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Search for Meaning in Tantric Ritual in the Śaiva Scriptures*

JUDIT TÖRSÖK

INTRODUCTION

The question whether ritual is meaningful or not and if yes, what meaning it can have, keeps haunting various fields of Indian studies. Although it would be important to summarise what conclusions have been reached so far, it would require another paper — or even a book — to give an overview of the situation. The aim and scope of the present paper being different, I need to skip the general discussion of the problem, in order to concentrate on some aspects of what certain Sanskrit texts actually say about Tantric ritual. Nevertheless, it can be remarked in general that whatever meaning the texts seem to find in the rituals they prescribe, it always necessitates the performer's prior knowledge of this meaning. This knowledge then can be of various kinds, such as the recognition of one's identity with Śiva or the knowledge of the hidden meaning of ritual elements etc.¹

*This article is dedicated to the memory of H  l  ne BRUNNER, whose pioneering works on Śaiva ritual have opened up a new field in Indian studies and have served as the most important sources on the subject. A first version of this paper was read at a workshop on Tantric ritual on the 20th of March, 2004, organised by Prof. Harunaga ISAACSON at the South Asia Institute of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. I am grateful to him and everybody present for important comments and criticism, especially for remarks made by Prof. George CARDONA and Shaman HATLEY. A second, revised French version of the first half of the paper was presented on the 3rd of May 2004 at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. I am grateful to Prof. Lyne BANSAT-BOUDON for the invitation and her very useful comments. Moreover, I would like to thank Dominic GOODALL for his invaluable criticism and suggestions to improve this paper at its final stage.

¹This paper owes much to Alexis SANDERSON's ground-breaking article on Meaning in Tantric Ritual (SANDERSON 1995). An important part of that article is devoted to an analysis of the ways in which Kashmirian exegetes, most importantly Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja (of the 10th and 11th centuries AD), interpreted some aspects of Tantric ritual in an effort to infuse meaning into or to project some new meaning onto its elements. In addition to the philosophy of the Pratyabhijñā school, their ultimate exegetical source was the esoteric systems of the Kaula Trika and the Krama, regarded as the highest in a hierarchy of tantric systems. The

Leaving aside the exegetical interpretations, I shall attempt to give a number of examples taken from Śaiva scriptural sources and to show that certain concerns about ritual already appear in these rather unsophisticated texts.² These passages could demonstrate that the exegetes were not the first to raise such questions. While in the majority of cases one can show only that the arguments are similar, in a few passages there are more than one reason to suspect that the exegetes made use of some ideas taken directly from these sources. Be as they may borrowings or parallel arguments, these extracts reveal that in spite of great differences in aims, method, and level of sophistication, the scriptures and their interpreters were often concerned with the same problems, albeit from different perspectives. The passages examined will then also show that there is an internal theoretical development within the scriptural tradition of questioning the meaning of ritual action, of searching for meaning in ritual.

The examples given for various developments are meant as illustrations and are definitely not exhaustive. All the sources examined here were available to the Kashmirian exegetes of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Among these sources, the *Tantrasadbhāva* is one that has a special place and importance. This text is one of the three surviving scriptures of the early phase of the Trika tradition, which forms the basis of Abhinavagupta's exegesis.³ Just as another early scripture of the Trika, the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*,⁴ it concentrates on the attainment of supernatural powers and the cult of *yoginīs* and other female spirits associated with it; but it also discusses some aspects of ritual and

ideas of the Kaula and Krama systems were freely made use of when interpreting the scriptures of other tantric currents.

²Such investigations would not have been possible without important recent contributions to the study of Śaivism. First, Dominic GOODALL's critical edition and translation of the *Parākhyaatantra* made this important text available. In many passages, it is only thanks to his efforts that the text of the *codex unicus* has become intelligible. His introduction is also a major contribution to the study of the Siddhānta. Second, Somdev VASUDEVA has identified and transcribed several early Kaula sources from Nepalese palm leaf manuscripts. I am grateful to him for having made his electronic texts available to me, of which the *Kulasāra* in particular has proved very important for this paper. He has identified a citation of the *Kulasāra* (fol. 38v) in Kṣemarāja's *Śivasūtravimarśinī* p. 136 and references to the title in *Kubjikāmata* 20.67 and *Kulacūḍāmaṇi* 1.9. Finally, it is also of great help to scholars of Śaivism that Mark DYCZKOWSKI made the electronic texts of a number of scriptures accessible on the website of the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute. However, in this article I make references to my own working edition of parts of the *Tantrasadbhāva*.

³See SANDERSON 1988:672.

⁴For an edition and translation of most of the text, see TÖRZSÖK *1999.

gives some rather unique interpretations of some of its elements. Many of the quoted passages were then borrowed in a Kaula scripture, the *Kubjikāmata*, which is heavily indebted to the Trika tradition.⁵ The fact that the *Kubjikāmata* borrows these very passages could be of double importance. First, it may show how elements of the early Trika became absorbed into the Kaula tradition; second, it could possibly suggest that these questions about ritual, which were raised in a relatively early phase of the scriptural tradition, may have been a prompt for developments towards the overtly anti-ritualist Kaula systems.

However, this mixed nature of the *Tantrasadbhāva* does not imply that it dates from before the appearance of the Kaula system or its earliest texts. At the present state of research, it would be difficult to establish a relative chronology, especially because many of the early Kaula texts have not survived.⁶ There are two possibilities one could assume: either the *Tantrasadbhāva* represents a real transition between the *yoginī* cults and the Kaula systems, or it was compiled at a date when some early Kaula scriptures were already in existence, thus uniting the two traditions in a relatively late compilation. The latter hypothesis seems more likely, especially in view of a similar case, that of the *Mālinīvijayottara*. The *Mālinīvijayottara* is the third of the three surviving scriptures of the early Trika, and just as the *Tantrasadbhāva*, it shows influences from different Śaiva currents, thus suggesting a compilatory origin and a relatively later date among the early scriptures.⁷

The questions about ritual that the texts examined here discuss are of diverse nature. First, I shall examine what general meaning some of the Tantras see in Śaiva ritual. Then I shall give a few examples of the ways in which they interpret particular ritual elements or details. Finally, I shall raise the problem of how particular elements can be or can become meaningful for the ultimate purpose of ritual, and re-examine the question of the meaningfulness.

RITUAL AND ITS OVERALL MEANING: ŚIVAHOOD IN INITIATION AND BEYOND

Śaiva initiation confers the right to practise certain rituals (both obligatory and optional) on the initiate and, at the same time, it is the purificatory

⁵See SANDERSON 1988:686ff. and 2002:1.

⁶On this problem, see VASUDEVA 2004:XLI.

⁷On the syncretic nature of the *Mālinīvijayottara*, see VASUDEVA 2004:XXXIX ff.

rite that performs the major part of his preparation for final release. In its commonest form, which does not produce salvation immediately, initiation purifies the individual soul while leaving certain residual impurities, which are then eliminated in the course of time.

Among the earliest scriptural sources, all of which prescribe initiation to be performed with basically the same ritual structure, the scriptures of the Siddhānta appear to treat the purpose and meaning of initiation much more often than more esoteric schools teaching the cult of Bhairava and Yoginīs; and there may be a reason for that.⁸ Tantras teaching the cult of Bhairava and Yoginīs concentrate much more on the attainment of supernatural powers and on worldly enjoyments that result from the attainment of such powers, and therefore are less concerned with the meaning of rites that lead to these (for them) obvious results. But the scriptures of the Śaiva Siddhānta aim primarily at salvation,⁹ which normally happens only at the time of death. Therefore, they have probably more reason to argue and demonstrate why and how that (in this life) invisible result shall come about after considerable time of dedication. As the *Tantrasadbhāva* puts it: All teachings say that initiation equals liberation; but liberation is invisible, although it is proven by a visible cause.¹⁰

In fact, envisaging a question about the very existence of liberation as such was not inconceivable to the Śaiva tradition:

PRATODA SPOKE:

Some hold that this liberation is empty of the existence of all things, since it is when the existence of those has reality that the soul is involved in what characterises *samsāra*.

PRAKĀŚA SPOKE:

If liberation were not real, a means [to accomplish it] could not reach it, since its nature should be to accomplish a [really existing] goal. [And] who would use

⁸On some other questions concerning initiation and liberation in the Siddhānta, see GOODALL 2006.

⁹This does not mean they do not teach the attainment of supernatural powers; but their focus is different. See SANDERSON 1988.

¹⁰*Tantrasadbhāva* (9.236, referring to the various visible signs one is supposed to display when initiated): *śāsanānām tu sarveṣāṃ dikṣā mokṣo vadanti hi / sa ca mokṣas tv adṛṣṭas tu sādhyate dṛṣṭahetunā*. This argument is less sophisticated than what SANDERSON 1995:24 refers to before elucidating the theological problem and the answers exegetes have tried to give. 'It is only here [i.e. in the obligatory worship of those who seek liberation alone] that it was felt necessary to formulate explanations of the far from obvious process by which ritual as the manipulation of finite forms and quantities could achieve the infinite and absolute state of liberation.'

a means [to such a goal]?¹¹

It is also notable that among the demonstrably early scriptures of the Siddhānta the texts concerned with the problem of how ritual works and what its meaning is are relatively late.¹² This may be due to the fact that such questions were raised only after the Śaiva Siddhānta established itself to some extent and it was felt that a somewhat more solid theoretical defence of the system was needed. Such defence may have also been prompted by the fact that other (Śaiva) schools tried to challenge the original ritual system. It is also noteworthy that scriptures other than those of the Siddhānta discussing this problem also seem to belong to a relatively later layer of the tradition (such as the *Tantrasadbhāva*).

As to the purpose of initiation, it is often brought out in a semantic analysis (*nirvacana*), which is frequently cited by the exegetes.¹³ In all versions of this analysis, initiation, *dīkṣā* is derived from two verbs: to give, *dā-*, and to destroy, *kṣi-*. The *Parākhya*tantra, which has a relatively long discussion of the subject, puts it in the following words (15.10):

It bestows (*dā-*) Śivahood and destroys (*kṣi-*) the bonds of the soul — therefore it is called initiation (*dīkṣā*), established as such because of the bestowing and destroying functions.¹⁴

¹¹*Pratoda uvāca: sarvārthabbhāvaśūnyā sā keṣāṃ cin muktir īpsitā / yatas tadbhāvasadbhāve pumān saṃsāradharmagaḥ // Prakāśa uvāca: abhāvarūpayā muktyā sādhanam na tadāśritam / sādhyasādhanarūpatvāt prayoktā sādhanasya kaḥ // Parākhya 15.46–47.* Translation quoted from GOODALL 2004:399. As remarked by GOODALL 2004:399 in view of the subsequent discussion, it is not very likely that a particular rival's conception is referred to when the real existence of liberation is questioned. However, the argument could be perhaps that of a *śūnyavādin*.

¹²For the relatively late date of the *Mataṅgapārameśvara* and the *Parākhya*, which are used here, see GOODALL 1998:lxiii–lxiv. As GOODALL 2004:lviii concludes, the *Parākhya* is perhaps the latest of the early listed scriptures of the Siddhānta. Among the early Saiddhāntika scriptures, it is only the *Mrgendra*, the *Mataṅgapārameśvara* and the *Parākhya* that have more developed theological discussions (see Goodall 2004: xlvi).¹³

¹³This semantic analysis is mentioned in SANDERSON 1992: 287 and GOODALL 2004:386 note 865. For yet more examples and their translations, see *Somaśambhupaddhati* vol. 3, pp. 3–4. See also *Bhairavamāṅgalā* 257b–d, with a slightly different wording: *śivatvam ca pradīyate / aśivā (?) malakṣayaṃ kṛtvā dīkṣ[ā] iti vidhīyate (iti corr. Somdev VASUDEVA: itya MS).*

¹⁴*śivatvasya pradānam yat kṣapaṇam pāśasamtateḥ / tena dīkṣā samākhyātā taddānāt kṣapaṇāt sthitā //* For a different formulation with the same purport, see *Mataṅgapārameśvara Kriyāpāda* 2.2–3b (also referred to in GOODALL 2004:389, note 865): *dānam nāma parā kṣāṭhā mantrapradhvastakarmanām / paśor yā vyaktim āyāti prakṣiṇakaluṣasya ca // anayoh śāsane siddhā dīkṣā kṣapaṇadānayoḥ.*

As pointed out above, normally neither of these two aspects of initiation is fully carried out in the rite of initiation itself. For if the initiate was to obtain perfect Śivahood, and if all his bonds that tie him in this world were to be cut, he would cease to live and would become Śiva or Śiva-like immediately. Instead, what initiation bestows is supposed to mature through time, as explained in the same text about the fruit of initiation:

Its fruit arises through maturation, just as [fruit arises] from sowing seeds in the ground. That fruit is Śiva-hood, which releases [from the bonds], [and] which is of the nature of bliss.¹⁵

The above cited semantic analysis of the word 'initiation' occurs in slightly different forms in other texts. According to these variants, things to be given and to be destroyed are not exactly the same. The citations below replace the attainment of Śivahood with that of knowledge, and the bonds that are severed with the impressions of the bound soul or karmic residues obliterated.

True knowledge is bestowed (*dī-yate*) and the impressions of the bound soul are destroyed (*kṣī-yante*). Therefore, because it is associated with bestowing and destroying, it is called here initiation (*dīkṣā*).¹⁶

True knowledge is bestowed and the impression of actions is destroyed. Therefore, because it is capable of bestowing and destroying, it is called initiation; it is the purification of those who are ready.¹⁷

The variations concerning what is eliminated, whether it is the impressions of the bound soul (*paśu*) or actions (*karma*) that are destroyed seems less important here. Although being a bound soul implies not only karmic bonds, what is destroyed during the most part of initiation is karmic impurity. This

¹⁵ *paripākāt phalaṃ tasyā bijakṣepād yathā bhuvī / ānandalakṣaṇaṃ tat syāc chivatvaṃ muktidaṃ phalam, Parākhya* 15.45. Translation by GOODALL 2004:399.

¹⁶ *dīyate jñānasadbhāvaḥ kṣīyante paśuvāsanaḥ / dānakṣapaṇasamyuktā dīkṣā teneha kīrtitā*, scripture cited by Jayaratha ad *Tantrāloka* 1.43 and by Kṣemarāja ad *Svacchandatantra* 5.87, replacing the second *pāda* with the singular of the same words.) See also *dīyate paramaṃ jñānaṃ kṣīyate karmavāsana*, scripture cited by Yogarāja ad *Paramārthasāra* 3.

¹⁷ Cited by Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha in his *Mṛgendravṛtti ad Mṛgendrāgama Kriyāpāda* 8.1 *dīyate jñānasadbhāvaḥ kṣīyate karmavāsana / dānakṣapaṇayogyā hi dīkṣā śuddhiḥ kṛtātmanām*. The first compound is translated more literally as 'true nature, which is Knowledge' (la nature vraie, qui est Connaissance) by BRUNNER 1985:198.

could explain why *karmavāsanā* appears here as a synonym of *paśuvāsanā*, even if, strictly speaking, the latter would imply more than karma.

The transfer of knowledge instead of Śivahood in some versions is possibly more significant. What can be intended here by (true) knowledge is the realisation of one's identity or similarity with Śiva, which ultimately leads to Śivahood after some maturation, as the passage above explained. But knowledge may also stand for one of Śiva's qualities the initiate shall finally obtain at the time of his liberation: omniscience.¹⁸

This variant leads us to the question of the role of knowledge in Śaiva ritual in general. For it is knowledge of Śaiva doctrine, transmitted in the course of initiation, that can possibly ensure that the performer of the ritual perceives and understands the meaning of what he does.

It is often reiterated that one of the major differences between the dualist Siddhānta and nondualist schools of Śaivism is that the latter gives more importance to knowledge, in the sense that it sees liberation primarily as the knowledge or realisation of one's identity with Śiva. By contrast, dualist Śaivas maintain that initiation must always involve and depends on external (i.e. not internal, mentally performed) ritual, which removes (most) impurities in the same way as one removes a cataract from the eye. Now this opposition is certainly present in exegetical texts,¹⁹ but it does not imply that knowledge in general is more important for the nondualists. For, as SANDERSON (1995:40–41) points out, dualist exegetes claim that the practitioner can remove impurities that remain after initiation only if his daily ritual is also a cognitive action. It is nevertheless true that according to this theory, knowledge works as a kind of action and not as knowledge.

If we turn to the scriptures, some that are qualified as dualist or belonging to the Siddhānta lay rather heavy emphasis on the role of knowledge, and it seems they do so much more often than the supposedly nondualist texts of *yoginī* cults. They explain the link between Śivahood and knowledge as follows:

The real nature of Śiva is revealed to the individual so that his knowledge may manifest itself. Enlightened by this knowledge, he will appear as Śiva and he

¹⁸It must also be remarked that the *Parākhya* perhaps deliberately transformed the line into a more recognisably Śaiva definition by replacing knowledge with Śivahood and karma with 'the bound soul' (*paśu*). The *Mataṅgapārameśvara* also presents a more shaivite version.

¹⁹For the categories of dualist and nondualist in various Tantric senses and in the scriptures as opposed to exegetical sources, see SANDERSON 1992:282ff.

will be Śiva when his body ceases to exist.²⁰

When one is initiated by a guru, due to an intense descent of Śiva's Power, one becomes omniscient like Śiva, being devoid of limited knowledge; then one is filled with the manifestation of Śivahood and one shall not return to the world of transmigration.²¹

He [the person who has attained Śivahood] has that true knowledge which is left, all bonds [having] fallen away it. It is pure, has everything as its object and is devoid of all limitations.²²

When ignorance and one's limited power to act are consumed by the fire of knowledge, then all dispositions of the mind such as passion [or desire (*abhilāṣa*), egotism (*ahaṃkāra*)], together with things beyond this range [i.e. anything else produced by ignorance²³], will be destroyed immediately. From that moment, one's [remaining] karmas are destroyed and one will obtain unlimited Śivahood, visibly and completely.²⁴

Knowledge as a powerful instrument and an important aim appears in contexts other than initiation and the direct attainment of Śivahood. It is also claimed as necessary for the performance of any ritual. Ritual and knowledge about what it means are thus inseparably linked, as it is explained in the passage below, using the more general concepts of 'action' (which implies more specifically ritual action) and 'knowledge'.²⁵

Knowledge by itself is not seen to produce results, since, when [objects of desire such as] women or food are cognised, enjoyment of them is not possible without action. So too action depends on knowledge, for action is necessarily

²⁰ *jñānābhivyaktaye vyaktaṃ śivatattvam aṇuṃ prati / vyakto 'sau śivavad bhāti śiva eva tanukṣaye, Mataṅgapārameśvaratantra, vidyāpāda 26.72.*

²¹ *tīvrāśaktinipātena guruṇā dīkṣito yadā / sarvajñah sa śivo yadvat kiñcijjñatvavivarjitaḥ // śivatvavyaktisampūrṇah saṃsārī na punas tadā, Kiraṇatantra 1.21–22ab.* For a different translation according to Rāmakaṇṭha's interpretation, see GOODALL 1998:215ff.

²² *sajjñānaṃ tasya tacchiṣṭaṃ sarvapāśaparicyutam / śuddhaṃ tat sarvaviśayaṃ sarvopādhibahiṣkṛtam (Parākhya 15.65)* describing true knowledge in the state of Śivahood, along with true dispassion, power and dharma. Translation by GOODALL 2004.

²³ According to Rāmakaṇṭha's commentary ad loc.

²⁴ *yadā vidyāgninā pluṣṭā sāvidyā kalayā saha / madādayas tadā sarve hy āśayās cordhvagocarāḥ / dhvaṃsam āyānti vai kṣipraṃ; tatkṣaṇāt kṣīṇakarmanah / puṃso 'mitaṃ śivatvaṃ syāt prakataṃ sarvatomukham (Mataṅgapārameśvaratantra, vidyāpāda 26.75cd–77ab).*

²⁵ The context of the following passage is the discussion of the four means (*sādhana*) one can employ to attain liberation, viz. knowledge (*jñāna*), (ritual) action (*kriyā*), yoga and observances (*caryā*). The arguments, however, go beyond these specific considerations.

preceded by knowledge. Therefore both knowledge and action come together as the means to attain the fruit. And *caryā* [[observances]] and yoga are taught to be subsidiary to knowledge and action.²⁶

According to passages cited above, the transfer of Śaiva knowledge can have several roles after initiation: it reveals and confirms the initiate's Śivahood, which he will fully obtain after death; it destroys by itself several negative dispositions of the bound soul (so knowledge has the power to act on the bonds of the bound soul); and Śaiva knowledge is also indispensable in order to perform Śaiva ritual after initiation, which in turn also contributes to the full destruction of the bonds.

But this efficiency of knowledge — as well as ritual action — can only work for those who have the right to perform post-initiatory practices. Women, children, the elderly, the hedonists and other such weak creatures are unable to obey post-initiatory rules of practice, and therefore are excluded from (ritual) action and knowledge:

And for children and others [incapable of following the post-initiatory observances of the cult], He has taught the cleansing of post-initiatory observances and such, by which the activities referred to as knowledge and action are therefore excluded for them.²⁷

The same scripture also raises the question of meaningfulness in another context. It concludes that life-cycle rites and the like are meaningful only inasmuch as they ensure a social framework for Śaivas, which is important to show to the outside, non-Śaiva world.²⁸

Celibacy [and other observances] are for the sake of the [continued] functioning of social institutions and practices. Otherwise Śaivas would be reviled as being without correct practices and without social groupings. There are no particular benefits of those [practices and so forth to be derived] from the variety of practices that can be chosen; but still this variety of practices must be

²⁶*kevalatvena na jñānaṃ dr̥ṣyate phalasādhakam // yataḥ strībhakṣāvijñāne tatsukhaṃ na kriyōjjhitam / jñānāpekṣā kriyāpy evaṃ jñānapūrvā yataḥ kriyā // ato jñānakriye dve 'pi phalopāyasamāgate / caryāyogāv api proktau citkriyānugatāv api (Parākhya 15.14cd–16). Translation by GOODALL 2004:391–392.*

²⁷*bālādīnām api proktaṃ samayādiviśodhanam / vyāpāro dr̥ḥkriyākhyo 'to vyāvṛttas teṣu yena saḥ (Parākhya 15.31). Translation by GOODALL 2004:395.*

²⁸I understand that *brahmacarya* here stands metaphorically for practices belonging to life-cycle rites and other rituals, defined and prescribed by Smṛtis and practised by Śaivas and non-Śaivas alike; but that it does not cover Śaiva initiation and daily ritual. For a different interpretation, see GOODALL 2004:394.

protected, just as [the caste hierarchy of] brahmins and the other castes [must be respected].²⁹

A similar view is expressed at one place in another, earlier scripture,³⁰ which states that any post-initiatory expiation is performed only to keep up appearances. Although the text refers to expiatory or reparatory rites (*prāyaścitta*) in particular, which are meant to make up for omissions and faults committed while performing other ritual actions, it may understand that expiation includes most post-initiatory rites by extension; and that those initiated do not need any ritual, for they are already liberated. Indeed, apart from certain elements in daily ritual, all other rites were or could be generally considered expiatory.³¹

Those who belong to the four varṇas, of unmixed origin, and have been purified by Śaiva initiation are released from all sins, just as those who are absorbed in Śaiva knowledge.³² [For them,] any [post-initiatory] expiation is taught only to protect common social practice.³³

Although the passages cited justify the necessity of knowledge including ritual knowledge, and, in one way or other, maintain that at least certain post-initiatory rituals and practices are needed, they do not clarify why or in what particular way post-initiatory ritual contributes to the destruction of the remaining bonds or impurities in the course of time.

The answer given by the exegetes³⁴ is that the daily enactment of one's transformation into Śiva, which is a necessary part of all Śaiva worship, gradually contributes to the ultimate transformation obtained only at death. Although

²⁹ *āśramācāravṛttyartham brahmacāryam iha sthitam / nindyāḥ syur anyathā śaivā nirācārā nirāśramāḥ // na tatphalaviśeṣo 'sti vṛttibhedair vikalpitaiḥ / tathāpi paripālyo 'sau vṛttibhedo dvijādīvat // (Parākhya 15.28–29). Translation by GOODALL 2004:394.*

³⁰ (*Pauṣkara-*)*Pārameśvaratantra* cited in GOODALL 1998:361.

³¹ On this idea, deriving from Vedic ritual theory, see SANDERSON 1995:31

³² The last clause may be understood in two ways. It could mean that those absorbed in Śaiva knowledge are liberated even if they are not of unmixed origin etc. (This has been followed in the translation.) Or it could have a restrictive sense, i.e. that not only one has to belong to the four varṇas, of unmixed origin etc, but also absorbed in Śaiva knowledge in order to be liberated. The grammatical structure suggests the former interpretation, but the restrictive meaning could equally have been intended, for the last clause may be added there in this form for metrical reasons.

³³ *varṇināḥ śuddhajātīyā[ḥ] śivadīkṣāviśodhitāḥ / vimuktāḥ sarvapāpēbhyāḥ śivajñānaparāś ca ye // lokasamvṛttirakṣārtham prāyaścittam prakīrtitam* (cited by GOODALL 1998:361, who understands the passage to mean that all post-initiatory observances are unnecessary).

³⁴ See SANDERSON 1995:38ff. and 1992:287.

exegetes would differ in the interpretation of how exactly this contribution to Śivahood takes place, they would agree on the necessity of daily rites due to this principle. And this enactment of Śivahood is indeed prescribed in all scriptures. Their principle is often cited in the form of “*śivo bhūtvā śivaṃ yajet*”: becoming Śiva, one should worship Śiva.³⁵

While the exegetical understanding seems sensible, I have not found any actual occurrence of such interpretation of the daily ritual in the scriptures. Either it was something too obvious for their authors to state, or it was simply not one of their major concerns.³⁶

What is nevertheless quite remarkable is that some early scriptures of the Siddhānta do question the point and meaning of certain rites. Even if these questions are rare and cannot be called typical, they show us that such doubts were not voiced only by anti-ritualist Kaula texts. These argumentative passages form an important part of the history of ritual interpretations.

Another noteworthy element in these arguments is that, at least in some cases, it is accepted that some — or even most — rites are performed only for the sake of preserving common social practice, in order to maintain a façade of conformity. Part of the difference between the ritualists and the anti-ritualists then is simply that the former want to preserve this façade, while the latter do not find it necessary.³⁷

³⁵Another possibility has been proposed by Richard H. DAVIS (1992). He suggests that what is enacted in the course of daily worship is the divine cosmological activities of emission and reabsorption, and that it is — at least partly — by this enactment of the divine functions that one’s transformation is effected. Examples for reabsorption include the reabsorption of all the levels of the universe (*tattvas* of the subtle body) before worship, and the return of the secondary circles of deities into the central one, Śiva, at the end of a *pūjā*. Emission is performed when the worshipper creates his divine body with mantras, or when he visualises the secondary circles of deities (*āvaraṇas*) around Śiva. Such practice of creating and reabsorbing the universe and the senses seems to be described in *Paramārthasāra* 78 as a special kind of mantra recitation (*japa*); but here there may be an allusion to a more esoteric Kaula practice. In Yogarāja’s commentary ad loc. (p. 150), *°sṛṣṭiṣṭhitisaṃhārakrameṇa* should be emended to *°sṛṣṭisaṃhārakrameṇa*, a reading found also in the ms. Wilson (238a) at the Bodleian library.

³⁶It is of course also possible that I have failed to identify this interpretation or a relevant passage in the available corpus, or that a now lost text dealt with it.

³⁷This difference of attitude is also reflected in two similar *pādas*: *lokasaṃvṛttirakṣārtham* (‘in order to protect common social practice’) in the above citation of the (*Paṅskara*)*Pārameśvara* as opposed to *lokapravṛtīhetvarthe* (‘because of social practice’) in a passage of the *Tantrasadbhāva* quoted below.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICULAR ELEMENTS OF A RITUAL

Another way in which ritual is or can be considered meaningful is if its constitutive elements are meaningful, in other words, if each of its elements taken separately contribute to the ultimate purpose, whether directly or indirectly. Here, I shall examine four ways in which scriptures attribute meaning to certain elements of ritual. The first is the identification of various elements with Śiva, the second is the analysis of the meaning of elements in the immediate ritual context, the third is giving meaning to some elements irrespective of the ritual context in the form of semantic analyses, and the fourth is attributing meaning through internalisation of some ritual elements.

THE MEANING OF ELEMENTS IN RELATION TO ŚIVA: IDENTIFICATION OF A SUPPORT WITH ŚIVA

In the course of all Śaiva ritual, various factors of the rite are transformed into Śiva, by infusing mantras into them. This fact has been emphasised by nondualist exegetes in order to affirm that it promotes awareness of one's identity with the god, and thus leads to liberation.³⁸ In fact, the same procedure is seen in all the Tantras and manuals, not only in those of the nondualist school. Moreover, this identification is practised not only in view of final liberation, but also to obtain success in this world. Scriptures abound in lists of factors which are thus transformed. The following is just a sample to illustrate the idea in various ritual contexts, from daily ritual to initiation and rites of magic.

One should worship the Lord of gods in an image (*liṅge*), on a platform, in the fire-pit [as the sacred fire] or in the [practitioner's] body — thus is it always taught.³⁹

After the *pūjā* performed in this way on the platform and in the [purificatory] chalice, one should worship the Highest Lord in the fire-pit and in one's own

³⁸On the nonduality of the factors of action, see SANDERSON 1995:48–49

³⁹*Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* 17.28 (in the context of daily ritual): *pūjayed atha deveśaṃ liṅge vā sthaṇḍile 'pi vā / agnikuṇḍe 'bhavā debe nityam evaṃ prakīrtitam*. Here as elsewhere, *liṅga* probably does not denote the well-known phallic representation of Śiva, but may mean any kind of image in which Śiva is installed. The platform usually implies the *maṇḍala* drawn on it, but other objects can also be placed there. Śiva is made to be born in the fire from the Goddess of speech (Vāgīśvari), and he is identified with the ritual fire in the course of fire offerings. He is propitiated, and takes part in the purificatory procedure during initiation. 'Body' signifies the practitioner's own body, transformed into Śiva by the appropriate mantras.

body.⁴⁰

If one worships Him properly on one's hand, on the platform, in an idol (*liṅge*), on the *maṇḍala*, in the rice-offering, in the water [of the purificatory chalice], one shall obtain the fruit of initiation.⁴¹

One should visualise Rāvaṇa with the Sword [Khaḍgarāvaṇa, a manifestation of Śiva] together with his Female Mantra-companions in one's body, in an idol, in the middle of the sacrificial fire and on a platform.⁴²

While these identifications explain the *raison d'être* of the major factors of Śaiva worship, they do not attribute meaning to smaller elements and minor details of the ritual, nor do they explain why certain minor actions are performed.

THE MEANING OF ELEMENTS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER, IN THE IMMEDIATE RITUAL CONTEXT

A certain number of elements which are not identified or identifiable with Śiva can gain significance because they fit into a longer ritual sequence whose final aim is the preparation of one of the factors identified with Śiva. In these cases,

⁴⁰ *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.119 (in the context of initiation): *evam sampūjayitvā tu sthaṇḍile kalāśe tathā / kuṇḍe cātmaśarīre ca pūjayet paramēśvaram.*

⁴¹ *Svacchandatantra* 3.31cd–32ab (in the context of initiation): *svabhaste sthaṇḍile liṅge maṇḍale caruke tathā / jale cāgnau ca sampūjya samyag dikṣāphalaṃ labhet.* Śiva worshipped on one's hand means the so-called *Śivahasta* or 'Śiva's hand'. The guru ritually places the appropriate mantras on his right hand, which is thus transformed into Śiva. He then puts his hand ceremonially on the initiand's head, thus transferring Śiva's power onto him. See e.g. *Somaśambhupaddhati* 3 p. 97. As BRUNNER explains in note 245 on p. 98ff., this gesture may have been the most important moment of initiation at an earlier date. Tantras teaching goddess worship call this hand the *Śaktihasta* 'the hand of Śiva's power' and prescribe the transformation of the left hand, instead of the right one. See e.g. *Brahmayāmala* 38.3–5 (187r3). The purificatory elements, fire and water, are also worshipped as Śiva, just as the rice-offering made to Him.

⁴² *Kriyākālaguṇottara* fol. 57v (for the attainment of supernatural powers): *ātmadehe tathā liṅge agnimadhye ca sthaṇḍile / dhyaṅyet khaḍgeśvaram devaṃ (dhyaṅyet em : dhyaṅyeta) vidyāmantrais tu āvṛtam.* In the context of the attainment of supernatural powers, it may be significant that the male deity is not invoked on his own in the usual *loci* of worship, but accompanied by a host of goddesses or demonesses. In various Tantras of different branches (e.g. the *Svacchandatantra*, the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*, the *Mataṅgapārameśvara*, and the *Siddhayogeśvarimata*), the same phenomenon can be observed quite often. When the deities are invoked to bestow supernatural powers, they are often accompanied by a larger circle of deities, which usually includes additional female deities. For some more details and references, see TÖRZSÖK 2003:203ff.

the link of the particular element with the rest is quite obvious and does not need any clarification. I shall give two examples of such contextually required or justified rites. The first is the case of hand-gestures, *mudrās*. By simple analogy, they are associated with certain ritual acts which are reinforced or even performed by them. A text confirms that they are to be shown to complete the ritual action (*pūranāya kriyāvidheḥ Mrgendra Kriyāpāda* 3.26d). Thus, the presence of four different *mudrās* are justified by the actions they perform, as in the following passage: the invocation of the deity is accompanied by the hand gesture of Invocation, then the god is installed with gesture of Establishing, greeted with the gesture of Homage and retained with the *mudrā* of Blocking.⁴³

One should invoke the mantra-body [of Śiva] following the sequence of creation,⁴⁴ starting from the end of the mantra [i.e. from the point situated twelve inches above the head according to Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha], creating the ancillary-mantras of He Who Has the Radiance of the Rising Sun. This is to be done with the gesture of Invocation. Then one should establish Him in a support made of His powers⁴⁵ with the gesture of Establishing, and after receiving Him with the gesture of Homage, one should make him stay there with the Blocking gesture.⁴⁶

⁴³It is noteworthy that the commentator, Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, does not seem happy with this straightforward explanation of how the gestures function. Therefore, he gives a general semantic analysis of the word, which is based on another passage of the same text: ...the gestures (*mudrā*) seal (*mudrayanti*) the numerous obstacles [i.e. demons] that could have found some occasion [to interfere with the rite]; the gestures do not let them free, that is why they are called *mudrās*. (...*labdhāvākāśaṃ vighnaughamaṃ mudrayanti na tu svātantryaṃ kurvanti mudrāḥ*). Cf. *Mrgendra Kriyāpāda* 5.2ab, whence this derivation comes. I come back to this *nirvacana* below.

⁴⁴This is normally done by identifying five sections of the body with five large segments of the universe, five parts of Śiva's fivefold mantra and five Śaiva ancillary mantras, starting from the uppermost of each (the downward movement representing creation, the way in which the created object is further and further away from its source, the creator). The equivalences can slightly differ in various Tantras. For two examples, see *Somaśambhupaddhati* vol. 3, Pl. III, IV and V.

⁴⁵The word *śāktavighraha* refers to the term *vidyāmūrti* or 'female mantra body' according to Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha ad loc. (*nirliṅgā daṇḍākārā vidyāmūrtiḥ*): Śiva's body made up of his mantras, having no particular visual representation apart from being arranged vertically. See BRUNNER 1985:48.

⁴⁶*Mrgendra Kriyāpāda* 3.12cd–14ab: *mūrtāv āvāhanaṃ kuryān mantrāntāt sṣṭivartmanā // navārkatejaso ṅgāni vidhāyāvāhamudrayā / sthāpanyā sthāpanaṃ kuryāc chāktavighrahasaṃśraye // prañatyaṃ saṃnidhikṛtya nirudhyād rodhāmudrayā*. For an illustration of how to perform the hand gestures, see e.g. *Somaśambhupaddhati* vol. 1, Pl. I, keeping in mind that Tantras can slightly differ on this subject.

Another, different kind of example of how ritual elements depend on each other and form a sequence could be the various rites performed around the fire-pit, which is identified with Śiva. Śiva is in fact born there from the goddess of speech, Vāgīśvarī, whose presence implies a whole series of rites. A small house is symbolically created for her with sacred *kuśa* grass; she is protected behind a curtain visualised around her, and before she conceives she is ritually given a bracelet to be tied on her right wrist so that she should have a male child. Thus, a major factor in Śaiva ritual, the fire identified with Śiva, justifies and necessitates a chain of minor rites. It is, however, never questioned why just exactly these actions are needed to establish Śiva in the fire.⁴⁷

The concatenation of minor rites is something one can observe in various contexts. But just as the association of *mudrās* with the corresponding ritual actions are too obvious to point out, so too the ways in which minor ritual items are linked to each other are left unexplained. Rather than stating such trivial matters, the scriptures devote their attention to more complex associations of ritual and meaning. Why is Śiva worshipped in such and such forms? What is the purpose of carrying attributes such as the sword? What is the point of performing ritual in prescribed places, at crossroads, on the top of a mountain etc? What is the actual role of consorts in ritual? The scriptures do attempt to provide answers to such questions. However, it must be remarked that in most cases, the replies they give are not the more or less obvious ones we would expect them to say. In several examples below, instead of offering straightforward explanations, some texts develop what could be called an exegetical discourse on each subject. And in so doing, they sometimes anticipate their own, later, exegesis by writers such as Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. Indeed, it seems that some of these texts are the first to write the exegesis of their own tradition.

THE MEANING OF ELEMENTS ON THEIR OWN I: SEMANTIC ANALYSES

In analysing less evident and more hidden links between ritual and meaning, the scriptures often turn to a traditional exegetical device: semantic analysis (*nirvacana*). The *nirvacana* of deity names is a device through which the exegetes, most notably Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja, often encoded additional, more esoteric meaning into their cult. But in this too, there are some scriptural antecedents, even if their analyses are far from being as learned and complex as the exegetical ones. Moreover, the aim of the scriptures is obviously not the

⁴⁷For the sequence, see e.g. *Svacchandatantra* 2.183ff.

same as that of the exegetes in that they do not try to infuse the system of the Krama into them; these *nirvacanas* are attempts to fit all details into the ritual and doctrinal complex and thus to enrich their meaning.

One such semantic analysis appears in an unpublished anti-ritualist Kaula text, the *Kulasāra*.⁴⁸ Interestingly, it concerns the name of Bhairava, a favourite object of analysis in the Kashmirian exegetical literature. This well-known name describing a frightening form of Śiva denotes 'the Terrifying One' and derives in fact from the adjective *bhīru*, which comes from the verb *bhī-* 'to be afraid'.⁴⁹ Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja propose several complex exegetical analyses of the word. According to one of them, the name is derived from an aggregate of three verbs: *bhr-*, *ru-* and *vam-*. The first verb 'to hold, to nourish' expresses that Bhairava holds and nourishes the world while he himself is held and nourished by the universe in which he is manifest. The second verb, *ru-* 'to roar', shows that Bhairava manifests the world as sound within himself. The third verb *vam-* in the sense 'to vomit' or 'to emit' refers to the fact that he emits or creates the universe, even if it is ultimately identical with him. The three verbs thus reflect the three divine functions, maintenance (*sthiti* with *bhr-*), retraction or resorption of the world into the god (*saṃhāra* with *ru-*) and creation (*ṣṛṣṭi* with *vam-*).⁵⁰ The analysis of the *Kulasāra* is much simpler, deriving the name from only one verbal root. But it agrees with Kṣemarāja and Abhinavagupta in making it come from the verb *bhr-*, to hold, in the sense that he holds or nourishes the universe and / or that he manifests himself as the universe.

bharitaṃ tena cāśeṣaṃ akalpanakalādikam

By Him everything is maintained / nourished / filled up, from the internal power of creation onwards.⁵¹

⁴⁸For a summary of Kaula doctrines, see SANDERSON 1988.

⁴⁹*bhī*+*Kru* according to Pāṇini 3.2.174. *bhiyah kru-klukan-au* *Kru* and *Klukan* are *kr̥t* (nominal) suffixes one can add only to the verb *bhī-*.

⁵⁰Summary of SANDERSON 1995:62–63, who analyses Kṣemarāja's interpretation in his commentary on *Svacchandatantra* 1.4ab with the help of the *Tantrāloka*, and points out, among other things, that the explanation of the *ru-* element requires more exegetical effort. See also *Tantrāloka* 1.96–100. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see the excellent analysis given in KAHRIS 1998:55–97.

⁵¹The meaning of the word *akalpanakalā* is not clear to me. Lit. 'kalā of non-fashioning', it could denote a section of the Śaiva universe called *śāntikalā*, the second one from above corresponding to the very beginning of creation; or it could stand for the highest level of pure non-creation. It could also mean 'limited power to act' (one of the senses of *kalā* itself), which is the first evolute of *māyā* or the plurality of creation, paving the way for other levels (*tattva*)

There is another line in the same text, which most probably also contains a semantic analysis, echoing *nirvacanas* well-known from Kashmirian exegesis.⁵² Since the text is very fragmentary here, one cannot be sure what it is really about. The context is about Śiva's power, *śakti*, in any case, which suggests that the derivation concerns the goddess Kālī, but as she does not appear elsewhere in the text, this remains only a possibility.

kalā[ḥ/ṃ] kalayate sā tu kālasaṃgrahakāraka [ā(?)]... (fol. 4r)

She creates the Kalā(s) [i.e. the five levels of the universe(?); or: limited power to act(?)] and she withdraws time (*kāla*)... [therefore she is called Kālī]

These *nirvacanas* are not restricted to the texts of the more esoteric Kaula branch, although they are definitely less ubiquitous elsewhere. One example is to be found in the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*, a text mainly concerned with exorcism and snake-charms. In one of its longer sections, the text prescribes the worship of a god called Khaḍgarāvaṇa ('Sword-Rāvaṇa') and his female attendants. Khaḍgarāvaṇa is a Rāvaṇa-like form of Śiva, mostly invoked to chase away evil spirits who possess people. The *Kriyākālaguṇottara* tells us that once Śiva created five mantras in order to kill the demon Kālanemi. As it was a furious form of Śiva that created the mantras to fight the demon, his roar or cry (*rāva*) became the mantra-deity Khaḍgarāvaṇa. (The story is told by Śiva in the first person singular to the goddess.)

mantrās tv ete saha vidyai[r] niḥṣṛtā mama debataḥ /

krodhe (krodhe em : krodha) krodheśvaro jāto rāve vai khaḍgarāvaṇa[ḥ] !!

And these mantras, together with their female mantras, were created from my body. Krodheśvara ('Lord of Wrath') was born from my wrath (*krodha*) and Khaḍgarāvaṇa from my roar (*rāva*).⁵³

The derivation of Rāvaṇa from *ru-* 'to roar' is of course a common one, but the context created around it also explains why he is not a devotee (as he is in the *Rāmāyaṇa*), but an embodiment of Śiva. It is also possible, although

of the universal creation. Or this 'natural' *kalā* could also stand for divine energy, *śakti*. In any case, in most possible interpretations, it appears to denote the first step towards creation.

⁵²For examples and their analysis, see SANDERSON 1995:64.

⁵³Note that *vidyā* is treated as an -a stem noun and the locative is used for the ablative.

by no means provable, that through this derivation some association is created between Khaḍgarāvaṇa and Śiva in the form of Rudra.⁵⁴

Another semantic analysis, more closely related to ritual action, is to be found in a scripture of the Siddhānta. It explains that hand gestures, *mudrās*, instead of simply repeating and confirming the ritual action in gestural language (as one would think from the examples given above), are employed to seal or paralyse (*mudrayanti*) demons called 'impeders' or 'obstacles', who could spoil the rite or make it unsuccessful. The derivation also makes use of the fact that *mudrā* is a feminine noun: 'Since they paralyse (*mudraṇāt*) the horde of obstacles, these Female Powers belonging to Śiva are called gestures (*mudrā*)'.⁵⁵

Furthermore, objects or substances used in ritual are also given additional significance through *nirvacana*. Thus, again the *Kulasāra*, derives the name of one of the impure offerings, rice beer (*surā*), from the word 'god' (*sura*), while another word for alcohol (*vāruṇī*) is identified with the nectar of immortality:

*kṣīrābdbhimadhyamathanā[d] vyaktitvasamupāgatā
avasthā vāruṇī jñeyā suraiḥ pitā surā smṛtāḥ* (fol. 78r–78v)

Alcohol is called *vāruṇī* [in the sense of 'coming from or belonging to the god of the ocean, Varuṇa'] because it was produced as such from the churning of the milk ocean.⁵⁶ Rice beer is called *surā* because it was drunk by the gods (*suraiḥ*).

In this context, it is also notable that the *Kulasāra* justifies impure offerings such as alcohol and meat by pointing out that some vedic rites also require them: the Sautrāmaṇī involves drinking *surā* (rice beer), and the Aśvamedha for instance necessitates the killing of a horse: *sautrāmaṇyaṃ surāpānam ... aśvamedhe tu cāśvaṃ vai evamādīpaśor vadham* (fol. 70r). These lines are echoed in some similar arguments in Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*. In the following

⁵⁴Ru-dra meaning 'running about (*dra-*) and roaring (*ru-*)' is a common interpretation recorded in dictionaries. For the name Rudra being separated into Ru-dra, see Kṣemarāja on *Netratantra* 16.64a glossing *sarvatorudraḥ* with *samastaruḍrāvaṇād rudraḥ*. Rudra is explained by him here as 'annihilating (*drāvaṇa*) pain (*ruj-*)'. For yet another interpretation, see his commentary on *Svacchandatantra* 1.42 (vol. 1, p. 36.).

⁵⁵*vighnaughamudraṇān mudrāḥ kathyante haraśaktayaḥ, Mṛgendra Kriyāpāda* 5.2ab. For some more sophisticated derivation in the exegetical literature, see e.g. Kṣemarāja ad *Netratantra* 7.33, explaining the word as 'bestowal (*rā-ṇa*) of happiness (*mud-a*)', 'releasing (*mu-c*) [from bonds] and destroying (*drāvaṇa*) [duality]' and as 'sealing (*mudraṇa*) the power (*dra-viṇa*) of supreme consciousness': *mudo harṣasya rāṇāt pāśamocanabhedadrāvaṇātmatvāt parasamviddraviṇamudraṇāc ca*.

⁵⁶The meaning of the word *avasthā* here is not clear to me. It may be understood to form a compound with the preceding word.

passages, in addition to adducing the above examples of the *Kulasāra*, Abhinavagupta also justifies the prescription of a female partner (*dūtī*) in tantric rites by referring to the vedic injunction according to which a wife (*patnī*) is needed to perform the rites.

Surā is pure for the sacrificer in the Sautrāmaṇī sacrifice, while it is impure [lit. ‘contrary’] for others.⁵⁷ [...] There is no sacrifice without a wife, the gods are all treated as equals, the Brahmasatra requires the offering of alcohol, and one also offers the marrow, intestines and the heart [of animals]. This has been taught even in the scriptures of bound souls [i.e. in non-Śaiva scriptures] by the Lord.⁵⁸

Cult objects do not escape from this scriptural exegesis either. The esoteric *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*⁵⁹ (3.10cd.) for instance gives the following, rather widespread,⁶⁰ derivation of the word *liṅga*, standing here probably for ‘symbol’ or ‘idol’.

tena liṅgaṃ tu vikhyātaṃ yatra līnaṃ carācaram

Thus it is called *liṅga*, because [lit. ‘in which’] the world of moving and non-moving creatures dissolve (*līn-am*) in it.⁶¹

Many other occurrences of semantic analysis in the scriptures could be enumerated to demonstrate the various ways and fields in which it was applied as an exegetical tool; and many of these occurrences would be similar to the above cited examples in that the explanations they give would be general, i.e. independant of the particular ritual context in which the object of analysis is used. However, it also happens that the *nirvacana* is applied not only to explain,

⁵⁷ *sautrāmaṇyāṃ surā hotuḥ śuddhānyasya viparyayaḥ*, *Tantrāloka* 4.246ab.

⁵⁸ *na patnyā ca vinā yāgaḥ sarvadaivatatulyatā // surābutir brahmasatre vapāntrahṛdayābutiḥ / pāśaveṣu api śāstreṣu tad adarśi mabeśinā*, *Tantrāloka* 15.172cd–173.

⁵⁹ This text, of which an eleventh century manuscript survives, probably dates from the 9th or 10th century C.E. For the dating of the manuscript, see e.g. BAGCHI 1934. A discussion of the dating will be found in Shaman HATLEY’s thesis, which is in preparation at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁶⁰ One of the earliest occurrences of this derivation may be in the commentary of Kauṇḍinya on *Pāsupatasūtra* 1.6: *līyanāl liṅganāc ca liṅgam*. For closer parallels, see *Niśvāsa Guhyasūtra* 1.100 *kathaṃ līyej jagat sarvaṃ liṅge caiva carācaram* and *Mālinīvijayottara* 18.3 *yajed ādhya-tmikam liṅgaṃ yatra līnaṃ carācaram / bahirliṅgasya liṅgatvam anenādhiṣṭhitam yataḥ*. I am grateful to Dominic GOODALL for pointing out these parallels in an email message of the 26th of August, 2006.

⁶¹ The idea seems to be this: *liṃ / layam gacchatīti liṅgam*, where *li-* would stand for *layam* or *linatvam*, dissolution, and *ga-* for *gacchati*, to go.

but to create a new form of ritual. In most of such cases, the old form of ritual is reinterpreted and transformed from external rite into an internal, mental or yogic one. While semantic analysis is not the only way of internalising ritual, it is a very common one in the Kaula scriptures.

THE MEANING OF ELEMENTS ON THEIR OWN 2: INTERNALISATION

The internalisation of several elements of external ritual was an important development in the history of Śaiva tantrism, and it has been amply analysed in the literature on the Kaula branch. Here I simply intend to show that this transformation of external into internal or mentally performed ritual was at least partly the result of the attempt to infuse more meaning into ritual, and that this quest for meaning is clearly discernible in some scriptural passages. An important element of internalisation in the Kaula cults was of course their esoteric interpretation of the word Kula, which, instead of denoting Yoginī lineages, came to mean the body, consisting of various internal powers (internal Yoginīs or Śaktis).⁶² But their interpretative élan went further than that. In what follows, I shall give examples of some more unusual internalisations through interpretation. The examples are mainly taken from the *Tantrasadbhāva*, which is not a purely Kaula scripture of the Trika; but the passages on internalisation I cite have all been borrowed in a Kaula text, the *Kubjikāmata*.⁶³

The first set of examples concerns the attributes a practitioner (*sādhaka*) is supposed to carry during his *vidyāvratā*. The *vidyāvratā*, lit. 'observance of the female mantra', was an obligatory preliminary observance to propitiate mantras before making use of them, i.e. before invoking them to help in the attainment of supernatural powers. Various such observances are prescribed in different texts. The practitioner must usually wear certain clothes, carry certain objects, and wander around reciting a particular mantra. Sometimes excentric behaviour is also prescribed, reminiscent of *pāśupata* practices.⁶⁴ When the *Tantrasadbhāva* comes to the discussion of this topic, it lists a number of attributes prescribed for the practitioner to carry during his wanderings. For each object, the text gives an esoteric interpretation, by which the attribute, usually a weapon commonly carried by a deity, is enriched with esoteric meaning and is thus said to lead to final liberation. In each case, the interpretation takes the

⁶²On a summary of the changes in the Kaula cult, see SANDERSON 1988:679ff.

⁶³These borrowings have been pointed out in SANDERSON 2002.

⁶⁴See e.g. chapter 10 of the *Siddhayogēśvarīmata*.

form of a semantic analysis, and the text introduces this passage as a *paribhāṣā* or explanation of technical terms. Here are three weapons of the long list:

*vāmā jyeṣṭhā tathā raudrī icchājñānakriyātmikā[h] /
trīśūlam tripatham khyātam trīśaktim anupūrvaśah //*

The goddesses Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā and Raudrī are of the nature of Will, Knowledge and Action. Thus the trident is known to be made of these three goddesses, of three spheres / roads, in due order.⁶⁵

*kharūpā vyomagā śāntā nirmalā aṭate priye /
khetakam tena nāmaṃ tu dvādaśānte vyavasthitam //*

There is [a Female Power] which has the form of space (*kha*), moves in space, is calm and pure while erring (*aṭate*), o my beloved; therefore, she is called the shield (*khetaka*), which is established at twelve inches above the head.⁶⁶

*kartarī jñānaśaktis tu yena pāśān chinatty asau /
sā kalā paramā sūkṣmā mantrāṇāṃ bodhanī parā //
kartarī kartṛrūpeṇa jñātavyā sādhakena tu /*

The scissors / knife is the Power of Knowledge by which one cuts the bonds [of the soul]. It is an extremely subtle element, which is the supreme awakener of mantras. Thus it is to be known as the performer [of initiation / ritual] by the practitioner.⁶⁷

These semantic analyses do not simply explain or justify why these objects should be carried by the practitioner; they transform them into his internal powers he must master in order to proceed in his observance. The object becomes a metaphor for a Female Power (Śakti) in his body, and thus the whole rite is internalised. The external observance is transformed into a yogic practice.

The last interpretation concerning the *kartarī* (scissors or knife) is interesting also in that it gives us a parallel to Kṣemarāja's exegesis on an attribute of Svachandabhairava, the sword. For in his commentary on *Svacchandatantra* 2.90, Kṣemarāja identifies the sword of the deity with the Power of Knowledge

⁶⁵ *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.107cd–108ab = *Kubjikāmata* 25.134. The word *tripatha* can denote a group of three worlds or spheres (such as *āmatattva*, *vidyātattva* and *śivatattva* in the Śaiva context) or a place where three roads meet, which could also be understood to refer to the three goddesses metaphorically. The equivalence of the trident and the goddesses is also established through the homonymy of the word *śakti* 'female power' and 'spike / prong'. (N.B. Every noun is transformed into the neuter in the second line.)

⁶⁶ i.e. *khe aṭate — iti khetakam. Tantrasadbhāva* 9.108ab–109cd = *Kubjikāmata* 25.135. (*Nāman* is thematised.)

⁶⁷ i.e. *kartṛrūpeṇa pāśān chinattiti kartarī. Tantrasadbhāva* 9.111–112ab = *Kubjikāmata* 25.137cd–138.

(*jñānaśakti*) and calls it the instrument with which the bonds of the soul are cut — a role quite similar to that of the *kartari* in the *Tantrasadbhāva*.⁶⁸

In the same chapter of the *Tantrasadbhāva*, another set of equivalences concerns the places where the practitioner is to go during his mantra observance. In fact, the list of places given also corresponds to the lists given in many Śaiva Tantras, which recommend them for the performance of any ritual, for daily worship as well as for initiation. The enumeration includes mainly abandoned places, such as abandoned mansions, the top of a mountain, forests etc. and places which are traditionally thought of as invested with magic properties such as the confluence of rivers or crossroads. The cremation ground is also mentioned of course. The primary reason for preferring these places must have been twofold: since they were abandoned, invested with magic power, they were particularly auspicious for tantric rites to obtain supernatural powers; and since they were far or hidden places, the rites could remain secret and well protected from the uninitiated. Although these reasons seem obvious and understandable enough, the appropriateness of these places would be difficult to justify soteriologically. However, through their reinterpretation, the *Tantrasadbhāva* gives them particular significance for the individual practitioner and his practice. The following examples are metaphorical understandings of two such places: 'the top of the mountain' and 'crossroads':

The mountain is the mouth of the preceptor, and one should rely on / cling to the tip of his mouth. Thus is the mountain top [in Tantras] known metaphorically, o Goddess worshipped by the gods.⁶⁹

Oh Goddess, the crossroads is that of the goddesses Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, Raudrikā together with Ambikā — the individual soul roams there / in them.⁷⁰

In this way, the places prescribed for ritual lose their primary association with external rites and magic. They are transformed into sources of knowledge and internal sources of power.

Names of consorts (*dūtīs*) in ritual, the Mother, Sister and Daughter (three nouns which are also used as simple synonyms of Yoginī) are similarly

⁶⁸This is not meant to suggest that Kṣemarāja borrows from this scripture, for in both cases, the word lends itself to the derivation mentioned quite easily.

⁶⁹*Tantrasadbhāva* 9.45cd–46ab, *Kubjikāmata* 25.74: *parvataṃ guruvaktraṃ tu tasyāgram avalambayet / parvatāgram smṛtaṃ tantrē paryāyeṇa sunārcite* (tantrē TSB : tena KMT).

⁷⁰*Tantrasadbhāva* 9.46cd–47ab: *catuspathaṃ bhaved devi vāmā jyeṣṭhā tu raudrikā / ambikāyā samāyuktā -m- aṭanaṃ pudgalasya tu*; citation almost identical with *Kubjikāmata* 25.75.

reinterpreted; and their function and importance are again explained through semantic derivations.

*māteva samsthitā śaktir jagato yonirūpiṇī //
atopannaṃ samastaṃ hi vāṇmayam sacarācaram /
tena māteti vikhyātā mayā te paramēśvari //
udbhavasthā duhitṛ tu duhanā jagatasya tu /
duhitṛ tu dvitīyā tu bhaginī tu tathocyate //
bhagarūpā parā sūkṣmā utpannā sātmanā saba /
yathāgnis tejasā nityam anānātve vyavasthitāḥ //
tadvad eva hi cātmathā bhaginī bhagarūpiṇī /
svayaṃjātā mahāsūkṣmā nānyatkenaiva nirmitā //*

The female Power is established as the Mother, she is the matrix of the world. Everything moving and non-moving, made of speech, is born from her. Therefore I call her Mother, great goddess. The Daughter (*duhitṛ*) is established in the origin [of the world], she provides the world with desired objects (*duhanā*).⁷¹ Thus the Daughter is the second [type of female power], now I explain the Sister (*bhaginī*). She is extremely subtle in the form of the female organ (*bhaga*), born together with the individual soul. Just as fire is always inseparable from its heat, so too the Sister, in the form the female organ, is within the individual soul. She is born of herself, is highly subtle, and is not constructed by anyone or anything else.⁷²

In a more elaborate way, the sacred places (*pīṭhas*) are also internalised, starting with the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, Prayāga, in the navel, thus transforming the external geography of pelegration into an internal one. Both the *Tantrasadbhāva* and the *Kubjikāmata* affirm that the internal places are more important, and that external ones are prescribed only to comply with worldly conventions.⁷³ The *Kubjikāmata* then adds yet another set of equivalences, whereby it identifies various parts of a house with the sacred centres. Thus, Prayāga is placed in the middle of the house for instance, Aṭṭahāsa in the fire-place (*cullī*), Devīkoṭṭa in the grinding stone (*gharattā*) etc.

⁷¹The word meant is probably *dohanā*, which has both a primary and a metaphorical meaning. What is intended is probably the metaphorical one, but with reference to the verbal root *dub-*, ‘to milk’, which the text connects with *duhitṛ-*.

⁷²The extract, in strongly Tantric Sanskrit, comes from the beginning of the passage in question (*Tantrasadbhāva* 9.132cd–136), which has been somewhat shortened in the version of the *Kubjikāmata* (25.158–160).

⁷³*lokapravṛttihetvarthe bahiḥ pīṭhāḥ prakāśitāḥ / prakīrtitāḥ* (*Tantrasadbhāva* 9.79cd, *Kubjikāmata* 25.98ab).

These equivalences are established, at least partly, in search of meaning in ritual. And in this respect, the Tantras continue the same method that one can see in the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. For these vedic texts also seek meaning in ritual by creating macrocosmic and microcosmic links, equivalences — *upanīṣads* — between elements of vedic ritual, the universe and the human body.⁷⁴

Now the reinterpretations of these isolated elements in ritual do not necessarily change the basic ritual structure of initiation and daily rites, at least not in the *Tantrasadbhāva*. On the whole, the text does not reject external ritual altogether, but attempts to enrich the meaning of some observances by writing some sort of primary exegesis on them. These metaphoric interpretations, homologisations and even the internalisations remain separate from and independent of the traditional, external ritual complex of initiation and daily ritual, which are maintained and prescribed in this text. As opposed to this, Kaula scriptures go further in this interpretative procedure. For there, once the elements of a rite are given new meaning, the whole rite changes, often in that it becomes internal, and initiation and daily ritual are also affected by these transformations. The pan-Śaiva offering of eight flowers (*aṣṭapuspikā*), for instance, is transformed into an offering of eight mental flowers in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* (3.24ff): non-violence (*ahimsā*), the curbing of the senses (*indriyanigraha*), compassion (*dayā*), sincerity or devotion (*bhāva*), patience (*ksamā*), the conquering of anger (*krodhavinirjita*), meditation (*dhyanā*), and knowledge (*jñāna*).⁷⁵

⁷⁴This idea was already expressed in a remark by KAHRS 1998:60, pointing out that the interiorisation of Śaiva ritual is 'strikingly similar to the way in which sacrifice was interiorised in late Vedic times.'

⁷⁵This offering is performed with real flowers and recommended for the poor, the weak, women, children etc. in *Bṛhatkālottara* fol. 137r. In its various versions prescribed there, the flowers are to represent parts of Śiva's mantra-body and his throne. For more details, see TÖRZSÖK *1999:133 citing Prof. Alexis SANDERSON's edition of the passage. Note that *Kiraṇatantra* 59.29 also prescribes what it calls mental (*mānasa*) flowers. (I thank Dominic GOODALL for pointing out this passage in an email of 26th August, 2006.) However, this text seems to identify the flowers (whether they are indeed mental or just mentally transformed into something else) with various elements of a common worship (*pūjā*), i.e. water, honey mixed with milk and ghee, incense and lamps, sandalwood paste, roots, flowers and fruits, cooked food and clothes (understanding *vāsanā* in the sense of *vāsana*).

THE MEANING OF THE RITUAL ELEMENTS IN VIEW OF THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF RITUAL

As the above examples show, it was not an uncommon procedure to seek meaning in various elements of external ritual taken separately, especially concerning rites other than initiation and daily ritual. However, the purpose and meaning of rites are rarely questioned in view of the ultimate purpose of ritual, except in the more esoteric Kaula texts. The Kaula inquiries include questions that do not seem to preoccupy other scriptures and which also concern initiation and daily ritual. Why would one need to be purified before performing a rite? Why is a *maṇḍala* a necessary support on which to invoke the deities during initiation? These Kaula investigations result in the rejection of almost all external ritual, with the argument that this or that rite ultimately does not make sense. Below I should only like to point out a few arguments taken from Kaula scriptural sources. Thus, the *Kulasāra* reasons as follows on the futility of purificatory baths:

Unwise people think that purity is obtained with water or earth. The body is born from blood and sperm and contains faeces, urine and phlegm. It is destined to live with disorders of the blood, the bile etc. Now how could purity be obtained by pouring water on it, oh Faultless One? When one rubs a stone, it can be shown to be made of earth. But just as it is destroyed [by rubbing] without becoming different, so too, embodied souls [remain the same]. If you rub a piece of charcoal or if you pour water on it, it will not abandon its own nature. The same is true for all embodied souls.⁷⁶

Interestingly, another Tantra, the *Bhairavamāṅgalā*, uses the same image with almost identical wording. It continues the argument by saying that one should resort to non-duality, i.e. one should stop seeing objects in terms of pure or impure, auspicious or inauspicious. It concludes that nothing is inauspicious, and that only what is auspicious for Bhairava (*bhairava-māṅgalā*) exists. This in turn may refer to the title of the text itself.

If you rub a piece of charcoal or pour water on it from hundreds of jars it will not abandon its own nature. The same is true for all embodied souls. Therefore,

⁷⁶fol. 74v *vāriṇā mṛttikābhiḥ ca śaucam icchanty apanḍitāḥ / raktaretodbhavam piṇḍam viṇmūtrakaphasamyutaṃ // raktapittādi-cānyaiś ca doṣair yukto vyavasthitāḥ / sa tatprakṣālanāc chuddhiḥ katham sambhāvyaṭe 'naghe // śilāyāṃ ghrīyamānāyām mṛdbhavatvapradarśanam / kṣayam yāti na cānyatvam tadvad dehavatām punaḥ // ghrīyamāno yathāṅgārah kṣālyamāno jalena tam / na jahāti svabhāvam tu tadvat sarvaśarīriṇām.* As Somdev VASUDEVA has pointed out (in his electronic text), the first line has a parallel in *Tantrāloka* 4.223.

since nothing exists that would be pure by nature ... what is the purity of mind for people is non-duality ...⁷⁷ Nothing should be inauspicious, only what is auspicious to Bhairava exists.⁷⁸

Of course, one could argue against this by saying that it is not the water or some other substance that purifies, but the water that has been transformed into Śiva by mantras. This is indeed affirmed by the *Bhairavamāṅgalā*, which consequently rejects not only all calendrical restrictions and observances, but also purificatory rites and baths, claiming that only mantras have the power to change the nature of someone or something.

There are no rites to be performed on certain lunar dates or vows to be observed under certain constellations, no calendrical fasts,⁷⁹ purification, observances and baths, and there are no inauspicious moments. It is the mantra that is the supreme time, observance and secondary rites; baths and purificatory rites are ... established in mantras.⁸⁰ Mantras derive from the Omniscient and are capable of ending this transmigration. They are unfailing, pure and still, devoid of inauspicious times and the like. They are made of time and they give rise to the *nāḍīs*. They perform initiation, and *Sadāśiva* is also formed with mantras. ... Just as something touched by the philosopher's stone turns from copper to gold, someone purified by initiation reaches Sivahood.⁸¹

⁷⁷The text is difficult to construe here either due to corruption or to irregular grammar or both.

⁷⁸*Bhairavamāṅgalā* 249–252ab: *ghṛṣyamāno yathā[ni]gāraḥ kṣ[ā]lyamāno ghaṭaśataih / na jahāti svabhāvatvaṃ tadvat sarvaśarīriṇām // tasmā[t] svabhāvaśuddhasya abhāve bhāvam āśritah / bhāvaśuddhir manusyānām advaitaṃ bhāvam āśritaṃ // amāṅgalaṃ na kiṃcit syād asti bhairavamāṅgalā* (*abhāve* has been corrected from *abhāved* and *na* from *naiva* by Somdev VASUDEVA).

⁷⁹These two *pādas* rejecting only calendrical observances seem to have been quite popular, although they figure mostly in the context of obtaining supernatural powers. See e.g. *Tantrasadbhāva* 1.56 and *Tantrāloka* 29.65, the latter perhaps based on the former. A similar line, in yet another context, also occurs in the *Īśvarasāṃhitā* (19.787) and the *Viṣvaksenasāṃhitā* (38.3 and 39.321). I am grateful to Dominic GOODALL for pointing out the popularity of this verse.

⁸⁰The Sanskrit has an illegible syllable here.

⁸¹*Bhairavamāṅgalā* 252cd–256ab, 258: *na tithir na ca nakṣatranīyamo nopavāsakaṃ // na śaucaṃ na vratasānāṃ kālavelā na vidyate / mantram eva (mantram eva em.: manum eva MS) param kālāṃ vrataṃ ca niyamādikaṃ // snānaśaucādikaṃ karma mantra(—)tra pratiṣṭhitam / sarvajñād āgatā mantrāḥ bhavacchedaka-rā[h] smṛtāḥ // amoghā nirmalā[h] śāntā[h] kālavelādivarjitāḥ / kālātmakaṃ bhaven mantram mantrān nāḍisamutkalam // mantraiḥ tu kriyate dikṣ[ā] mantrarūpī sadāśivah ... yathā rasendrasaṃ[s]prṣṭa[s] tāmrahāvāṃ pramuñcati / tadva[d] dikṣāviśuddhas tu śivatvaṃ pratipadyate.*

Now if it is Śiva in the form of mantras who purifies everything, he could just as well purify one directly, and do that once and for all. This is the point of view of the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, which affirms that he who has learnt the science of conquering old age from the Kaula texts will be able to purify anything by touching or by looking, thanks to the powerful rays of the Bindu.⁸² Other common elements of daily ritual are also rejected, such as the material idol (*liṅga* probably referring to any idol here) in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*⁸³ and any kind of iconic image (*pratimā*) in the *Timirodghāṭana*:⁸⁴ ‘For them [for true yogis] there is no clay, stone, silver or gold idol (*liṅga*). [...] What is the use of images for he who possesses the divine way [i.e. liberation]?’

In the same way, elements of the initiatory ritual are also found purposeless: the tracing of the *maṇḍala*, which is necessary in other systems for the Samaya rite to introduce the neophyte into the Śaiva community, the construction of the fire-pit (*kuṇḍa*) together with all ritual around the fire, which are the principal means of initiation in the tantric systems. Instead, the *Timirodghāṭana*, for instance, states that the real fire-pit is in the body,⁸⁵ and that liberation occurs not through initiation with fire ritual, but through the transmission of knowledge.⁸⁶ In a similar spirit, the *Kulasāra* maintains that one can be initiated simply by the touch of a Kaula yogi.⁸⁷ Needless to say that other, optional rites, such as observances (*caryā*) are also often declared useless or to be done simply according to one’s wish⁸⁸; and sacred sites (*pīṭhas*) are not to be revered externally, but only inside the body.⁸⁹

While some of the internalisations cannot be considered reductions of ritual in that they involve elaborate visualisations, most of them not only

⁸²7.30cd–31ab: *yam yam sprṣati hastena yam yam paśyati cakṣuṣā / śuddham bhavati tat sarvaṃ parabindukiraṇāhatam* The printed text has *yām yām* for what should be *yad yat* in Sanskrit. ‘Whatever he touches with his hand or looks at with his eyes will become pure, struck by the rays of the supreme Bindu.’ Bindu stands here for the subtle essence of the power of all mantras.

⁸³3.14: *na kāṣṭhaṃ mṛṇmayam liṅgam na śailaratnasambhavam...* ‘[In this system,] there is no wooden clay or stone idol (*liṅga*), nor one made of precious stones...’

⁸⁴12.4ab: *na teṣāṃ mṛṇmayam liṅgam na [śailam] rūpyakāñcanam*; 12.14ab: *kiṃ tasya pratimārūpaiḥ yasya divyā gatih sthitā*.

⁸⁵*debastham tu mahākunḍam*. ‘The great fire-pit is in the body.’

⁸⁶5.2ab: *yadā saṃkrāmita[m] jñānam tadā muktiḥ suniścitam*. ‘Surely, it is when knowledge is transmitted that liberation occurs.’

⁸⁷*sparsanād dīkṣito bhavet* (fol. 40r). ‘He will be initiated by touching.’

⁸⁸See *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* chapter 12, *Kulasāra* fol. 83r.

⁸⁹*Kulasāra* fol. 80v: *vāmadakṣiṇam agre tu tṛdhā pīṭham tu sundari / paryateḍ [d]eḥasamstham tu yogī bāhye vivarjayet*.

internalise ritual, but also reject parts or the whole of it. Moreover, many of the internal practices are not developed in greater details, only the internal-external equivalences are established in an outline. Therefore, it seems that the majority of these internalised rites do not form a full structure for meditation, unlike Buddhist Sādhanas.

As it has been pointed out in SANDERSON (1995:87–90), this compression or reduction of external ritual was coupled with the intensification of what remained. Most importantly, it implied the intensification of initiation, which had to involve visible possession by the deity. Below, the example of the *Tantrasadbhāva* is cited because it reflects some of the contradictions and problems involved in such intensification and emphasis on spontaneous possession.

The passage starts with the enumeration of various kinds of *śaktipāta*, the descent of Śiva's Power, which is a manifestation of his grace. In all tantric systems, this descent — whether it is visible or not — is a sign that the person is ready to receive initiation. In the *Tantrasadbhāva*, a mantric manifestation of this Power is written on the ground, which the initiand is to look at.

He who, concentrating on the Curled Śakti while looking at her, falls [on the ground] after a hundred [repetitions of the mantra] is known to have had an intense descent of Śiva's Power. He who falls after one thousand or ten thousand [repetitions] is known to have had an average descent of the Power, o goddess. And he who falls after twenty, thirty or fifty thousand repetitions is known to have had a basic descent of His Power, my beloved one. This is how I describe the various descents / falls in the order of decreasing quality. One should initiate those who have fallen on the ground, those who do not fall should be discarded.⁹⁰

The passage clearly requires a visible sign to prove the intensity of Śiva's grace: the falling on the ground. Moreover, the requirement of this sign is implicitly justified by suggesting a parallel between the intensity of the descent (*pāta*) of Śiva's Power and the falling (*pāta*) on the ground. After this, the guru can go on with the process of initiation. But the subsequent lines, which describe the effects of initiation, more precisely, the effects of the cutting of the

⁹⁰ *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.327–330: *bhāvitātmā yadā paśyec chaktim vai kuṭilākṛtiṃ / śatena patate yas tu tivrāpātaḥ prakīrtitaḥ // evaṃ sahasram ekena atha caivāyutena ca / yasya pāto bhaved devi madhyamaḥ parikīrtitaḥ // dvyaayutais tryayutair vāpi tathā pañcadaśaiḥ priye / patate vartanair yas tu so 'dhamaś ca tv iti smṛtaḥ // pātānāṃ ca vibhāgo 'tra vivṛṇve daśakānvaye / patitaṃ dikṣayed devi pātāhīnaṃ tu varjayet.*

initiate's bond, do so in very similar terms. The initiate is to fall on the ground again, albeit not exactly in the same way.

This is the sign of those who have been transformed [by initiation]: they move about, tremble or shake. And when the bonds of the soul are cut, the initiate falls on the ground. He who falls on his face is the best, he who falls on his back is average and he who falls on his side is taught to be the least good by Śambhu, the god of gods.⁹¹

The effects of the spontaneous descent of Power and the cutting of the bonds being quite similar, initiation does not appear to make a remarkable difference. And the concluding part of the passage seems to suggest that apart from the touch of the guru, indeed, nothing else is really needed for initiation.

If initiation is liberation, as it is according to all Śaiva scriptures, then initiation is to be understood when the bonds of the bound soul have been stunned. When the body, released from all merit and demerit, falls on the ground, then it is salvific initiation; he who performs it is the guru. He who has the bonds stunned merely by his touch is called the guru: he makes people cross the ocean of transmigration.⁹²

In spite of the wording, it may be too far-fetched to interpret this extract to assert that no ritual is needed for initiation apart from the guru's touch. When the guru is defined as he who liberates merely by his touch, it can also be meant as a general praise of the guru rather than a theoretical statement about the role of initiatory rites. It is, however, remarkable that the passage appears to start out as a defense of ritual initiation, but ends with a Kaula-type anti-ritualistic statement — even if it is just metaphorical here — reducing initiation to the guru's touch.

⁹¹ *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.332–334ab: *bhāvitānām tu cihnedam calate kampate dhunet / pāśacchede tu samjāte patate kāśyapītale // samṃmukhaṃ patate yas tu cchinnapāśo na saṃśayaḥ / uttamo 'sau samuddiṣṭa utiāno madhyamo mataḥ // tiryakpāto 'dhamah prokto devadevena śambhunā.*

⁹² *Tantrasadbhāva* 9.340–42: *yadi dikṣā bhaven muktiḥ sarveṣu cāgameṣu ca / tasmād dikṣā tu bodhavyā pāśastobho yadā bhavet // dharmādharmañibaddhas tu piṇḍo yatra patet priye / tadā nirvāṇadā dikṣā yaḥ karoti sa deśikah // yenaivālabdhamātrasya stubhyate pāśapañjaram / sa gurus tu samākhyātaḥ saṃsārāṇavatārahah // (°āñibhaddhas conj.: °añibaddhas codd.).*

CONCLUSION

From the ways in which the scriptures examined here treat the problem of how to interpret and find meaning in ritual, three distinct approaches emerge. These approaches sometimes seem to be characteristic of certain branches of Śaivism, but this is not necessarily the case.

1. The first could be called the argumentative approach. The basic ritual structure is accepted and never questioned as it is; instead, this approach tries to argue for why rites are necessary and what they accomplish. Although texts of the Siddhānta have been cited in most cases, it is not the case that all texts of the Siddhānta would argue in this way, nor is the Siddhānta the only branch that would do so.

2. The second approach, for which most examples have been quoted, is an interpretative one. This interpretative approach may or may not accept all external ritual; but whichever is the case, it attributes special meaning to external ritual elements by reinterpreting them, often through semantic analyses. All branches of the scriptural tradition seem to adopt this approach, albeit not to the same extent. The interpretative approach sometimes transforms external rites into internal ones, which thus partly undermines the original ritual system.

3. The third one may be named the rejectionist approach. As is known, this is characteristic of the Kaula branch, which rejects most external rites as meaningless; but it can also be adopted by others, especially concerning a particular type of ritual.

As I remarked above, the sources examined here do not give us a complete picture of the situation and therefore any conclusion drawn here is subject to revision.⁹³ Nevertheless, I think many of the scriptural examples clearly show that there is an internal and theoretical development within the scriptural tradition of questioning the meaning of ritual action. And this self-questioning and search for meaning may be a more significant factor in the reduction of external ritual than usually assumed. Of course, there must have been other, most importantly social, factors behind; and it is generally true that

⁹³As SANDERSON (1995) argues, one Śaiva tantric tradition appears to have been able to solve the problem of how ritual can be meaningful in all its elements in an organic way. It is the Krama, which attempted to render every element of ritual meaningful for the attainment of Śivahood, and which was a source for many an interpretation given by Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. However, the scriptures of the Krama, too, simplified external worship to a large extent: they considered internal worship superior, and suppressed all icons.

the reduction of external ritual is always more convenient for a number of reasons.⁹⁴ But it seems more likely that the questioning of the meaning of ritual contributed to the reduction of external rites rather than that it was the simple manifestation of an intention or tendency to reduce them. As mentioned above, a distant parallel of such developments might be the case of the Upanishads, which reinterpret, internalise, and, at the same time, undermine the Vedic ritual system.

There is another reason why it is not unreasonable to think that much of the internalisation is a result of the tradition's internal, theoretical development. It is the fact that in many cases the internalised ritual does not appear to be related to actual practice. This is especially true for many homologisations of the *Tantrasadbhāva* (concerning e.g. the internalisation of places of worship and of the weapons), which give the impression that there is more exegetical work than actual practice behind them. Now such arguments are very questionable; for who are we to judge today what was actual practice at the time of the composition of the Tantras?⁹⁵ But in spite of the difficulty of proving this, one should bear in mind that the homologisations of the *Tantrasadbhāva* are rather unique, and the *Tantrasadbhāva* itself does not refer to them in other contexts, whether ritual or not. This strongly suggests that in the majority of the cases we are dealing with what I called primary exegesis, exegesis within the scriptural tradition itself, evolving from questions raised by their authors.

MANUSCRIPTS CONSULTED

KULASĀRA

NAK, MS 4-137. NGMPP A 40/11.

KRIYĀKĀLAGUṆOTTARA

NAK, MS 3-392. NGMPP B 25/32.

TANTRASADBHĀVA

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BRĤATKĀLOTTARA

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⁹⁴For an analysis of such tendencies in Kashmir, see e.g. SANDERSON 1995.

⁹⁵Other evidence, such as the mention of certain rites in non-tantric sources, could help. However, inscriptions rarely give many details of these rites, especially concerning Kaula practice, and literary sources describe what appears even more fanciful than the scriptural prescriptions.