

THE TANTRA AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST

What need is there for the Tantra when we have the Veda? In reply to this enquiry the commentator of the Tantra will tell you that they meet the needs of the men of our times, the need of the soul of that modern man who seems to have cut himself off from traditions and revelations and feels himself to be a selfreliant individuality, a free being: we Westerners would express it as « self-consciousness ».

We have indeed the impression that the Tantra books speak above all to the Faustian, anti-mystical type of the new man, as Goethe conceived him; who wishes to base his inner experiences on the granitic foundations of reality, courage, freedom from prejudices. Even the love of the child for the Mother means nothing if it be not an act of will, the donation of something organic one really possesses. Such devotion is, indeed, an aspect of power. How can one give something one has not got?

These considerations were aroused in us on seeing the beautiful new edition of the *Tantra Tattva* of Shríyukta Shiva Chandra Vidyârnavá Bhattachâryya Mahodaya, published under the title of *Principles of Tantra* (Publishers: Ganesh & C^o, Madras, 1952, pp. 1200). As is known, the *Tantra-tattva*, the systematic presentation of the *Tantra-sâstra*, was published forty years ago, edited by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) who had as collaborators Shrí Jnanendralal Majumdâr and Shrí Baradá Kânta Majumdâr. This second edition contains in one volume the two then published and is still the basic text required for an understanding of the *Tantra-shastra*, thanks partly to the clear summary contained

in Arthur Avalon's introduction. To him is due the credit of having, by his subsequent essays and by the publication of the texts, enabled the Western World to become acquainted with the Tantra doctrines.

The central theme of the work is that of the *Sakti*, that is to say, the theme of the primordial cosmic power. What is *Sakti*? The usual idea man forms of power is of something related to his mode of being and of knowing; but this mode, in so far as it is not possessed in its full value, cannot be the measure of power *per se*. It is evident that the Tantric system in which all the metaphysical conceptions of India converge and interpenetrate, from the antique Vedic ritualism to the recent Visnuite mysticism, brings a new element into the world of tradition: the awareness of the changes that have occurred in the inner mind of man, in his *Kali-yuga*, and the intuition of a new type of spiritual activity.

It would seem that the Tantras possessed that knowledge (which in the West lies at the foundation of modern philosophy) of the fall of the ancient metaphysical conceptions according to which man is guided by the gods, by revelations, inspirations. The Gods now leave man alone; he must stand by himself; he must fulfil in himself and by his own unaided efforts, the nature with which he has been endowed from the beginning. Those who wish to turn back, follow « the path of the dead », for they only unbury in themselves former states of consciousness, beyond which man must now pass if he is to be himself; it is the way of liberation. The Gods expect man to travel along that path; he is not to return to a state of dependence and passive remissive-

ness, justified only in ancient times when man was not yet really born as a personality (*Siva*), but lay immersed in the bosom of the Mother (*Sakti*).

Gradually, as time passed by, accompanied by corresponding revelations (the traditional Yoga), man acquired an independent personality; but he paid for this individuality by the loss of the ancient states of transcendent consciousness. Man's experience becomes more and more of this earth; it is the *Kali yuga*, the dark night that precedes dawn. The ancient Mother now leaves man alone in the solitude of sensorial experience, for he must now face the responsibilities of freedom. And it is just for this that the Mother must now be found again in the material world, the world of sensation, in the physical body. Nor can this rediscovery be made any longer as a gift from the gods; it must be a free action, a personal initiative taken by man, something he may decide to do, but that he may also refuse. This is the path of freedom; but it is also the way for the rediscovery of the Mother in conformity with a new Yoga, which remains an impenetrable mystery for those who are immersed in that traditionalism in which Tradition no longer flows. If it does not flow it is because tradition may not be confined once and for all in this or that system; it does not allow itself to be fixed in ritualistic forms, in human habits and customs, for its perennial and unchangeable character lies in its perpetual transmutations.

To find once more the Mother, the primaeval power towards which human conscience today is immersed in a dreamless sleep: this is the task to which the *sat-cakra-sâdhana* points: the principle of consciousness itself, of *Siva*, must be reached in its abode, the *sahasrâracakra*, whence it will draw strength to descend to the *mûlâdhâra-cakra*, and join with the principle of creative power, the *Shakti*, slumbering there in the form of the serpent, *Kundalini*.

The means for performing such a task is that which, in Western terminology, would be described as «absolute immanence». All forms of transcendence are now abstractions for man who has no longer the direct perception of the Divine. That awareness from which the start is made can not be replaced by intellectual postulates which make no substantial change in the factual condition of human nature. The awareness man already has, his physical

constitution, his body, are the positive points from which the start is made. It is a question of reconquering those modes of being in their essence. If the foundations of the world are really in the Divine, then the Divine will be found there as a positive essence. Such is the premise to the method taught by the Tantra.

Their theory develops in conformity with a doctrine of knowledge which does not seek confirmation in itself but in the method it implies. It is not, therefore, a question of turning back, of seeking for the corpse in oneself — which is what is being done unawaredly by the West with psychoanalysis, analytical psychology, of which such outstanding personalities as Shrî Aurobindo and Ramana Maharshi have spoken with justified severity — it is a question of going forward, not of instilling fictitious life into that which is dead by recourse to means which are themselves connected with dead things, but of resuscitating it, taking possession of the essence of one's own being, transmuting oneself.

According to the *Tantra* «being» — in so far as it is an exterior physical or superphysical reality — opposes thought in so far as thought itself is opposed to being, that is to say in so far as thought, unaware of the very act by which it consecrates life, lives as an abstract function, detached from the central focus of the individual.

The Tantra thus conceive the reality of being, not as proceeding from a principle referable to that reality, but as arising from the relations by which the Ego can appropriate it. What distinguishes the several forms of experience to which this gives rise, is the degree of union existing between *Siva* and *Sakti*, that is to say the degree in which the divine force becomes action.

Thus the purely intellectual or devotional methods of the previous schools are eliminated, making room for the conquest of the most deep seated centre of personality, which is the starting point along the path leading to the possibility of dominating life and physical reality. The exterior order of things is in itself power, and the power vested in a thing does not depend on intellectual recognition, *i. e.* reflected thought. Here, therefore, *Mâyâ* is not a value in itself but one of the ways in which *Sakti* presents itself; it is, therefore, *Mâyâ-Sakti*. The *jîva* may even allow himself to conceive the world as a play of illusions, a dream, a phantom; but this phantom will always be able to force

itself on him as brute necessity, whatever his mental position may be. The Tantra, on the other hand, seek to acquire sure knowledge of principles from their corresponding results. The proof of power is in its action. The Divine Power itself, the Mother, becomes action in all its forms of manifestation, down to what may appear to be Maya; but at each degree, as knowledge and action are one — a position of absolute immanence which in some way reminds one by analogy of the *verum et factum convertuntur* of Giovan Battista Vico — it may be aroused again by the *sâdhaka*. This arousing is neither the intellectual movement of the *Jñâna-yoga*, nor the idealistic stand taken by the *Vedânta*; it is the realisation, the identification with the very power of the Mother, the radical transmutation of oneself, the resolving capacity of *natura naturata*, i.e. of that lower *Prakṛti* which is constantly asserting itself as a necessity in ordinary persons, even if in its nobler form, which is the *sattvica* one.

The spectacle the world offers us is not something final and inexplicable in itself, except in so far as we see it take place before us while we are unable to link it up with our inner decision: but what we have to realise is that we are not only the spectators but also and above all the actors responsible for this spectacle. We must realize that this spectacle is before us because it is the ever changing sum total of our sensorial perceptions, and that to view this spectacle systematically, not as a confusion of exterior notes but as a harmonious whole made up of many elements — mineral, vegetable or animal — culminating in man, is in itself an act of the mind. From the perception and the control of this first immediate action of the spirit the possibility of liberty arises; man begins to acquire freedom in the inner source of his being, at the point in which his realisation of himself as a conscience and the actual fact of his *being*, coincide in a unity which is the power process of the world. Here begins the unification of his soul with the very soul of the world, alluded to in the Tantra when they speak of the union of the *deva* (*Siva*) with the *devî* (*Sakti*): a union which realised in all its degrees by virtue of the *Kundalinî-Sakti*, is the final consummation of the *sâdhana*.

We do not secure liberation by obedience to a law; for such a law, notwithstanding its metaphysical nature, would still be a necessity, a bond, a condition — a chain of gold binds

no less than a chain of iron; — we secure it by identifying ourselves with the principle from which the laws arise. Those laws are needed only by the *jîva*, the uninitiated, the non-free, who cannot stand by themselves, who cannot find in themselves the principle of their being which is the principle of the world itself. The Tantra path is therefore an *ati-dhârmik*.

One cannot but perceive in this doctrine a position surprisingly similar to that of Western philosophic idealism, there where it tends to cast off not only all traditional metaphysics, and all myths relating to a reality that stands apart, whether sensorial or supersensorial, but to free itself even from the limits placed on knowledge by Emmanuel Kant, who, after all continued those myths, giving them a modern form. The path towards absolute immanence along which Hegel started, thus getting beyond all residual « realism », all conceptions which see in the world a reality, whether physical or super-physical, independent of the individual who contemplates it, unaware of this fundamental action of his which is contemplation, this path which was pursued to its logical consequences by Giovanni Gentile, is, even if in reflected form and in the terminology of Western philosophy, substantially the same as that which in the Tantra is looked on as the methodological premise.

Western idealism, carried to its logical conclusions, may be considered as introductory to the metaphysics of the Tantra. Thought is seized at the moment when it becomes power, when it arises continuously in the conscience without preliminaries, a reason to itself alone; with no need of a logical reason or of a previous thought to account for its being. It is evident that when the spiritual seeker tries to translate into action this intuition of idealism, carrying it beyond the mere plane of philosophical cognition, he will have to set aside argumentation and reasoning. Henceforth the only path he can follow will be that of concentration, meditation, contemplation. Let us consider the ultimate meaning of « thinking thought »: it can only become practical experience through the possession of the act of thinking; and this can only be the result of mental concentration. This is the discovery that must be made. The spirit of the West seeks that of the East through the positive conclusions to which it is led by its own philosophic concept, by the lucid vision of « thinking thought ». This postulates

meditation. It is all a matter of perceiving this.

In the realisation of *thinking thought*, the Western man may begin to acquire the experience of *pure will*, in as much as he begins to wish for something that is not required of him either by the laws of his physical nature nor by those of the abstract mental sphere. In this thought, desired for itself, and in this will, set in motion by thought which is not subject to the physico-psychic « nature », it is evident that man begins to realise his *shivaic* essence, that is to say his liberty which places him beyond all *dharma*. The final argument of sound Western thought — not of that which has fallen into the blind alley of problematization — entails for those of clear understanding and who are still in touch with the inner meaning of the *philosophia perennis* the urgent need of meditation, *dhârana*, *dhyâna*.

It is not easy to understand the value of this meditation; as the culminating point of the philosophical experience it does not imply the elimination of thought but its acquisition on a higher level at which thought has not yet taken the form of logic (dialectics) nor has yet shut itself in a conceptual form. Obviously, such an acquisition is only possible if that conceptual form, that dialectical logic, have been possessed and then solved. Otherwise, while believing that one is meditating and contemplating, one falls into a state of psychic illusionism, that is to say in mental states still linked to the dynamism of the nervous system. A mind still tied to the cerebral process, *i.e.* conditioned by sensorial experiences, cannot go forward towards supersensorial experience if it has not first realised in what way and in what shape it is tied to the corporeal world.

Any form of metaphysics, whether Eastern or Western, that believes it can elude the cognitive function of thought, is foredoomed to failure. Unfortunately, today it is usual among those pursuing esoteric doctrines to turn to the Spiritual World, or to Tradition, or to the Yoga, in a frame of mind that takes no account of the changes that have occurred in the inner constitution of the modern man as compared to that of the man of antiquity to whom, when certain special conditions were present. Tradition spoke without need of any mediation.

A well defined « Spiritual object », focussed in conformity with the rules of a subtle esoteric criticism, is the starting point, and as it has been so clearly fixed one believes that

one is advancing towards it; but one has not realised that in order to enter into real communion with the super-sensorial, it is not the object of knowledge that counts but the inner act aroused by that object. The object is only a means, a pretext; it may be a tree, the sun, Tradition, concept, any thing.

The Spiritual World is not to be sought outside of the meditative activity that seeks for it, for it is in that activity that the Spiritual World ready expresses itself. To think of it as an « object » that is somewhere waiting to be known, and that can therefore be known or not, is an attitude of mind not dissimilar to that of the ingenuous realist who believes he has before him as reality *per se* a « material », a « nature ».

Tradition therefore cannot exist apart from the act of the mind that resuscitates it in itself; it lives there alone. To believe that a tradition exists which stands before us like a « thing », possessing a mysterious aspect of its own which may even be identified, and that therefore one can approach it or not, be within or outside of its « orthodoxy », means that one has ingenuously mistaken an object or a motive of spiritual activity for that activity itself; this would be a sort of metaphysical naturalism. We have in mind more especially the position taken up by René Guénon, an admirable critic and exponent of doctrines, but certainly not one who points out the path for attaining the essential values that are shadowed forth in those doctrines. The error consists in seeking for the spirit or the reality outside of that inner activity in which the spirit begins to express itself.

Sakti, *Siva*, primordial power, the transcendent *Ego*, the *a priori* essential principle of being, all that of which the mere conception, in terms familiar to the Western intellect, enabled Kant to conceive a new, even if restricted, vision of the world, *in primis et ante omnia*, cannot be other than action, function, pure thought, inner activity, the *Ego* in the moment of meditation.

Kant began to falsify his initial intuition when he tried to analyse the several forms of opinions so as to derive categories from them. These categories, deduced from the analysis of opinions so as to deduce from them categories. These categories, derived from the analysis of opinions *per se*, considered as products of the mind, crystalised effects of the activity of thought, could not but be and indeed turned out to be nothing but abstract modalities

without the life of thought, yet obliged to act the part of spiritual functions. Categories indeed are not ways of *thinking* but expressions of things *thought*, which themselves have thought as their premise. Kant did not realise this, and therefore he could not solve the problem of gnosiology, but made it more complicated. He had to fix limits to cognition, thus preparing, in the field of philosophy, the subjection of man to modern materialism with all the catastrophic consequences to which it has given and is still giving rise.

The Tantra are certainly a highly modern way of the Yoga; provided one really possesses the key to them. That key will always remain lost for those who see in the Tantra a system that will be realised as a result of the mere fact of knowing it; the lack of that knowledge being an obstacle to its realisation. The Tantra as living metaphysics cannot be an object of knowledge, a mere philosophic effort, or a chance encounter. He who without knowing them, himself knows how to live the act of meditation should be held to be in touch with their eternal essence; provided the meditation is not studied and abstract, determined without the possession of the problem of value, carried on as the result of « spiritual development » through which egotism, decked out in ascetic virtues, comes again to the fore. The meditation required must be a process of which one is master; it must be meditation *per se*, the living and unmistakable sign of the spirit in which the spirit itself is found.

Is it possible for thought that is unaware of its limits, of its deeply-rooted conformity with sensorial experience to arrive at such a meditation? It is not possible to evade the task of a conversion of force-thought which is a clear problem of cognition and therefore, in the first place, a problem of value, of awareness of what one really wants, and not the acceptance and practice of Tantra merely because one sympathises with their doctrine.

It must be living meditation, not the abstract or intellectual or sentimental cultivation of a theme set for study, which always inevitably links up mental activity to its instrument, the brain. If the act of being is not itself an ideal world but a mere category, and if — as the Tantra teach — a category is an inner action, how is it possible for the act of meditation to be achieved otherwise than as the identity of being and non-being, *i.e.* as creation, *i.e.* as power? This action that wells up within one, which presupposes nothing prior to itself, is

pure thought. It exists in so far as it is self-created, drawing on a universality that is complete in itself. It cannot exist until it is self-created. As soon as it defines itself as «being», «category or concept» it ceases to be, it dies as an abstraction or as knowledge. According to Plato, the essence of a thing or of an idea exists; but according to the new metaphysics the existence of a *cogitatum* in so far as it is *cogitatio* is always nascent; it creates itself from that nothing which is all; the measure of its existence is its infinite capacity to realise itself. A truth, this, that leads us back to the central thought of the Tantra.

The opening out to the *Sakti* — according to Shri Aurobindo's modern interpretation of the Tantra — in which the *bhakti* and the *samarpana* are nothing but mediating attitudes, leads up to identification with the Mother, that is to the unutterable activity of the *sâdhana*. In its essence it must be recognised as a purely inner act; the recovery of the original spiritual life; it is an inner deepening and strengthening that tends to the *bhâva*, an expression that cannot be defined which expresses that state of perfect lucidity thanks to which thought surges up as being, being *per se*, being expressed in things, in such absolute identity with them that the Ego and the world are one.

Through the process of Western philosophy the requirement of the bhava is postulated as the ultimate term, represented as the achievement of « pure thought » or creative thought which will remain as a pure and motionless mental intuition, unless the evolution of philosophy, which takes place through the activities of such great figures as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Gentile, conceives a thought whose purpose is to accompany by its own development this spiritual aspect of world history.

The positive response of the Orient to this need is given by the Tantra which point to the *dhârana* and the *dhyâna* as the paths leading to the *bhâva*.

Faithful to the principle that the spirit is a reality, let us add that, thus understood, the point of contact between East and West, sooner than in the sphere of politics or sociology or culture, can be found in the soul of man, who will be fit for it in so far as he finds in himself the sacred source of meditation.

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