

# The Socio-Cultural Condition of North-East India (650-1000 A.D.): Tantric Religion

## Abstract

The Tantra as a special religious or philosophical concept gradually came into use from about fifth or sixth century A.D. We can have a fair idea of the general principles of Tantricism from the Mahanirvana Tantra which is one of the most popular and well known Tantric texts. It is perceived that all life proceeds from the womb of woman. Philosophical concepts like prakriti and Maya and mythological figures like Parvati, Durga, Laxshmi and Radha constitute the female principle of creation. They are merely different names of the Jaganmata or Mother of the World. All gods including Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are contained in and issue out of the Divine Mother. So that Tantricism looks upon every woman as an incarnation of the Universal Mother.

**Keywords:** Socio-Cultural, Condition, Tantric Religion.

## Introduction

Tantricism puts special emphasis on the Mantras ( prayers and formulate), Bijas (syllables of mystic significance peculiar to each deity), Yantras (diagrams drawn on paper or inscribed in precious stone , metal, etc.) , Mudras ( special positions of fingers and movements of hands ) and Nayasas (placing the deities on different parts of the body by touching them with finger tips and the palm, mostly of the right hand ).These are the means by which the Sadhaka or the aspirant after perfection invokes and identifies himself with his Ishtadevata or chosen deity .The Primary object of the Sakta worshippers in using them was to became one with the deity and attain salvation.

The Sadhaka practising siddhantachara is not afraid of following socially disapproved practise openly. He is relentless in the pursuit of what he thinks to be true and is not troubled by the opinion of other regarding what he eats and drinks, enjoys or hurts. The use of five M's- Madya ( wine), Matsya (fish), Mamsa (meat) , Mudra (parched grain) and Maithuna ( coition) – under certain prescribed conditions of discipline could be made without secrecy in appropriate places and time. That was intended to further the progress of the aspirant towards the elimination of all empirical distinctions and attainment of complete freedom. Likewise, fresh that nourishes the body, fish that increases sexual potency, grain that invigorates the system and coition that brings about a blissful condition or Mahasukha and prolongs the race at the same time, are all intended to keep the sadhaka in a fit condition of body and mind to pursue spiritual aims.

The North-East India, land of seven sisters - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura; was known as 'Pragjyotish' or 'Kamrupa' , in ancient time. In this region various religious sects like Buddhism, Viashnavism, Saktivism, Tantra and Indigenous Tribal religions are existed from early century AD. The North-East India is an important place in not only India but also South-East Asia since Eight century AD. It is strategically located in areas of India, where in diverse civilizations, religions and cultures met in past. Since the Gupta period north-East India linked with south –East Asia through various trade roots. The cross-road of Assam and Bengal, it was probably connected with Burma via land routes through Gomati. From northern part of Asia the Chinese people and different Indo- Mongoloid race came from same route.

In its present day widely accepted sense. D.N. Bose and H.L. Halder said that "Tantra will then come to mean all comprehensive knowledge or expansion of knowledge an appreciation of the fact that external objects about us are all the outcome of some conscious force



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within. The material universe is the play of a conscious energy expressing itself in various modes of manifestations. Tantra, thus attempts to expand our bounds of knowledge which are confined to material objects only and bring about all development of mind."<sup>1</sup>

Tantra means a literature which spreads knowledge and particularly Knowledge of profound things with the help of mystic diagrams (Yantra) and words possessing esoteric meanings (Mantra) and helps the attainment of salvation. The Tantra as a special religious or philosophical concept gradually came into use from about fifth or sixth century A.D.

Dr. Nalini Kanta Barhma Said that " The Tantras claim their origin from the Vedas. The Tantric form of Sadhana probably came into special prominence when on the one hand. The elaborate details enjoined by the Vedic sacrifice, taking a long time to be performed, could not be accomplished by short lived people of feeble attainments and when on the other, the Upanishad method of acquisition of transcendent knowledge surpassed the intellects and equipment of most people. The puranas were at this time preaching the Bhakti-cult in order to place before people on easy method capable of being grasped followed by all. But these could not reconcile themselves satisfactorily with the Vedas and the Upanishad, the accepted and time honoured authorities, seemed to promulgate something foreign to them. The Tantras offered themselves to the people at this stage containing within them the essentials of the Vedic sacrifices and oblations and the essence of the monotheistic philosophy of the Upanishads of the Bhakti-cult preached by the puranas , of the Yoga-method propounded by patanjali and of the mantra element of the atharra-veda."<sup>2</sup>

We can have a fair idea of the general principles of Tantricism from the Mahanirvana. K.L.Barua said that "The system (Tantricism) , as an offshoot of Buddhism of the Mahayana school, developed about the ninth century under the Pala rulers of Magadha. It was the Pala king Dharma pala who flounder the Buddhist University at Vikramasila which become the famous centre Tantricism probably spread Kamrupa and Tibet."<sup>3</sup> It deals with Brahman which, according to the Saktas, is nothing but sakti which is eternal dynamic source of all things.

It is perceived that all life proceeds from the womb of woman. Hence we should think of the ultimate creative principle in terms of the mother and not of figures like Parvati, Durga, Laxshmi and Radha constitute the female principle of creation. They are merely different names of the Jaganmata (Mother of the world). Hence Tantricism looks upon every woman as an incarnation of the Universal Mother.

Haraprasad Sastri said that "The word Tantra means shortening abbreviation, i.e, reducing into something like algebraic forms mantras or formula that would otherwise run to scores of syllable."<sup>4</sup> The word Tantra Tantricism puts special emphasis on the Mantras ( prayers and formulate), Bijas (syllables of mystic significance peculiar to each deity), Yantras (diagrams drawn on paper or inscribed

in precious stone , metal, etc.) , Mudras ( special positions of fingers and movements of hands ) and Nayasas (placing the deities on different parts of the body by touching them with finger tips and the palm , mostly of the right hand ).These are the means by which the Sadhaka or the aspirant after perfection invokes and identifies himself with his Ishtadevata or chosen deity .The Primary object of the Sakta worshippers in using them was to became one with the deity and attain salvation.

The advocates of Tantricism justify their existence on the ground that the Vedas are a sealed book to the majority of the people and there is the necessity of an easier cult for the people at large. Moreover, the Tantra form of worship is open to women and sudras also. This cult was popular both with the higher and lower castes. There has been a lot of controversy with regard to the evaluation of the Tantras literature. There are people who praise it as the repository of sublime truths, rigorous discipline, catholic outlook and indispensable means to the attainment of highest spirituality. There is a strange mixture of higher and lower thoughts of strenuous discipline and moral laxity of sound understanding and primitive credulity which bewilders the reader.

The Sadhaka practising siddhantachara is not afraid of following socially disapproved practise openly. He is relentless in the pursuit of what he thinks to be true and is not troubled by the opinion of other regarding what he eats and drinks, enjoys or hurts. The use of five M's- Madya ( wine), Matsya ( fish), Mamsa (meat) , Mudra ( parched grain) and Maithuna (coition) – under certain prescribed conditions of discipline could be made without secrecy in appropriate places and time. The view of Kularnava, "Tantras is that just as one rises with the help of the very ground on which one has fallen, likewise it is through drinking life to the very less than one has to make the spiritual ascent.' A thorn has to be taken out with the help of another thorn." 5 Likewise, flesh that nourishes the body, fish that increases sexual potency, grain that invigorates the system and coition that brings about a blissful condition (Mahasukha) and prolongs the race at the same time are all intended to keep the Sadhaka in a fit condition of body and mind to pursue spiritual aims.

It is pointed out that Tantricism arose as a result of the large-scale admission of the aboriginal people in Brahmanical society. The Brahmana adopted many of the tribal rituals and charms which were officially compiled, sponsored and fostered by them. In course of time, those were distorted by the Brahmanas and priests to serve the interests of their rich clients. Tantricism permeated Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism and Vaishnavism. From the seventh century, it continued to hold ground throughout the medieval age.

The view of Prof.H.D.Bhattacharyya is that in their attempt to provide a comprehensive scheme of social life, individual perfection and religious devotion, the Tantras failed occasionally to keep the baser elements in proper check among a motley population of different grades of culture but the innate moral sense operated to redeem man from the thraldom of

desire and selfishness. They certainly brought the gods nearer the hearts and homes of men and inspired their devotion, prompted their collective action for charity and gave a fillip to the building of religious edifices all over the country.<sup>6</sup>

#### Conclusion

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The vision, with which the early reformer Tantra and his immediate successes of the Tantricism movement organized the movement, gradually effected by the entry of many personal and narrowed the scope of the movement. The tribal and lower caste people who were welcomed by the early preachers to the fold of it gradually lost their faith in like any other religion; the feelings among of devotion is prevalent in Indian religious tradition since antiquity. But 'Tantra' or devotion as a means of salvation had assumed special significance in the medieval period of the Indian History. It had brought much change in the socio-religious life of the Indian people and so it is turned as 'Tantric Movement, to establish their social, cultural and religious equality against the neo- Tantric itself. Which was a movement organized only for establishing equality in the society.

#### Endnotes

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