poetry, song and dance in *mahāsiddha* culture is well known and their poetry reflects the broad Indian aesthetic context in which their traditions developed. While courtly *mahākāvya* followed strict structures, the poetry of antinomian Buddhist *tāntrikas* used less formal, more popular forms of literary expression to convey their religious experiences. However, *siddha* poetry shares the characteristics of antiphrasis, paradox and contradiction with *kāvya* (Ruegg 312), and most importantly, the erotic sentiment of *śṛṅgāra*. Previously developed in high courtly *kāvya*, *śṛṅgāra* was granted special emphasis and prominence in Buddhist tantric arts, as a necessary aperitif for the flavour of nondual *samarasa*. During such sexo-yogic practices as consort practice, which develop the conventional erotic taste of *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*,

⁶⁶ This is from page 96.25-29 of *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy of Aesthetics*.

⁶⁷ Although *rasa* theory never gained the prominence in Tibet that it had in India, it did become influential, largely through Sakya Paṇḍita (Sapaṇ) (1182-1251), the Great Scholar of the Sakya school. It was in Sapaṇ’s time that the Tibetan elites adopted *kāvya* “as the model of refined literary expression” (Gold 117). Interest in Sanskrit poetics was guided by the Sakyapa rulers of Tibet and their new Mongol patrons and focused around Daṇḍin’s *Kāvyaḍārśa* “*Poetry’s Mirror*.” Daṇḍin’s seventh century work was first introduced to the Tibetan world through Sapaṇ’s *Mkhas pa ’jug pa’i sgo* “*Gateway to Learning*” but like many Tibetan poetic theorists before and later him, Sapaṇ does not theorize poetics itself, lacking a constant distinction between *rasa* and *bhāva*. He instead far more interested in characterizing the distinctive literary types of poetry (Gold 117 and 120).

samarasa could be ultimately generated through a shift from the dual perspective of oneself and other to nonduality.

According to Davidson, it was tantric *siddhas* who established an aesthetic place for the sentiment of *śṛṅgāra rasa* within Buddhist ritual (2002, 197). He has found that “the aestheticization of the esoteric scriptures,” their description in terms of poetic sentiments, occurs in the very first yoginī tantra, Amoghavajra’s *Sarvabuddhasamāyoga*, which employs the nine *rasas* of Sanskrit literature in its message (Davidson 2002, 197).⁶⁸ Despite the recent attention given to Buddhist *siddha* poetry there has been little scholarship surrounding the aesthetic meaning of these arts in their rituals, which is neglectful, as it is highly doubtful that these great adepts would have adopted the high arts of South Asia with neither regard nor opinion on the aesthetic models which fuelled these performances.⁶⁹

Śṛṅgāra rasa is understood to be the most powerful *rasa* (Schwartz 48), the source of the greatest pleasure and the sweetest of sentiments (Kulkarni 12). *Śṛṅgāra rasa* is the aesthetic utilized and induced during consort union. In consort practice the *vibhāva* or source of origin (*prakṛit*) is the consort, “an excellent young woman” (Bharata 76), either a physical woman or a visualization with varying degrees of internalization. The *anubhāvas* are the four progressive stages of contact: eye-contact, smiles, bodily-contact and sexual embrace, which are correlated to the four tantric systems.⁷⁰ The *vyabhicārībhāvas* are the increasing degrees of pleasure experienced from the four joys: *ānanda* “bliss,” *paramānanda* “supreme bliss,” *viramānanda* “bliss of cessation,” and *sahajānanda* “innate bliss.”⁷¹

The fifth verse of a Sanskrit praise to Vajravilāsinī, the *Vajravilāsinīsādhanā-stavaḥ*, summarizes the four stages of contact:

He, on the lotus-seat, meets the eyes of the lotus woman,

⁶⁸ Davidson 2002, 384, footnote 86: *Chin kang ting ching yu ch’ieh shih pa hui chih kuei*, T. 869.18.286c12-15; Giebel 1995, pp. 181-2; Davidson thanks Kenneth Eastman for sharing this point with him.

⁶⁹ Art historians have examined the interaction and impact of different religions on the visual arts in India, but although it is noted that interactions between Hindu, Buddhist and Jain groups “generated tremendous creativity and the continued development of aesthetic understanding” (Schwartz 79), comparatively insufficient work has been done delving into the impact of Buddhist aesthetic theories on Indian poetry.

⁷⁰ These are *kriyā* tantra, *caryā* tantra, *yoga* tantra and *anuttarayoga* tantra.

⁷¹ Some authors understood the bliss of *sahajānanda* to be equivalent to orgasm, “while others indicate it is the moment following passion and beyond the process of sexual ritual” (Davidson 2002 a, 64).

The direct contact of the object and perceiver,
This is the first stage, later *vajra* and lotus,
Absorb into one another.

The passage above clearly describes the first stage of eye-contact. Smiling and physical contact are not mentioned, instead the author turns to the final stage of sexual embrace, using the same sexo-awakened terminology as Lakṣmīnkarā, that of the *vajra* and the lotus, to describe male and female union and ultimate absorption into one another.⁷²

In the *Vajravilāsinīsādhanaṣṭavaḥ*, Vajravilāsinī is described as a lotus woman. Lotus here denotes the entire female body, not only the genitals. Of the four types of consorts given in the *Kāma Sūtra* the *padminī*, lotus woman, is considered to be most desirable, the pinnacle of feminine beauty. According to the *Kāma Sūtra*, a *padminī* has a face like a full moon, is doe eyed, has firm, full and lofty breasts, has three folds of good fortune across her navel, has genitalia which resembles an opening lotus bud and smells like a lotus (8) (Brown 225-226). This classification of women carried over into Buddhism, where this type of partner is also especially prized. For instance, the *padminī* consort is described in the *Samvarodaya tantra*, an early Cakrasaṃvara text (Brown 225-226) and the *Vajravilāsinīstotraṃ* also refers to Vajravilāsinī as a lotus woman, because the smell of her (vagina), has a “perfect lotus scent” which is “full of compassion and brings welfare to this world” (verse 16).

In Hindu literature, tantric consorts are often referred to as *dūtīs* “female messengers.” They are considered by many to be necessary for tantric practice. Abhinavagupta holds this view and states in his *Tantrāloka*, that no one is “qualified to practice the Kaula traditions unless he had a female partner (*dūtī*, *śakti*)” (Sanderson 1995, 83).⁷³ Jeffrey Masson and M. V. Patwardhan argue that the term *dūtī* was borrowed by Abhinavagupta from love poetry, although it appears in Kaula sources well before his aesthetics. In Sanskrit love poems, a heroine always has a *dūtī*, who acts as her “go-between” (40-41) (White 2006, 114). Additionally, Abhinavagupta connects sex and taste further, by referring to both sexual intercourse and *rasa* as *abhivyaktikāraṇa* (that which manifests or suggests) bliss (Masson and Patwardhan 28).

⁷² While both the motifs of the moon and lotuses are used in *sandhābhāṣā* and *kāvya*, the *vajra*, as a Buddhism term does not have a history of conveying beauty in a poetic context.

⁷³ *Tantrāloka* 1 (1) 32:3-7; 11 (29) 63:15-20.

Although further study is required, there seems to have been an exchange of erotic concepts between tantric traditions and *rasa* theories.

Returning to the lotus, there is almost no part of a goddess' body which her adoring devotees will not refer to as being lotus-like, and lotuses are a recurring trope in *kāvya* poetry. Just as bees naturally are drawn to flowers in nature, bees are another prominent poetic theme, as are beautiful women themselves. Vajravilāsinī's eyes are described as being like large black bees which extend right to her lotus ears (verse 7 *Vajravilāsinīstotraṃ*, verse 1 *Vajravilāsinīsādhanāstavaḥ*). When her lips are referred to a lotus, the bee that is attracted to them is Cakrasaṃvara, conveying the concept of the erotic being something one can taste:

Oh lotus lips! The honeybee Saṃvara kisses [your mouth],
Oh! Your lotus bosom is embraced by both his arms.

Verse 13 of *Vajravilāsinīstotraṃ*

Being a *padminī*, Vajravilāsinī has a moon face and this reflects the fact that the moon is another important metaphor in *kāvya*. Although in *sandhābhāṣā* the moon references the semen in the male body, in *kāvya* the symbolism of the moon is pure beauty and therefore can refer to the female body. A passage which describes not only Vajravilāsinī's moon face, but also clearly creates the *śṛṅgāra rasa*, is verse 14 of the *Vajravilāsinīstotraṃ* :

Oh! Your eyes half closed in the pleasure of ardent love making,
Oh! Your hair let down, and your clothes dishevelled,
Oh! Your moon face is bitten by Heruka as Rāhu,
Oh! With a smile you produce the mantra Hūṃ Hūṃ.

Just as Cakrasaṃvara is earlier described as a bee who tastes the nectar of Vajravilāsinī's lotus lips, he also is portrayed as consuming her face with his kisses. He is described as Rāhu, the eclipse making, the cosmic monster who eats the sun or moon, but who releases them soon afterwards because he has no body below his neck to retain these spheres. The reference to Rāhu further ripens the sexual imagery of the verse, because sex itself, in tantric terms, is discussed as a macrocosmic union of the sun and moon, thought of as an eclipse, and Rāhu is also the name for the top of the central channel (Kongsprul 172). Although Lakṣmīnkarā's verse may not seem to create as erotic an atmosphere as eulogies to Vajravilāsinī do, within the context of a ritual space where consorts were to engage in union, likely adored as Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara

themselves, her verse would be more than sufficient to act as a stimulant towards the initial *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*.

Sahaja can be an erotic term used to describe the highest degree of the four stages of pleasure reached in tantric practice, that of *sahajānanda* “innate bliss,” the spiritual experience of awakened bliss. It is in this way the poet Tilopa employs *sahaja*:

When you know just what
utmost ecstasy is,

at that very moment,
you’ll waken to the innate (Jackson 2004, 138).

This blissful state is to be shared by both sexual partners. Śabara’s *Guhyavajravilāsinī sādhana* devotes twelve verses to the nine kinds of sex play (*navapuṣṭī*) which are done to induce the highest innate bliss of *sahaja* (*sahajāśaktacetasaḥ*) in order that the female consort, possessed of the goddess, should tremble from the sex play performed by the yogin (English 92, 360).

Beyond its use in the terminology of *vyabhicārībhāvas*, *sahaja* is used outside of erotic contexts of bliss to describe spiritual experiences. Indeed, the concept of “the innate” is so prevalent in various forms of *siddha* poetry, that some scholars have concluded that their vehicle to awakening was *sahaja*, that they were followers of the Sahajayāna, which as a defined religious path likely never existed. *Sahaja*, like *samarasa*, is way of describing the awakened experience and could be examined in aesthetic terms. Because *sahaja* is called the *anupamarasāsvādāna*, “taste of liberation,” Ronald M. Davidson concludes it must have had an important place in Buddhist aesthetic theory (2002 a, 72-73). The *mahāsiddha* poet Tilopa discusses *sahaja* in terms of *samarasa*, stating: “*sahajeṃ bhāvābhāva na pucchaha suṇṇakarūṇā] tahi samarasa icchaha*,” which Roger R. Jackson has translated as:

In the innate, don’t ask
for existence or for nothingness—

seek the emptiness and compassion,
which taste the same (2004, 129).

This translation does not convey the concept of *sahaja* in terms of *bhāva* and *rasa*, specifically *samarasa*, which I suspect Tilopa wished to portray. I instead translate this verse as:

Do not ask whether the innate
has feelings or apathy,

desire [instead] the same taste
of emptiness and compassion.

If translated this way, giving *bhāva* the specific meaning of feeling (*bhāva*) and not existence (*bhava*), this verse shows a strong grasp of the expectations of portraying *bhāva* and *rasa* in poetry. Despite the understanding of poetics that is conveyed, Tilopa argues that his poetry goes beyond not only these poetic structures but the very confines of ordinary experiences.

The attitude and skill conveyed in Tilopa's work reflects *siddha* poetry in general. While all the *rasas* are expected to be detectable in works of high literary quality, the works of *siddhas* often flout these expectations and seem to convey their spiritual experience with little to no regard for standard poetic conventions. However, their rebellion should not be viewed as a lack of awareness of these aesthetic concepts; their employment of *śṛṅgāra rasa* as the foundation of *samarasa* was unlike to have been part of an unformed, haphazard model, but likely reflected their own views on aesthetic perception of religious experience. The poet Tilopa discusses *sahaja* in terms of *rasa*:

The real can't be shown by the guru's words,
so the disciple cannot comprehend.
The fruit of the innate taste ambrosial;
who teaches the real to whom? (Jackson 2004, 131).

Clearly *sahaja* is an aesthetic experience with a definite ambrosial taste. This *sahaja* is a familiar taste for the yoginīs, as described by Saraha:

She's eaten her husband,
relished the innate
destroyed attachment and detachment;

seated by her husband,
mind destroyed,
the yoginī appears before me (Jackson 2004, 101).

Here *sahaja* is described as the taste of the *yoginī*'s own consort, her union with him, as the taste of the dissolution of their duality. While Saraha's verse outlines this realization in highly

cannibalistic terms, a verse of Tilopa's frames *sahaja* in terms of a more sexual, than edible, union:

Thought is the lord,
Spaciousness the lady;

Day and night they're joined
in the innate (Jackson 2004, 135).

These *siddha* poems which describe the taste of *sahaja* are composed as *dohā*s, aphoristic couplets. *Dohā*s attained prevalence in vernacular languages and religious cults during late medieval India. The language these *siddha*'s *dohā*s are written down in is thought to be the eastern dialect of Apabhraṃśa, which was influenced by classical forms of Sanskrit and popular speech (Jackson 2004, 9).⁷⁴

Buddhist sages commonly chose to relate their spiritual realizations in popular lyrical genres, such as *dohā*s. However, their choice of popular mediums does not detract from the reality that the Buddhist tantras developed within a society of high literary sophistication (Wedemeyer 392). The choice of Buddhist *siddhas* to use common lyrical forms and languages, including Apabhraṃśa and Prākṛit, cannot be simplified to only the languages' popularity; Ruegg suggests that these languages were employed by the *siddhas*, because they "lend themselves especially well to oblique and suggestive discourse because of the ambivalence or polyvalence of so many of their words and locutions caused by their phonology and grammar" (317). Popular vocabulary could easily be employed as *sandhābhāṣā*.

When *dohā*s are not pithy maxims that can be performed in isolation, but are meant to be linked together to form a larger unit of meaning they form a song, a *gīti*. The concept of *sahaja* appears also in *gītis*, divided in Indian Buddhism into *caryāgītis*, "performance songs" or *vajragītis*, "diamond songs," which are both meant to be performed in the context of a ritual setting. Charlotte Vaudeville has noted that the oldest known *caryā-padas* (collections of tantric songs) are from Buddhist *siddhas* who emphasize *sahaja*, as well as Jain Munis (73), and that they therefore "seem to have been the first to use popular lyrical forms to propagate their doctrines" (Kværne 8). The concept of *sahaja*, however, is also found outside *siddha* literature

⁷⁴ Although Apabhraṃśa is not considered to be their original vernacular it is thought to be very close (Jackson 2004, 9).

in the works of Kālidāsa, showing that it had a level of prevalence in the classical world (Davidson 2002 a, 47, 53).

Dohās also became a popular genre in Tibetan Buddhism. According to Matthew Kapstein, the later yogic songs of the Tibetan Kagyu masters were modeled upon the *dohā*s of the *mahāsiddhas*, especially the famous singer Saraha (772). The Tibetan word for song is *glu*, and the form which Tilopa's verse of page 41 is now available is as a *glu* from Tibet. Although *caryāgītis* are often quite short, consisting of stanzas with lines of either seven, nine or eleven syllables in Tibetan, David Templeman explains that "their performance would have lasted a considerable time [... so that a] cycle of *caryā* songs might take more than a day to complete when the ...dances were performed" (31). *Caryāgītis* are still sung today to the accompaniment of dance in tantric rites in Nepal (Kværne 7-8) as Lakṣmīnkarā's poem, in its original context, was likely performed.⁷⁵

Descriptions of the divine in erotic terms of affection are not exclusive to the Buddhist tantric tradition. Vaiṣṇavites added the devotional sentiment of *bhakti* "out of the love and longing associated with *śṛṅgāra rasa*" (Schwartz 19) as a tenth *rasa* to Bharata's list, although it was not until the thirteenth century that any systematic effort was made to establish *bhakti* as a full-fledged sentiment (Bhaduri 379). The aesthetician Rūpa (1480-1564 C.E.) appropriated all the components of classical *rasa* theory in his development of *bhakti rasa*. Yet, in a few significant ways his theory differs, as is the case in his conception that the flavour of *bhakti* may last longer than a few hours during a performance and instead extend throughout a devotee's entire life (Wulff 1986, 682). Also, he considers *bhakti* to be unattainable to those not initiated into the cult of *bhakti* (Bhaduri 397). These perceptions are in line with how Buddhist view the experience of *samarasa*, both as ideally a life-long experience and as an attainment that can only be bestowed through a transmission of awareness, be that in a formal ritual setting, consecration ceremony, a *siddha* song or a unconventional teaching bestowed by one's *guru*.

Yet despite efforts, *bhakti* never reached the ninth's *rasa*, *śānta*'s, level of authorized addition, outside of Vaiṣṇava circles. Traditional aestheticians accepted the sentimental impact of *bhakti* without making room for it as a separate *rasa* (Bhaduri 381). Impediments to the

⁷⁵ Although the term *mgur* was originally a subdivision or synonym for *glu*, it now means a song which is Buddhist, a "song of experience" (369).

establishment of *bhakti* as a *rasa* occurred largely over the disagreement of *bhakti*'s *sthāyibhāva*, leading some to argue that *bhakti* is itself a *bhāva* as opposed to being a *rasa*. There is also debate over whether *bhakti* is truly different from *śṛṅgāra rasa*, or just love expressed devotionally.⁷⁶

Although Vaisnavas are the most adamant in finding a place for *bhakti* within the *rasa* system, erotic *bhakti* poetry is found through the devotional traditions of Indian. Akkā Mahādevī, a devotee of the god Śiva, expressed her love for him in highly sexual terms:

...O Siva
when shall I
crush you on my pitcher breasts
O lord white as jasmine
when do I join you
stripped of body's shame
and heart's modesty? (Chakravarti 315).

Although this is a fine example of the *śṛṅgāra* form of *bhakti* poetry, it is certainly not only in erotic terms that *bhakti* finds poetic expression. *Bhakti* encompasses all forms of love which a devotee may feel for his or her *iṣṭadevatā* (chosen deity). For Vaiṣṇavas, Bharata's *rasas* are of secondary aesthetic importance. Their five major *rasas* are the five modes of *bhakti*: devotion as peace (*śānta*), the devotion of a servant towards his or her master (*dāsyā*), devotion as friendship (*sakhyā*), the affectionate devotion of a parent towards his or her child (*vātsalyā*) and erotic love (*śṛṅgāra*), called *madhura*, "sweet," in Vaiṣṇava texts (Siegel 54). Of these five types, the peace of *śānta*, where the consciousness of the worshipper is united with the deity, is considered to be least desirable, because it lacks *madhura*, sweetest, and emotional intensity (McDaniel 158). *Śṛṅgāra*, the union of shared awareness between the devotees with the deity, is considered to be the highest and finest form of devotion for Vaiṣṇava, as well as many Śāktas (Siegel 54) (McDaniel 158).

The adaption of *śṛṅgāra rasa* into Buddhist tantra and the emergence of *bhakti* in Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta circles show poets wishes to explain *brahmāsvāda*, the enjoyment of spiritual realization, in terms of *rasāsvāda*, the enjoyment of aesthetic tasting. This is the same

⁷⁶ "According to traditional rhetoricians like Mammaṭa, etc. *bhakti* is nothing but *devādiviṣayā rati* (love directed towards god or any such divine being) and hence nothing more than a *bhāva*" (Bhaduri 379).

concept at play in the defining of nonduality, the Buddha's presence, in terms of the taste of *samarasa*. Hindu groups sought to find a place for their religious experiences within the system of Indian aesthetics, but Buddhist *tāntrikas*, though often educated in these same systems, sought to express their religious experiences in terms that both broke away and moved beyond such systems as posed by the aesthetics Bharata or Abhinavagupta.

Although both *siddhas* and *bhaktins* employed the *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra* in their poetry, their intentions for doing so were extremely divergent. Buddhists, through their transformation of *śṛṅgāra* into *samarasa*, sought to dissolve the divide between the human and divine in a way that *bhakti* poets sought to not weaken but maintain. The love expressed in *bhakti* is done so in the space that is established between the human lover and the beloved deity. Conversely, Buddhists show their affection through the adage that “imitation is the highest form of flattery” and seek to become the deity they adore. Tantric Buddhist love dissolves all boundaries and leads to a state where there is no distinctions. *Siddhas* attempt to share their realizations of this union through poetry, although language is as poorly equipped to convey the aesthetic of *samarasa* as the Buddha found it to be to express his awakened experience.

While Buddhist *siddhas* maintained the original flavour of *śṛṅgāra rasa* found originally in *kāvya* in their own poems and rituals, the context that these works were performed lent *śṛṅgāra* a spiritual taste. The sense of *śṛṅgāra rasa* in religious works shows the common desire to define a religious taste in art in terms that fit within the prevalent model of aesthetic expression. All these Indian aesthetic theologians are trying to express an inexpressible, underlying flavour. It is as if they are searching for the “secret ingredient” of religious experience.

It is not commonly emphasized in studies of Buddhist poetry that these authors were highly educated in literary theories of how the arts came to be experienced. This is perhaps because these *siddhas* often disregarded traditional poetic expectations.⁷⁷ Yet Buddhists were certainly not the only poets to see their own religious experiences in terms of tastes that went beyond Bharata's *rasa* theory, and expanded his scheme to reflect their own aesthetic impressions. Other sectarian Indian poets envisioned love for the divine in terms of *bhakti*,

⁷⁷ This topic was given special emphasis in Dr. Lara Braitstein's “Buddhism Poetry” class, RELG 548, at McGill University in the Winter semester of 2010.

which while associated with humans-to-human emotions, applied solely to their human-to-deity relations. Buddhist *tāntrikas*, applying the worldly *śṛṅgāra rasa* to the divine realm and the transcendental *samarasa* to the human realm, showed in their aesthetic theory the nonduality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

Samarasa: the nondual taste of Buddhist aesthetics

A conception of a blissful taste beyond conventional aesthetic experience is not unique to Buddhism, it is found in other Indian religions that emphasize *śānta* or *bhakti*. Tantric Buddhist *rasas* are formed similar to tastes in classical *rasa* theory, but utilizes the aesthetic system to transcend the system. In Buddhist aesthetics, *śṛṅgāra rasa* develops in accordance to classical *rasa* theory, but the erotic mood of sex becomes a signifier of *samarasa*. *Samarasa* is produced as the highest, most transcendental taste, which is dependent upon the refinement in of the base flavour, *śṛṅgāra rasa*. When induced with a high intention the erotic sentiment can lead Buddhists out of *saṃsāra* instead of deeper into it.⁷⁸

In *rasa* theory, *bhāvas* give rise to specific *rasas*. However, within tantric texts, the *rasa* that is created from the *bhāva* of *rati* is not a *śṛṅgāra rasa*, but that of *samarasa*. Indeed, all aspects of tantric ritual, whether arousing, as in consort practice, or disgusting, as with the consumption of bodily fluids, are meant to lead to the ultimate flavour of *samarasa*, and not to one of the nine conventional *rasas*. Despite this, *śṛṅgāra rasa* seems to have a certain proclivity towards the generation of *samarasa*, as noted in Abhinavagupta's commentary on the

Nāṭyaśāstra:

“Someone objected as follows: how can there be only one *rasa* (*śṛṅgāra*) when there are so many different kinds of love (*rati*) ...? The person objecting thus is not (really) acquainted with love. For all love is only one. It (exists) where there is not the separation of the one (from the other), because there is a mutual (commingling) of consciousness” (Masson and Patwardhan 14).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Further support for this theory can be drawn from Christian K. Wedemeyer's (2007) application of Roland Barthes (1957) theory of connotative semiotics into the field of Buddhist tantra to explain the meaning of tantric signs during the ritual consumption of transgressive substances. Like the *rasa* theories which seek to explain the creation of aesthetic moods, Barthes' theory of the formation of meaning involves multiple levels of digestion of signs and signifiers. While he argues that ordinary encounters have only three stages of comprehensive digestion, whereby a signifier “the plane of expression” leads to a signified “the plane of content” which points to a sign, Barthes argues that myths and poetry function through going through these stages again, so that the sign itself acts as a signifier leading to a new signified language-object and a sign which functions at a higher level of discourse (115, 133 ft. 10, 383 and 394).

⁷⁹ From *Abhinavabhāratī*, Vol. 1, p. 302.

This passage implies that inherent within *śṛṅgāra rasa* is the taste of *samarasa*; that to love is to lose the distinction between self and other.

The desired goal of tantric Buddhist practice is a third level of aesthetic experience, whereby the feeling of pleasure does not end at the creation of an arousing atmosphere, but goes further to create a mood of nonduality, in which all experiences that would normally be perceived as distinct have the same flavour. This is like the taste of cream that is inherent in all flavours of ice-cream and is the innate flavour of the dessert. This understanding places consort practice within a larger context of ritual practice in which all sorts of *bhāvas* are established to created distinct *rasas*, with the specific intention of being transcended.

In Buddhist tantra the ritual poetics employed means that the *śṛṅgāra rasa* created, during consort practice, acts more as a *bhāva* than a *rasa* to lead further to the ultimate *rasa*, *samarasa*. This is similar to how *bhakti* is considered by some to be a *bhāva*, and not a *rasa*; in the context of Buddhist ritual, *śṛṅgāra* is not a *rasa* but acts as a *bhāva* for *samarasa*. In the same way that *bhakti* as a *rasa* has been largely unaccepted, partly due to the lack of a compelling *sthāyibhāva* for it, *samarasa* as *rasa* may also be negated if a convincing *sthāyibhāva* cannot be proposed for it. However, I have already established that I consider the *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*, specifically in the context of consort practice, but all the conventional *rasas* really, to be acceptable *sthāyibhāvas* for the experience of *samarasa*.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself states that *rasas* can and are generated out of other *rasas*, so that some *rasas* are the cause of other *rasas*, resulting in a higher level aesthetic experience, just as *sandhābhāṣā* creates higher levels of semiotic meaning. In this way *hāsyā* (comic) is formed in dependence upon *śṛṅgāra*, *karuṇā* (compassionate) from *raudra* (wrathful, terribleness), *adbhuta* (marvellous) from *vira* (heroic), and *bhayānaka* (terrifying) is generated from *bibhatsa* (odious) (Bharata 74-75). These relationships are clearly not as cogent as are the relationships between the *bhāvas* and their respective *rasas*, and perhaps for this reason are not developed on in comparable detail in later treatises. The main distinction between this explanation given by Bharata and my theory of Buddhist aesthetics is that there is not a one-to-one relationship between *rasas*, as *samarasa* can be formed through all *rasas*, although *śṛṅgāra* is the predominant flavour utilized in consort practice.

This theory can be viewed as a re-articulation, using Buddhist tantric terminology and principles, of the conclusion of aesthetic experience, according to many Indian aestheticians. The concept of *samarasa* is found not only in Buddhist aesthetics, but also in Abhinavagupta's tantric literature, which describes immersion or possession (*saṃāveśa*) of Śiva in one's own body as *sāmarasya* "sameness of flavour" or *jagadānanda* "universal bliss" (Flood 1992, 51). *Rasa* in Indian culture and ritual is most commonly understood to create *ānanda* "bliss" in the *samājika* (participant/observer) (Kapoor 104), in a parallel way that *samarasa* is formed when utilized in Buddhist tantric ritual. For Hindus, when *ānanda* is experienced the *samājika* becomes a *rasika*, an awakened observer, just as when *samarasa* is tasted by Buddhists they become an awakened one, a buddha.

Alexis Sanderson emphasizes the views of Abhinavagupta in his analysis of meaning in tantric Kaula worship. Tantric ritual's aesthetic intensity is described by Sanderson as a shift away from an "appetitive style of perception" in which things are seen as existing outside of your consciousness, to an "aesthetic mode of awareness" in which objects are perceived as existing inside your consciousness. For Abhinavagupta the "shift from the appetitive to the aesthetic mode of awareness is ... the divinization of the senses themselves" (Sanderson 1995, 87). Sanderson discusses that in Abhinavagupta's nondual tradition, the deity was "to be equated with the nondual consciousness which the worshipper seeks to realize as his ultimate identity [...] [t]he whole text of the ritual was ... thereby transformed into a series of variations on the theme of nonduality and the nondualization of awareness" (1995, 47).⁸⁰ What Abhinavagupta was proposing was that religious sentiment was an entirely different form of perception, just as the generation of meaning is different in ordinary language and poetic ritual language employing *sandhābhāṣā* and imbued with *rasa*.

The realization of nonduality is a highly blissful and inherent state in tantric Buddhist theology, and the understanding of *ānanda* as the inherent nonduality of all experience for the Śaiva tantric theologian Abhinavagupta shows the similarities in aesthetic perceptions within nondual tantric traditions. Whereas Abhinavagupta saw the pure experience of *rasa* naturally

⁸⁰ Since this ritual structure was "virtually identical in all the Tantric Śaiva traditions.... this nondual exegesis was easily extended from the Trika" to the adjacent cult of Svachhandabhairava (Sanderson 1995, 47), which the Buddhist Cakrasaṃvara tantra clearly developed or borrowed heavily from. I have explained in the previous chapter that Vajravārāhī's cycles formed out of her consort Cakrasaṃvara's tantras.

leading to the nondual state of *ananda*, Buddhist aestheticians may have seen the transcendence of *rasa* leading to the highest bliss (*sahajānanda*) of *samarasa*. Abhinavagupta views the aesthetic experience of *rasa* to be *ānanda*, which is “the purified state of undifferentiated experience . . . self-luminous and self-conscious, devoid of all duality and multiplicity” (Schwartz 17).⁸¹ Indeed, Abhinavagupta essentializes that all synonyms for aesthetic pleasure (*camatkāra*, *rasanā*, *āsvāda*, etc.) are just different names for the same experience of consciousness devoid of any obstacles (*sakalavighnavi-nirmukta-saṃvittir*)” (Masson and Patwardhan 46). Therefore, *rasa* in its most primitive state is *samarasa*, nondual, clear consciousness.

This theory suggests that while the moods intentionally established in Buddhist tantric rituals were understood to begin through the coming together of various *bhāvas* to form a *rasa*, none of the conventional *rasas* were the desired moods for the practice and had to instead be transformed into a nondual state of awareness. Although tantric sex may be experienced initially as *śṛṅgāra rasa*, this perception achieved through conventional understandings of aesthetics must be pushed through and understood to be what it truly is: unreal. This is the realization that the *siddha* poets were trying to convey through their works which found their way into tantric *sādhana*s.

After taste: conclusion

The attainment of nonduality through the refinement of *śṛṅgāra rasa* is expressed in the poetry that the *siddhas* wrote and in the yoginī tantras that these adepts performed. This process of poetic aesthetic refinement, which leads to spiritual realization, can be initially understood in terms of conceptions of classical *rasa* theories, but can only be fully comprehended through examining the views of Indian *tāntrikas* and aestheticians. Although developed theories of Buddhist aesthetics are not readily available, through examination of *siddha* poetry alongside a clear understanding of poetic theory at the time of their composition, it is possible to glimpse the method behind the madness of such *mahāsiddhas* as the mad princess Lakṣmīkarā.

These poets create the mood of *śṛṅgāra rasa* so that, through its digestion within the tantric body, it could become not only a visceral experience of pleasure, but the highest bliss

⁸¹ This is drawn from “A Performative Approach to Ritual,” Proceedings of the British Academy 65:113-169.

which comes along with the realization of nonduality. Therefore, to truly understand Lakṣmīkarā's poem within in the performative context of consort practice it must be comprehended how *samarasa* is expressed through the dance of sexual union, where meaning is imposed on gendered bodies. According to David E. R. George, the “message” conveyed by the sexual union of *yab yum* (father-mother) figures is that awakening is imperfect unless accompanied by performative action (101). My next chapter discusses the dual gendered performance of *samarasa*, with the premise that it is not enough to understand that this is the awakened mood that is created in tantric consort practice, one must also see how this aesthetic is played out. This is done through an infusion of the divinities presence, which often leads to dancing in men and shaking in women.

Chapter 2

From *Samarasa* to *samāveśa*: gendered performances of nondual possession

Although Lakṣmīnārā's Buddhist *mahāsiddha* poetry establishes the ritual mood of *samarasa*, it is not enough to recite Lakṣmīnārā's poem to establish the correct ritual mood for practice; the practitioner is also required to maintain, re-create and personally re-define the ritual space to be in line with the goals of practice. As Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown states: ritual does not simply express sentiments it creates them (Bell 28). In the arts, including dance, *bhāva* and *rasa* are two aspects of the same thing; *rasa* is the mood induced within the viewer through the dancer's expression of emotion (Zoete 30). Through advanced Buddhist practice the aesthetic experience of *samarasa* in ritual can become more than a *rasa*, and instead become the spiritual experience of *āveśa*, possession, whereby the practitioner is imbued not only with the mood, but the presence of the deity. Just as *śṛṅgāra rasa* is transmuted into *samarasa*, *samarasa* is itself transformed into *samāveśa*, a mutual possession in consort practice.

Just like the sentiment of *bhāva* in the arts, the feeling of *āveśa* in ritual must be expressed. According to Benard's understanding, Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory within ritual means that "the goddess depicts the actress, the practitioner the spectator, and the feeling of transcendence or holiness is the sentiment evoked" (56-57). Expressions of possession vary in the context of erotic practices performed during initiations, but for Newar Buddhists in Nepal they involve the men dancing and the women shaking. Therefore, the practitioners' maintenance of the taste of *samarasa* and the presence of the deity within ritual varies according to gender. While participants of both genders are expected to transform their experience of *samarasa* into *samāveśa* by the deity, the degree and expression vary based on their capacity to submit to the penetration of the deity. This receptive capacity is understood in India as a unique power possessed intrinsically only by women, termed *śakti*, but which could be transferred to men during sexual intercourse.⁸² Men derive their *śakti* from sexual intercourse with women,

⁸² In tantra, as in Brahmanical religion, those who are most liminal to society are most susceptible to becoming possessed. The more antinomian a woman is the more likely she is to fall into a possessed state. Women, especially those of low caste or disreputable professions "are regarded as penetrable, both sexually and by spirits, and susceptible to abandoned selfhood" (Smith 330). The *Īśānaśivagurudeva-paddhati* lists various women vulnerable to possession, included those who are naked, filled with passion, intoxicated, or prostitutes (Flood 2006, 92).

(whether as their ritual *mudrā* or their wife) because all women embody this power (Kapadia 426, 428).⁸³

Vajravārāhī's practices are prevalent in Newar Buddhism; the initiations of Vajravārāhī and Cakrasaṃvara are the primary tantric initiations (*dīkṣā*) given (Gellner 268).⁸⁴ Within Nepal, Vajravārāhī and Cakrasaṃvara initiations, where sexual yogas were originally implemented, tantric dances, *caryā nṛtya* (Tib. 'chams), are now performed. Because *caryā nṛtya*, where couples dance, or more specifically, men dance while their wives shake, is overlaid with deep sexual symbolism, their performance shows the gendered expectations also found in consort practice. Men perform, in the form of dance, and women dance or shake in response to their partner's movement, the music and the force of the deity within them. Newar rites, imbued with sexual symbolism, illuminate what it means to resonate with and actively express *samarasa*, as the embodiment of the deity. They embody the goals and expectations of the completion stage level of tantric practice, which consort practice falls under, through the sexually charged empowerment rituals that initiates undergo before they can begin to develop these practices.

In Newar Buddhism, "the ritual copulation of the texts has been symbolically reinterpreted" (Gellner 263).⁸⁵ However, the practices that replace them, dance and other forms of possession, remain as parallel, private, and powerful performances. This is clear from the view that a priest of the Vajrācārya caste cannot give tantric initiation unless his wife, who is necessary for the ritual, is also a Vajrācārya (Gellner 259).⁸⁶ Additionally, according to a young

⁸³ White claims that since its origins, tantra has foundationally consisted of techniques to seize control over primarily female beings, and that possession is one such strategy (2006, 13). Therefore, one could claim that tantra seeks to control *śakti*, female power.

⁸⁴ In Kathmandu, Vajrācāryas, Śākyas, and Tulādharas castes may receive Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī initiation. In Lalitpur, Vajrācāryas, Śākyas, and Śreṣṭhas castes may receive it. In Lalitpur, the Tāmraṅkar caste may receive it only according to Asha Kaji Vajracharya, but because they are initiated into the two-armed, and not the twelve-armed, form of the deity, they may not receive it with other castes" (Gellner 268-269).

⁸⁵ The only person that Gellner became aware of in his study of Newar Buddhism who made "a conscious attempt to enact the Tantras" was a man known as Dharma Guruju (298). "Born in Lalitpur, he spent some time as a monk in Tibet. He now lives in Kindol, Svayambhu, with his two female partners (*śakti*). He ... is liable to become possessed when performing rituals. [...H]e seems to have only foreigners as disciples; the reason seems to be that he insists that his disciples follow his belief that sex is the path to enlightenment and consume the sexual fluids of their *śakti*. Openly prescribing this kind of thing is enough to brand him as mad in the eyes of most Newars" (298).

⁸⁶ This is similar to possession in Tamil, *teyyāṭṭam* "dancing the god," where certain patterned or choreographed dances are performed to lead to deity possession (Smith 129). In Tamilnadu, *sami-adis* are male "god-dancers" who have "inherited" the ability to become possessed by the female deities Mariyamman and Kali, but must first marry before they can access this power (*śakti*) (Kapadia 426, 428).

Śākya man interviewed by Gellner, a woman of the tantric lineage cannot undergo possession (literally “shaking,” *khāye*) in the company of uninitiated men, or it will be impossible to end the possession (283).⁸⁷ Appropriate matching of male and female power in Newar ritual remains essential in symbolic sexual performance.

I have employed Gellner’s work on tantric forms of Newar Buddhism and Ahmed’s study of Newar ritual dance in my analysis, because as Brooks reiterates from Goudriaan, “a purely textual reconstruction of tantric practices... is liable to misrepresent both historical and living traditions” (7).⁸⁸ However, there are four valuable textual sources which illuminate the experience of *rasa* becoming *āveśa* in Buddhist ritual. The *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṃvara* is a very earlier Cakrasaṃvara tantra, which uniquely discusses *rasa* leading to *āveśa* states that correspond to different buddhas. Its root text, the *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*, describes consort practices as a dance. Outside of the Cakrasaṃvara cycle, Nāgabodhi describes dance as a sign of possession in his auto-commentary on Vajrabhairava initiation. The understanding of possession being observable through various signs is found outside of Buddhism in Abhinavagupta’s works, specifically the *Tantrāloka*, which links sexual practices to *āveśa* and nondual aesthetics.

Bhāvāveśa: feeling possessed

Possession is most commonly referred to as *āveśa* “to enter in.”⁸⁹ Possession is denoted by this term in both the *Ṛgveda* and modern Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages (Smith xxii).⁹⁰ Yet, the only definition of *āveśa* is from the *Tantrāloka*, where Abhinavagupta defines it as “the

⁸⁷ The importance of properly ending a possession is well noted. Smith has found that all Indic ritual texts on possession give detailed instructions on how to “abandon” (*tyaktvā*) or “calm” (*upaśamana*) possession (397).

⁸⁸ This is drawn from *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature* pp.11-12.

⁸⁹ Although possession is generally not discussed in non-tantric Buddhist literature *āveśa* is alluded to in the Pāli *Mahāsutasoma Jātaka*, as *bhūtapaviṭṭho* “possessed by a spirit” and *Padakusalamāṇava Jātaka* as *amanussapariggahī* “possessed by a non-human” (Smith 303).

⁹⁰ By the late Vedic period, derivatives from the root *grh* “to seize,” especially *grahaṇa*, indicate some forms of possession (Smith xxii-xxiii). Related to *grahaṇa* is the term *bhoga* which covers both the notions of “feeding one” and “sexual enjoyment.” Between a divine yoginī and a human male *grahaṇa* indicates a possession where she tastes him, by either directly preying on him or taking him as her sexual partner, leading to a *samāveśa* “mutual possession” (White 2003, 14). White claims that the female Seizers (*grahṣ*) are the most direct forerunners of the *Yoginīs* of the later Kaula and Tantric traditions (2006, 35).

submerging of the identity of the individual unenlightened mind and the consequent identification with the supreme Śambhu who is inseparable from the primordial *Śakti*” (Smith 372).⁹¹ Smith concludes from Abhinavagupta’s definition that in tantra, *āveśa* must come to mean “interpenetration” (372).⁹² *Samāveśa*, a mutual interpenetration, is an expansion of the term *āveśa*.⁹³ Smith has found this meaning of interpenetration in the Himalayan context also, in András Höfer’s study of possession and shamanism in Nepal, which found that the relation of a possessed Tamang shaman (*bombo*, Tib. *bonpo*) to the supernatural being is likened to the relationship between a husband and wife, because there is “an interpenetration, rather than a fusion of identities” (Höfer 27) (Smith 125).⁹⁴

Within the context of Tibetan tantric ritual, possession is thought not to occur as an overt “take over” by the deity, a full possession in which their identities were supplanted by the deity’s, as occurs for oracles (Höfer 27), but as a self-induced state that the practitioners themselves worked to achieve. Practitioners work from the time they receive their daily tantric vows (*samayās*) to achieve an identity of themselves which is equal to the deity, a *samayāsattva* “pledge being.” Through visualizing their body as the deity’s they attain the form of their buddha, through contemplating nonduality they achieve the mind of a buddha, and through reciting the mantras of the deity they obtain the speech of a buddha (Beyer 408). This sense of self connected to their tantric vows is their *samayāsattva* and it is this identity that becomes

⁹¹ *Tantrāloka* I.173.

⁹² Tantric conceptions of possession build upon, but contrast earlier Brahmanical views. In Brahmanical religion the body is in constant danger of becoming polluted, and if one fails to follow ritual prescriptions a “hole” in one’s shadow may occur, through which malevolent forces can possess you. In the early tantric world a very different emphasis is given to the body and pollution, and correct ritual procedures allows instead of avoids possession, and this controlled possession by *yoginīs* grants the magical powers of *siddhis* (Flood 1992, 49).

⁹³ It is so essential for Śaivas to visualize and manipulate the forces of the subtle body during religious practice to bring about *samāveśa* (Flood 1992, 54), that in Kashmir Śaivism, liberation is understood to be achieved through *samāveśa*, instead of the tranquil abiding of *samādhi* (Smith 370). From Finn, Louise M. *The Kulacudamani Tantra and the Vamakesvara Tantra with the Jayaratha Commentary*. 1986: 65.

⁹⁴ The Tamang *bombo* tradition has no ties to the Bon religion of Tibet. Höfer presumes that the name was given to them by Tibetan lamas, associating Tamang shamans with pagans or heretics (18, 20). Both Abhinavagupta and Tamang perceptions of *āveśa* lead to an understanding of possession as an experience akin to sexual interpenetration. It is therefore not surprising that possession is sometimes described using to same erotic and loving sentiments found in poetry. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* combines *āveśa* with the word *smara*, meaning erotic love to form such compounds as *smarāvīṣṭa* (possessed by erotic love) (81:55), *smarajvar-āveśavivaśa* (in a swoon as a result of possession by lovesickness) (119:156), and *ārūḍhasmar-āveśa* (overcome by sexual conquest) (65:230) (Smith 358).

possessed by the buddha's *jñanasattva*, the "wisdom being" of the buddha, the latent potential of all beings to attain awakening (Samuel 2001, 80) (Samuel 1993, 164).⁹⁵

Although in the case of this state, the human identity is not supplanted by the divine, the merging of the wisdom and commitment beings has similar valid signs to an oracle that the deity has actually entered the body. Kelsang Gyatso claims that with practice the experience can come to be as powerful as when an oracle is possessed by a buddha. The practitioner should therefore have no doubt that his or her identity has become unified with Vajravārāhī (Gyatso 1999, 139-140).

During possession the identities and mental states of the *jñanasattva* and *samayasattva* are merged. Just as in dance, where *bhāva* is the dancer's expression of emotion and *rasa* is the mood induced within the viewer (Zoete 30), the *jñanasattva* can be understood as the *bhāva* which affects the *samayasattva* and leads them to experience a *rasa* of the entrance of the deity into them. If one is possessed by an awakened being one will not experience an erotic *rasa*, even if one is in sexual embrace, but instead the experience the flavour of the Buddha's presence.

In Bengali there are three terms that describe such religious ecstasy: *bhāva*, *mahābhāva*, and *bhāvāveśa* (Smith 120).⁹⁶ A religious experience may be at the level of a standard or great feeling (*mahābhāva*), or it can become the possessed state of *āveśa* for advanced devotee performers (Smith 355-356).⁹⁷ Although *bhāva* is a religious experience that can be experienced by all devotees as *rasa*, the experience of *rasa* does not necessarily lead to possession. Just as the more strongly an audience resonates with a performed *bhāva*, the more intensified it becomes (Smith 336), the more strongly a *tāntrika* experiences *samarasa* the more complete his or her union with the deity will be during *samāveśa*. The aesthetic degree of religious experience depends on the advancement of the devotee. It is the experience of *āveśa* that Buddhist *tāntrikas*

⁹⁵ This position, which can be understood as a *mudrā*, of the *samayasattva* and the *jñanasattva* are sustained in nondual union, is held by the power of mantras (Samuel 1993,235).

⁹⁶ Outside of poetic contexts, *bhāva* is used as a central term for dance sequences and combinations, tying dance performance to an emotional and cognitive content (Marglin 221). In dance, the performers must not let their own subjectivity interfere with the execution of the refined *bhāvas* in the dance (Marglin 222). Dancers must distance themselves from their own subjective mental and emotional states in order to allow the spectators to experience a transformative state, which Marglin describes as "not discontinuous with their everyday physical-emotional-cognitive experiences but sufficiently qualitatively different to merit the label "spiritual"" (220).

⁹⁷ The merging of these two terms: *bhāvāveśa*, occurs as early as the seventh century, found in the *Mattavilāsa*, a farcical drama (Smith 356). In his study, Frederick M. Smith has found that in *bhakti* texts the term *bhāva* is sometimes tantamount to *āveśa* (386).

seek, the actualization of the aesthetic state of *samarasa*, which leads to flavour of the buddha's presence in their own body.

Although there is a significant dearth of direct references in Buddhist tantras connecting *āveśa* states to *rasas*, there is one eighth century early yoginī tantra which does just this. This Buddhist text, extant now only in Tibetan, may be the earliest yoginī tantra, according to Gray (Smith 305). The *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍḍākinījālasaṃvara* describes how in ritual the nine *rasas* states can lead beyond the creation of sentiments to *āveśa*. In this tantra male buddhas manifest as the nine *rasas* and lead to different states of *āveśa*.⁹⁸ Smith has discovered no other Hindu or Buddhist tantric text which links *rasas* with meditations on specific deities, in order to induce *āveśa*. The text claims that through endowment with *śṛṅgāra rasa* and so forth, “dancing with the various gestures (*mudrās*), and uniting oneself with all, one will achieve all *āveśa* states” (Smith 333). This tantra links *rasa* and *āveśa* states in Buddhist tantric practice and implies that just as there is a diversity of *rasas*, so too is there a diversity of ways in which *āveśa* can be expressed, which are all valid means of conveying the bodily presence of different buddhas during ritual.⁹⁹ While this text lends support to my theory that *rasas* within tantric Buddhist ritual can be developed further into states of *āveśa*, because the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍḍākinījālasaṃvara* is not known to have been a highly significant work until other textual evidence is found it adds unique, but limited, support to my argument.

Just as religious experiences vary in intensity based on the devotee's ability to translate *bhāvas* into *rasa*, the degrees of *āveśa*, fall along a spectrum of penetration of the deity into the practitioner's body. The preceptor judges the degree to which the identity of the neophyte and the deity have fused during consecration based on the degree of signs that the buddha has entered the subtle levels of the body. Although an audience's ability to correctly respond to a performance in the arts is important, the ability of neophytes to demonstrate their aesthetic experience at a physical level to their preceptor is vital, because if the neophytes do not receive the deity's presence into their body, they are not qualified to undergo tantric practices.

⁹⁸ *Śṛṅgāra* corresponds to Vajrasattva, *vira* to Hero Tathāgata, *karuṇa* to Vajradhāra, *hāsyā* to Lokeśvara, *raudra* to Vajrasūrya, *bhayānaka* to Vajrarudra, *bibhatsa* to Śākyamuni, *adbhuta* to Arali and *sānta* to Buddha (Smith 333-334).

⁹⁹ Classifying the nine *rasas* to correspond to nine male buddhas is similar to the practice of categorizing deity's many names according to the *rasa* that is induced by the name, such as can be done for Chinnamastā's 108 or 1000 names (Bernard 57).

The first time: sexual penetration during tantric consecration

Before a particular tantric buddha's *sādhana* can be practiced, it is necessary for the practitioner to receive *abhiṣeka* (Tib. *dbang*), translated as initiation, consecration or empowerment, into the family of that buddha. "The conferral of initiation serves as an empowerment, which creates a karmic connection between the student, the deities of the *maṇḍalas* and the *lama*" (Powers 283). Much like joining the mafia, *abhiṣeka* allows the practitioner to engage in specific antinomian activities, because they have become part of the family. This idea of keeping it in the family (San. *kula*) is especially prevalent with the class of yoginī tantras, such as Vajravārāhī's.¹⁰⁰

The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* emphasizes the importance of *kula* (clan), stating that one must engage in sexual intercourse with women of the correct *kula*, because if one engages "in meditation with the wrong clan, there will be neither success (*siddhi*) nor one who succeeds" (Gray 109 ft. 297).¹⁰¹ The importance of *kula* means that women are necessary as spiritual mothers, to give their spiritual life force through sexual fluid. Initiation ceremonies are the site at which the neophyte loses his or her spiritual virginity, they are unique in that during these rites, drops of *bodhicitta* (male and female sexual fluid) are not only permitted, but required to be ejaculated; red (female) and white (male) sexual fluids are necessary to form a spiritual body. The consort act as a *dūtī*, transmitting the "coded" clan fluid (*dravya*) (Gray 117), which is her own sexual fluids and the male's that have entered her during the course of sexual union.

This transmission of sexually coded messages by *dūtī*s often induces possession. Within the *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta refers to *samāveśa* as "the mouth of the yoginī" (*yogiṇīvaktra*), because it is through her the spiritual tradition (*sampradāya*) tradition flows, through which "one obtains true cognition of Śiva" (Flood 1992, 57).¹⁰² The flavour that flows through the nether

¹⁰⁰ Vajrayāna Buddhism inherited the importance of initiations from the Śaiva traditions of northern India and Kashmir (Smith 390).

¹⁰¹ This is Gray's own translation made from Snellgrove's text (1959, 2:64; cf. also Snellgrove 1959, 1:103): *mudraṇam liṅgaṇāikaṇ ca ankena lakṣate kulam / vyastakulam bhāvanāyogān na siddhi nāpi sādhaḥ //*. Chapter twenty-eight of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* lists acceptable familial mudras. Durjayacandra explains these incestuous spiritual relations with one's mother to refer to relations with the guru's consort, with one's sister to mean one's fellow disciples, one's daughter as she to whom one gives one's oral instructions, and one's wife as she whom was given to you by your guru (Gray 115) (*Ratnagaṇa-nāma-pañjika* 294b-295a).

¹⁰² *Tantrāloka* 122-123. It is common for tantric cults that emphasize the importance of lineage (*kula*), known as Kaula systems, to require the initiate to exhibit signs of possession (*āveśa*) during the ritual (Sanderson 1988, 682). In the Kaula Mata, "the Mother Lineage," which is the worship of the twelve forms of the popular Hindu goddess

mouth (vagina) of the yoginī is *samarasa*. The *Tantrāloka* further states that at the level of supreme penetration, the minds of the guru and neophyte should experience *samarasī*, which Silburn translates as “of the same flavour throughout” (Dupuche 172, e.n 301).¹⁰³

Initiation occurs through the penetration of the subtle energy channels of the body by the divinity, for both men and women neophytes.¹⁰⁴ David Gordon White discusses yogic initiation in terms of bodily penetration.¹⁰⁵ The significance of initiation does not lie in external events, but in the observation by the guru that the descent of *śakti*, female energy, (*śaktipāta*) has occurred and therefore also some degree of absorption (Dupuche 154). *Śaktipāta* is the cause of *samāveśa*, and this experience is bestowed by the guru, with varying degrees of intensity and significance depending of the degree of attachment that the neophyte has to his or her body.¹⁰⁶ Because the ability to be penetrated in thought of in terms of female energy, *śakti*, which is transferred during the course of tantric rites, I propose that women are essential to tantric practice because the more *śakti* the male neophyte has accumulated from sexual contact with a female partner the more potential he has to be penetrated fully by the deity during consecration.

It is not only women who are penetrated during consort practice, with the divinely imbibed penis of her partner; both partners’ subtle bodies are penetrated by Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara, through the power of their guru. This penetration is made possible through their bodies taking on the unique power of penetrability, *śakti*, an energy usually only possessed by

Kālī, sexual intercourse between an adept and his *dūtī* was believed to irradiate or possess their consciousness (Sanderson 1988, 682).

¹⁰³ The *Bṛhannīla Tantra* (4.112;21.24-30), dating likely no earlier than the fifteenth century (Biernacki 156), emphasizes the importance of correct feeling (*bhāva*) in tantric ritual, not only for one’s own practice, but for the impact that the *bhāva* you bring to the ritual has on the entire clan: “By *bhāva* one attains enlightenment and strengthens the clan. By *bhāva* the lineage (*gotra*) is strengthened; by *bhāva* one does the spiritual practice for the clan; [if one doesn’t have *bhāva*] why do the various *nyāsa* (ritual placement of the alphabet on the body), why the various bodily purifications; why do worship if *bhāva* doesn’t arise?” (Biernacki 118).

¹⁰⁴ Flood claims that “[A]s *man-tra* might be rendered as ‘instrument of thought’ so *tan-tra* might literally be taken to mean ‘method or instrument of extension,’ perhaps with the implication that it is the self or body that is extended to become coterminous with the divine body. [He] do[es] not intend this etymology (*nirvacana*) to be taken too seriously, but [as] nevertheless suggestive” (2006, 12).

¹⁰⁵ White views the yogic “co-penetration” (*samāveśa*) between two bodies found in the late epic account of the sage Bharadvaja and the king of Kasi, Divodasa, to be the model for a guru’s initiation of his disciple, which is commonplace in the tantras (2006, 145-146). White considers the type of yoking (*yoga*) that occurs during yogic initiation to be a form of symbiosis, mutualism, in that both beings benefit (2006, 47).

¹⁰⁶ This descent of female energy into the body is also stated in even more obvious terms of possession in the *Vijñānabhairava tantra* (verse 69) as *śakyāveśa* (Smith 375). This tantra compares the bliss of sexual absorption one experiences with Śakti as the same as one feels with a real live woman (*śaktisaṃgama-saṃkṣubdha*) (Smith 375, 378), making it clear that real women can bestow the same state of possession as divinity.

women, but shared with men in the course of intimate tantric practice. A double penetration occurs for the woman both physically and divinely, so that her performative reaction is different from that of the man during consort practice. Men take on women's ability to become penetrated, *śakti*, in order to receive divine possession.¹⁰⁷

There are various levels that divine energy can penetrate the initiate's body. In his *Tantrasāra* (29.208) Abhinavagupta explains that if the energy descends to only the level of the external body (*bahistanu*) the result is reeling or shaking (*ghūrṇi*), if the energy goes to the internal body (*antartanu*) loss of consciousness, fainting or swooning (*nidrā* lit. "sleep") will occur, at the level of the subtle breath (*prāṇana*) it causes trembling (*kampa*), within space (*vyoma*) lightness (*udbhava*) will occur, and if it penetrates the mind (*citi*) bliss (*ānanda*) will arise (Dupuche 160 e.n. 272 and 312).¹⁰⁸ While displaying more subtle signs of yogic penetration shows a deeper spiritual penetration during initiation, some of these signs of possession are clearly more favourable than others during sexual yogas. Gross shaking or subtle trembling would display a possessed state to one's male partner in a way that lightness would not, nor bliss, and loss of consciousness is clearly not the most ideal response during sex, whether in or out of ritual.

Interpenetration of the deity and disciple is referred to in Tibetan ritual as a "shared blessing" (Tib. *skal mnyam*; Skt. *sabhāgah*), it also displays signs that the divinity, in its form as a penetrative wisdom being (*jñanasattva*), has entered the initiate. The seventh Dalai Lama quotes from Nāgabodhi in his auto-commentary on Vajrabhairava *abhiṣeka* giving signs of entrance which are similar to Abhinavagupta's classification. These are: shaking, elation (lightness), fainting, dancing, collapsing or leaping upwards (Smith 391-392). It is uncertain whether Nāgabodhi considered these signs to correlate to increasingly subtle levels of yogic penetration. While these six signs match or loosely correspond to Abhinavagupta's classification, dance in no way meets the original qualifications for viewing the descent of a deity into a devotee, yet in the Himalayan context, dance is stated as a viable form for expressing possession as a voluntary act.

¹⁰⁷ This fits with Karin Kapadia's conclusion in her study of Murugan possession in Tamil festivals, that men, in regards to the reality that they are penetrated by the deity, "become" female for the duration of the ritual (Smith 131).

¹⁰⁸ This list is given in opposite orders in other tantric texts. For instance, the *Tantrāloka* (5.207, 8 vols) and the *Mālinīvijāyottaratantra* (11.36), which is quoted in the *Tantrāloka*, list the five signs of *samāveśa* as: joy (*ānanda*), arising (*udbhava*), trembling (*kampa*), loss of consciousness (*nidrā*), and shaking (*ghūrṇi*) (Flood 1992, 61 ft. 41).

The degrees of penetration of the subtle body show the complexity of the tantric body. The objective of tantric consecration is to open the pathways of the subtle elements in the body so that the practitioner can, through daily practice, work towards controlling his or her own subtle anatomical system. To some degree this is possible to do on one's own, but at the most advanced levels of practice, one must rely on a female consort to correctly seal the pathways of one's body so that their energy may all flow within the subtle invisible central channel, the *avadhūtī*, which symbolizes, and leads to, the attainment of nonduality.

Getting to last base: an introduction to the completion stage practice of ritual union

Sādhana practice is the principle form of tantric training and there are two main stages found in these texts: the generation stage (*utpatti krama*) and completion stage (*utpanna/niṣpanna krama*). During generation stage the practitioner imagines his or her body as Vajravilāsini's. It is necessary to self-generate as the deity before worship can fully commence: *Devo bhūtvā devaṃ yajeta*, "In order to worship a deity, one must become a deity" (Bernard 83). So to engage in sexual union with a buddha, you must yourself become a buddha.

Although generating as Vajravilāsini in an outward way is necessary for consort practice, what is of higher importance in sexual yogas is the detailed visualization of psycho-physical constituents of her subtle body which are affected through yogic techniques, making it a completion stage practice.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of which type of consort is employed, the essential aim of completion stage yoga is to engage the psychophysical constituents of the body (Gyatso 1998, 258). The science of constituents of the psycho-physical subtle body in completion stage practices is inherited from Indian Ayurvedic medical understandings of the body. According to this view, the body has seventy-two thousand physical channels (*nāḍī*, Tib. *rtsa*) that are too subtle to be perceived by the human eye. These channels contain vital winds (*prāṇa*, Tib. *rlung*) and hormonal drops (*bindu*, Tib. *thig le*). At the confluence of these channels are whirlpools of energy called wheels or *cakras* (Tib. *rtsa 'khor*). There are three main channels in the body,

¹⁰⁹ Consort practice is also known as "consort (lit. knowledge) observance" (*vidyāvratā*) or "great observance" (*mahāvratā*) (Gray 118), and the "profound path" (*zap lam*) (Dowman 1996, 235).

rasanā, on the right, *lalanā* on the left and *avadhūtī* in the center.¹¹⁰ The channels of the right, associated with the male, and left, understood as female, are viewed as the two dualities and the central channel is associated with nonduality.

Tantric practice aims at bringing all the winds of the body into the main central channel, the *avadhūtī*, to dissolve into the “indestructible drop” at the heart. The indestructible drop is believed to be the subtle fusion of the white drop of your father and the red drop of your mother given to you at the moment of your conception.¹¹¹ This reflects Indian medical views of the body, that people inherit all white components, such as bones and cartilage, from their father, and red parts, blood and muscles, from their mother. The tantric body is therefore composed of a nondual pair of female and male fluids (Gyatso 1998, 249).

The indestructible drop is believed to be just as powerfully tied to death as it is to conception. The indestructible drop is destroyed only at the time of death, but if one’s winds penetrate and dissolve into it before death, as is possible during consort practice, blissful states of mind arise. Some Buddhist masters, instead of engaging in consort practice, (which may compromise monastic vows), wait until the time of death, when the channel knots have completely loosened, and the winds naturally dissolve into the indestructible drop, to realize the clear light of isolated mind and attain the illusory body (Gyatso 2003, 173). Therefore, although completion stage yogas at their most complex level involve sexual union with a consort, some do not consider it essential (Gyatso 1998, 190).¹¹²

It is not only because sexual yogas can be viewed as a breach in monastic discipline that their practice is rare. Warnings are often given of the dangers of performing completion stage practices without the proper preliminary training and continued guidance from a qualified master, and consort practice is no exception. As opposed to other completion stage practices, such as inner heat (*cāṇḍālī*, Tib. *gtum mo*), it is not just your own psycho-physical constituents

¹¹⁰ Janet Gyatso claims that the two side channels of the body are reversed in females, but I have yet to see this view repeated in other Buddhist literature or scholarship (1998, 192).

¹¹¹ David Gordon White notes that the emerging medical understandings of the male and female sexual fluids “in conception, gave rise to the concept of these as power substances and to the notion that a transfer of the same to the initiand was a requisite moment in Tantric initiation” (2006, 67).

¹¹² This view is opposed to those, like the Tibetan master kLong chen pa, who claim that awakening is only possible through dependence on a consort (*mudrā*) (Campbell 112) (Guenther 194).

which you are affecting through the practices, but also your partner's.¹¹³ Because of its dangers there are only certain rites in which it is considered appropriate by most Buddhists to practice sexual yogas.¹¹⁴ By the end of the tenth century the practice of sexual union seems to have been generally confined to two settings: the consecration of initiation rituals, to authorize “advanced stages of yogic engagement” and the practice of sexual yoga itself within practices of the perfecting stage (*utpanna/sampanna/nispanna-krama*) (Davidson 2002 a, 56).¹¹⁵

The power of sexual yogas lies in its ability to affect the psychophysical constituents of the body, balancing all dualities of the two gendered bodies. Within a ritual space, the union of a male and female was regarded as the “restoration of the primeval Buddha-nature,” and, therefore, sexual union became a symbol of the internal yoga which abolishes duality (Kvaerne 34). However, many contemporary scholars, feminists among them, do not consider this spiritual transformation to be the result of an equal partnership. June Campbell, according to her own scholarship and experience as a Tibetan lama's consort, understands the aim of uniting the male and female in tantric sexual practices to be attempted by the male through the use of a female partner (117). This view is also put forward by Agehananda Bharati, who claims that there is nothing nice or romantic about sex in tantric ritual, that instead tantric sex “is hard-hitting, object-using manipulative ritual without any consideration for the other person involved” (Urban 40).¹¹⁶ The male in ritual practice utilizes the female to balance his own dualities, in this way she is a vehicle for his own awakening. This is seen in the terms applied to female consorts, *mudrā*, which refers to sealing the body to gain control.

Female *mudrā*s as seals

Tantric practice relies heavily upon the use of the ritualized recitation of sacred sounds, mantras, which are the phonic presence of the deity. These mantras must be performed in conjunction with the appropriate *mudrā*s “seals,” (Tib. *phyag rgya*), generally referring to hand

¹¹³ The Six Yogas of Nāropa, found within the Kagyu tradition, is the most well-known set of completion stage practices. These are: inner heat yoga, illusory body yoga, clear light yoga, dream state yoga, intermediate state yoga, and the yoga of the transference of consciousness.

¹¹⁴ According to the rDzogs chen “Great Perfection” tradition of rNying ma Buddhism one should undergo ritual sexual intercourse only to project an apparition of one's guru or *dākinī*s, “to initiate a neophyte in the Third Initiation, or to effect certain alchemical transformations that involve blending the white and red *bodhicittas*” (Dowman 1996, 250).

¹¹⁵ Sexual union may also occur at fortnightly tantric ritual feasts (*gaṇacakra*).

¹¹⁶ “The Future (if Any) of Tantrism” (1975).

gestures, but which also can denote full body postures, an example being the cross-legged posture the male takes in Lakṣmīkarā's poem. The proper execution of the *mudrā*s are rarely discussed in the text, and must therefore be learned through transmission from a teacher.

The term *mudrā* also refers to female consorts in Buddhist texts, implying that they are another means of constrictive bodily action whereby the potency of the rite can be sealed. Just as there are numerous forms of *mudrā* hand gestures, there are various types of *mudrā*s as female consorts.¹¹⁷ There are three major types of *mudrā*s that are listed in varying orders in Buddhist texts. The first is the *karma mudrā* “action seal” a flesh-and-blood woman, the second, the *jñāna mudrā* “gnosis seal” (also known as the dharma *mudrā*, “dharma seal”) is a visualization, and the third is *mahāmudrā* “great seal” defined by Roger R. Jackson as the “nondual contemplation of the nature of reality” (12).¹¹⁸ *Mahāmudrā* is not just a type of consort, but a kind of action, a sexual dance, and therefore it will be discussed later.¹¹⁹

The *Sekoddeśaṭkā* describes the *karma mudrā* as having breasts and hair and being the cause of bliss in the Desire Realm.¹²⁰ Her *karmas*, her “actions,” include kissing, embracing, touching the sexual organ, and rubbing the *vajra*. She gives proof of herself through her bestowal of fleeting bliss (Kvaerne 35).¹²¹ Many Buddhists consider the use of a *karma mudrā* to be superior to a visualization.¹²² The biography of the famous Tibetan adept Milarepa (1040-1123) states “that of all the services the best is *karma mudrā*,” and in Nāropa's writings it states that there is no *mahāmudrā* without *karma mudrā* (Campbell 112).

¹¹⁷ In the context of Indian performance theory it often is used as a synonym for *hastamudrā* meaning exclusively hand gestures (Schwartz 54). This is drawn from Narayan, *Rhythmic Echoes and Reflections: Kathak*, 70.

¹¹⁸ Roger R. Jackson considers these three to be the most central (12). There is also the *samayamudrā* “commitment seal” although it is not as frequently referenced by Munidatta in his commentary on the *Caryāgī*. This *mudrā* is described in the *Caturmudrāniścaya* as “a flashing-forth for the good of living beings of the Vajradhara in the form of Heruka” (Kvaerne 35). This is found in the *Advayavajrasaṃgraha*, ed. H.P. Sastri, GOS XL (Baroda, 1927) p. 35. The highest aim of tantric practice in the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism is the attainment of *mahāmudrā*.

¹¹⁹ Guenther also concludes that mudra must in some cases be taken to signify more than a woman, but a “mode of activity” or “way of doing” (194).

¹²⁰ The other realms are the form and formless realms of the gods.

¹²¹ The physical woman of the *karma mudrā* is also known as the external seal (*bāhyamudrā*) or the action woman (*karmaṅganā*).

¹²² There is debate on what extent these sexual practices even occurred. David B. Gray, however, notes that the presence of criticisms on these practices from members of the tradition “strongly suggests that there were Buddhists who interpreted the texts literally and practiced accordingly” (104). Despite this, Ronald M. Davidson concludes “that the actual physical enactment of sexual rituals seems to have become increasingly rare as time pass[ed]” (2002 a, 57-58).

The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* states that it is the outer woman, a *karma mudrā*, who has the power to bestow secret consecration (Gray 112, 114). The desirability of employing a woman who is beautiful as a consort, ideally who has the features of a *padminī*, has already been discussed, but beyond beauty it was also ideal that the consort displays a penchant for possession, showing a high degree of *śakti*, that could be sexually transferred to her male partner. Within the Śaiva tradition, Jayaratha, the commentator on the *Tantrāloka*, claims that for a rite of sexual union, you must utilize a physical woman who has a higher consciousness, beyond greed and delusion, is beautiful and demonstrates “signs of possession through trembling, rolling her eyes and so on” (Flood 1992, 56).¹²³ This expectation for female possession during initiation is also found in Newar Buddhism, which will be discussed shortly.

In the context of sexual practices the penetration of the body at a subtle level is primary, and physical sexual penetration is secondary. For this reason, tantric sex can be performed in a visualized context. The imagined *jñāna mudrā* is the necessary means of awakening for those not adept enough for practice with a physical woman, or whose life choices dictate more traditional boundaries of sexual behaviour. Kelsang Gyatso claims that once one is “able to dissolve most of the winds into the indestructible drop through solitary meditation” one can employ a *karma mudrā* (1999, 227), but until then one should rely upon a visualized *jñāna mudrā* (Gyatso 2003, 73).

The visualized *jñāna mudrā* is visualized as precisely the central channel of the *avadhūtī*, which Per Kvaerne describes in musical terms as “a sustained paean of the divine Yoginī in the yogin’s own body” (35).¹²⁴ Interestingly, *avadhūtānī* is an epithet for a female *siddha*, meaning in this context one who has “shaken off all worldly attachments” (Denton 226), tying the concept of an inner consort back into physical categories. The central channel in Tibetan is using called

¹²³ *Tantrāloka*viveka p. 68f. In his *Kula Ritual* Abhinavagupta outlines that both men and women must have a penchant for possession to make ideal sexual partners. The *kula prakriyā* is a Śaivic rite of sexual union, wherein the practitioner and his partner identify themselves as Śiva and Śakti, and experience the bliss of their union. To undergo the *kula prakriyā* the couple must have the requisite qualifications (*adhikāra*), meaning having undergone an initiation into the practice, and have shown high levels of receptivity, such as displaying the signs of possession (trembling, loss of consciousness) during the initiation (Flood 2006, 168). Flood draws this from: Flood, *The Ascetic Self*, pp. 105-14, also Dupuche, *Abhinavagupta, The Kula Ritual*; Stilburn, *Kundalini*, pp. 177-204; Flood, *Body and Cosmology*, pp. 295-301.

¹²⁴ Kvaerne notes that there is some ambiguity over whether she is the “purified *avadhūtī*, free of all opacity” or the “unpurified *avadhūtī*” understood to be the vital breath (35-36). According to the *Caturmudrānīścaya* the gnosis seal and the great seal are “spontaneously-produced” (*akṛtrima*) (Kvaerne 35).

the *rtsa dbu ma*, literally central (*dbu ma*) channel (*rtsa*), but it is also named the *ku 'dar ma* “all shaking,” which Kongsprul Blogrosmtsa‘yas (1813-1899) explains is because of the shaking movement of the *bodhicittas* within the channel, which gives rise to innate bliss (434).¹²⁵ Although the *jñāna mudrā* may be a visualization, the employment of this seal is still tied to the somatic experience of the inner body, the choreographed movement of the *bodhicittas* that leads to shaking.

It is not possible to know whether a consort of flesh or imagination was intended to be utilized in Vanaratna’s *sādhana*. Although the author of the poem was a woman, Vanaratna compiled her verse into the context of a ritual text and the intended actors of the text, with perhaps the exception of such extraordinary women as Chodron, were men. Initially, it seems that if Lakṣmīkarā was the original author the main deity is not likely to be male, inferring that Vanaratna changed it. However, it seems that the *yab yum* practice of male deities was more prestigious and/or powerful than that of their female consorts, so it may be the case that Lakṣmīkarā intended the main practitioner, whether a male or a female, to imagine their subtle body as a male’s during the practice.¹²⁶ A contemporary English Geluk Vajravārāhī *sādhana* gives instructions for practitioners who may wish to dissolve their breasts and grow a penis, and turn their vaginal walls into “bell-like testicles” in order to visualize themselves as Cakrasaṃvara instead of Vajravārāhī for the duration of sexual union (Gyatso 1999, 293). This conforms with most cases of *yab yum* meditation, in “a male is confirmed in his sexual identity, whereas a woman is shaken in hers, being obliged to mentally change her sex” (Hermann-Pfandt 21).

Darśana, the mutual seeing which occurs between the deity and their devotees, is found throughout Indian religions. The positioning of *yab yum* deities facing each other in sexual union results in eye contact only being possible between the devotee and one of the deities. Therefore, one deity, almost always the male, is always more prominent in *sādhana* practice. Representations of deities in *yab yum* posture display the cardinal deity facing the viewing devotee, thereby establishing themselves, and not their consorts who are facing towards them, as

¹²⁵ I have not yet found other significant references to the *avadhūtī* translated as “all shaking.”

¹²⁶ This inference is drawn by dGe bshes Pema Tse ring from the story of the male adept Thakki nag na pa told by Tāranātha. Thakki lacked sufficient money and intellectual capacity to receive the Cakrasaṃvara initiation from his teacher Nāropa, so he was instead given “instruction for Cakrasaṃvara in union reversed” (Tib. *bde mchog yab yum go zlog gi gdams nag*), which means that the practitioner visualizes themselves as the female deity (Herrmann-Pfandt 1997, 25) (Willson [169-216] 200 f.).

the main objects of meditation. Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt notes that goddesses are sometimes characterized as being part of, or an attribute of, their partner, such as found in the wording *sangsa rgyas thod pa yab yum* meaning the male deity Buddhakapāla is both father and mother (1997, 19). While Vajravilāsinī may have originally been the main deity in Lakṣmīnkarā's practice, this seems to have either been changed by the time of Vanaratna, or been changed by him.

When Vajravārāhī is portrayed with Cakrasaṃvara, in sexual union, *yab yum* pose, he almost always takes precedence as the main focus of worship, so that she faces him and not the devotee.¹²⁷ Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt sees this as reflecting the old Buddhist monastic rule: “equality when separate, female subordination as soon as male-female relationship is concerned” (19). She states this because it is not the solitary female tantric deities that seemed to be problematic, but the images and practices of union which placed the female in the dominant spiritual position (1997, 25). This conception is transferred onto Vajravilāsinī's female practitioners, who also must fulfil a complimentary role when positioned with males.

Returning to the concept of *mudrā* as seal, during most forms of Buddhist sexual yogas it is specified that men are supposed to hold in their semen, and thereby maintain celibacy. Indeed, the early Buddhist goal of celibacy is still present and retained in Vajrayāna Buddhism, albeit with a modified definition. Whereas the early *Vinaya* monastic code of the *Pārājika* defines sex as the penis entering a sesame seed's length in the vagina of a woman (Gyatso 2005, 278),¹²⁸ many Buddhists *tāntrikas* redefined sex as the point of ejaculation. For instance, Jagaddarpaṇa refined celibacy (*brahmacarya*) as “the retention of semen in the course of yogic sexual practices” (English 17). This extremely difficult retention occurs through the reversal of the sexual fluids back into the central channel of the subtle body. Janet Gyatso notes that tantric practice involves more, not less discipline, because what is a more challenging renunciation “than to stop at the brink of orgasm and try to reverse the flow of sexual fluids back up the central channel?” (1998, 195).¹²⁹

¹²⁷ There are a few exceptions to this that have been found. Namely, a poem by Ḍombīyoginī in which Vajravārāhī sounds like she is the main deity, while “she embraces the blue-faced lord,” who is Cakrasaṃvara (Herrmann-Pfandt 23).

¹²⁸ This is taken from the *Pārājika* 1.8.5.

¹²⁹ This discussion brings up the never ending questions surrounding consort practice: “Should the semen be ejaculated into the female body at the moment of orgasm? Or should it be sublimated and withdrawn upwards into the male body? Is the pleasure of orgasm something accidental to the ritual? Or is it the very essence of the act, as the manifestation of the supreme bliss of divine Consciousness? What is the role of sexual fluids? Are they to be

Loss of sexual fluids for Buddhist *tāntrikas* is a transgression of vows for both males and females.¹³⁰ This is clearly stated in Ye shes mtsho rgyal’s biography, where she tells her female disciple, Kalasiddhi, that if seed-essence is actually lost one incurs the karma of slaying a buddha (Dowman 1996, 156).¹³¹ However, if ejaculation does occur, during consort practice, various methods can be employed to recover from this transgression of one’s tantric vows. Kelsang Gyatso tells his Western disciples that if they accidentally ejaculate their drops they should recover them by imagining to taste them (2003, 74), and other teachers likely promote the oral ingestion of spilled drops as an even more concrete way of re-assimilating the *bodhicittas* back into the body.

Vajrolī mudrā, originally a hydraulic hatha yoga practice of the Nath siddhis (White 2006, 82), offers another method to assimilate ejaculated sexual fluids back into the body. This method works on sexual fluids that were lost by accident, but also may become practiced with such proficiency that drops are released intentionally. *Vajrolī mudrā* requires the genitals to act as a vacuum to suck up the double emission ejaculated.¹³² In Buddhism, practitioners of sexual yogas are envisioned to be able to suck up blended *bodhicittas* as natural as ducks drink water (Dowman 1996, 249-250). This *mudrā*, when performed by a male, reverses the normal order of sexual reception, making the man the possessor of both powerful sexual fluids that would normally be received by the female sexual partner.¹³³

manipulated physically and consumed by the practitioner as a sacramental meal? Or are they to be internalized and transformed into some nonphysical essence? And what is the role of the female in this? Is she a necessary partner, who also achieves spiritual power from the union? Or is she a mere tool to be used by the male and then cast aside” (Urban 41).

¹³⁰ It has been argued that because of this prescription to retain semen that the power in tantra focused away from the innate power of sexual fluids, to the power of the blissful state of orgasm. However, I think that this is not the case. The power of sexual fluids is not only maintained, but heightened in later tantric treatises, and this is demonstrated by the admonition to retain these powerful fluids. See Alexis Sanderson (1988: 680) and White (2006, 73).

¹³¹ Ye shes mtsho rgyal’s consort, the great eighth century master Padmasambhava, stressed the necessity of retaining *bodhicitta* in the body (Dowman 1996, 234). Dowman explains that the “[r]etention of semen is a *samaya* impressed as an imperative upon the neophyte in *anuyoga*. In Tsogyel’s practice the motive force which drives the *bodhicitta* up the medial nerve is the desire riding on life-force (*srog-rlung*), stimulated by memory of her initiation; that desire is love, the after-glow of desire (*rjes-chags*), renewed desire for consummation, all of which has been ‘sublimated’ into Awareness at the time of initiation” (1996, 234 and 249).

¹³² *Hathayoga Pradīpikā* 3:83-91.

¹³³ This practice is said to preserve life, and conquer death (*Hathayoga Pradīpikā* 3:88). The stages (*krama*) of tantric sex are clearly outlined in the worship of the twelve forms of the popular Hindu goddess Kālī. The first three are Emission (*sṛṣṭīkrama*), Maintenance (*sthītikrama*) and Retraction (*samphārakrama*), and the last is Nameless (*anākhyakrama*), “which pervades the three as their ground” (Sanderson 1988, 698). We can infer that this

While the most well-known descriptions of *vajrolī mudrā* are from the *Śiva Saṃhita* and the *Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā*, references to this practice are also found in Buddhism. Vīrāvajra interprets the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*'s mention of “drinking” the flower water of uterine blood and semen “into the aperture of the central channel (*avadhūti*)” (Gray 121) to mean that the sexual fluids should be reabsorbed “via reverse urethral suction” (Gray 121).¹³⁴ Vīrāvajra states further that if during the great worship of the consort the seminal essence goes to the joy of cessation (ejaculation), “then in the state of concentration one lays down mantra, i.e. reverses [the flow of seminal essence]” (Gray 121).¹³⁵

Although Ye shes mtsho rgyal's advocates that females should control their sexual drops, it is difficult to know to what extent women would have been expected to maintain control during ritual intercourse. Tantric texts are written almost exclusively under the assumption that it is the male practitioner who is seeking to control of his subtle anatomical system, to attain the ultimate *siddhi* of awakening. For men, orgasm and ejaculation are inseparable, but for women ejaculation of vaginal fluid does not have as direct a connection to orgasm. Furthermore, because orgasm is a less public experience for women it is more difficult to set boundaries around correct sexual behaviour in ritual. Women's biology masks the expectations for women's bodies in spiritually charged performative contexts. If female consorts were not expected to retain the same degree of agency which is required to prevent ejaculation or orgasm, this would allow a more full penetration of the identity of the deity into their body and manifest in a more obviously possessed performance.¹³⁶

classification of stages was also found in other circles of tantric practice, as “the prestige of the Krama-based Kālī cult was widely felt in esoteric Śaiva circles” (Sanderson 1988, 699).

¹³⁴ *Padārthaparakāśikā-nāma-śrīsamvaramūlatantraṭīkā* 435b.

¹³⁵ *Padārthaparakāśikā-nāma-śrīsamvaramūlatantraṭīkā* 427b. In his commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*, Vīrāvajra is more specific and elaborates on the process of *mantra-nyāsa*, the laying down of seed syllables to prevent ejaculation, explaining that the “wind is diverted upwards by the seal of laughter,” the eight seed syllables beginning with the letter *h* (Gray 122) (*Padārthaparakāśikā-nāma-śrīsamvaramūlatantraṭīkā* 436b).

¹³⁶ In contexts outside of initiation men are expected to hold in their drops during sexual union. Their performance is therefore not conducive to full possession, as they must retain enough bodily control to prevent ejaculation. This mandate to hold their drops can be interpreted not only as maintaining celibacy, but as a way to maintain the power of the divinity's presence in their own body. According to the *Vijñānabhairava* and *Spandanirṇaya*, *samāveśa* “mutual possession” can occur at the beginning and end of the release of a sneeze (*kṣutādyanta*) (Flood 1992, 55) (VB 101; SN 1.22). With this understanding, ejaculation, as a much more powerful bodily release than a sneeze, would further risk practitioners falling into *samāveśa*, before and after. In the Mahābhārata, a late epic describes the penetration of Śiva's stomach by the mahāyogi Kāvya Uśanā. He asks to be released by Śiva after feeling Śiva's heat and is ejected from Śiva's body through ejaculation (White 2002, 149-150).

Both partners should enter into a state of trance during ritual intercourse. Although the term *mudrā* usually means seal or consort it can also refer to the possessed state which *mudrās* can induce for both partners. For instance, the eyes of Bhairava's consort "are full of wonder because like him she is immersed in the Bhairava trance (*bhairavamudrā*)" (Sanderson 1995, 69). This quotation implies that both tantric partners, following the manner of the deities they emulate, are expected to enter a state of possession. Both Abinavagupta and his prolific student Kṣemarāja describe *mudrā* as "both an instrument of *āveśa* and a state of possession itself" (Smith 376). For them, *mudrā* is both a vehicle for the absorption of the individual consciousness into a possessed (*āveśa*) state, and the state that the individual body absorbs into itself.¹³⁷

Females, in the form of *mudrās*, are essential for the performance of sexual yogas. Whether physically or mentally invoked, female energy must be present for the psycho-physical components of the yogin's subtle body to become sealed with the intention of achieving awakening. Yet, no sexual rituals can be performed without first receiving initiation from one's guru and in this rite also women's power is essential to allow the spiritual energy to penetrate the neophyte's body, so that he can later learn to bind it.

Secret sex, wise women: the second and third consecrations

In Highest Yoga tantric traditions there are four levels of consecration given after the initiate enters the *maṇḍala* in which the empowerment will be held. These four are the vase consecration (*kalaśābhiṣeka*),¹³⁸ the secret consecration (*guhyaābhiṣeka*), the wisdom-knowledge consecration (*prajñāñānābhiṣeka*) and the fourth consecration (*caturth-ābhiṣeka*). The secret consecration and wisdom-knowledge consecration are the most sexually explicit, and for this reason are considered to be the least "Buddhist," and are often given the most minimal description in texts.¹³⁹ However, *abhiṣeka*, whether overtly involving sexual performance or fluids, has sexual connotations, because it comes from the root *sic* which means "to pour out,

¹³⁷ The *Parāṭiṃsikālaghuvṛtti* says that one's own body becomes possessed (*āveśa*) by *mudrā* and mantra (Smith 377).

¹³⁸ By the end of the eighth century, the authorization to perform generation stage practices was understood to be conferred during *kalaśābhiṣeka* (Davidson 2002 a), 57).

¹³⁹ They are said to be held in a *bhaga* (vagina) *maṇḍala*.

sprinkle, soak,” and, by extension, “impregnate”” (White 2006, 134). *Sādhana* practice of sexual yogas is a way of reliving the experience of initiation, of being reborn as a buddha through your own power daily.

The periods of the initiation when possession occurs in Newar consecration, expressed by the men as dance, and through the women as shaking, show the dual but inseparable performance that men and women undergo in tantric rites. While the sexual symbolism is still maintained, the modern consecration rites of Newar Buddhists express the transformation of *śṛṅgāra rasa* into *samarasa* and further into *samāveśa* through the dancing of male performers and the shaking of female ritual participants. The sixth to ninth days of the initiation ceremony, where the *maṇḍala* is established, shown to the ritual participants and the knowledge and secret consecrations are performed, show the gender expectations in sexual charged performative contexts. The women play a complimentary but vital role, expressing their own possession with more *śakti*, in a more overt way than is acceptable for their male partners.

Buddhist texts explain that in the secret consecration, a female sexual partner is brought to the guru who then engages in sexual union with her, for the purpose of creating a blend of male and female sexual drops, referred to as red and white *bodhicittas* (minds of awakening).¹⁴⁰ The union of the two *bodhicittas* is ingested by the neophyte, as “bliss-bestowing ambrosia,” which purifies his subtle channels, winds and drops and qualifies him to practice the subtle yogas of the completion stage (Gray 112).¹⁴¹ Through ingestion the disciple inherits “the genetic potency of the thought of awakening” as semen from his master and partner, thereby becoming a master himself. Sexuality is experienced by the adept in relation to the deity, so the consequent ejaculate is considered to have “the mystical properties of the divinity” to literally be “the seed of divinity,” which allows the neophyte to be reborn into the buddha family of the deity (Davidson 2002, 198-199).

Although a study of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* does not allow one to ascertain “exactly what practices were undertaken by a given community” (Gray 103), because what tantras *say*,

¹⁴⁰ The concept of *bodhicitta* is so central that Kvaerne claims that the fundamental notion of tantric Buddhism is not the *vajra*, for which this movement is named after, but *bodhicitta* (30).

¹⁴¹ However, in modern contexts, especially those of large scale empowerments granted to thousands of westerns, the two *bodhicittas* can “created” by the guru out of non-sexual substances, such as yogurt and red food coloring. This was the case with the empowerments of Heruka and Vajrayoginī, given by Kelsang Gyatso in Berlin in 2005.

what *tāntrikas* “say they do, and what they *actually do* are not necessarily the same” (Brooks 7) it does give a “rhetoric of sexual practices, which reflects an *ideal* of practice” (Gray 103), which shows the *rasa* of the practice and the varying gendered roles that male and female consorts take on. The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* clearly states that the secret consecration occurs in sexual union, the “deity’s place of the lotus,” and that it is bestowed by the rubbing of the *vajra* and lotus (Gray 112). Mantras are recited over the blindfolded neophyte, and after the neophyte has tasted the *bodhicitta*, he should be unveiled and shown the *maṇḍala*, the external woman’s vagina (Gray 112). In Newar ritual an external *karma mudrā* is not used as the site for secret consecration, although the sexual symbolism and gendered roles are maintained; instead of sexual intercourse the men dance and their women shake.

The Newar rite of “heroic conduct” (*vīryacaryā*), performed on the seventh day of the initiation, parallels the sexual symbolism of the secret consecration. The order, however, is somewhat divergent; the neophyte is unblindfolded, given the *amṛta* (nectar) to taste and shown the *maṇḍala*. The day before *vīryacaryā*, the *maṇḍala* is established (*maṇḍalapratiṣṭhā*) and male priests dance. The candidates cannot view this private performance so wait in an outer room.¹⁴²

Before they can enter the main room all neophytes, married or not, are paired off as couples (Gellner 275). This prerequisite pairing together of male and females shows the clear sexual connection which is present in the rite. The next day, in pairs, they are permitted to enter, blindfolded, while the main guru again dances (Gellner 275). After being shown Cakrasaṃvara’s *maṇḍala* they consume the tantric fivefold nectar (*pañcamṛta*)¹⁴³ which is likely to cause many of the women candidates to shake “possessed by the goddess” (Gellner 276).¹⁴⁴ Despite this pervasive state of possession, it is only the women who show this possession by shaking. The *rasa* which is tasted during this rite: *samarasa*, is explained to the neophytes; they are told there is no duality, no you or me, no purity or impurity (Gellner 277-278).

¹⁴² It is indicated in Beryl de Zoete’s work that it is common for initiands to be unable to view some of the dances that occur as part of initiation ceremonies (23).

¹⁴³ In this context Gellner states that the nectar is made of partridge, deer meat and alcohol (276).

¹⁴⁴ The Tantric singers will stop them by touching their hands and reciting a verse from the guru *maṇḍala* rite, and if this does not work, by sprinkling them with water and reciting the hundred-syllabled mantra of Vajrasattva” (Gellner 276). Gellner notes that “It is likely that in fact the esoteric version of this, in which Heruka is substituted for Vajrasattva, is used (375 ft. 31) (cf. Finot 1934: 58).

During the rite of “heroic conduct” the tantric bodies of the advanced ritual practitioners are penetrated by the deity, shown as dancing and shaking, instead of sexual union. The guru and his wife dance *as* Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, meaning that this performance is a form of possession. Although dancing and shaking are the means by which the masters of the ceremony attain the state of possession, for the neophyte’s possession occurs by an act of mutual tasting. Instead of drinking the double ejaculate from each other’s pudendas, as would occur if literal sex was performed, all participants drink the *pañcamṛta* from their own and each other’s skull-bowls. This act of tasting the nondual nectar causes the neophytes to be possessed by Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, just as the guru and his wife have already attained through dance performance. The means by which *samarasa* can be tasted, and *samāveśa* experienced, seems to vary on the ritual proficiency of the devotees.

During the wisdom-knowledge consecration, under the guru’s guidance, the neophyte in turn engages with the female partner in ritual union.¹⁴⁵ This consecration further prepares the neophyte for the completion stage practices that he will engage in during *sādhana* practice. Consecration is given before the practitioner can begin to undergo consort practice, therefore, *abhiṣeka* is the practitioner’s first encounter with sexual practice, whether performed physically or mentally. Because the completion stage practice of sexual union is the focus of the third consecration it is often a euphemism for completion stage practices, especially those involving sex (Gyatso 1998, 191).

In Newar ritual, the sexual meaning of the knowledge consecration (*jñānābhiṣeka*) is maintained, although consort practice is not performed overtly. For this rite, the unmarried candidates, although ritually paired up, have to leave. This is most likely because the *śakti* has not been transferred from the woman to the man if they are not sexual active together. Once they are gone, the “couples sit side by side and lean together so that their heads are touching” (Gellner 277). They are covered and the man’s right hand is placed in the woman’s left hand. Sexual union is implied in the symbolically blanketed sexual interaction by the contact of hand holding

¹⁴⁵ Although the third initiation is commonly referred to as simply the wisdom-knowledge consecration (Tib. *shesrab yeshes kyi dbang bskur*) or broken down into the “initiation into the primordial consciousness of intelligence” (Gyatso 1998, 191), Cyrus Stearns has broken down this compound (*samāsa*) to mean the “initiation of primordial awareness dependent on an embodiment of wisdom” (494, ft. 317). A woman is the embodiment of wisdom; therefore, if sexual union is not preformed, this consecration could be said to simply be the knowledge empowerment, which is what it is referred to in less overtly sexualized Newar ritual setting.

and the joining of the tops of their bodies under cover. They sit like this while a tantric song is sung, and then it is explained to them that a couple being together, is the dharma of householders, termed Sahajayāna, understood to mean “the way of innate bliss” (Gellner 277).¹⁴⁶ Sahajayāna here seems to be a contraction of *sahajānadayāna*, the purified erotic bliss of *śṛṅgāra* refined into the nondual path of *samarasa*. Although sexual union is not performed here, teachings on bliss are given to the couple.¹⁴⁷

Although the extent to which the secret and knowledge consecrations can be reinterpreted is infinite, the erotic sexuality fueling these empowerments cannot be completely hidden. Whether the nectar shared by the couples in tantric initiation is blood and semen, or alcohol, the taste that they are sharing is *samarasa*. This sentiment is conveyed to the other ritual participants through performance; through the power of the presence of his wife, the preceptor dances, possessed by the deity, and she herself joins him in this possession, through shaking or dancing along with him. The study of ritual dance as a substitute for what seems to have originally been sexual yogas, does not imply tantric dance is a watered down performance of an original, purer expression of tantric ritual, but that it is a development within a dynamic and changing ritual culture, which displays gendered expectations, likely similar to their original Indian context, in different ways.

Degrees of *śakti*: he dances, she shakes

Examining the degree of agency possessed by ritual participants is essential to understanding the gendered distinctions the dual performances of *samarasa* in consort practice,

¹⁴⁶ This eighth consecration is what, in the scriptural texts such as *Kriyā Samuccaya*, a single consecration, the *prajñāñānābhiṣeka*, which has been split into two. “The rituals which Asha Kaji here classifies as the Knowledge Consecration come under the head of the Secret Consecration in the handbook NGMPP E 1093/5.” (Gellner 375 ft. 34).

¹⁴⁷ After this the *maṇḍala* is taken down (*maṇḍalaropaṇavidhi*) and a fire sacrifice is performed: “[T]he guru’s wife, the sponsor’s wife, and the next four most senior women pupils come dressed as the six *yoginīs* and sit around the fire. Each is given a skull-bowl with a different Tantric mixture (four types of rice beer, spirits with egg, and so on). Their husbands stand behind them holding alcohol flasks. The women close their eyes and shake, possessed. They flick the alcohol with the ring finger of the left hand into the fire 108 times” (Gellner 279). Then they return to their own places, and the concluding rites are performed (Gellner 279). This rite is rich in sexual motifs. The fire ritual itself is understood to be a parallel to sexual union and the male transfer of transgressive fluid to the female via their left ring finger has deep sexual symbolism. The ring finger is the symbolic clitoris, the alcohol is the male sexual fluid, and the fire is the womb where this fluid is sprayed into.

while the devotees are in a state of *samāveśa*. James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey note that ritual participants are never completely in charge of their actions, the intentionality of ritual action is displaced so that “participants both are and are not the authors of their ritual actions” (Diemberger 294).¹⁴⁸ This is described in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*:

“[w]here [a practitioner] was required to do anything during the ritual he was to act in a trance, impelled not by his own will but the power of the deity (*rudraśakti*)¹⁴⁹ possessing his limbs; and when the officiant united the initiand’s soul with the deity (*yojanikā*) this state of possession (*āveśa*) was to manifest itself in ecstasy, convulsions, swooning and the like, the officiant reading these as evidence of how intense a Descent of Power (*śaktipāta*) was taking place” (Sanderson 1995, 88-89).¹⁵⁰

Abhinavagupta not only relates *śakti* to *āveśa*, he, as previously stated, defines *āveśa* as the submerging of the individual identity with the inseparable male (Śambhu) and female *Śakti* beings (Smith 372).¹⁵¹

It is not the case that male *sādhakas* remain in total control while their female partners lose all agency, but that their rituals actions are expected to fall within different areas of a spectrum of possession, dancing showing more agency and shaking displaying less. While for both practitioners of consort practice some loss of agency is expected to show that they are no longer just themselves, but a divine version of themselves, Gellner found that while controlled possession by a deity is permitted for men, it is required of women (143). In most (if not all) societies, women experience a lesser degree of agency over both their own bodies and identities, as do men. This means that their bodies are more permeable, and ripe for possession. The spiritual world aligns with cultural understandings of body and environment; just as women are physically penetrated during sex, so too are they more deeply penetrated during the state of *samāveśa* aroused in consort practice.

There is a range of views on degrees of agency and power put forward in the scholarship on possession in South Asia, and women’s possessions in particular. Frederick M. Smith has maintained the indigenous term *śakti* in his study of possession, tantra and aesthetics in South Asia, but other scholars, such as Mary Keller, have sought to create new terms to define women’s unique power as conductors of penetrability, such as Keller’s “instrumental agency,” a

¹⁴⁸ This is taken from James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey’s upcoming work.

¹⁴⁹ The sentiment of power here is clearly *raudra*, wrathfulness.

¹⁵⁰ *Tantrāloka* 29.187c-197b and *Tantrāloka* 1 (1) 3229.207-208.

¹⁵¹ *Tantrāloka* I.173.

modified form of Catherine Bell's symbolic agency in ritual (Keller 65). My study draws on material from Fredrick M. Smith, David Gordon White and Gavin D. Flood's studies of possession in South Asia, to understand the possessed performance that Buddhist men and woman undergo to varying degrees while divinely penetrated in erotic rituals. The texts which best illuminate this are the eighth century *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṅvara* and the tenth century *Tantrāloka*.

The Sanskrit word *śakti* continues to be used in Nepal to denote inherent feminine power. Smith defines *śakti* as “the conductor of women's permeability or penetrability or, more strongly, that it is a uniquely gendered substance that cultivates women's power and (among other things) contributes to the capacity for possession” (70). Although *śakti* is a powerful force, its power can be interpreted as a power to submit, as Margaret Egnor notes (in agreement with Mary E. Hancock), women have more *śakti* because they are subservient to men (Smith 71). However, men can also possess *śakti*, and therefore also the power to submit to the deity and become possessed, through receiving this power from engaging in sexual intercourse with women.

Susan Starr Serad argues that possession is a normal experience for both men and women to undergo. Serad does not conclude that there is something distinct (or abnormal) about women, as in the indigenous understanding of *śakti*, that makes their bodies more permeable to possessed states, but instead puts forward the possibility that male socialization “prevents most men from developing the ability to embrace the enriching, exciting, *normal* experience of spirit possession” (Keller 52).¹⁵² Smith agrees with Serad that men are not necessarily less capable of becoming possessed as women; although there are more anthropological findings of women becoming possessed in India, this does not definitively indicate that men are less permeable to possession, that instead their equal level of permeability is expressed in different configurations (xxvii), such as dance performance. If performance of possession is extending beyond fits of shaking to dance, than *śakti*, the form of power that is essential for possession, can be seen as a commodity that is transferred from women to men, just as men transfer their sexual organs and fluids to women.

¹⁵² Serad 190-191.

Instrumental agency is Keller's term for women's power in possession as unique conductors of penetrability, and she argues that this capacity for receptivity is itself a form of power (82). Although, her theory of instrumental agency is in at least one way compatible with understandings of *śakti*, in that *śakti* is also considered to be a power and an ability to be permeable and penetrated, in many ways Keller seems to essentialize women's experiences, seeing them as opposed to men's, instead of falling on a different point of a spectrum of agency. Keller claims that it is women's physiological capacity to be vaginally penetrated that makes them more receptive to possession (52), instead of socialization as Serad claims.

In Keller's view, possessed bodies cannot be defined as the ritualized agents, as Bell discusses, because possessed subjects are not the sole agents of their actions. Instead, agency is formed through a negotiation of power between the interrelationships of the human body and divine being (72-73). While I agree with Keller that a unique form of semi-divine agency is created during possession, in at least the Tibetan context, the possessed subjects themselves have agency. Tantric practice is not an overt "take-over" possession by the deity, with no regards for the *tāntrika*'s agency or identity. Tantric bodily and mental assumption of divine identity is achieved through the practitioners actively making themselves permeable to nondual union with buddhas, through properly cultivating a *samayasattva* and inviting the *jñanasattva* to enter into it. The agency that is formed during tantric possession is a negotiation of the devotee's own power as the *samayasattva*, combined with the deity's power as the *jñanasattva*.

Possession is not a spontaneous ecstatic event, but a highly constructed and codified conceptual performance. J. R. Freeman notes that possession is "socially stipulated and regulated at the level of organisation and recruitment, and ritually effected through practiced, performative enactment" (76-77). Ritual possessions in South Asia are just as formalized as sacred dances. It is not the case that in ritual settings where men dance and women shake that they are performing under opposing expectations; they both retain enough agency to perform according to ritualized regulations.

Some practitioners of tantric dance, *caryānṛtīya*, argue that in earlier times there was no codified system of gestures, body stances, or choreography, that practitioners were free to communicate the meaning of the songs (Ahmed 164). Although this certainly fits with the *siddha* culture that tantric song and dance developed in, dances in Tibetan and Newar contexts

are now highly structured and choreographed, just as the *siddha* songs that they express have also been codified and in the process lost much of their original, spontaneous character. Tibetan sources attribute the origins of some of their dances to the experiences of masters in meditation, who have viewed the dances of their guru with *ḍākinīs* (George 127).¹⁵³ In accordance with this, changes in dances do not occur due to conventional artistic experimentation or improvisation, but only occur if given in visionary experiences to respected lamas (Cantwell 48). Dancers, within the modern contexts of South Asian tantric Buddhism, must perform the dances of the deities that they embody according to performative structure of the meditative experiences of great masters, so in this regard they are not able to display their personal religious experience, nor lose personal control to the point that they cannot fulfil the choreography of the dance. However, it is their own experience of the deity within them, expressed as the aesthetic sentiment of *bhāva*, that allows the dancers and the audience to experience the *rasa* of *samarasa*.

The naturally sensual movements of the body during many forms of dances often causes the *bhāva* of *rati* (love) to be formed by the dancer, leading to the arousal of *śṛṅgāra rasa* for the audience. The arousing state of *śṛṅgāra rasa* is most prominent when *caryā nṛtya* culminates in *yab yum* posturing. In these performances, the performer's embodiment of the deity serves to convey the *bhāva* of *rati* (love), which leads to the experience of *śṛṅgāra rasa* by his audience in a controlled, systematic way. Within the space of the ritual this erotic sentiment can further be transformed into *samarasa*. If *samarasa* is experienced by an advanced devotee, the *samāveśa* state of dance may occur. In this case the ritual culminates with a divinely imbued dance performance which expresses *samarasa*, and parallels the dance begun with the *bhāva* of *rati* that was an initial vehicle towards this state.

Dance is considered to be a vital part of the monastic curriculum in Tibet and Nepal. 'Chams "dance" in Tibet is traced back to Indian master Padmasambhava.¹⁵⁴ For Newar Buddhists, dance is a more acceptable form of possession than overt shaking for high status

¹⁵³ George's claim here is largely based on Cantwell's work, specifically the meditative experiences of Guru Chos kyi dBang phyug (1212-1270) which led to the introduction of the Dance of the Guru's Eight Aspects (*Guru mTshan brgyad 'chams*) to many Nyingma monasteries (49). In Tibet, religious music is believed to come from the teachings of the *ḍākinīs* (Khanna 288) and in Nepal, the dancer's performance and visualization of themselves as the deity works back to enhances the singer's own visualization (of themselves as the deity) (Ahmed 162).

¹⁵⁴ Padmasambhava danced to subjugate the evil spirits which were preventing the building of bSam yas monastery in south-east Lhasa in 881 C.E. (Khanna 284).

males (Gellner 285). Many ritual dances are often performed exclusively by male Vajrācāryas in Nepal and only celibate men in Tibet (Ahmed 164) (Marko 147).¹⁵⁵ It is claimed that the Vajrayāna priests in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal have been practicing *caryā nṛtya*, esoteric dance, in their *sādhana* practice, for over a thousand years.¹⁵⁶ While towards the end of the first millennium C.E., *caryā nṛtya* was performed among the Vajrayāna Buddhists in Bengal, and possibly other parts of South Asia, today it is only observable in Nepal (Ahmed 161). *Caryā nṛtya* is performed in almost all the monasteries of the Kathmandu Valley (Ahmed 163). *Caryā nṛtya* is so essential for many tantric rituals, including empowerments, that if a dance is not performed, the ritual is not believed to be effective (Ahmed 165).

It is challenging to decipher whether Buddhist dance, endowed with *rasa*, leads to possession or expresses *āveśa*. Nāgabodhi’s autocommentary on Vajrabhairava *abhiṣeka* gives dance as one of the “signs of entrance” of the deity, whereas the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṅvara* claims that dance endowment with *rasa* is the vehicle towards “all *āveśa* states” (Smith 333, 391-392). Additionally, Gray argues that the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālasaṅvara* defines *āveśa* not as a separate state achieved through a form of dance, but a dance itself. Gray argues that in this Tibetan text, *’bebs pa*, their translation of *āveśa*, “does not refer to spirit possession per se, but rather the employment of dance to invoke the deity, with whom the practitioner seeks some sort of union in order to achieve the magical siddhis which the deity can bestow” (Smith 305). The “some sort of union” which Gray refers to is vague; possession itself can be referred to as a kind of union, and therefore his definition of *āveśa* as a dance which invokes a dance and leads to a state of union, does not convincingly negate *āveśa* and dance as separate states, although I agree with him that these states are often intimately connected.

While it is difficult to conclude which comes first, *āveśa* or *caryā nṛtya*, what can be concluded is that within current Tibetan and Nepali contexts, dance is a form of moving meditation that allows the dancer to move closer to the represented deity during the performance.

¹⁵⁵ Therefore, if a female character is personified it is done so by a male (Marko 147).

¹⁵⁶ *Nṛtya* can be defined more precisely as “mimetic dance, dominated by gestures that correspond to the narrative or theme of performance” (Schwartz 34) is just one form of dance found in India. There are also *nṛtta*, which is more abstract in its performance, *nāḥya*, which is highly dramatic, and uses specific body gestures outlined in the tradition, *tāṇḍava*, which uses masculine movements, and *lāsya*, using feminine motions (Schwartz 34-35).

Whether the practitioner begins the dance possessed, or becomes possessed through the power of the performance seems to vary on the context. This “fake it ‘til you make it” attitude is foundational to tantra.

Jamyang Norbu, essentializes Tibetan dance, ’*chams*, as a “meditation in movement,” where the dancer, aided by the chanting, costumes and music, conceives himself as the deity he is representing (George 127-128).¹⁵⁷ The Tengpoche Rinpoche explains that performing different dances makes the deities closer to the dancer and eventually unite with him (George 123), (Zangbu, op. cit. p. 40). Therefore, the aim of all tantric rites: “to have power; liberation through identification with the deity” (Gellner 143), is found in *caryānṛtya*, where during the dance performance the dancer focuses on visualizing the deity, in order to become one with the god (Ahmed 162). Madhu Khanna’s study of the Tibetan Hemis festival found that “there is no concept of a dancer as a person, the dancer is an empowered deity in the body of the human” (296). The dancer is considered to be the deity, while in the performative state of dance which has induced possession.

Sexual union can be viewed a kind of divine dance, the *mahāmudrā*.¹⁵⁸ Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen states that to know *mahāmudrā* “is to know the true nature of all phenomena, and to actualize it is to become a buddha” (Powers 416).¹⁵⁹ Vajravārāhī herself is often envisioned as a dancer. In Chodron’s biography she is describes as “Vajravārāhī, the female Buddha, [who] took a human body and enjoyed the magic dance of Mahāmudrā in this world” (Diemberger 151). Chodron’s biography claims that if tantric practice is done completely “the vajra dance (*rdo rje gar*) is indispensable” (Diemberger 194). When Chodron is called Vajravilāsini, she is said to perform and enjoy the multiple dance (Diemberger 50, 151). Śabara’s Vajravilāsini dances on the penis of her consort Padmanarteśvara, whose own name means “Lord of the Dance in the Lotus” (English 89). Further, the *Cakrasamvara Tantra* begins chapter forty-two with: “Then the hero, having drunk the “flower water” (*kusumodaka*) should recollect this mantra. The adept should thus dance with his consort” (Gray 120).

¹⁵⁷ Jamyang Norbu, *Zlos-Gar Performing Traditions of Tibet*, Dharamsala 1986, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ Guenther notes that while *mahāmudrā* is an exclusively female term in Sanskrit, in Tibetan it has both masculine and feminine nominal form, as either *phyag rgya chen po* or *phyag rgya chen mo* (193).

¹⁵⁹ *Mahāmudrā* is not the truth body of a buddha, but the realization that all appearances are the truth body, its state of happiness is both within and beyond *saṃsāra* (Powers 423).

The connection between dance performance and sex is clearly drawn in Ahmed's study. He plainly states that a dance between a non-celibate male and his female partner may culminate in *yab yum*, which Ahmed describes as "sexo-yogic union," but states further that this is done "under very controlled meditative conditions, so that lust is directly confronted, and crushed, by transmuting its energy into a form of wisdom" (176).¹⁶⁰ The transcendental aesthetic experience that was established during the dance must be maintained during *yab yum*, if it is done. The taste of *samarasa* must not be lost or permitted to revert back to the more base flavour of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, during either performance.

More than any other sentiment, dance is linked to *śṛṅgāra rasa*. Because lust negates the erotic experience of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, the viewer must not directly lust for the dancer, or the performative efficacy of the ritual will fail (Marglin 224) (Schwartz 52). If the audience fails to comprehend *śṛṅgāra rasa* in the dance the erotic becomes embodied at a personal level (Schwartz 53).¹⁶¹ Dance and yogic-sexual ritual union both face the same challenges of attachment destroying the appropriate aesthetic experience, turning *samarasa* back to *śṛṅgāra*. This is often referenced in tantric Buddhism, that desire, if not properly channelled, can cause further delusion instead of awakening.

The performances of dance and shaking are intimately linked through their mirrored gendered roles. It is observable in the context of Newar tantric rituals that often when the male agent performs, divinely imbued but remaining more in control than not, the female protagonist experiences divinity through a loss of control and agency, shown in her tremors. While the possessed states of dance and shaking are both performative actions, the woman assumes a more passive role, as we can assume she would be expected to in ritual contexts with more overt sexual practices.

¹⁶⁰ Harvey *An Introduction to Buddhism* 1990:267. The dance that Ana Marko observed on the final day of the *Spituk Gustor* festival at the Spituk Gompa in Ladhak had deities represented in *yab yum* (135 and 148).

¹⁶¹ This reflects a larger problem that Abhinavagupta notes can arise during performance, which is the issue of proper personal distance of the viewer towards the performer, wherein the viewer wrongly "identifies the various dramatic feelings with himself and relishes them accordingly" (Walimbe 50).

Conclusion

Although the maintenance of the taste of *samarasa* is sought in tantric rituals through the transcendence of *śṛṅgāra rasa* the ways that this flavour is expressed is not nondual in any straightforward sense. There are divergent expectations of how practitioners should display their possessed state of the Buddha's presence in their own body. Dance, as an ecstatic, but highly controlled ritual expression is suited to males in Newar Buddhism, and overt possession in the form of shaking is desirable in a ritual context for their wives. Within the highly sexualized symbolic context of Newar Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī initiation it can be seen that while the flavour of nonduality is sought by all ritual participants it is expressed differently for men and women. This pattern reflects the expectations of sexual yogas, where nonduality is created through bringing together the distinctly dual gendered behaviour of dancing and shaking, which simultaneously and divergently expresses a nondual state. Through dual performances of duality, men and women can create a flavour of nonduality. In this way duality is utilized for the purpose of its own transcendence into *samarasa*.

The coming together of Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara, a female and a male buddha, in nondual union, is not the same as the joining of a male and a female human during sexual intercourse. Buddhahood transcends gender, it is neither male nor female; it is only an *upāya* (a skillful means) that buddhas appear male or female. Therefore, *yab yum* figures do not express the joining of two dual opposites, but the reinforced presence of two nondual beings. However, when unawakened beings enter into states of trance which mimic the roles of *yab yum* figures they represent two polar dualities coming together to form one nondual union, and therefore act in exaggerated gendered roles, with women highly passive and men extremely active. *Tāntrikas*, not separately but through their union, mimic the state that the father and mother buddhas possess whether together or separate.

Whereas single humans cannot express *samarasa* on their own, but only through relation to each other, through possession with Vajravilāsinī, they can become the nondual state that she herself is always, whether in union with Cakrasaṃvara or as a solitary heroine. Vajravilāsinī may appear to be part of a dual pair, but she unlike humans, is part of a nondual pair. The power of her union with Cakrasaṃvara lies not in the union of two dual entities, but in the merging of two beings that together or separate embody nonduality.

The imaging of two dual figures in nondual union provides a powerful means of both comprehending and ritually expressing *samarasa*. Unlike other metaphors of nonduality which involve dissolution of identity, such as when salt dissolves into water, sexual union allows the original signs of duality, male and female, to be visible, while simultaneously being overwhelmed by the more powerful sign of nonduality. The *yab yum* symbolism portrays the capacity to maintain one's original dualistic form, while realizing and therefore becoming a nondual being, just as one retains one's human form while in the state of *samāveśā*, but becomes someone so much more divine: a buddha.

Conclusion

Finishing together: thoughts on nondual union

Good sirs, you have all spoken well. Nevertheless, all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing – that is the entrance into nonduality.

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra (Prebish and Keown 102-103)

Ritual sexual union provides a context in which dual ideas of pure and impure, male and female, divine and human, with correct attitude and guidance, can be shattered.¹⁶² Consort practice brings together male and female bodies to create a nondual symbol of complete union. Tantric rites aim at a direct aesthetic understanding of nonduality, that everything should be experienced as the same taste, *samarasa*. The various aesthetic representations, including dance and poetry, employed during ritual, are meant to create a world in line with the nondual tastes of the deity who is invited to share the place of the practitioner through ritual possession. During tantric ritual, devotees are possessed by both the sentiment of *samarasa* and the presence of the Buddha.

Although *samarasa*, nonduality, is the aesthetic taste of consort practice, the arousing circumstances by which practitioners' bodies come together in ritual union creates a challenge that the nondual flavour of *samarasa* may convert back to the erotic taste of *śṛṅgāra*. *Siddha* poets, including Lakṣmīnkarā, understood this challenge and purposely worked with *śṛṅgāra rasa* instead of against it. The language which Lakṣmīnkarā employs to describe Vajravilāsinī in union with Cakrasaṃvara is highly erotic, but it does not have only a sexual meaning but points towards the ultimate attainment of awakening: a *vajra* means both penis and the tantric path, a *padma* (lotus) is both the vagina that buddhas enter and the form from which they take rebirth, and the moon is both the semen in the body and the a symbol of the possibility of leaving this world behind. This coded, double language, *sandhābhāṣā*, exemplifies the attitude of the wild, antinomian Buddhist poets towards the necessity of transforming one's views, while actively

¹⁶² In order to comprehend this, substances which are repulsive, such as fecal matter and urine, or that are of the body and not of the body simultaneously, such as menstrual blood and semen, or that are layered with strong cultural standards of impurity, such as alcohol and dog meat, are consumed. While conceptions of purity and impurity are powerful perceptions, especially within a South Asian context, ideas of gender, male and female, shape our perceptions even more.

engaging in the world, as beings who have transcended the desire to fit into society, but remains in this world to actively show the way out of *saṃsāra*.

Buddhist *siddhas* engaged in socially transgressive behavior with the goal of bringing all their actions onto the Buddhist path. Therefore, sexual union is performed not to maintain the worldly mood of *śṛṅgāra rasa*, but go to the higher aesthetic of *samarasa*. Buddhists seek in ritual to transmute all nine conventional *rasas* into *samarasa*, but especially utilize *śṛṅgāra* because the erotic sentiment is considered to be the first, most primary, universal taste.

The sentiment of *śṛṅgāra rasa* is developed through the varying levels of visual and physical contact experienced by the ritual practitioners. Through these four stages of contact, eye-contact, smiles, bodily-contact and sexual embrace, *śṛṅgāra rasa* is formed. The contact between the man and the women is aesthetically powerful, it creates the erotic sentiment that can be transformed into *samarasa*, but their contact also results in a powerful transference of energy. During the four states of contact, specifically the last, when *padma* and *vajra* merge together, *śākti*, the female capacity to be receptive to another's agency, is shared by the women and transferred to the man. This contact results in a blurring of not only the lines of the gendered identities, between the sexual partners, but also between the divine and human identities of the devotee and the divine.

Through this descent of *śākti* (*śaktipāta*) a mutual sharing occurs between the human and divine bodies, a symbiotic “shared blessing” (San. *sabhāgaḥ*), where the human *samayasattva* (pledge being) merges with the deity's *jñanasattva* (wisdom body). Through this *samāveśa*, mutual co-penetration, the divinity becomes embodied and the human becomes divine through possession. The depth that the possession penetrates the devotee is dependent on the ability of the *tāntrika* to dissolve the boundaries of the gendered self.

Whereas the performance of poetry shows the nondual goal of tantric practice, the possessed performances of shaking and dance show that this aesthetic goal has been achieved. Women in Newar ritual show that they are the goddess Vajravārāhī through shaking, and men show that they are her partner Cakrasaṃvara through their performances of *caryā nṛtya*, highly codified esoteric dance. Their simultaneous gendered performances both express the sentiment of *samarasa*, not as a human might through poetry, but how a deity would through bodily

performance. The achievement of this entering of the deity is conveyed in divergent gendered performances by the male and female practitioner, returning some of the duality into nonduality, showing that *samarasa* encompasses everything, even duality itself.

Aesthetic experience allows humans to identify with emotive contexts beyond the boundaries of themselves, creating an atmosphere where conceptions of self and other disintegrate. Conceptions of self as dual and singular must be modified in order for *samarasa* to be experienced, and must be dissolved for the performative state of *samāveśā*. This dissolution of duality can be further enhanced within ritual settings where the devotee's aim is not only to love the deity, as in the context of *bhakti*, but to become his or her beloved, in order to never be separated from them. It is only through fully tasting *samarasa* that the state of nonduality beyond differentiation can be attained.

Vajravilāsinī and Cakrasaṃvara, in sexual union, portray the human capacity to merge with another being, thus losing one's own limited, singular, dualistic identity, in favor of a nondual realization of self. Although all buddhas are beyond dualities, and therefore beyond gender, tantric deities appear gendered and sexual active to show that humans are capable of acting in a nondual fashion during sexual intercourse. The goal of tantric practice is to fully taste *samarasa*, blur the lines between your unawakened and awakened self during ritual and then bring the flavour of nonduality into all one's experiences and actions, beginning with ritual performance. In tantra, buddhas act like they are dualistic, male and female, and humans act as if they are already awakened buddhas. However, it is not the case that any of the participants are acting inauthentically, that they are faking their aesthetic or bodily states of experience, rather they have expanding their sense of self to encompass all things and all tastes.

Appendix 1: *Vajravilāsinī namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana*¹⁶³

Here is contained the two-faced Vārāhī according to the system of the *mahāpaṇḍita* (Vanaratna).

In Sanskrit: *Vajravilāsinī namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana*

In the Tibetan language: *Rdo rje phag mo sgrubs thabs rdo rje rnam par sgeg ma zhes bya ba*

In English: *The sādhana of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī*

Homage

I prostrate to the Venerable Vajrayoginī

ll1ll Having the female *kāya* (form) of the unified body and speech of a Conqueror,
The mother indistinguishable in the form of the unity of emptiness and compassion,
Those worldly ones who understand [her] to be in nature the oneness of the two
truths, pay homage to the *vajra* lady having the extraordinary face of a pig, free of
attributes.

Preface

ll2ll In accord with the wish of the great Indian yogi Śavaripa,
Just like the excellent secret oral instruction is in accord with the Mañjuḥoṣa (Mañjuśrī)
consecration,
Tightly linked to [the unity of] emptiness and meditation that establishes wisdom,
I will compose Vajravārāhī's *sādhana* with firm rejoicing.

ll3ll If [some] one after me, copies [this text, and]
Mixes up fault and the faultless, [and]
[If] that should be so, then the virtue [of my work],
Would be understood to be the same by those whose joy [depends on] others.

Preliminaries

In that [case], first of all, the time being auspicious, the intelligent *sādhaka*, in a solitary place
completely in harmony with the mind, sits on a very comfortable seat. Having turned one's head
in the direction of [and having acknowledged] the gurus, one should meditate on emptiness in
order to guard against becoming haughty with the brilliance of [one's] ordinary pride.

¹⁶³ Samuelson, Anna. *A translation and study of the Vajravilāsinī namaḥ Vajravārāhī sādhana (Rdo rje phag mo sgrubs thabs rdo rje rnam par sgeg ma zhes bya ba)*. Honour's Thesis, Department of Religious Studies, University of Calgary, 2009. Supervisor Dr. Leslie Kawamura. It is found in Narthang phu 43a2-51a4, Cone 3734- and Ganden Tanjur 2680 – phu 58a3 (p. 30-1-3).

Meditation on suchness

Thus, it has been explained:

ll4ll Among the mental miraculous [power] of the tathāgatas,
Suchness is the supreme protector,
As “Suchness,” all things,
Everywhere are pure.

Then say [this mantra]: "Om śūnyatā jñāna svabhāvātā konya Hūṃ."¹⁶⁴

Hasta Pūjā (Hand Worship)

After that, pour the auspicious alcohol into the vessel. While repeating “Om Āḥ Hūṃ,” prostrate. In taking up a little cloth with the left hand, cleans [your] body by [saying] the three letters or the mantra of the goddess, rub [your] hands together. Then, while [making] the sign of embrace [with one’s hands crossed], [you] should [adopt] the method of anointing [the body] between the crown of the head to the toes.

Then [one] should meditate on the limbs [of the hand] in an orderly way like this:

Adorn the middle, the thumb with: Om Vaṃ;
The index finger [with]: Haṃ Yaṃ;
The middle finger [with]: Hriṃ Moṃ;
The littler finger [with]: Hreṃ Hriṃ;
The little finger [with]: Hūṃ Hūṃ;
[And] at the base and top of all fingers [with]: Phaṭ Phaṭ.

The bodily succession is thus:

At the navel: Om Vaṃ.
At the heart: Haṃ Yaṃ.
At the throat: Hriṃ Moṃ.
At the mouth: Hreṃ Hriṃ.
At the head: Hūṃ Hūṃ.
[And] on all the limbs Phaṭ Phaṭ.

Regarding the method of prescription, [there is] only the left-hand practice, and that, moreover, is expounded in the *Cakrasaṃvara* thus:

¹⁶⁴ The Sanskrit mantras have often been transcribed inaccurately into the Tibetan. I have done my best to fix these diacritical and other errors.

Always, [in practicing] the left-hand yoga
[Begin] by extending the left foot.

Establishing the ritual site

Therefore, when the site is cleansed by the alcohol [in a vase] held by the left ring finger, from writing the sounds of the three syllables [in] the triangular phenomena source three finger widths in size, offerings should be made [to] the essence of Vajradhāra of red flowers, oleander flowers and *bandhuka* flowers and so forth. Then purify the human skullcap possessing a symbol by burning incense. After writing the syllable Vaṃ visibly within the skull, properly fill it to the brim by venerating Vajradhāra by means of the three letters and put [it] on the phenomena source. Cover it on the top with a stainless mirror. Pour completely purified *sindhura* powder in a red silk clothe soiled by the menstrual blood of the *padma* [vagina] of the maiden. One should spread this leisurely in different directions of the mirror by rubbing [it with] the tip of the finger. Regarding them, because it is stated: “The essences of the victorious ones is the *maṇḍala* of essences.” Here, the essence of the Victorious One [is] the essence of enlightenment. The heart cakra, is the circle of the sacred, highest *maṇḍala*. From drawing what is called the phenomena source, with a triangular appearance, upon that, the essence mantra garland should be drawn only with the left hand using a golden stick. The instruction regarding this is [one] should draw inside the subtle side of the phenomena source, the nature of the Bhagavatī, the syllable Vaṃ possessing the primordial sound (*nāda*) [and] the crescent moon [and] the drop (*bindu*). Then one should sketch the effects of the phenomena source, in as many directions as the wrathful and the wholesome aspects of the pure *sku*, *gsung* and *thugs* (body, speech and mind), and in three strands of garland, [sketch] the King of mantras of the Bhagavatī. This [mantra] wheel is owing to the pure syllable A that causes [one] to go to the citadel of the perfect non-dual nature of the Bhagavan and the Bhagavatī. [One] should scribe the syllable Ha on top of the Vaṃ, [which is] below. In the external directions of east and so forth, [one] should draw in a leftward direction the particular joy-swirls. After that, [the dharma] practitioner should abide in the four *Brahmanvihāras* (Brahman abiding) (of compassion, joy, equanimity and love) and in emptiness.

Self generation

[One] should apply [oneself] instantaneously to the embodiment of Vajravārāhī having the definitive characteristic that can be explained from [the perspective of] that [*śūnyatā*] alone.

Summoning the Knowledge Being

Then by means of the flaming *mudrā*, in inviting from the abode of Akaniṣṭha the Bhagavatī together with her retinue, who observes by means of the hook-like light rays of the mantra garland of the goddess on the surface of the mirror, summon [the knowledge being]. Attract [it] (*akarṣaṇa*), make [it] enter (*praveśana*), bind [it] (*bandhana*) and propitiate [it] (*toṣaṇam*) while [saying] the individual letter *mudrās*, “Jaḥ Hūṃ Vaṃ Hoḥ” with each [movement].

Outer offerings

After that, [one] should properly worship the very one [Vajravārāhī] having the form of the mantra, with different kinds of foods, drinks, gruel, [alcoholic] beverages and tastes, all possessing the five attributes of sensory pleasure and [by means of] sublime worship: a variety of pure *bala* (any of the five meats), appropriate *madana* (feast liquor), the five offerings (flowers, incense, lamps, odors, eatables), songs, musical instruments, dancing, circumambulating, prostration and songs of praise.

||5|| Everyday and in each and every cardinal direction,
Every month, on the tenth day, [in] the direction [of] the forest,
Wishing for the two *siddhis* of Vajravārāhī,
The ritual of making offerings should be said in that manner.

This [ritual] is an offering [from a *sādhana*] other than *The sādhana of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī*.

Generating the Four *Brahmavihāras*

Then, in this manner, when seating [one’s self] properly in front of Vajravārāhī taking the form of a mantra, the practitioner, having seated [oneself facing] in the westward direction, should meditate intensely on the four Brahman abodes [with] all sentient beings as [one’s meditative] object. Regarding those [four Brahman abodes], the sequence [of each is as follows]: To always possess the thought [“May] all sentient beings be blessed with great bliss,” just like a mother’s [thought] to an only child is [the meaning of] loving-kindness. The characteristic of wishing to emancipate all sentient being who are drowning in the ocean of discursively thinking about disease/suffering and the cause of disease/suffering is [the meaning of] great compassion. The characteristic of being completely satisfied because [one] is not separated from the finest,

unchanging, treasure is [the meaning of] bliss. To be accomplished in the path that removes the eight worldly concerns [of gain, loss, fame, disgrace, praise, and blame] is [the meaning of] equanimity.

Self generation

Then, one should be cultivating [the practice of] *śūnyatā* by the elaboration on the arising [of] the interdependence of all phenomena, etc. Having done that [practice], from the instant of *śūnyatā*, in the midst of the expansion on the *prāṇa* of the outgoing breath make [one]self only on top of the phenomena source, the brightest red central red lotus.

The vow transmitting the red Vaṃ [is also] the female bodhisattva, the victorious Vajravārāhī. [One] should in meditation completely manifest the yogic identity only on the form [of Vajravārāhī].

- 11611 [Oh! Vajravārāhī]
By *sindhura* [powder] and [at] practice breaks,
Having the complexion completely red,
Owing to the accumulation [of] the wholesomeness of the radiance [of] a brilliant sun,
[You] outshine all the radiance of the seven suns (at the end of a *kalpa*).
- 11711 The collection of light rays [which is] the crescent knife
[Held] in the right hand pointing upwards,
May you who retain the aspect of the sow
Sever all sorrow.
- 11811 In the white skullcap
Completely filled with the blood of Māra,
Held at the breast in the left hand,
The supreme *kataṃ[ga]* rests in the elbow.
- 11911 By the garland of blue (or green) *vajras*,
The head is completely surrounded by [a hallow of] splendor,
Yet adorned by a garland of dried skulls;
A small amount of bound hair is free flowing.
- 111011 A garland of female heads hanging down to [her] shoulders,
A river of blood flowing from [her] *bhaga*,
Proclaiming completely the expanse of rejoicing,
[Oh!] on the right, the upward turned sow face.
- 111111 The main face wrathful merely in thought,

Being supremely beautiful, possessing six eyes,
Through the means of possessing joy,
Amused in the enjoyment of the various dances,

- ll12ll By the very circular earrings, necklace,
And the bracelets and belt,
Adorned by [having] the five signs [of observance],
Stay while in the dance of the half-*vajra* posture (*ardha-paryāṅka*),
- ll13ll [Oh!] lady clothed in nakedness,
[Oh!] goddess possessed of the youthful charm of a sixteen year old,
From within the highest flame, or
Within the circle of manifestation of this [goddess],
Resides the *padma* (lotus) in the phenomena source, and
From the syllable *Vaṃ* at the heart of the *Roṃ*,
Visualize the goddess of the view expounded previously,
Also, again that seed syllable at the navel centre,
[One] should observe as the syllable *Vaṃ*.

Inviting the deities

Then, by mentally constructing an assembly of radiant light possessing the form of an iron-hook, invite [the deities] from *Akaniṣṭha* and the various heavens, the complete retinues of the *Bhagavatī*, encircled by all heroes and heroines of the *Mahādevīs*, the visually praiseworthy *dākinīs* of radiant light freed from the concept of self, by proclaiming the sound *Pheṃ* with its accompanying [*mudrā*].

- ll14ll Arising from the palm of the hand of [one's] self-identification,
The middle fingers are pointed together,
The thumbs [and] the other fingers [in] *Amrita mudrā* (*ksepana*),
Making the blazing *mudrā* as if a flame.

[This verse] is for explaining [the *mudrā*].

Water offerings

With earnest devotion [one] should properly give offerings, in experiencing [one's] entry into the depth of open space in becoming fully realized. The sequence regarding that [offering] is this:

- ll15ll Offer the [pure] water possessing the eight superior qualities, [and]
Camphor [and] sandalwood chosen because of [their] fragrance,
In the front of the eyes of the venerable goddesses,
In accepting this please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ Hṛī Hraḥ Śrī Vajravārāhyai pravara sadkāra-arg[h]aṃ pratīccha Hūṃ Svāhā

111611 Offer the [pure] water possessing the eight superior qualities, [and]
Camphor [and] sandalwood chosen because of [their] fragrance,
At the feet of the venerable goddesses,
In accepting this please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ Hṛī Hraḥ Śrī Vajravārāhyai pravara sadkāra pādyaṃ pratīccha Hūṃ Svāhā

111711 Offer the [pure] water possessing the eight superior qualities, [and]
Camphor [and] sandalwood chosen because of [their] fragrance,
To the mouth of the venerable goddesses,
In accepting this please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ Hṛīḥ Śrī Vajravārāhyai pravara sadkār[ā]chamanaṃ pratīccha Hūṃ Svāhā

111811 Offer the [pure] water possessing the eight superior qualities, [and]
Camphor [and] sandalwood chosen because of [their] fragrance,
To the *sku (kāya)* of the venerable goddesses,
In accepting this please be kind to me.

Oṃ Ā[h] Hṛīḥ Śrī Vajravārāhyai pravara sadkar[a] prośkranam pratīccha Hūṃ Svāhā

Sensory Offerings

111911 Offer those flowers which are extremely exquisite among gods and humans,
Arising from water and arising from dry earth,
To the assembly of the venerable goddesses,
In taking these offerings please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ vajra puṣpe Hūṃ Svāhā

112011 Offer those fragrances which are extremely exquisite among gods and humans,
Arising from a combination of or an independent incense,
To the assembly of the venerable goddesses,
In taking these offerings please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ vajra dhupe Hūṃ Svāhā

112111 Offer this illumination of the precious Tārā,
Which is extremely exquisite among gods and humans,
To the assembly of the venerable goddesses,
In taking these offerings please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ vajra āloke Hūṃ Svāhā

112211 Offer this wind of excellent scent from every direction,
Which is extremely exquisite among gods and humans,
To the assembly of the venerable goddesses,
In taking these offerings please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ vajra gandhe Hūṃ Svāhā

112311 Offer tasty food with a [pleasant] smell and appearance,
Which is extremely exquisite among gods and humans,
To the assembly of the venerable goddesses,
In taking these offerings please be kind to me.

Oṃ Āḥ vajra naivedye Hūṃ Svāhā

Hymns of Praise

Furthermore, those who have venerated completely also by making offerings in accordance with the explanations given should sing hymns of praise.

112411 Because the selfless phenomena source (*dharmadhātu*) is pure,
Resting one's foot on the lying corpse,
Dance on the breast of the dead *ālaya*,
Thus, demonstrate the very pure essence.

112511 Bow to the sow in the truly pure Vajra [form]:
The three times [in] the root face functions by ultimate truth,
The third eye functions by pure vision,
As the nature of relative truth, a sublime face of an impartial corpse,
As the nature of absolute truth, possessor of the third eye.

112611 This action arising to uplift all selves,
Is completely free from the limbs of the initial offerings,
It is freed from sapphire *sūnyatā*,
Having been freed, it is freed from bonds of hair half tied in a knot

112711 Severing the delusion of thought and the sun *nāḍī* (right vein),
The crescent knife owing to sharpness itself, in the right hand,
[Removes] attachment [to] the moon *nāḍī* (left vein), and
The skull filled with blood in the left hand is the nature of *bodhicitta*.

112811 Next to beautiful path of *dhūī*, *bodhicitta*,
The ascending *khataṃga*
To the magnanimous lady contextually linked to “*khataṃga*”
Bow [to her], represented by the hanging banner.

112911 The foot of the emanation of dance, accomplishes the benefits for all,
The dignity [even] in being naked is beyond all obstructions.
The five pure victorious ones who properly possesses signs,
I respectfully prostrate by bowing [my head] to the mother of the conquerors of great
bliss.

Rejoicing in being actively engaged in praising, I compose these verses called *The sādhanā of
Vajravārāhī* named *Vajravilāsinī*.

The Seven Pure Actions (*Saptavidhārcanā*)

Following that, [we] will discuss the seven pure actions,

113011 The Bhagavatī[’s] one patterned form [in] the three realms,
The dwelling place of joyful bliss that arises simultaneously,
To the great Śrī Vajravārāhī, [and]
The Buddha, I go for refuge.

113111 The *mudrās*, tantras, *maṇḍalas* and cakras,
To those [things] that explain the dharma I go for refuge,
To the assembly of *dākinīs* who reside in the *maṇḍala*,
The circle of *devas* and the *saṅgha*, I go for refuge.

113211 In beginningless *samsāra*,
They, who are born, continually wander, [and]
Have done whichever of the bad actions;
Bestow on them actions which cause rejoicing.

113311 May I confess all those [wrong deeds done],
I promise to never [do them] in the future,
The meritorious actions of all beings, and
Similarly, [of] all worldly gods, and

113411 Buddhas with the conduct of rhinoceros (pratyekabuddhas),
[Of] śrāvakas and sons of the victorious ones (bodhisattvas),
[Of] all enlightened protectors,
I rejoice in all the merits [of those living beings].

113511 To all the all-knowing guides,
Dwelling in whichever of the ten directions,
Because it illuminates the darkness of samsaric unawareness,
May [they] be encouraged to light the lamp of the dharma.

113611 Because, the protectors expounding *nirvāṇa*,
Benefit the ordinary beings,
That they remain until the end of the immeasurable *kalpas*

I pray with palms joined together.

113711 Just like the noble sons of the victorious ones (bodhisattvas),
And the all perfect, completely awakened Buddhas,
Dedicate themselves immeasurably, in that manner,

113811 I will dedicate [my merit] to
The immeasurable perfect *bodhi* (awakening)
As long as the roots of goodness
Is together with joy.

So it has been said.

Summoning the Commitment and Knowledge Beings

Then, by [chanting] “Jaḥ Hūṃ Vaṃ Hoḥ,” see [the commitment and knowledge beings] as being of the same taste because [the knowledge being is] completely attracted (*akarṣaṇa*), made to enter (*praveśana*), bound (*bandhana*) and propitiated (*toṣaṇam*) .

Summoning the Buddhas & Granting Empowerment (Abhiṣeka)

Moreover, by the hook of light rays sent to all the consorts, such as Locanā and so forth, and to all tathāgatas such as Vairocana, who enters into *dhyāna*, and so forth, I request *abhiṣeka* by reciting the prayer:

113911 Just as the tathāgatas [granted ablution],
Accordingly at [Buddha’s] birth,
With this pure water of the gods,
May I, likewise, receive ablution.

Om̐ Āḥ sarva tathāgata-abhiṣekata samaya śrīye Hūṃ

From bestowing this empowerment, may Vairocana be made into the crown of the [buddha] family.

Offerings to the self-generation

Then, as explained above, one should make the offerings and so on properly.

Mental Mantra Recitation

Then, rest in the thought that focuses on the mental one-pointedness that is steadied by the fast spinning, in the manner of a potter's wheel, of the white colored joy swirls leftward, in the very direction of the face of the swine. Regarding that, *Clear meditation* states:

The red triangular phenomena source dwelling in the centre of the principal phenomena source, [is] really framed like the mandala of *sindhura* [powder]. Also as before, rest in the same mental one-pointedness on the quickly [rotating] circles. Then, from having bound the path of the *rākṣasaḥ* (vicious demon), from the perspective of the downward moving (wind), the mind is made to focus singlepointedly on the rotation in the remaining joy swirls, which are above, owing to the upward moving wind. What is being expounded?

114011 “From applying oneself all day long or throughout the four periods [of the night],
Whoever makes the action of turning over the earth with [one's] mouth (being a pig)
[their] practice,
Even [if done] by Viṣṇu, Indra [or] Brahmā,
Will be transformed into the conqueror from embracing the victorious bliss,

114111 “Whoever cultivates the pig-face [of Vārāhī], together with the cakra, [one's] practice,
To him/her, many women and various suitable clothes, and
A store of the four earthly grains, and a palace with food and drink;
Also all siddhas sitting on pure silk cushions will arise.”

Thus [has it been] expounded.

Mantra Recitation

Then, by extolling in the heart, the mantra of the Bhagavatī together with [her] attendants, lay aside other systems [while] doing the recitation.

The mantra is: “Om̐ Om̐ Om̐ sarva buddha ḍākinīye vajra varṇanīye vajra vairocānīye Hūṃ Hūṃ Hūṃ Phaṭ Phaṭ Phaṭ Svāhā.”

Here the instruction is said this:

114211 In the *padma* that comes from the mouth,
The tantric path of entering the *pad[ma] dhūtī*,
Once again the lotus appears from the mouth,
This is the defining characteristics of recitation.

Here, what is explained is that which becomes beneficial.

114311 The *tāntrika* having recited the mantras of the superior family,
Although [one is] other than the eight great *siddhas*,
Will attain the five subtle extraordinary sensory perceptions and so forth, and
The eight good qualities without exception.

114411 A wish-fulfilling jewel, a wish-granting tree, and an auspicious vase,
A glorious wish-fulfilling cow are praised,
Here, having attained them, there is nothing other than giving and
This king of mantras, becomes the giver of blissful wholesomeness.

Then, properly praising the ritual similar to the circle of gathering (*gaṇacakra*), the seven pure actions are also [done].

Torma offerings

Then, if [you] desire to give *tormas* (dough offerings), then [do this]:

Filling a *padma* vessel and so forth, with various kinds of food and drink and so on, [then] set [them] out properly in front [of the deity], and reflecting upon the *padma* vessel (skull) that takes the human skull hearth which arose from the white syllable Aḥ as its basis, [as] the fire *maṇḍala* arising from the Ram syllable which relied on the wind *maṇḍala* arising from the syllable Yaṃ [as its basis], perceive those provisions, such as food and so on, however much there may be, as being of the nature of the five nectars and the five meats that are transformed by [the seed syllables]: Oṃ Trāṃ Āṃ Khaṃ Hūṃ Lāṃ Māṃ Sāṃ Tāṃ Vāṃ. Perceiving the *samaya* substance, completely mixed by the fire fanned by the wind and blessed by the ten seed syllables as if the color of the rising sun, perceive a *khataṃga* facing downward produced from the nectar arising from the syllable Hūṃ suspended above. [Then because the *khataṃga* is] dissolving together with the steam below the liquid is mixed, turned to the color of mercury, natural cool it should now be considered the nectar of *siddhi*. *Āli* (vowels) and *Kāli* (consonants) having completely transformed on top of that [nectar] from perceiving the three syllables Oṃ Āḥ Hūṃ, by the brilliance of those [syllables], summon the nectar of all the heroes and heroines of the Mahādevīs of the ten directions. Then enter properly [into comprehending] the three syllables and from thinking of dissolving the syllable Oṃ and so forth in an orderly way, one should make the blessing of only the three syllables.

Offering the principle *torma*

Then, when, by the blazing *mudrā*, the Bhagavatī has been invited to the front, properly offer *argham* (drinking water) and so forth. Opening the palms upwards [in the gesture] of the *vajra* visualize the *padma* vessel. Considering [this to be] one's *torma* offering, this [verse] should be recited:

114511 “The goddesses are valid, the *samaya* is valid and also those three syllables [Om̐ Āḥ Hūṃ] are valid,
Being the highest truth, [may] it be the cause of all the pure,
Goddesses taking me under their care.”

With that very vessel turning in the left direction, repeat three times [the following mantra]: Om̐ vajrāralli Hoḥ Jaḥ Hūṃ Vaṃ Hoḥ Vajravārāhī samayas tvam̐ ḍṛśya Hoḥ

Offering the *torma* to the mundane *Ḍākinīs* and Requesting forbearance

By the white *vajras* arising from the white Hūṃ [on the tongues of the deities]

114611 With the white iron *vajra* arising from the white Hūṃ
Consider to wrap the Bhagavatī
Then from offering *tambu* etc., you should worship and
Having openly praised, you should request the desired attainment

114711 Cutting off the accumulations of life together with death, quell discursive thoughts,
You, who see that extent of things like sky is properly endowed,
Within a mind that increases like water of very profound compassionate protector,
Oh goddess! Be completely compassionate, be compassionate, be compassionate.

Then, to all those beings from the eight charnel grounds who reside properly [repeat the following mantra]:

Om̐ Kha Kha Khāhi Khāhi / sarva yakṣa rākṣas[a] / bhūta / preta / piśā[c]a-unma[tt]a-
as(p)asmāra / ḍāka ḍākīnyāḥ daya / īmaṃ baliṃ gṛhṇantu / samayaṃ rakṣantu / mama sarva
siddhiṃ me prayacchantu / yathai[v]aṃ / yatheṣṭaṃ / bhuñjatha / pibatha jigh[r]ātha / māti
kramatha / mama sarva [a]kār[a]tāyā sat sukhaṃ vivṛddhaye / sahāy[a]ka bhavantu Huṃ Huṃ
Phaṭ Phaṭ svāhā/

Think of satisfying [the deities], while repeating this so-called [mantra] twice. From offering *tāmbula* etc., through proper worship praise and from knowing the *chomā-ka-mudrā*, (secret hand signals), for the purpose of not becoming obstructed by ordinary omissions and so forth, you should chant [the following mantra] for the sake of attainment:

"Om Vajravārāhī samayam / anupālaya / Vajravārāhī tvenopatiṣṭha / d[ṛ]dho me bhava / su[t]osyo me bhava / supoṣyo me bhava / anurakto me bhava / sarva siddhiṃ me prayaccha / sarva karmasu ca me / chittaṃ śreyaḥ kuru hūṃ / ha ha ha ha hoḥ / bhagavatī / sarva tathāgata / vajra mā me muñca vāraho bhava mahā samaya sat[t]va āḥ [hūṃ phaṭ]."

Completely pleasing [the deity] with the five positions of the *Padma*-Turning *mudrā*, the sound of snapping the fingers of the thumb and ring finger of the left hand precedes the position of embracing of close absorption and by the saying “Vajra Muḥ” [one] enters completely into that cakra alone, and then having made the vow, [one should] dwell in the form of the goddess.

ll48ll By that very *jñanasattva*,
Oh spiritual warrior,
The foremost and essential primordial wisdom,
Please approach.

Torma as the Root Mantra

That the ordinary *torma* as the very root mantra of the Bhagavatī is the secret instruction is well-known. The ritual of the *torma* was explained in the sequence of the stages that appears in *The sādhana of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī*.

Authenticity of the Lama

Now, that the certainty of authenticity by the degree of the oral instructions of the lama should be experientially known as the form possessing goddess who is born spontaneously. She is the essence freed of the characteristics such as color, the rainbow beyond the limits of words, the castle in the sky, the beautiful paintings of the sky, and like the assembly of the five radiant lights which comes from precious jewels. From only the mental [mystical] domain of a meditator the white *kapāla* (skull), and the yellow corpse, and the black crescent knife, and the beautiful multi-colored offering banners in green and so forth dwell in the midst of the fence of the yogini, the embodiment of the five tathāgatas, [and] the Bhagavatī similar to the red blossom of the *bandhuka* flower transforms into the direct experience of the manifestation in the realm of the unobstructed skies.”

Thus has it been said.

The Practice of *Tummo* (Inner Heat)

Being similar to that, Vajravārāhī, who resides in the cakra of the *nirmana* (navel) of the practitioner, [transforms]. Within the red phenomena source in the core of the *padma*, in the *maṇḍala* of the lord of the sun, white Āli swirls left and Kāli lacking [the symbol] Kṣa swirls right. By turning [one's] attention inward, there arises in the midst of the pure nature of the nine nadis and the forty subtle winds, the syllable Oṃ which is the nature of *caṇḍālī*, the downward moving syllable U of the three patterns that occur simultaneously having the distinction of the uncommon pervade all beings as their nature. Like the unwavering light [of] a butter lamp, undisturbed by the wind, the crescent moon dwells in the image of the syllable Vaṃ possessing the tip of the *bindu* (creative potentiality). If one habituates [oneself in] proceeding uninterruptedly towards this, the wind having stopped, [one] will become the *a-saṃskṛita* (unconditioned) citadel. That being the case, being free of both the size and division of the moon, in taking [one's] stand on this by blocking the two movements of the wind, [one] enters into the *dhūtī*, containing [the vowels] Āli and [the consonants] Kāli. Then, by slowly urging with the downward moving [wind], the path of the *dhūtī*, [which is like] a thin line, having the nature of *tummo* (*caṇḍālī*) will be set up from the top of the *nada*.

From the mouth of Śabara, the great lord of the yogins:

ll49ll “Having bound the mouth of the rakṣana,
The light rays should be properly linked.
The syllable A of the lower chakra [which is],
That sow will rise up.”

It is said so.

That line is thin like the thread of the *padma* because the Prajñāpāramitā is the nature of *dhūtī*. Moreover, because the nature of wisdom (*jñāna*) is aroused by the fire of attachment, just like a bolt of lightning, the nature of radiance, [the light] burns up the cakra of dharma, enjoyment and great bliss. Again, by being aroused by the downward moving [wind], the 72,000 *nāḍīs* are all completely purified. Furthermore, the syllable Ham is enjoyed by going into the cakra of great bliss. In a [manner] similar to the flow of oil from [a vessel with] a crack, [one] should perform ablutions to the Bhagavatī with the stream of nectar falling uninterrupted from the middle of the syllable Ham. By reaching the end of the jewels of the base and the middle and top, by means of

the stages of cakras, by means of the series of various different moments and so forth, abandon the discrimination of material and immaterial things. The impartiality of cognition and the knowable [objects] are similar to the bliss of a young maiden, [and] are naturally merely the nature of experiences, are beyond expression or the domain of purity. As reality, they are filled with elixir. By just stopping the breath in all the *nāḍī* cakras, they properly come into being as the great bliss which arises simultaneously with the yoga that arises as non-discursiveness. They possess the wisdom body (*jñāna-kāya*) of union. They are free of cause and effect, and characteristics and non-characteristics. The essence of *mahāmudrā* (great seal) is Vārāhī, and is stated by the venerable [one] of the *mahāsiddhis* (Kṛṣṇa-cāryapāda):

ll50ll “She cannot be described by the syllable Vā,
She is free from the characteristics of the syllable Rā,
Because of being without origins she is the syllable Hī,
In Sanskrit she is known as Vārāhī.”

Consort practice

By the venerable Lakṣ[m]i it is also said:

ll51ll “The graceful [deity] possessed of the precious *vajra* [penis enters] into the tip [of] the opening [of his] consort,
From binding [the legs] in the cross-legged posture, [he enters] into the *padma* [vagina] treasure chest,
As long as there is flavor of the Buddha’s presence, the moon in the *bindu* coming forth,
For that long [one] attains the highest status [of] Lord Buddha (Munīndra).”

Also from the *Song of Saraha* who invites the master Nagarjuna:

ll52ll “In whichever life, there is a certainty of a belief that must be removed in one’s mind during that time.
Although there may be a wholesome heart owing to joy [know that] it is nothing more than a concept.
Accordingly, [know that] the cause of samsara are those two things from which one must be freed.
There is no other [way] that [one can be] liberated from the mind that does not comprehend the world.”

That being the case, it will be like this: By going in the direction towards the very ultimate truth, delighting properly in the bliss in all things, when all conjecture disappears, having identity as nothing more than appearances, for so long as whatever great bliss is possible, for that long [one

is in] meditative equipoise. After that, from the perspective of going in the direction of that very cakra of the yoginī, which arises from the great bliss [in] all things born at will, venerate completely through one's own great bliss and recede from self nature for the sake of quickly completing [of] the two accumulations of merit and wisdom.

ll53ll Collecting the two accumulations and meditating [on them] are excellent actions; therefore,
The three worlds arise from [belief] in self, and the attachments to life are of the nature of self.
That everything of this samsaric existence is none other than myself is the cakra of the yoginī.

ll54ll The yogin who properly [practices] the yoga following the meditation,
Having habituated [himself] unceasingly in meditation,
Even though [he] may have done the five heinous sins and so forth for a small *kalpa*,
[He] should trust the accomplishment of *mahāmudrā* for an immeasurable length of time.

Bliss of *Phowa*

Here there arises the thought of joy alone:

If the bliss that is solidified by the bliss of *phowa* (the transference of consciousness) and the bliss of the *bindu* should be those of the fools, then how is it that the great bliss will arise from the components of action?

[Response:] This is a suffering that changes every moment, but [compared to] Great Bliss, the bliss of that is of the three worlds is incomparable even to one ten millionth of a fraction!

The Yoga of Sleeping

That may be true, but regarding it, according to statement of the secret oral teachings of a sublime lama, “Taking the yoga of sleeping as [one's] basis, meditate by applying [oneself] to the cessation of breath, perception and the sense faculties, the application is sleep on account of the moment of thought, and die for a moment.”

Furthermore, so it is said in the *vajra*:

ll55ll “Herein, death by whatever bliss,
Meditation (*dhyāna*) is spoken about as that bliss.”

Any other death would be delusive.

So it is also said in the *ŚrīCakrasaṃvara* [tantra]:

115611 “By this conceptual thought, the so-called “death,”
[One] is lead to the Khecara citadel.”

By that very meditation, because there is no transformation of the *bindu* the great bliss will arise.
[This is] known as the attainment. He takes great bliss as if food through the yoga of sleeping
while conscious [of sensory] fields and sense faculties, because for him this is the same nature he
is praised and so forth as Bhusuku.

115711 “This was realized by Bhusuku
By the very [act of] remaining asleep,
Regarding everything else as an [worldly] accomplishment.”

Clear Light Yoga

115811 To one accomplished in this yoga, the great elements, such as earth and so on
Because they dissolve in a mirror in an orderly way, [they are] like various forms [in a
mirror];
By the wise ones, they are experientially known as a circle of illusion,
By means of wisdom, as nothing more than a baseless object to be known.

Even that wisdom is illustrated by means of the five kinds of characteristics. From single-pointed
meditation, smoke is the first form and the appearance like a mirage is the second. The form of a
fire-fly is the third A blazing lamp is the fourth, the fifth is the brilliance free of discursive
thought, [which] appear like an eternally unobstructed sky.

The *siddhi* of *mahāmudrā* is supreme because [one] has acquired the succession of the signs in
that manner, in achieving non-doubt, removing fear, [by] means of single-pointed [meditation
one] must overcome [doubt and fear]. The spontaneity of the natural act of giving is the
wholesome act of removing suffering is the causal *tummo*. Because that alone is the nature of
wholesomeness, which is unchanging, by the firmness of that very yogic practice being linked
with the upward ascending from the jewel.

115911 “The lamp in the vessel of meditation,
Completely fills the midst of water [with light],
When [the water] enters into the vessel which is its home,
Regard the water as trickling upwards.”

This is only a parable of what is to be known.

Moreover, because each and every cakra is the connector within the vessel, the *bindu* is of the same taste as the syllable Haṃ, because they are the very nonconceptuality of everything. After that, [there is] the need to know the commitment (*samaya*) which is to be stretched for the purpose of the *siddhi*. You should not practice the not uprooting of attached to life and of things that are not auspicious and wholesome. Shouting and downfalls and arrogance and intoxication and anger and attachment and delusion, etc. should be abandoned with regards to the self which have riches and honor as their causes.

Never consider the left hand practice, the deity nor the mantra as different. To know the complete purity of nature, and to guard worldly people, and to abandon also wrongdoings, and do not be afflicted by your own ascetic practice, and never do not truth all women, specific consorts and wives. [One should] abandon sluggishness and excitement and so forth, and the root downfalls, and being caring for the sake of others, and diligently striving to perform the veneration of Buddhists, and [one] should not torment another for one's own sake. Having removed doubt for the sake of attaining *siddhi*, [one] should practice like a courageous lion. [Thus concludes] the completion stage instructions from *The sādhana of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī*.

Dedication of merit

ll60ll Just as the intention of Vajradhāra (Vajra holder) the pure Adamantine Vajravārāhī,
Having bowed to and exhorted with the Joy the Great Protector of the world and the
Spiritual Guides,
In order to experience quickly the unsurpassable Joy of Ānanda, the heap of living being,
By those virtues attained through my actions, may all beings become a Vārāhī.

The sādhana of Vajravārāhī named Vajravilāsinī of Śrī Vajravārāhī was written by the great *paṇḍita*, the venerable Śrī Vanaratna. However, through the graciousness of that very great *paṇḍita*, [and] by the [translated] books of the life-long *bhikṣu* Vajradhāra Gyatso, may those who were unable to grasp because they do not correctly understand, come to understand the very meaning of [their] teaching.

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