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# The Concept of the Ultimate Reality in Tantric Philosophy



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India is a spiritual land of many cults and among them tantra is one of the important cults. The Hinduism brings all the cults and cultures of its motherland under the one roof of Veda and the influence of Vedanta while allowing them to maintain their individuality. With this basic idea the present paper aims to study the tantra cult and its relationship to Vedanta with reference to the concept of the ultimate Reality. Tantra generally accepts Advaita Vedanta and suggests the ways and means of self-realization. However, the tantric philosophy introduces some modifications into the theories of Vedanta concerned with the concept of ultimate Reality and leads to an interesting study.

All philosophic doctrines of religions aim at identifying their own ideology of ultimate Reality. The Advaita Vedanta upholds nirguna Brahman as the ultimate Reality, with its maya theory. Its theoretical aspect is the conception of moksha as the merging of jiva in the Brahman, whereas the practical method for attainment leads karma-sanyasa or complete renunciation (jnana). It is true that this Reality is not the mere unity underlying the diversity of the universe but unity and diversity are relative to each other and for an Advaitin the ultimate Reality is beyond the unity and diversity. It could be explained as the infinite consciousness implied by empirical knowledge or as the infinite being presupposed in all finite existence. Tantra is closely associated with Sakti Cult. The sakta philosophy confirms that the world is the lila (play) of the sakti. Using this "unreal" world, as an instrument the jiva should attain emancipation, which is the attainment of the ultimate Reality. The duality is the act of maya in Advaita but lila of sakti in tantra, which is an equal and opposite form of energy to siva.

The advaita affects its synthesis by its concepts of different levels of Reality but the tantra does it by its doctrine of unity in duality and duality in unity.

The beginning of Sakti Cult as the worship of the divinity in the female form or mother goddess could be studied from the pre-historic period. But unfortunately the philosophy of Tantra cult had been hidden and commented as a dangerous ritual or magic. It is true that there were crucial sacrifices and offering of animals and other prohibited activities were conducted in those days without realizing the inner truth. Later the influence of Vedanta has reformed the tantra cult from the level of offering the life sacrifices to the mother deity to the stage of the realization of the ultimate reality. The tantra cult enters a new shape only in the beginning of the 7th century A.D. and the emergence of the tantric literatures is noteworthy. Such works are Lalitha Sahasranama, Soudaryalahari and some Sakta Upanisats. There is a strong misconception towards tantra cult regarding the adoption of certain rituals related with the usage of Mamasa (flesh), Matsya (fish), Madya (wine), Mudra (gestures), and Maiduna (fornication). In the light of vedantic realization the word mamsa has been explained as the sacrifice of earthly attachments, the Matsya denotes the unrest of mind and mastery over such senses, Madya means the nectar emerging from the top of the head and coming down through the inner tongue, Mudra are the meaningful communications and Myduna denotes the unification of the male and female concepts within oneself.

Originally the term tantra referred to many branches of the same cult of yogic mystical treatise. Here in this paper it refers only to that has relationship with Sakta tradition, since the vast subject contains innumerable texts.

The worship of Sakti is seen in Rgveda where she is praised as 'The supporter of the earth living in heaven'. Kena upanishad praises her as the great mother of Universe. Sakti is the power of existence, knowledge and Bliss of brahman and is insufferable. Sakti according to tantra exists in male, female or neutral form. The Saundarya lahari says Siva when he is united with Sakti, is able to create; otherwise he is unable even to move. Siva without Sakti is Corpse. Liberation in Tantrism is the knowledge of Sakti which leads to the dissolution in the Blissful effulgence of the supreme.

Tantra Sastra recognizes the four Vedas. Vedas consist of knowledge, which is the ultimate spiritual experience, and it is also called as 'Cit'. The realization of 'Cit' is nothing but Brahman, the pastern infinite. In the early Vedic literatures we have no reference regarding a supreme Goddess any more than a Supreme God. All the female forms like Ratri, Vak, Prithivi and Sarasvati were given only a subordinate position. But before the end of the Vedic period Sakti as a supreme Goddess and God emerge. Taittiriya Aranyaka refers three different names for Sakti, as Katyayani, Kanayakumari and Durga. In the Kena Upanisat she is defined with Uma Haimavati, who symbolizes Brahma - Vidya. Sakti is worshiped as mother of Vedas as well. Historical references confirm that the scholars brought all the tribal deities, beliefs and faiths under aegis of the Veda and the spiritualizing influence of the Vedanta philosophy, without erasing the inner core

of their individuality. We find such notions form Devimahatmiya and Lalitha Sahasranama. This is the background for the tribal deity who is fond of flesh and wine with sacrificial victims then hailed as the mother of the Vedas and the presiding deity of Brahma - Vidya with the identification of brahman, and leads to direct realization produced by the famous sayings, Tattvamasi. (That thou art), so'ham (He I am) Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman).

Tantra contains a remarkable philosophic presentment of religious teaching, profoundly applies in ritual of psychological experience, which leads to emancipation.

'Tantra' is a word, which has been misunderstood and misinterpreted always. The word tantra is derived from the root 'tan', which means 'to spread', and the suffix 'tra' from the root 'to save'. The real meaning is 'the knowledge is spread which saves.' Tantra is a great boon to humanity and it is the message of real peace and happiness. It is a practical philosophy built upon the edifice of scientific reasoning, which is being affirmed by the modern scientists. It teaches the best yoga, proclaims the unity of all existence, and promotes the happiness and welfare of all beings, free from chaos and contradiction.

Tantrism consists of Jnana, the philosophical doctrines, Yoga, the methods of meditation, Kriya instructions regarding rituals and Caryas, the value teachings for morality and social duties. The Jnana is the union with brahman, the yoga is the meditation on brahman, the Kriya is praise of the brahman and Caryas is the external worship. We have sixty-four tantra texts those strictly observe this regulation. The tantras are essentially Sadana Sastra or practical philosophies.

According to tantric philosophy, the ultimate Reality is both part less whole and with parts (niskala and sakala) .Tantra also considers the world as a lesser reality in a sense for it owes its existence to the association of Brahman with maya, in tantric terms Siva and Sakti. The concept of maya in the Advaita philosophy remains unexplained as true or false (anirvacaniya). But the concept of Sakti in tantra possesses as much reality and importance as Siva. There is no real change as per Advaita but only an appearance. Tantra confirms that the ultimate Reality is immutable in one aspect and undergoes a real evolution. The ultimate Reality in tantra is neither wholly static nor wholly dynamic. It is both. The doctrine of unity in duality is the unique feature of tantric philosophy which explains the ultimate reality. In order to explain this Lalita Sahasranama a tantric literature of seventh century A.D., expresses in its hymns through the names of the mother Goddess Lalithambika - Siva-Sakti aikya rupini (unity of Siva and Sakti), Cideka rasa rupini (She includes everything in Herself), Siva murtin (She is the form of Siva), Siva (the consort of Siva, whose power she is), Svaprakasa (She is self - illumined) and Vimarsa rupa (She is of the nature of Vimarsa, the mirror of objectivity which makes Siva self - aware as Prakasa, the pure luminosity who is the subject). Thus there is no Siva without Sakti and no Sakti without Siva, without supreme Sakti; there is no all-pervasive knowledge for Brahman. That He is Omnipotent, the cause of all becoming, the leader of everything, to be adored by all, the best over of grace to all and the cause of all purusharthas, can not happen without this supreme Sakti.

All Sruti and Smiriti, epic, puranic and other texts, testify that Paramaskati is the form of (Swarupa) and quality (guna) of Siva. She is the form of entire sentient and non - sentient beings of this world. She is the knower of everything and the embodiment of bliss, unbounded by time, space etc., and is the inherent power of Lord. According to the tantric expression of the Tamil Siddha cult, the ultimate reality is the fact beyond three thresholds of man. One is the world, another is time and the third one is his limiting consciousness. In the tantra cult of saktism the ultimate Reality beyond the world, time and consciousness is explained clearly, Nishprapanja (beyond the sphere of multiplicity), Kala hantryai (an end to time) Pratyak – chit rupa (the form of consciousness turned inward when the Reality is “unmanifest” in dissolution).

The 667th epithet of Sri Lalitha Sahasranama praises Devi as “Nir Dvaitayai (Nondual)” and 668th, “Dvaitavarjitayai ( remover of the duality)”. The dual aspect is seeing the Jiva as a different existence from the Brahman due to maya, the illusion. If that maya disappears the dual aspect ends and the realization or Brahma Gnana is achieved. The same sahasranama calls Devi as Ekagini, to express the non- dual ultimate Reality. The advaita effect its synthesis by is doctrine of different levels of reality, but the Tantra does it by its doctrine of unity in duality and duality in unity. This is the concept of Advaita philosophy seen as the influence in tantric cult.

According to Samkya philosophy the tatva is twenty-four in numbers as prakriti emerges from purusha as follows:

Purusha  
Prakruti  
Mahat  
Manas  
Ahamkara

Tanmatra	Gnanendriya	Karmendriya	Panca buta
form	eye	vision	fire
fragrance	nose	smell	air
taste	tongue	taste	water
sound	ear	hearing	sky
touch	skin	feeling	earth

But according to tantra cult the above concepts are thirty-six in numbers as follows:  
Sivatatva (5): Agora, Sadasiva, Eswara, Maheswara and Rudra

### **Vidyatatva (7): Purusa, Kala , Avidya, Raga, Kaala, Maya and Ananda**

The above said 12 concepts along with the 24 of samkya make 36 tatva. There is no controversy between advaita and tantra about the end, but it rises regarding the beginning. The argument of Advaita is vivartavada and that of tantra cult is parinamavada. The meaning of vivarta is illusion, which shows the delusive appearance, which is referred by the example of rope and snake. The parinamavada argues to prove the evolution. The tantra cult defines that the reflection of the sun seen in a water pot is not the real sun and this illusion can be removed by the consciousness attained through tantric practices. This is some thing like the milk becomes curd. Of course, there are some criticisms towards this idea as the milk becomes curd but not the curd turns milk. It is true but the philosophy of tantric cult explains that the realization is

something like the curd becomes butter, butter makes ghee and finally the ghee burns into a fire ritual and spreads in the atmosphere. The tantric cult strongly advocates sadhana the spiritual practice for the realization of the ultimate reality. The realization is that of the unity of Jiva and Brahman with the help of a true guru. Man must transform himself through sadhana and accomplishing his responsibilities. Gandarva Tantra says: 'Having saluted the Guru as directed and thought so' ham the wise Sadhaka, the performer of the rite should ponder the unity of Jiva and Brahman". Kali Tantra says: " Having meditated in this way, a sadhaka should worship Devi as his own Atma, thinking I am Brahman". Kubjika Tantra Says: 'A Sadhaka should meditate on his own self as one and the same with Her and so on'.

The doctrine of the tantra cult postulates that our body consists of the same elements as those of the Universe. What is in the Universe is there in the body as well; and what is in the body is there in the Universe. In other words, by correlating the chakra found in our body to the countless stars and planets in the Universe, it may be understood that the Universe and the body are one and the same.

Before trying to understand the tantric sadhana or meditative techniques, it is necessary to understand the mighty Kundalini Chakras found in our own body. There are six basic chakras namely: Mooladhara Chakra, Swadhisthana Chakra, Manipura Chakra, Anahata Chakra, Vishuddhi Chakra and Ajna Chakra. The large expanse over the head is known as Sahasrara Mandala. Let us now see in detail the abodes and characteristics of all the above chakras.

### **Mooladhara Chakra (Root Chakra or Base Chakra) :**

This chakra is at the lowest of our ribs. This may be considered to be in the shape of a lotus with four petals. What is referred here, as petals is only the Vedic chanting. The Goddess rests here in the form of a serpent of three and half spirals at a spot known as Kulagundam.

In the doctrines of the Panchaboodha (Five elements) the Root Chakra is the discipline of the earth. In the Navagraha (Nine Planets) this is the Mercury. In the Universe the root is the earth. This is the Chakra, which forms the basis of self- consciousness, memory, nervous system, intellect and learning. The Goddess is elevated and fixed at the root chakra and worshipped meditatively.

### **Swadistana Chakra (Hara, Sacral or Sexual Chakra)**

Above the root chakra and slightly below the navel is the Hara chakra with six petals in the spinal. Its element is water. Conforming to the theory that all lives originated from water, the Mother Goddess reigns here in the form of the Brahma and carries out creation.

### **Manipura Chakra (Solar Plexus Chakra)**

This Chakra with ten petals is located in the spinal chord just directly above the navel. Its element is Fire. The Goddess rules here in the exalted form of Vishnu and performs the merciful act of protection.

### **Anahata Chakra (Heart Chakra)**

It is located in the chest, above the heart. It is a lotus with twelve petals. Its element is Air. The mother rules here as the Goddess of Fury and accomplishes the act of destruction. In the exalted state of the Guru, the Mother destroys ego; destroys unrighteousness and upholds justice.

### **Vishudi Chakra (Throat Chakra)**

Its location is the hollow of the throat. This is a chakra with sixteen petals and is ruled by the Mother with the doctrine of concealment with infinite love, sympathy, mercy, attachment and motherliness as the parts of her manifestation.

### **Ajna Chakra (Brow or Third Eye Chakra)**

It is the chakra located between the eyebrows. It is the lotus with two petals. The Mother reigns here as the Goddess of Compassion. It is here that the role of the five elements ends and the domination of the mind emerges. Above this, just outside the head the Mother manifests Her-self as Siva-Sakti in inseparable unity with the Lord Siva

who dwells in the thousand petals Sahasrara plane. Just like the lamp and the light, like the word and the meaning, Siva and Sakti are one. This is the tenet of Sahasrara.

Worldly life is interpreted only through the eyes of the world. So, the mind is always being attracted towards the world outside; and consequently gets corrupted. The tantric way of meditation may be treated as the Master's level in spirituality. Next to that, we can reach the self-realization stage, the ultimate Reality.

Tantrics affirm that the Kundalini energy lies in the shape of a spiraled serpent. Tantric practice of meditation is the arousing through the chakras, the Kundalini energy dwelling at the base chakra, raising it to the confluence at the centre between the eyebrows and to allow it to pervade its own expanse with the unification of Siva. "The characteristic features of Sakta - dharma are thus its Monism; its concept of the Motherhood of God; its in sectarian spirit and provisions for 'Sudras' and women, to the latter of whom it renders high honour, recognizing they may be even Gurus; and lastly its Sadana skillfully designed to realize its teachings".

### **Conclusion:**

Tantra is the practical way to attain the ultimate Reality mentioned by Vedanta. To quote John Woodroffe, "A subject of great of greater interest and value is the remarkable presentation of Vedantic knowledge which the Sakta Tantra in particular gives (I never properly understood the Vedanta until after I had studied the Tantras) as also the ritual by which it is sought to gain realization (Aparoksajnana)."The tantra cult is an important part of Hinduism and Indian

culture and therefore new researches should be conducted to remove the false generalizations, misunderstandings and hidden facts of the cult by the qualified. To conclude, sakta darsana or tantric cult is not a new one but as the development and amalgamations of various cults and especially that of Vedanta doctrines lead to a monistic realization through practicality.

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