

THE CREATION OF A LEGENDARY ORIENTALIST:  
SIR JOHN WOODROFFE AS ARTHUR AVALON IN CALCUTTA

by

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis studies the collaboration between Sir John Woodroffe and his Bengali friend Atal Bihari Ghose. Together they created the pseudonymous orientalist Arthur Avalon who produced a considerable volume of works on Tantra from 1913 onwards, and brought about a revolution in attitudes to this previously despised branch of the Hindu religion. Woodroffe became identified with Avalon in the public eye, but Ghose was Woodroffe's chief source of the textual knowledge in which 'Arthur Avalon' appeared to be deeply versed. I try to assess Woodroffe's own relationship to Sanskrit and to the texts, and highlight his very extensive use of secondary sources and the knowledge of other Indian people besides Ghose.

The thesis also focuses on Woodroffe's social identity in Calcutta which formed the context in which he 'was' Arthur Avalon. To a very unusual degree for someone with a high position under the empire, Woodroffe the High Court Judge of Calcutta Indianized himself, sometimes wearing Indian dress in social or religious contexts, but above all absorbing the world of the Bengali intellectuals of his time, among whom his popularity was widely attested. He had his critics, but he also had an enthusiastic coterie of admirers who were attracted by his Indian nationalism, to which his Tantric studies and supposed Sanskrit learning formed an important adjunct. He can be placed, then, alongside other prominent British supporters of nationalism of the time, such as Annie Besant, Nivedita, and C.F. Andrews. But Woodroffe possibly entered even more deeply into Hinduism (for a time at least), for he is reported to have taken initiation from a Tantric guru and to have practised Tantric sādhana in some form.

Best known for The Serpent Power, the book which introduced Kundalinī yoga to the west, Woodroffe and Ghose turned the image of Tantra around, from that of a despised magical and orgiastic cult, into a refined spiritual philosophy which greatly enhanced the attraction of Hinduism to later generations of Westerners. This thesis also studies Avalon's 'apologetic' themes by which he made Tantra, first acceptable, then fashionable.

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I owe a great debt to Mr Sobhun Ghose for his encouragement and for giving me most of the originals of the correspondence between Woodroffe and his grandfather discussed in chapter 9; and also to Mrs Sumita Guha and her son Jayadip who gave me much patient help and allowed me to browse in their grandfather's library; to Mr Krishna Ghose their cousin, who first welcomed me to the house and who drew my attention to the photograph discussed in chapter 6, and to all the members of the Ghose family. I am also extremely grateful to Mr T.T. Samdup, son of Lama Kazi Dawasamdub, for giving me the originals of his father's correspondence with Woodroffe and others, and for his and his family's hospitality. Both sets of correspondence are now with the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library.

I would like to thank warmly Mr Satyakam Sengupta for his support and friendship over the years of this work, and for his invaluable help with translation; and also Mr Keshab Sarkar who also helped with translations, and who assisted me in tracing the Ghose family. I must also mention Mr Gautam Sengupta of All India Radio Archives, Calcutta who with great patience found the important tape of an interview on West Bengal Radio which is mentioned in chapter 9, and the Mishra family who made me so welcome in Darbhanga.

I would like to thank for their support and helpful suggestions many friends, and especially: Indira Chowdhury, Singharaja Delgoda, Francesca Fremantle and Jeanne Openshaw.

Lastly I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother, and of my friend James Edward Woodroffe who both passed away before it was completed.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	<u>Āgamānusandhana Samiti</u> , the organization which published Arthur Avalon's books
BS	<u>Bhārata Shakti</u> (1917, 1918, 1921)
CWN	<u>Calcutta Weekly Notes</u> , High Court of Calcutta
DP	Dover Press edition (of <u>Śakti and Śakta</u> )
GLb	<u>The Great Liberation</u> (English translation of MNT), 6th edition 1985, Madras, Ganesh & Co
GOL	<u>Garland of Letters</u> , 9th ed, 1989, Madras Ganesh & Co
GOL (1)	First edition, 1922, Madras Ganesh & Co; London, Luzacs
IIC &	<u>Is India Civilized?</u> (1918, 1919, 1922)
IIC(3)	" " " 1922, Madras, Ganesh & Co.
ISOA	Indian Society of Oriental Art
ITS	<u>An Introduction to Tantra Śāstra</u> (The Introduction to MNT published separately): 8th edition 1990 Madras, Ganesh & Co
JASB	<u>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal</u>
JISOA	<u>Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art</u>
JRAS	<u>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</u>
KKV	<u>Kāmakalāvilāsa</u> (TT/10)
KT	<u>Kulārṇava Tantra</u> (TT/5)
MNT	<u>Mahānirvāṇa Tantra</u>
OICC	Oriental and India Office Collections, of the British Library
PST	<u>Prapañcasāratāntra</u>
PT/1 &	<u>Principles of Tantra</u> (translation of Sivacandra
PT/2	<u>Vidyārṇava's Tantratattva</u> ) in 2 Volumes 6th edition, 1986, Madras, Ganesh & Co
SCN	<u>Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirupāṇa</u> (TT/2)
SOR	<u>Seed of Race</u> (1919, 1921) Madras, Ganesh & Co
SP	<u>The Serpent Power</u> , 1989 (14th ed) Madras, Ganesh & Co

SS &	<u>Śakti and Śākta</u> , Dover Press edition, 1978, New
SS(DP)	York (Paperback). Unless an edition number is specified this is always the edition referred to. But when more than one edition is mentioned, this one is indicated by SS(DP)
SS (1)	<u>Śakti and Śākta</u> , 1st edition 1918 (May),
SS (2)	<u>Śakti and Śākta</u> , 2nd edition 1918 (Oct) Luzacs, Thacker Spink & Co.
SS (3)	<u>Śakti and Śākta</u> , 3rd edition 1927 Ganesh & Co, Madras
ST	<u>Śāradātilaka</u>
Studies	<u>Studies in the Mantra Śāstra</u> (Central portion of <u>Garland of Letters</u> originally published separately)
TRT	<u>Tantrarājatantra</u>
TT	<u>Tantrik Texts</u> . Volume numbers are indicated TT/1 etc. For a full list see Arthur Avalon/Woodroffe bibliography.
VRS	Varenda Research Society
WAP	<u>The World as Power</u> , 6th edition, 1981 Madras, Ganesh & Co

#### NOTE ON REFERENCING

References to Avalon or Woodroffe's books on Tantra are placed in square brackets in the text. Editions unless otherwise indicated are as stated in this list: ie SS (followed by a page number only) indicates the Dover Press edition of Śakti and Śākta and not the latest edition. All general references, including those to Woodroffe's non-tantric books, are placed in endnotes at the end of each chapter.

TABLE OF CONTENTSPage

	INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 1	A NEW ORIENTALIST APPEARS ON THE SCENE	29
CHAPTER 2	ARTHUR AVALON THE ORIENTALIST a public face and an open secret	61
CHAPTER 3	THE HIGH COURT JUDGE: popularity and unpopularity	86
CHAPTER 4	THE ART CONNOISSEUR: 'new' and 'old' Orientalists	119
CHAPTER 5	THE DEFENDER OF HINDUISM: 'India is an Idea'	149
CHAPTER 6	THE SECRET TANTRIC: a private identity	175
CHAPTER 7	ON TANTRA	209
CHAPTER 8	ON 'ŚAKTIVĀDA': Woodroffe on Śakta Tantra	242
CHAPTER 9	COLLABORATORS, SANSKRIT AND THE SCHOLARSHIP OF ARTHUR AVALON	284
	CONCLUDING REMARKS	332

APPENDIX

337

## A) PHOTOCOPIES

LETTER FROM GHOSE TO WOODROFFE (B1)	338
LETTER FROM SENTINATH IYER TO WOODROFFE (B2)	339
NOTE FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A1)	340
NOTE FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A3)	341
NOTE FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A4)	342

## B) TYPED COPIES

LETTER FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A2)	343
LETTER FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A6)	344
LETTER FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A8)	346
LETTER FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A17)	347
LETTER FROM WOODROFFE TO GHOSE (A21)	348
TELEGRAM TO AJAY K. GHOSE (C7)	348a

BIBLIOGRAPHIES A) GENERAL	349
B) THE BOOKS OF AVALON/WOODROFFE	360
C) TANTRIK TEXTS	362

## INTRODUCTION

...the opinion is expressed that there is in the body of the Scripture called Tantra a nucleus only of Tantrik teaching properly so called, which nucleus is defined as "black art of the crudest and filthiest kind, with a rough background of the Śiva Śakti cult"... It is of them that the author cited says: "The highly coloured Yogic imagination pales beside the doctrines of the infamous Tantras in which a veritable Devil's mass is purveyed in various forms to a swarm of sects, mostly of the Śivaite persuasion". [Principles of Tantra, vol 1, p.6]

In this passage a hitherto unknown orientalist called Arthur Avalon is quoting another Western scholar, the Sanskritist L.D. Barnett.<sup>1</sup> The year is 1913, when the first translations and editions of tantric texts under the name of Arthur Avalon were published. He appeared on the scene quite suddenly in the second decade of this century as an expert on Hindu Tantra, which he claimed was abused and misunderstood because of what today we would call the orientalist discourse. Barnett's was only one of several examples he gave in the preface from which I have quoted. He believed that the negative image of Tantra among members of the English-educated Indian middle-class was entirely due to the influence of foreign orientalists. His books set out to re-educate both groups, but primarily the former.

Those books of Arthur Avalon which are still in print have been published for many years under the name of Sir John Woodroffe, a British Judge at the High Court of Calcutta who won popularity with the Indian public as a defender of Hindu culture as a whole, and of Tantra in particular. As the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon, his work is still appreciated in India today. Although written initially for an Indian readership, it soon became popular and extremely influential in the West as well, where Woodroffe became an early role-model for Western converts to Hinduism or Buddhism. This was because he emphasised the mystical and metaphysical aspects of Tantra to which nearly all previous European orientalist scholars had been impervious.

This made his books controversial at first, for in Tantra there was much to offend. A vast pantheon of divinities among whom goddesses were more important than their male consorts, worshipped by complicated rituals strongly focused upon images and mantras; and the 'infamous' pañcatattva rite which included sex and alcohol as well as meat and fish among its 'five substances' for worship -- with all these elements, plus a reputation for black magic, Tantra represented everything that the notions of 'paganism', 'idolatry' or 'witchcraft' summoned up for Europeans of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its always highly sexualized image has now led to a reversal of values whereby 'Tantra' evokes popular notions of a romantic cult associated with erotic temple imagery.<sup>2</sup> In India, as well as being sexualized Tantra also still evokes fear because of its association with magic.<sup>3</sup>

In the Avalon/Woodroffe books Tantrasāstra, the doctrine contained in the Tantras, emerges as a refined subtle philosophy, its erotic and magic elements marginalised or else reinterpreted in an ethical or rational light; and Avalon emphasised how Tantric elements had become integral to general Hinduism. Although 'Arthur Avalon' presented his work as that of an independent outsider investigating Tantra impartially, there is evidence that Woodroffe was more personally involved. Exactly how he was first drawn to Tantra is not known for certain, though there are many stories (below chapter 6). We find few traces of the process in his writings. The books were all produced within a period of a little over a decade and most of the articles and lectures that went into them were produced within four years between 1915-1919 (below chapter 9). Consequently there is little development within his work, and the different strata within it are not so much chronological as related to the various influences acting upon Woodroffe, especially that of his collaborators.

It was not only as an exponent of Tantra, but also of Hinduism in general that Woodroffe as 'Arthur Avalon' won

recognition in India. Besides the Tantric writings, he produced three books on the general theme of Hindu culture and the threat of westernization. The best known of these, Is India Civilized? made him especially popular with the Indian public at a particularly sensitive time politically, and his name was associated among his contemporaries with that book as much as with his Tantric writings (below chapter 5). This thesis is thus also a study of a British supporter of Indian nationalism, contemporary with other more famous figures such as Annie Besant, Nivedita, C.F. Andrews.

#### SUMMARY

It has generally been assumed that 'Arthur Avalon' was simply Sir John Woodroffe's pseudonym. However, in a previously published paper I showed that the matter was not quite so straightforward. In his preface to Śakti and Śākta, the first of the books to appear under his own name, Woodroffe explained that he had used the pseudonym to cover the fact that he worked with 'others', especially one anonymous person whom I identified as the Bengali Vakil and scholar Atal Behari Ghose.<sup>4</sup> This thesis probes further this collaboration which created 'Arthur Avalon' as a largely imaginary character, the persona of Woodroffe and Ghose.<sup>5</sup> It also examines the role of Sir John Woodroffe in contemporary colonial society which formed the context of his identification with 'Arthur Avalon', and the mixture of nationalism and romantic or 'positive' orientalism that influenced him and his circle.

The first chapter sets the scene with a brief review of the works published under the names of Arthur Avalon and Sir John Woodroffe, followed by a summary of previous European orientalist attitudes to Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism. Chapter 2 discusses the pseudonym, the images it evoked and the response to this new Orientalist who seemed to have such profound textual knowledge of Tantra as well as an understanding that belonged to the 'insider', and whose sympathies with Hinduism made him seem a completely new kind of European scholar. This leads up to the appearance of Sir

John Woodroffe in person in the public arena as a lecturer on Tantra. The chapter ends by discussing the choice and significance of the pseudonym, and introduces questions around the extent of Woodroffe's dependence on Ghose's scholarship and the level of his own Sanskrit knowledge.

The next four chapters depart from the books and cover the life of Sir John Woodroffe in Calcutta, which formed the public face of 'Arthur Avalon'. This can be looked at through four roles, three public and one half-secret. There was the Judge of the High Court of Calcutta at a time of great political ferment in the province of Bengal (chapter 3); the patron and connoisseur of Indian art, friend of the Tagores and a founding member of the Indian Society of Oriental Art (chapter 4); the public speaker and writer who won popularity as a foreign defender of Hinduism (chapter 5); and lastly, the secret Tantric, whose secret nevertheless was not well kept (chapter 6).

The last three chapters return to the Avalon/Woodroffe books. Chapter 7 is a summary of 'Tantra' as the integral whole which the books presented (although their author avoided the actual term 'Tantra') and I attempt to contextualize it in relation to some modern studies. Chapter 8 treats the same thematically. Set against the background of Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta the books put forward 'Tantra' or Śaktivāda as an essential ingredient of modern, as it had always been of medieval, Hinduism. The chapter first examines some of the 'apologetic' themes to be found in the books and then closes with a study of how Woodroffe used fashionable western occultist and scientific concepts. The last chapter attempts to unravel different strands in the writings. Beginning with Woodroffe's correspondence with Ghose, and with Dawasamdip, it studies his relationship with these two collaborators. Then it turns to his relationship with Sanskrit and with the texts, with secondary literature and examines his skilful use of the knowledge of Ghose and of other Indian people. I argue that the books put forward a modern Indian 'insider's' interpretation of the Tantric tradition presented

under the name of a foreign 'orientalist'. The thesis ends by making some suggestions about how to distinguish the two different voices of Woodroffe and Ghose who speak through 'Arthur Avalon'.

Throughout the thesis I refer to the author as 'Woodroffe' for passages originally put out under that name, usually because they occur in lectures delivered by him; 'Avalon' is used for passages in books published originally under the pseudonym; and Avalon/Woodroffe when referring to the whole body of writings. This is because Woodroffe did write under his own name in his lifetime and so 'Arthur Avalon' does not strictly cover all the works.

#### Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936)

Woodroffe was born in Calcutta on December 15th 1865 and baptised in St Peter's Anglican Church there in January 1866.<sup>6</sup> He was the eldest of four sons and three daughters. His father, James Tisdall Woodroffe, was a barrister of the High Court who became extremely successful in his profession; at the turn of the century he was Advocate General of Bengal, and a member of the Viceroy's Council until he resigned from it after a quarrel with Lord Curzon. The Woodroffes were a family of Irish Protestant clerics and James Tisdall seems to have been the only member of the immediate family to work in India,<sup>7</sup> but his wife, Florence Hume, came from a family who had lived there for several generations. Her father was James Hume, Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, a cousin of Alan Octavian Hume who was among the founding members of the Indian National Congress, and one of a small group of British people who supported it in its early phase. The name James Hume crops up quite frequently in Anglo-Indian society. Someone of that name founded the only Calcutta club in the 1850s which was open to both English and Indian members, and this might have been Florence's father.<sup>8</sup> There was also a James Hume who was editor of the Star newspaper but it is not certain if all three were the same person.



When John Woodroffe was still a child both his parents converted to Roman Catholicism. His mother was probably the Mrs Woodroffe who visited Cardinal Newman in 1873 in the company of Lady Herbert of Lea,<sup>9</sup> for his father was soon afterwards giving generous donations to Catholic projects in Bengal. James Tisdall's conversion was said to have taken place in 1875,<sup>10</sup> and led to a passionately-held devotion to his new faith. John and his next brother, Francis, were educated at an attractively unconventional Catholic school which opened in 1878, and which seems to have provided a far more benevolent environment than most other public schools at the time. John Woodroffe may have felt himself fortunate in being one of its first pupils and <sup>in</sup> being able to stay through most of its brief years of existence. He went to University College Oxford in 1884, where he was one of the first undergraduates to study for the Bachelor's Degree in Law. Training for a profession at Oxford was an innovation at that time, when the prevailing ideal of a 'liberal education' was opposed to specialization.<sup>11</sup> Although Catholics had been admitted to Oxford since the 1850 , in the 1880 they were still discouraged by the Church from going there. Woodroffe's progressive headmaster Lord Petre, however, held different views.<sup>12</sup> The great Max Muller was a prominent personality at Oxford in the 1880s - although retired from his Chair in Comparative Philology - and he entertained people from all over the world, especially from India.<sup>13</sup>

But there is no evidence that the 'grand old man' of Orientalism ever influenced Woodroffe, who did not share Max Muller's idealization of an ancient 'Indo-Aryan' past.

Taking his BCL in 1888, John Woodroffe was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple in 1889, and joined his father at the Calcutta Bar the following year. He quickly established himself as an expert on Indian Law: his first two publications were his lectures as Tagore Law Professor of Calcutta University in 1897.<sup>14</sup> He was promoted to the Bench at the comparatively young age of thirty-nine in 1904. Whether <sup>or not</sup> the influence of his famous father played any part in this, John Woodroffe had produced two more important books on

Indian Law by this time in collaboration with a senior Indian Judge, Sir Sayeed Ameer Ali: The Law of Evidence and The Code of Civil Procedure. The former especially was regarded as an authoritative textbook and remained in print for a very long time.<sup>15</sup>

James Tisdall Woodroffe seems to have been a dominating personality, which helped to make him one of the famous figures at the Bar in his day, but it seems also to have made him a very authoritarian father. He banished his third son from both the family and the country for an indiscretion committed at his cadet school,<sup>16</sup> and he made arrangements in his Will for his second son, Francis, to lose his inheritance if he married a non-Catholic.<sup>17</sup> His eldest son John, however, seems to have known how to remain in his favour, for he was executor of his father's Will. The father and son lived together at the Bengal Club and in various lodgings until 1900, though they did not share Chambers.<sup>18</sup> There is an amusing account of how the two Woodroffes once appeared on opposite sides of the same case and how the younger demolished the elder in court.<sup>19</sup> This son, at least, did not appear cowed by his awesome father. Nevertheless it is extremely unlikely that the younger Woodroffe could have openly displayed any interest in Tantra before James Tisdall retired from India in 1904. However, John may have been secretly drawn to it much earlier. In 1894 his mother died at the age of only forty-eight. There is a cryptic reference by Woodroffe to 'a man I know who had lost his mother,' who was told by a tantric saint of the last century to seek out the Mother of the Universe.<sup>20</sup> It is highly probable that Woodroffe -- who normally avoided personal references in his work -- was here writing about himself.

It was another Tantric saint, Sivacandra Vidyārṇava, who is believed to be the Guru who initiated Woodroffe in Tantra. The main source for this story is a Bengali biography of the saint discussed in chapter 6. No dates are given to the events in the account, but Woodroffe may have met the Guru soon after he became a Judge in 1904. This would fit in with

his son James' belief that his father experienced some sort of religious conversion after his marriage in 1902, and to reports of Woodroffe practising Tantra with his friend, the art historian E.B. Havell, who left India in 1906. In 1907, Woodroffe was one among a group of Judges who were founder members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art (ISOA) in which he soon took a leading role. He was a close friend of Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore, the artist nephews of Rabindranath. 1912 seems to have been the year of a famous photograph taken at Konarak temple where Woodroffe, Ghose and a European friend wore Indian religious dress. As we have seen the first books of Arthur Avalon were published the following year in 1913. Woodroffe was knighted in 1915. He retired from the High Court in 1922 and the following year returned to University College Oxford to lecture in Indian Law.<sup>21</sup> He finally retired to the south of France in 1930 and died at Beausoleil, a suburb of Monte Carlo, in January 1936.

In 1902 John Woodroffe was married at the age of thirty-seven, to Ellen Elizabeth Grimson, then aged twenty-five.<sup>22</sup> She was a concert pianist and one of a large family of musicians. Their son James told me they met when his father attended one of his mother's concerts and thereafter they shared a love of music. The Woodroffes had three children, two girls called Nancy and Barbara, and a boy, James, who was born in 1909. None of these children married (Barbara died young in 1925), and so there are now no descendants. Nancy died in 1973. James Woodroffe lived until 1995, in a caravan near the south coast, where I first met him in 1989.

#### SOURCES

##### Primary Sources: private papers

At first there seemed to be no papers at all to help in a study of Woodroffe. According to James, the house at Menton on the Italian border where his mother lived after his father's death was looted twice during the Second World War. He gave this as the reason why there were no family papers and no trace of the huge art collection his father was said

to have amassed. James himself in his caravan had no papers at all, and was able to show me only a few family photographs.

Attempting to trace descendants of the larger Woodroffe family proved a frustrating task. The Woodroffes seemed to be a family prone to dying out. Neither of John's next two brothers left any living children when they died, and the youngest was killed in the First World War. Of the three sisters, only one left a large family of descendants; her last surviving child died in London in 1985, a few years before I started my research.

Private correspondence found in India: Ghose and Dawasamdup

The name of Atal Behari Ghose is mentioned in a clause in Sir John Woodroffe's Will. In Calcutta it was not difficult to trace his family to the house where they now live. His son is dead, but his grandson Sobhun Ghose and his granddaughter Mrs Sumita Guha still carefully preserved their grandfather's collection of Tantric manuscripts and his large library on religion and philosophy. Both these have subsequently been donated to the library of the Śri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. Some of the correspondence discussed in chapter 9 was found in the trunk containing the manuscripts and some more in other places in the house. The majority consisted of letters written to Ghose from England and France after Woodroffe's retirement from India. They are all now with the Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library. Photocopies of Ghose's letter to Woodroffe and of relevant extracts of Sentinath Iyer's letter discussed in chapter 9 are to be found in the Appendix, along with three early notes from Woodroffe to Ghose. I have not reproduced any further photocopies since the originals are available and because Woodroffe's handwriting is extremely difficult. But five longer letters whose contents are discussed have been typed out in full in the appendix. The reference numbers are my own. Mr T.T. Samdup, son of Lama Kazi Dawasamdup, who edited volume 7 of Avalon's Tantrik Texts, lives at Kalimpong in Sikkim and possessed letters between his father and several

Western scholars, who included Evans Wentz and the French explorer Alexandra David-Neel. The correspondence from Woodroffe numbered thirty-two letters and is summarized in chapter 9. These letters too are now with the India Office collection in London.

#### Archives and archival collections

Among the records of the former India Office Library, information on Sir John Woodroffe's official career is to be found in the papers of the Judicial and Public Department, and additional information comes from the Reports of the Native Press, Bengal. Many collections of individuals contemporary with him in India provided useful background information. Those of Lord Chelmsford (Viceroy 1916-21) contained some relevant correspondence with the Chief Justice, as did those of the Secretary of State (1905-10) Lord Morley; the papers of Lord Zetland (Governor of Bengal 1917-21) included his Bengal diary which had references to Woodroffe, to the Governor's relationship with ISOA, and his reflections on Indian religion. The unpublished memoirs of Sir Torick Ameer Ali, son of Woodroffe's collaborator Sir Sayeed Ameer Ali, provided a vivid portrait of Woodroffe; the letters of Cornelia Sorabji (Clerk to the Court of Wards and the only female lawyer at the High Court during Woodroffe's time there) provided useful insight into the social world of the British into which she had entry. The papers of the art historian E.B. Havell included some correspondence with Abanindranath Tagore but it is not a very large collection.

At Cambridge University Library I consulted the Hardinge collection (Viceroy 1910-16); and in the archives at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the papers of its first Director Sir E. Denison Ross, who was acquainted with Woodroffe in Calcutta; and at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the papers of the W.Y. Evans-Wentz who knew Woodroffe and Atal Behari Ghose in Calcutta.

The National Archives of India hold the Home Department Judicial Proceedings, which yielded more details of

Woodroffe's career, but unfortunately some of the most interesting proceedings, especially those concerning his retirement are listed as destroyed. The National Library at Calcutta contained the papers of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, Woodroffe's colleague on the Bench. The archives of the Indian Society of Oriental Art at Park Street in Calcutta yielded disappointingly little as no documents from the earlier period appear to have been preserved; but information on the founding of ISOA has been collected in the anniversary editions of its journal. The archives of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, hold the papers of Annie Besant, but only her public correspondence was available for researchers at the time I was there; her private correspondence was not on access. The Cousins (see below) papers at Adyar are mostly those of Margaret Cousins, a noted social worker, and were not relevant.

#### Printed Books and Secondary Sources

I have used anecdotes about Sir John Woodroffe which appear in two memoirs: those of Sir Torick Ameer Ali (see below), and O.C. Ganguly, art historian and member of ISOA (see chapters 4 and 6).<sup>23</sup> The biography in Bengali of Sivacandra Vidyārnava by his disciple Vasanta Kumar Pal provides much important information on Woodroffe, gathered from oral sources amongst the saint's large following.<sup>24</sup> Much of this is reproduced in S.N. Ray's Bhārater Śādhak, and in a collection of articles by Somarendranath Bagchi.<sup>25</sup> I have used anecdotes in the writings of the French Buddhist explorer Alexandra David-Neel, especially the diary covering her visit to Calcutta in 1912-13;<sup>26</sup> and the joint autobiography of James and Margaret Cousins also provides a vivid picture of his milieu. Examples of the 'positive orientalism' of that milieu occur in James Cousins' articles on Indian art and religion, collected in his The Renaissance in India.<sup>27</sup> Many other biographies and memoirs of the times by official and private people have provided background.

The information on Woodroffe's career at the High Court is drawn almost entirely from the Calcutta

Weekly Notes published by the High Court, with some help from the OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal.

In the many biographies and memoirs concerning the Tagores, Woodroffe is one of the background figures in a world of charismatic personalities. Abanindranath's autobiography mentions the Tantric leanings of Woodroffe and some of his European friends.<sup>28</sup> Similar references occur in Pañcānan Mangal's biography of Nandalal Bose and in the journal Viśva Bhārati,<sup>29</sup> and in Bhupendranath Datta's biography of his brother, Swami Vivekananda.<sup>30</sup> For background I have drawn on Rathindranath Tagore's memoirs about the circle around his father Rabindranath;<sup>31</sup> Mary Lago's edition of letters between the poet and the English artist Rothenstein<sup>32</sup> and the letters from the collections of Rothenstein and Coomaraswamy which are reprinted in Indian Art and Letters.<sup>33</sup>

Chapter 6, on ISOA and its ideology, relies heavily on three important studies of the relationship between Indian art, orientalism, and nationalism: Partha Mitter's history of European attitudes to Indian art, and his and Tapati Guha Thakurta's studies of nationalism, art and aesthetics.<sup>34</sup> Chapter 7 on Tantra sets Avalon's work in the context of modern studies and draws mainly on two of the foremost contemporary scholars of Tantra in the West, André Padoux (1990) and Alexis Sanderson (1985 and 1988), as well as Gavin Flood (1993) and Debabrata Sen Sarma (1990) on Kashmir Saivism, and Eliade (1958) and Liliane Silburn (1983) on the theories concerning Kundalinī.

### Periodicals

Reviews of Woodroffe's writings appeared in many contemporary papers and journals, and a large collection of them has been reprinted in his books, especially in the third edition of Śakti and Śākta. [SS(3) ps.iii-xxvi] Among other periodicals, background information and references to Woodroffe were found in The Bengali and Amrita Bazaar Patrika, two Indian owned English language newspapers, and The Statesman, a British-owned paper. The Calcutta journal

Modern Review gives a good insight into political, social and cultural attitudes of the period from 1907 when the journal started. Bhārat Varṣa and Baśumati, two illustrated Bengali journals had articles, reviews and obituaries of Woodroffe. The Theosophist provided a major source for the activities and views of The Theosophical Society at the time.

\* \* \*

### Portraits

In all of Woodroffe's roles we have a few 'snapshots' of him, in both the literal and figurative sense: photographs, as well as pen-portraits showing how he was seen through the eyes of others, and actions revealing how he presented himself to the gaze of those others. There is the orientalist scholar lecturing on Tantra to an eminent audience; and the pseudonymous 'Arthur Avalon' proclaiming his identification with things Indian by wearing Indian dress at a party (chapter 2), the popular figure at the High Court (chapter 3), the cultured scholar and art connoisseur in the memoirs of O.C. Ganguly (chapter 4), the defender of Indian culture against its detractors (chapter 4) and the various pictures of Woodroffe as a Tantric - slightly eccentric in the eyes of some, the devoted disciple of the Guru to others (chapter 6).

### Sir Torick Ameer Ali

Reminiscences of Woodroffe can be found in the memoirs of the son of Sir Sayeed Ameer Ali, Woodroffe's elder colleague and his first collaborator who was co-author of his legal textbooks (see above). The elder Ameer Ali was an Indian Muslim nationalist who has in modern times been claimed as a progenitor of Pakistan,<sup>35</sup> and would not seem at first sight a very likely friend of someone like Woodroffe. But that their friendship was real is attested by the son in his memoirs, who portrays Woodroffe as a loveable eccentric. He gives us an idea of what it was like to meet him personally, and provides us with a description of his physical appearance in 1917:



In appearance small and sallow, he had never in his life played an outdoor game, but on the other hand he never missed a race meeting. In repose he wore the mask of a disillusioned gargoyle: when amused that of a delighted goblin. His two passions in life were classical music, played for him by his wife, an accomplished pianist, and the more abstruse forms of Tantric philosophy. He was at the time engaged on his great work 'Śhakti and Shakta'. Due to his pre-eminence as a pandit, Woodroffe J. was yearly elected to be president of the All India Cow Conference, an office which he held with outward decorum and some inward amusement. All these sinister tendencies, together with his rooted objection to wearing nightclothes profoundly disturbed my more conventional father, but fortunately for me had not impaired the friendship between the two.<sup>36</sup>

The elder Ameer Ali seems to have been a rather isolated figure in British India from which he had retired to England in 1904. He achieved high positions -- he was a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council as well as later on a Privy Counsellor in England and was a noted jurist, but according to one account he was not fully accepted socially by either the British or the Muslim communities in India, partly because he had an English wife. The Arabic scholar Denison Ross worried that Ameer Ali on his retirement 'would not receive the send-off he would have liked' due to his general unpopularity.<sup>37</sup> Woodroffe's warm friendship with this man whose personal interests were so distant from his own, attests to the width of his friendships with Indian people, something which is obvious from the wide popularity Woodroffe acquired. By contrast, for Denison Ross himself, social contact with Indians was quite rare, and personal friendships seemed to him impossible.<sup>38</sup>

Sir Torick Ameer Ali's account continues: 'It was Woodroffe J's habit after court hours to meditate, bare-headed and semi-clothed in an attitude of yoga on the house roof.' This piece of information leads up to an amusing story: once when he was thus meditating a Calcutta kite had swooped upon his balding head, mistaking it for something shiny, and caused temporary concussion. 'The greatest of Greek dramatists, he told me, suffered the same or an even worse experience.' Woodroffe could tell a joke at his own expense.

The house, we are informed, was in Camac Street. It is situated in the heart of the city close to its two major thoroughfares, Park Street and Chowringhi. It was a select neighbourhood inhabited by high officials of the Raj. Woodroffe had taken the house over from another High Court Judge. Thacker's Directory informs us that it was number 4. In 1991 the site was empty, and very large -- it was planned to build government offices there. It is possible that in Woodroffe's time it was divided into several lots.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the compound was sufficiently large to conceal the rooftop meditator from the street, but already we sense that Woodroffe would not worry at thus flouting British-India's sensibilities. Another and far more noticeable event may have taken place at his home in Calcutta which if it did occur certainly would have seemed strange to the neighbours (see chapter 6).<sup>40</sup>

Sir Torick Ameer Ali mentions the fact that Woodroffe was a 'nephew' of Alan Octavian Hume, but that he himself took no interest in politics and made fun of the title, 'trustee for the Dumb Millions', once given to Hume -- 'such cant phrases he abhorred'.<sup>41</sup> This is all of a piece with the light vein in which Ameer Ali writes of him, but the remark suggests that he did not identify with his distinguished relative despite certain similarities in their sympathies and interests.

We see straightaway that it was a salient aspect of Ameer Ali's image of his host that he should be involved in 'philosophy and abstruse metaphysics'; he sees him as a Sanskrit scholar 'engaged on 'his great work Shakti and Shakta'. One interesting piece of information that follows is that this guest perceived a contradiction between his host being 'a fine scholar in a dead language' and his apparently poor linguistic ability in a modern Indian one.<sup>42</sup> Woodroffe's scholarly and philosophical interests are seen as one with his championship of cow protection and his meditation practice, and are all assigned by his guest to the image of lovable eccentricity he has decided to cast him in.

Perhaps he could not perceive him any other way, and Woodroffe's joke at his own expense perhaps shows that he accepted and acted up to this image. Ameer Ali reassures us that Woodroffe's more abstruse interests 'did not exclude a lively interest in ordinary human affairs' nor 'a warm appreciation of a pretty woman'. Like others did, he comments admiringly on the Woodroffes' home. His brief stay there he describes as 'a week of gracious living'.<sup>43</sup>

### James Woodroffe

A powerful and very sad contrast with this lively and loving picture of Woodroffe is given in the memories of his son James, who was mostly describing a slightly later period, when his parents had left India. James was the only living person who was able to give me direct information about his father, but unfortunately he did not like talking about his family, and no-one could penetrate far behind the veil he drew over his childhood. Several years before I began my own research James was interviewed by Louisa Finn who subsequently wrote a short unpublished article. When I first contacted him he immediately stated his dislike of 'interrogation' and was much on his guard. This might have been because he wanted to cover up a loss of memory, but he displayed what seemed like a carefully constructed pose of indifference at the mention of any member of his family.

It was evident, however, that the Woodroffes were a most unhappy family, at least in the latter part of their parents' lives when they were living in England and France. James was not close to his father, and seemed to have had little communication with him,<sup>44</sup> and the father seemed to have passed on nothing at all of his knowledge and interests to his son. James described him as extremely withdrawn and depressed, disillusioned with his life and enjoying no sense of achievement. But we cannot be sure of the accuracy of this latter perception: his depression could have been due to the Parkinsons's Disease from which he eventually died. James had only faint memories of the time he lived with his parents in Calcutta as a child during the First

World War, but it is significant that he thought his parents had few European friends, though many Indian ones. He remembered the Ghoses, and holidays which the two families took together at Ranchi, then a forest area in Bihar (see chapter 6). James absolutely refused to countenance the idea that his father was a Hindu (let alone a Tantric of which he seemed not to have heard). When I ventured one day to ask him about reports that his father had an image of the Goddess in his Oxford home, to which he performed rituals (see chapter 6), he replied curtly: 'Who's been spreading rumours like that?' James managed to convince Louisa Finn that his father wrote only as an objective scholar, and was not 'a secret adept'.<sup>45</sup> James himself was a practising Catholic. He said his father rarely went to Mass, but the children were all brought up as Catholics, and this could not be due entirely to the influence of their grandfather James Tisdall, who died in 1908 when the girls were small and James was not yet born. The girls boarded at a convent school, and James later went to Downside Abbey. Only James was with his parents in India, and even he only for a few years.

James' picture of his father's reserve was corroborated by Lady Sonya Wilson, daughter of E.B. Havell. Having known each other in India, the Havells and Woodroffes lived near each other in Oxford for a time. Lady Wilson knew Sir John when she was a child of six and remembers him as 'an extremely cold man' who never spoke to her.

#### The Woodroffes' Marriage: Ellen Woodroffe

James' memories of his mother were stronger than those of his father, though not more favourable. We have seen that Ellen Woodroffe was a concert pianist, and that according to their son they met when Woodroffe attended one of her concerts in England. She had never been to India before her marriage, but like many artistic and fashionable people of the day, she was a Theosophist and James believed it was she who influenced her husband to take an interest in Indian religion. It seemed to him that up until his marriage his father had been a more extrovert personality, interested only

in horse-racing, for which he had a passion, and in foreign travel -- he described to me how his father used to ride as a jockey and enjoyed steeplechasing. Before his marriage he used to spend his vacations from India exploring East and South East Asia and shortly after it, he and Ellen attempted their own brief incursion into Tibet, inspired by the example of the Younghusband expedition. James believed his father must have experienced some sort of conversion which changed his personality around this time. In this he may have been right, but I am doubtful whether it was due only to his wife's influence, for we shall see that his relations of friendship/discipleship with Indian men were obviously a strong factor. It is interesting to see the early love of adventure and exploration in 'the orient' turning in middle life into an inner exploration into new areas of the spirit which belonged to the image of this 'mystic East'. It was an inner pilgrimage made by other Westerners before and since, especially Francis Younghusband himself, although Woodroffe who disliked empire, presents a strong contrast to the 'great imperial adventurer'.<sup>46</sup>

Other sources too confirm that Woodroffe's wife at first shared his attraction for Hindu philosophy. The couple began studying Sanskrit together, and the name 'Ellen Avalon', was given as co-author to the translation of Hymns to the Goddess in 1913. According to several accounts Ellen at first shared his interest in Tantra too and was initiated alongside him. At the end of her life she converted to Roman Catholicism quite independently of her husband's Catholic background; indeed James believed that in this too it was she who influenced him, leading to his being re-baptised the year before he died, but quite why this was considered necessary is something of a mystery (see below chapter 6).

Ellen gave performances on the piano at musical entertainments in Calcutta and it seems the Woodroffes were highly thought of there for their taste in music, as in art. Denison Ross, who taught at the Calcutta Madrasa from 1902 till 1911,<sup>47</sup> was an amateur singer. In his letters of 1904

to his fiancée (also a concert pianist) he describes the great honour he felt at having been invited to sing at one of the Woodroffes' soirées and his anxiety to perform at his best. It was far more important for him than other singing engagements. The Viceroy had lent the Woodroffes his band for the occasion.<sup>48</sup> A little later, he mentions a dinner at the Lieutenant Governor's where Mrs Woodroffe played the piano.<sup>49</sup> This was during the first decade of the century and indicates that at least at that time the Woodroffes were still well integrated into English society in Calcutta. The same seems true in 1912 when Alexandra David-Neel described a grand musical soirée at the Woodroffes where the guests were from both communities (see chapter 6). Eventually however, according to the Ghose family, the Woodroffes were ostracised by European society and they believed this was one reason, along with anxiety over his deepening involvement in Tantra, which made Ellen persuade her husband to retire early from India. Other sources however thought he had been forced to retire.

Ellen Woodroffe had a strong personality and identity of her own in Calcutta. She founded the French Literary and Artistic Society there, at which Woodroffe gave a lecture in French in 1917.<sup>50</sup> But according to her son's description she was not a happy person. There were rumours of mental illness in the recollections of people I talked to at the High Court, though I have not been able to corroborate these, but her son James gave vivid testimony to the very bad relationship she had with her two daughters, which he put down to the very difficult temperament of their mother. Barbara, the younger daughter, died of anorexia at the age of eighteen, in 1925. Over twenty years later, her elder sister Nancy gave away to a taxi-driver a marble bust of her deceased mother because she could not bear the thought of living with her memory. Amid great domestic turbulence, according to James, his father tried ineffectually to make peace when he did not withdraw completely. "So that," he told me "was what life was like in the Woodroffe family." He was referring to the period after Woodroffe's retirement, for the two daughters

were not with them in India. Perhaps Ellen's unhappiness was due in part to the frustration of a very talented woman having to forgo a career on the concert platform, which, James said, would have been considered beneath her status as the wife of a Judge.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1.Avalon's quotations are from Barnett 1913. Barnett later taught at London's School of Oriental Studies.

2.See for example Kanwar Lal: The Religion of Love, Delhi 1971, on Khajuraho. For a survey of Western attitudes to Tantra see Kopf 1986.

3.A point made by André Padoux 1981 p.348.

4.Taylor 1996

5.The pseudonym refers to Ghose above all, but occasionally referred to others who provided Woodroffe with textual knowledge (See below chapter 9),

6.OIOC Baptism Records, Bengal: N/1/Vol 115/31.

7.His father being John Woodroffe, Rector of Glenmire in County Cork. Who was Who, 1908.

8.Ray Choudhury 1987 p.46.

9.C.S. Dessain (ed) 1974 Vol xxvi, p.351.

10.Provence Belge de la Compagnie de Jesus: 1921, Vol 1, p.442 mentions his donation to the building of a church in Asansol in 1877 and says he was converted only two years previously.

11.Historical Register of the University of Oxford to 1900, Oxford Clarendon Press. See Oxford Magazine Vol 3 (1885) ps.24, 38, 41 for articles defending the recent changes to allow for an Honours degree in Law.

12.Beck 1950 ps.299, 305.

13.Nirad Chaudhury 1974.

14.Woodroffe 1900 and 1903.

15.Woodroffe and Ameer Ali 1898 was a commentary on the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.

16.Communication of James Woodroffe. His uncle was ordered to choose a country from a map of the world which his father spread out before him, and then was given some money for his ticket and sent away. He chose Argentina because he liked its

Notes to Introduction

warm orange colour on the map; he knew nothing about it.

17.Or at least, if he married someone not approved by the Catholic Church. Francis Woodroffe's Will reveals that he had a long friendship with a woman who was not a Catholic.

18.See Thackers Indian Directory 1887-1961

19.Gangopadhyay 1969 ps.87-88.

20.SS:466. The sādhū was the famous Vāma Khappa of Tārapīth, here called 'the "mad" wine-drinking Sādhū Bhāma'.

21.He was Reader in Indian Law but did not hold the All Souls Readership as stated in Who's Who as this was for English Law. Historical Register: Supplement 1901-1931

22.OIOC Marriage Records Bengal: N/1/301/232.

23.Gangopadhyay 1969

24.Pal 1972. First serialised in the journal Himadri (Calcutta) in 1363 (1956).

25.S.N.Ray 1985; S.Bagchi 1982-5

26.David-Neel 1976

27.J.H. and M.Cousins 1950; J.H.Cousins 1918

28.Tagore and Chand 1985.

29.Mangal 1982

30.Datta 1954

31.Rathindranath Tagore 1958.

32.M.Lago (ed) 1972.

33.K.R.Towndrow 1951

34.P.Mitter 1977 and 1992; Thakurta 1992

35.K.K.Aziz 1968

36.OIOC Mss Eur C336/3 'Echoes of British India' chapter 2 p.1, draft in Ameer Ali papers

37.SOAS PPMS 8 Denison Ross Papers, file 11, vol 4: Letter dated 12 April (ps 152-3).

38.ibid, letter of 6th April 1904. 'I have been nearly three years in India and this is the first mixed party at which I have been present.'



Notes to Introduction

39. According to Thackers Directory of 1916 there was also a number 4/1.

40. The Woodroffes had many addresses in Calcutta. According to Thackers Directory they lived at 4 Camac Street from 1916 until Woodroffe's furlough in England in 1919. But according to James they lived there at least from 1914 and he thought Thackers was inaccurate. Denison Ross wrote to his fiancée that 'to have a house of one's own is more than half the battle in Calcutta' and European residents moved frequently. (Denison Ross papers file 13, vol 6: letter dated 1st July 1904).

41. Sir T. Ameer Ali op cit p.2

42. *ibid* p.3. He does not say however which modern Indian language Woodroffe was attempting, though it was not Bengali.

43. *ibid* p.1

44. Sometimes the father and son would take long walks together during which neither of them spoke a word. Communication of Louisa Finn.

45. Louisa M Finn c.1980.

46. French 1995

47. Denison Ross 1953

48. Denison Ross Papers: file 10, vol 3: letters from Denison Ross to his fiancée dated 13th-27th February 1904. On 13th he wrote: 'I am flattered at being asked to sing at the Woodroffe's home for it is tantamount to be considered the best singer in Calcutta' - he adds however that 'the competition is not great'. He had been asked to sing at several other parties and was anxious because he was unwell. He said he cared 'much more how I feel on the 26th and 27th. On the former date I am to sing at the Woodroffe's evening party and on the 27th at the Town Hall. On both occasions I am to sing a song with the Viceroy's band'.

49. *ibid*. Letter dated 18th March 1904, file 10 Box 3.

50. SS(DP) p.vii. (Preface to the third edition)

## CHAPTER 1

### A NEW ORIENTALIST APPEARS ON THE SCENE

#### 'Tantra'

This subject is discussed in greater depth in chapter 7. The term Tantra 'means simply a system of ritual or essential instructions'<sup>1</sup> and strictly speaking refers to certain texts, related to or derived from another class of scriptures called Āgama <sup>2</sup> - hence the name of the company which published Arthur Avalon's books, Āgamānusandhana samiti (the Āgamas Research Society). It was said by a commentator in the fifteenth century: 'Śruti is twofold: Vaidik and Tāntrik' -- which shows how the Tantras were regarded as a new kind of revelation (śruti) and a new source of authority.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the Vedic tradition is synonymous with orthodoxy in Hinduism, the position of the Tantras and their followers has always been more ambiguous; but the relationship between the two streams is complicated as the Tantras mostly claim to be in the Vedic tradition.<sup>4</sup>

A typical Tantra, according to a traditional list, should contain seven subjects including cosmogony ('creation and dissolution of the world'), worship, meditation, mantra, and the sat-karma or six magic acts.<sup>5</sup> The tantric literature is divided between original Tantras, which are usually anonymous, and digests and commentaries by named authors.<sup>6</sup> The former possibly originated from around the eighth or ninth century, but the period when Tantrism flourished was from the eighth until around the fourteenth century; it is still practised today.<sup>7</sup>

Tantras prescribe individual practices (sādhana) aimed at the general Hindu goal of personal liberation (mokṣa) and/or the acquiring of magic power (siddhi). With the dual goal of knowledge as inner self-realization and as mastery over nature, Tantrics seek initiation (dīkṣā) from a Guru who imparts oral instruction and to whom the disciple submits. Tantric sādhana has characteristic features; it concretizes

abstract principles and deities by locating them in physical or mental objects.<sup>8</sup> These are: mantra or bīja (sound-'seeds') accompanied by yantra (geometric patterns representing mantras and divinities), mandala (cosmos diagrams), mudrā (ritual gestures) and figurative images (pratimā). Tantric divinities are those of the wider Hindu or Buddhist pantheon but conceived in many more forms and with a special iconography important for dhyāna - mental images constructed in meditation - which accompanies outer ritual worship (puja). Ideas of microcosm-macrocosm correspondence underlie Tantrism, where the bipolar, bisexual divinity (Śiva-Śakti in Śaivite and Śākta Tantra) resides in the body and is brought into conscious union through Tantric or Kundalinī yoga.<sup>9</sup> Kundalinī is a form of Śakti - 'energy' or 'power' - the female, active, cosmogonic aspect of the divine polarity, which is conceived to permeate all things and is the most important concept of Tantra. In the theological context Śakti means the activity of a deity in manifesting the cosmic cycles and dissolving them -- or reabsorbing them into the Godhead.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually Śakti became more significant than her consort - especially in the Śākta literature that grew out of Śaivite Tantra - and in her many forms and her many lesser emanations the Goddess took central place; hence 'Tantra' became almost synonymous with Śāktism, although it originally had a wider reference.<sup>11</sup> Today, the term 'Tantra' is used generically to cover the body of metaphysical, theological and cosmological ideas, and the ritual and yogic practices which are contained in or derive from the Āgamas and Tantras but are also to be found in other texts which do not bear that label. This is the sense in which the term is used in this thesis.

The prominence of the Goddess in itself appeared sinister to most European commentators on Hinduism and Buddhism, both contemporary and previous to Arthur Avalon, because cults to female divinities were seen as degenerate; but to this was compounded the strong emphasis on ritual with images and

mantras -- seen as 'idols' and 'magic spells'. Moreover much of the imagery was associated with death and some rites (especially those of a more magical nature) took place in the cremation ground -- this gave 'Tantra' a particularly repugnant surface and was roundly dismissed as 'necromancy'; and last but not least, there was the sexuality of Tantra, derived at least in part from its concept of bisexual divinity. The notorious pañcatattva rite, or cakra puja (circle worship), was the main focus of criticism in Woodroffe's time, in which male initiates worshipped female partners who represent Śakti, through 'five substances' or 'five true things'<sup>12</sup>. These are also known as the pañcamakāra because each of the five elements began with "m" in Sanskrit: wine (madya) meat (māṃsā), fish (matsya), grain (mudrā) and sexual intercourse (maithuna).<sup>13</sup> This deliberately 'transgressive ritual was usually seen by orthodox Hindus and European observers as simply an excuse for licentiousness.

The pañcatattva and the rites performed in the cremation ground remained secret, esoteric affairs, but the general features of Tantric ritual and imagery had gradually penetrated the Hindu mainstream and were allied to Vedānta philosophy. It was on this aspect of 'Tantra' that Avalon/Woodroffe placed his emphasis.<sup>14</sup>

#### The works of Arthur Avalon

Arthur Avalon presented himself to the world as a European orientalist who unlike most of his colleagues had attempted to approach the Tantras with an open mind. He made the point that no other foreign scholar had at that time studied these scriptures in depth, whereas he had not only done this but his knowledge of them seemed prodigious. Yet no-one had heard of him when at the beginning of 1913 he published a translation of the Mahānirvāṇatantra [MNT] under the English title The Great Liberation [GLb]. This was a probably modern and very restrained original Tantra, but for that reason was extremely important in Bengal at the time, where it was popular with the English educated middle class (the

bhadralok) who were Arthur Avalon's first and most important readership. But the book was welcomed by many European orientalist at the time, especially for its introduction which outlined the conceptual framework of Tantra, and elucidated many technical terms. This introduction was not reprinted with the second edition of the translation: perhaps because sections of it were cannibalised in later works.<sup>15</sup> In 1952 Ganesh and Co resurrected it and issued it as a separate book: An Introduction to Tantra Śastra [ITS].

As mentioned in the Introduction, the books were published quite rapidly, the great majority of them appearing during Woodroffe's last decade in India between 1913 and 1923. Alongside the MNT translation three more titles came out in 1913 alone, and several more were announced as in the press. An anthology called Hymns to the Goddess was published in collaboration with 'Ellen Avalon', Woodroffe's wife; and 1913 also saw the publication of the first two volumes of the mostly Sanskrit series Tantrik Texts [TT], followed by a third in 1914. Eight volumes in the series had been published by 1918 and then three more in 1922. These eleven early volumes were produced by eight named Indian editors most of whom were pandits with titles to Sanskrit learning.<sup>16</sup> All the texts were accompanied by introductions, and some with detailed summaries of the contents which were nearly all written under the name of the general editor, Arthur Avalon. Avalon's name was also given to two translations of short texts in the series: kārpurādi-stotram (a hymn to Kali) and kāma-kalā-vilāsa [KKV] (a poem of fifty-five stanzas on the Śrī Yantra.) Out of eight further volumes published between 1926 and 1937, five (representing three texts) were edited under the name of Arthur Avalon himself. Finally, two volumes were brought out posthumously by colleagues of Arthur Avalon - the last of them in 1940 - making twenty-one volumes in all. Two translations published by Avalon but not included in the TT series appeared in 1917: the mystical-erotic hymn to the Goddess Wave of Bliss (Ānandalahari), traditionally ascribed to Śankaracharya, and Hymn to Śiva (Mahimnastava of Puṣpadanta). A translation by Jñanendralal Majumdar of the

Isopanisaḍ with a Tantric commentary was also published around 1917 under the aegis of 'Arthur Avalon' with an introduction by Sir John Woodroffe.<sup>17</sup>

1914 saw the publication of Principles of Tantra [PT], a translation from the Bengali of Tantratattva by Sivacandra Vidyarnava, Woodroffe's alleged Guru. The translation in two volumes was by Jñanendralal Majumdar [PT/1 p.32] but Arthur Avalon wrote prefaces to both volumes and the introduction to the first one. In these as we have seen he began his ideological defence of Tantra by addressing himself to its unfavourable image in the works of previous European orientalist, an image he believed had been inherited by the Indian Western-educated public. He consequently introduced the author, Sivacandra, as 'a well-known Tantric Pandit...who, happily for our purposes, knows no English'. His 'modern orthodox views', therefore it was claimed, were untainted by influence from Western education [PT/1:p.31]. Arthur Avalon opened his defence of Tantra with a strong statement as to its position within Hinduism: in the mainstream rather than on an esoteric fringe:

Medieval "Hinduism" ...was, as its successor, modern Indian orthodoxy is, largely Tantrik. The Tantra was then, as it is now, the great Mantra and Sādhana Śāstra and the main, where not the sole, source of some of the most fundamental concepts still prevalent as regards worship, images, initiation, yoga, the supremacy of Guru, and so forth. This, however, does not mean that all the injunctions which are to be found in the Śāstra are of universal acceptance...[PT/1:p.1]

Both the saint Sivacandra and his book were thus clearly labelled 'orthodox', while a sympathetic understanding of Tantra was essential in approaching Hinduism.

Sivacandra's Tantratattva had been published twenty years previously in opposition to the modernizing sect the Brāhmo Samāj, and other Indian opponents of Śākta Tantra. Its style, as Avalon admitted, was often polemical, [PT/1:13, 30-31] but the poetical and oratorical gifts of the author also come through strongly even in translation. The first volume of Principles of Tantra was published only a few months

before Sivacandra's death, and the second shortly after that event. A third volume which was promised in the preface to the first never appeared [PT/2 pl].

### Tantrik Texts

As we have seen the first two volumes of Tantrik Texts [TT] came out in January 1913. Volume 1 [Tantrābhidhāna] was a reference book, a collection of seven dictionaries. Six of them gave access to the esoteric meaning of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet - the bījas or monosyllabic components of Tantric mantras - which were written in the texts in code to conceal them from the uninitiated. The seventh was a reference book for mudras, the ritual hand gestures.<sup>18</sup> A revised edition of this first volume was published posthumously in 1937, edited by Pañcanan Bhattacharyya.

The second volume was ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa [SCN], and pāduka pañcaka, two texts dealing with kundalinī yoga which were later translated in Avalon's The Serpent Power [SP]. The former was a chapter of a much larger work by the sixteenth century Bengali Brahmin Pūrṇānanda [SP:xi-xii], the second a short text of adoration to the Guru by the commentator of the SCN, Kālicaraṇa. Two other Sanskrit commentaries were also used in preparing the edition and the later translation. Several nineteenth century editions of the SCN had already been printed, some in 'cheap publications on yoga' with Bengali translations, indicating that the text was already popular.<sup>19</sup>

TT/3 was Prapañcasāratāntara [PST] first published in 1914, to which there was a revised edition in two volumes much later in 1935 and 1937 [TT/19 and 20]. Prapañca means the 'extended universe' -- extended that is, from bindu, the dimensionless point (see below chapter 7); sāra means 'essence'. The PST is encyclopedic in character: it begins with the evolution of the cosmos by sound and speech through the concepts of nāda and bindu and prescribes mantras and dhyānas for a large number of divinities.<sup>20</sup> Like the SCN, it also deals with the concept of Kundalinī and the cakras.

It describes cosmogony in terms of embryology: according to microcosm-macrocosm correspondences, the growth of the embryo in the womb recapitulates the evolution of the cosmos. The PST is the only anonymous tantric digest but being the oldest and most authoritative was attributed by traditional Indian authorities to Sankarācārya, though this was not accepted by Western orientalists.<sup>21</sup> It was the first of the TT series to be accompanied by a long introduction which took the form of a chapter-by-chapter summary in English. This for the second time after the MNT translation made the contents of a Tantra immediately accessible to an international readership.

The majority of the other editions in the series were also of Hindu Śākta Tantric texts in Sanskrit belonging to the Kaula schools. TT/5 was an important original tantra, kulārṇava ('The Ocean of Kula'), which like the MNT was popular in Bengal. Its date is uncertain but is estimated to be between 1000-1400 AD. The Kula path (see chapter 7 below p.220) is extolled above that of the Vedas, although the text claims to be their fulfilment rather than their denial. It gives instructions for the ritual cakra and the offering of the five 'ma-kāras' or tattvas by the sādhakas and their partners in the rite. This is accompanied by moral injunctions against lust and other vices. The divinizing of the body through the rite of nyāsa with the bīja mantras is prescribed in great detail, and the deities worshipped therewith. A striking feature is a chapter on ullāsa, states of joy or ecstasy, which appears to prescribe a drunken orgy.<sup>22</sup> M.P. Pandit has published translations of selected extracts accompanied by the introduction to Avalon's edition. This book was attributed jointly to Pandit and Woodroffe (1973).

Tantrarājatāntra in two volumes was devoted to the Śrī Vidyā school of Kaulism and its worship focused on the Śrī Yantra, the great symbol of the Goddess Tripurasundari or Lalita with her many subsidiary śaktis. [TT/8 and 12]. This text was provided with a lengthy summary in English, later published separately by Ganesh & Co under the name of Woodroffe [1954]. Śāradātilaka (sometimes called Śāradātilakatantra), also



edited in two volumes with a summary in English, was a mantra digest by Lakṣmanadeśika, a Śaiva religious leader of the Kashmir school. Commonly ascribed to the 11th century, it was best known for its 15th century commentary by Raghavabhaṭṭa. It is 'a liberal adaptation of the PST'.<sup>23</sup> Its first chapter (on which Woodroffe drew heavily in his essays) describes cosmic evolution by speech in succinct stanzas.[TT/16,17]

TT/7 was a Tibetan Buddhist text edited and translated from a single manuscript by Lama Kazi Dawasamdub.<sup>24</sup> This was just one out of a collection of eight manuscripts which Woodroffe had brought from Nepal.<sup>25</sup> In his Foreword Arthur Avalon stated that it was his intention to include in his series Buddhist and Jain Tantras as well as Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta texts, and translations from Tibetan and Chinese as well as Sanskrit: this was in order to point to the basic similarities of Tantra across different sects and religions.<sup>26</sup> But in the event the series was less ambitious and only the one Buddhist text was included, and one Vaiṣṇava (Brahmasaṃhitā, TT/15).

Although not the first Tantric texts to be published, Arthur Avalon's series were the first to be brought to the serious attention of Western scholars, and this was to a large extent because their general editor was believed to be a European orientalist. The preface to the first edition of TT/1 provides a list of Tantras which had been published previously in either Bengali or devanagari script.[TT/20,p.i], Roughly concurrent with Avalon's series was the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies published from 1911 under the auspices of the Maharaja of that state and edited by Kashmiri pandits, which aimed to publish all the major texts of Kashmir Saivism.<sup>27</sup> But these books were only for the specialist, they did not entail the sort of comprehensive commentary that Arthur Avalon's work provided.

One of the first European writers to make use of Avalon's material was Heinrich Zimmer, who described the impact the Tantrik Texts editions made on him when they first became

generally available in European libraries around 1918. The German Sanskritist and writer on art and mythology acknowledged his debt to Arthur Avalon, and the inspiration he provided.<sup>28</sup> Principles of Tantra, and several of the Tantrik Texts were substantially drawn on in Zimmer's first book, Kunstform und Yoga im Indischen Kunstbild <sup>29</sup> which contained the first European study of the mandala diagram -- the śrī yantra -- which very soon took an important place in Jung's psychology. This book of Zimmer's has subsequently been described as 'the work that introduced Tantric studies to Jung and to much of educated Europe'.<sup>30</sup>

### English Writings

In 1918 there appeared two works which were destined to have a long life and a wide popular readership. Śakti and Śākta [SS] was the first book to be published under the name of Sir John Woodroffe in its first edition in April 1918, to be followed quickly by a second enlarged edition in October of the same year. It largely consists of talks and magazine articles, and its initial core was a series of lectures given by Woodroffe to the Vivekananda Society of Calcutta in 1917-18 [SS (1):i]. The influence of neo-Vedanta is evident, and 'Tantra' is presented as Śaktivāda, a subtle philosophy allied to a psychologically profound ritual system conforming to advaita (monism) with a spiritual or mystical goal, and confirmed by contemporary Western philosophical and scientific ideas. Replies to Western orientalist criticisms are prominent, but the preface to the second edition makes clear the readership at whom the book was primarily aimed: 'the English educated Indian ... who has hitherto neglected his Scriptures' [SS (2):vii]. If this appeared arrogant from a foreigner to some of the Indian public, it was welcomed by most others at a period when nationalist feeling and pride in Hindu identity were strong. Mahatma Gandhi read Woodroffe while in prison.<sup>31</sup>

SS also had an appeal in the West, where it has inspired an interest in Tantra in several generations of readers on a popular as well as academic level, despite its style which in

places is obscure and repetitive. Being written primarily for an Indian readership it assumes much knowledge on the part of the reader. It is illumined in other places however by pieces of fine writing, and Woodroffe's intellectual attraction to metaphysics gives it an appeal to those already drawn to Vedanta. The repetitiveness is mostly the result of its having originated in lectures and articles where Woodroffe covered the same ground on different occasions. The author's attempts to present philosophical concepts in scientific terms may have added to its appeal, though sometimes also to its obscurities.<sup>32</sup>

A third edition in Woodroffe's lifetime appeared in 1927. A fourth edition produced by Ganesh & Co. in 1951 is the basis of the many subsequent editions and reprintings. In 1978 Dover Press of New York published Ganesh's 6th edition in paperback and this was until recently still on sale in bookshops in the UK, mostly those specialising in 'New Age' or Theosophical literature.

In September of 1918 The Serpent Power [SP] was published -- the book above all others which popularised Kundalinī Yoga in the West.<sup>33</sup> The 'Serpent' of the title is of course Kundalinī, the form of the all-pervading Śakti or divine energy that lies dormant in the human body till awakened by Yoga. The two Sanskrit texts (TT/2) were included in roman script, and the translations were accompanied by detailed footnotes augmenting the translated commentary of Kālicarana. The second and third editions (1922 and 1928) included some coloured prints illustrating the method of visualizing the cakras, but these were dropped from subsequent editions.

The book was designed on the same lines as the translation of the MNT five years previously. It has a long introductory section which is almost another book in its own right. This describes the notion of the 'subtle body' with its six cakras or centres of power and the physical and mental methods of arousing the kundalinī power. It presents a view of anatomy which today we would regard as 'mystical' or magical only

because we have learned to see the body through the lens of Western biological science, where 'spiritual' and material aspects of mind and body are separate. It could be argued that SP has itself almost become a Tantric 'text' in its own right, and this too, despite the fact that like SS it is often badly written. It has helped to standardize the number and positions of the cakras in modern works on yoga and was for long the major work on the subject in English, being quoted in nearly all subsequent secondary sources. At some date it was read by C.G. Jung, who claimed it had a crucial influence on the formation of his concept of the collective unconscious.<sup>34</sup> Both these books, along with Hymns have been translated into other European languages.<sup>35</sup>

The Serpent Power was attributed to Arthur Avalon. Three more publications came out under the name of Sir John Woodroffe. Garland of Letters [GOL] appeared in 1922 during his last year in India; but its central core was a series of articles originally published in 1917-18 under the pseudonym and called Studies in the Mantra Shastra. GOL is a book about the "science" of mantra, especially its cosmogonic aspect. The 'letters' of the title are the varṇas, or bījas, the primordial phonemes out of which the universe evolved, and their garland is the necklace of skulls depicted in iconography around the neck of Kali. The first chapters outline Vedic and Tantric doctrines of Vāc or Language; for these Woodroffe acknowledged the help of his friend P.N. Mukhopadhyay [GOL: p.xi], a mathematics professor who was later to take sannyās under the name of Swami Pratyagatmanand Saraswati. After Atal Behari Ghose, he was Woodroffe's second major collaborator.

Woodroffe and Mukhopadhyay collaborated on two other titles: The World as Power [WAP] and Māhāmāyā both published in 1929, but WAP grew out of a series of pamphlets on Śiva-Śakti philosophy published in 1922-3. The 'Power' of the title is Śakti, who manifests as the world, and as Life, Mind, Matter, Causality and Consciousness. The sections devoted to each of these topics provide a glimpse of the philosophical questions

that exercised intellectual Indians and Europeans in the light of scientific ideas at the turn of the century in physics, chemistry, biology and psychology. Space does not permit dealing fully with the interesting aspects of the history of ideas which this book reveals, but some topics are covered in chapters 14-16 of SS, discussed in chapter 8 below.

The Avalon/Woodroffe books instituted a revolution in attitudes to the Tantric texts, being in striking contrast to the language and approach of nearly all previous European scholars who either ignored or vilified them.

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#### Previous Orientalist Studies on Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism

That the books of Arthur Avalon marked a turning-point was acknowledged by Ernest Payne, a missionary author who wrote on 'the Śāktas' in 1933 in a series on Hindu sects edited by J.N. Farquhar. He wrote of Woodroffe: 'The zeal of a convert often runs away with his judgement... Students of Indian religion, however, owe him a great debt for having opened up this important and difficult field.' He noted a marked change of attitude 'almost entirely due to the publications of Arthur Avalon', reflected in the writings of Helmuth von Glasenapp,<sup>36</sup> Sten Konow<sup>37</sup> and, as already noted, Heinrich Zimmer.<sup>38</sup>

Admitting that previous writers on Śāktism 'have been content to follow one another in expressions of disgust rather than embark on the difficult task of examining it,' Payne listed E.W. Hopkins (1896),<sup>39</sup> William Ward (1818), the Abbé Dubois (1821), Horace Hayman Wilson (see below), Monier Williams (see below), A Barth (1881) and William Crooke (1896). Among this list, Ward was ridiculed by Arthur Avalon, and Dubois and Wilson strongly criticised in the same Preface in which he attacked his contemporary L.D. Barnett. [PT/1 ps.1-6] Among writers on Buddhism Avalon quoted critically from L.A. Waddell,<sup>40</sup> and he was fond of citing Brian Houghton Hodgson's summary dismissal of Buddhist Tantra as 'lust, mummary and

black magic'.<sup>41</sup> Thus it was first and foremost the language of the orientalist discourse that Arthur Avalon confronted, language which he claimed dismissed with abuse what was difficult to understand. Payne, too, commented on this, pointing to the frequent occurrence of words like bestiality, obscenity and pious profligacy.<sup>42</sup>

Yet Payne himself can be seen struggling between two opposing pictures of Śāktism. Basically he had inherited the older attitudes, but could no longer express them uncritically after Arthur Avalon's books had become influential. Sometimes he answered him directly, as when he attacked Woodroffe's allegorising of the Kali image.<sup>43</sup> In a passage on mantras, Payne cited both J.N. Farquhar's contemptuous dismissal ('Many of them are mere nonsense syllables, sparks from the blazing furnace of aboriginal superstitions...') and Arthur Avalon's philosophical gloss: ('The whole idea of mantra in the Śākta system goes back to the conception of sound as an essential part of the Supreme...'). Payne himself turned to psychology, but his position remained closer to Farquhar's than to Avalon's, for he commented: 'We know enough now about the laws of the mind to understand how such things can appeal to...the untutored and credulous.'<sup>44</sup>

It was Tantric Buddhism which first made a strong impression on European minds. Peter Bishop in The Myth of Shangri-La has described the reactions evoked among nineteenth century travellers into Tibet when they first encountered the Vajrayāna with its frequently sexual or violent imagery. The ideal of the austere religion of Sakyamuni Buddha as reflected in Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia was painfully contrasted with the 'degenerate' and 'superstitious' practices of vajrayāna. Buddhist Tantra became the target of 'vitriolic abuse', being described as 'the evil teaching of the Tantrik philosophy'. 'To those well-read travellers' comments Bishop 'it was simply inconceivable that such doctrines bore but the barest relation to the noble philosophy of self-denial that was believed to constitute original, pure Buddhism'.<sup>45</sup>

Intertwined with these adverse reactions, went also romantic idealizations: both originated in European perceptions of 'the other'.<sup>46</sup> Bishop is able to show how Tibet became for the European imagination a 'sacred space' on to which romantic and spiritual yearnings were projected. For this the landscape was crucial: a beautiful wilderness, vast, dangerous and hard to approach, helped to constellate this image.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps it is possible to view Tantric Hinduism in Woodroffe's time as a similarly inaccessible country of the mind, sealed off from European penetration not by physical barriers but by the horrific exterior which its symbolism presented. Consequently Arthur Avalon's expedition into this 'forbidden' territory and his discovery of spiritual treasures within it earned him the accolades of 'pioneer' and 'explorer' by fellow orientalists (see below chapter 2).

If 'Arthur Avalon' appeared to take on the mantle of the pioneer opening up a new field of knowledge then one of the original bearers of that image must surely have been Brian Houghton Hodgson. The discovery by Europe of an entirely new literature -- the Sanskrit Buddhist texts of the prajñāpāramitā as well as of the Sanskrit and Tibetan scriptures of the vajrayāna school -- was initially brought about through his prodigious labours. A British civil servant in Nepal, he pursued research into every aspect of his Himalayan environment, scientific, cultural and religious. Knowing neither Sanskrit nor Tibetan, he built up knowledge of the structure of the living Buddhism around him through oral inquiries from local 'learned men'. Through them he attempted to map the literature and set about collecting texts. Eventually he donated literally hundreds of manuscripts to the libraries of Great Britain, India and France during the first half of the nineteenth century, which formed the basis of Buddhist studies in European universities and India for the second half.<sup>48</sup> He presented the fruits of his oral inquiries in papers to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the 1820s and '30s. Abstracts of the Sanskrit texts which

he donated to the library of the Society were published towards the end of the century by Rajendralal Mitra.<sup>49</sup>

The first European academic to make use of Hodgson's material, was the French orientalist Eugene Burnouf, who published his Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien in 1844 through working on the many texts presented to the Société Asiatique de Paris. Hodgson is warmly acknowledged in the preface.<sup>50</sup> Burnouf devoted a chapter to the Tantric works in this book<sup>51</sup> but saw little in them beyond tedious systems of magic for utilitarian ends, devoted to a cult of 'bizarre and terrible gods and goddesses'. 'These treatises' he wrote 'are merely sets of instructions for the guidance of devotees in the construction of circles and other magical figures (mandala)'. He felt that in them Buddhism was reduced to human proportions and he was disappointed to see a facile cult aimed at temporal advantages displacing the cultivation of the virtues of a Buddha.<sup>52</sup> Derogatory phrases abound in his chapter.<sup>53</sup> Noting that in many of the texts the name of Buddha is rarely mentioned whereas Śaivite divinities were frequently named, he classified Tantric Buddhism as a comparatively recent synthesis with Hindu Śaivism and Śāktism.<sup>54</sup>

During the same period as Hodgson collected his manuscripts, the legendary Hungarian traveller Csomo de Koros visited Tibet where he studied the language in the monasteries. He too brought many texts to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. Many of these Tibetan texts, it was realised, were translations of Sanskrit originals which Hodgson had acquired in Nepal.<sup>55</sup> De Koros published a dictionary and grammar of Tibetan in 1834, and his analysis of the Tibetan textual library, the Kangyur and Tangyur, appeared in Asiatic Researches in 1836.<sup>56</sup> He listed nine groups of texts in the Kangyur, the seventh being called Gyut, or Tantra in Sanskrit. His language was not derogatory and he even wrote of a 'mystical theology'. He noticed that they also included such subjects as astronomy, astrology, chronology and medicine.<sup>57</sup> It was de Koros who introduced to the Western



world the Kālacakratāntra ('The Circle of Time') said to have been written in the fabulous imaginary country of Shambala far to the north -- the precursor of the mythical 'Shangri-La' in a popular book of the 1930's.<sup>58</sup>

The work of Hodgson, de Koros and Burnouf formed the basis of the study of māhāyāna and vajrayāna Buddhism by later European orientalist. Unlike de Koros, both the other sources viewed the Tantras unfavourably. Hodgson only gradually came to know of certain sections of the Buddhist canonical texts called 'Tantra' or 'Upadeśa'; his verdict on them was that they were 'in general disgraced by obscenity and by all sorts of magic and demonology.' But he added nevertheless that they were 'frequently redeemed by unusually explicit assertions of a supreme Godhead.'<sup>59</sup> This referred to the sixth dhyāni Buddha of the Tantric scriptures, Vajrasattva -- corresponding to the Mind governing the five who represented the senses.

Among writers on Hinduism, Horace Hayman Wilson in India and England, like Burnouf in France, was one of the great Sanskritists of the nineteenth century. Translator of the Vishnu Purāṇa and other texts he occupied the first chair of Sanskrit at Oxford University from 1832 after serving for many years as a surgeon for the East India Company.<sup>60</sup> In the 1828 edition of Asiatik Researches Wilson published a translation from the Sanskrit of three of Hodgson's manuscripts.<sup>61</sup> The texts were characterised by Wilson as of a 'popular not a scriptural' nature and as 'guides to the common and corrupt practice and belief'; they showed 'how far the Buddha creed has been modified by Tantrika admixture'.<sup>62</sup> The longest of the three, Ashtami Vrata Vidhāna, consisted of instructions for a tantric ritual from which Wilson translated brief extracts. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Wilson was already aware of distinctive features that were characteristic of the Tantras, whatever their doctrinal affiliation:

The ceremonial of the Tantras is distinguished by the repetition of mystical syllables, the employment of Yantras, or diagrams, a superabundance of gesticulations, the adoration of the spiritual teacher or Guru and the fancied identification of the worshipper with the divinity worshipped.<sup>63</sup>

Behind the dismissive language we can see that Wilson already knows that 'mantra, yantra and mudra' are among characteristic features of what came to be known as 'Tantra'. 'In all of these', he continued 'as well as in the order and nature of the presentations, the Ashtami Vidhāna is as applicable to Calcutta as to Kathmandu; the only difference being in the object or objects addressed.' He dismisses the text as 'nonsensical extravagance'.

The same edition of Asiatic Researches, (which also contained Hodgson's first account of the system of dhyāni Buddhas) included the first part of Wilson's essay on the religious sects of the Hindus.[Wilson 1828b] His main sources he explained were two works in Persian by contemporary Hindu authors, along with the popular Bhakta Māla of the Vaisnavas. These he augmented from oral sources. Wilson himself characterised his account as 'necessarily superficial' being based on only a 'cursory inspection' of a few texts.<sup>64</sup> He may have consulted the texts a little more by 1832 when he presented the second part of his essay in the following edition of Asiatic Researches, which included a short section on 'the Śāktas', for he supports his account with many short quotations in footnotes from the Śākta Puranas and a few Tantras.<sup>65</sup> The latter he has introduced as the collective term for the works from which are derived 'the principal rites and formulae' for 'the worship of Śakti', having already traced the history of that concept in the Vedas and Puranas.<sup>66</sup> He wrote that the Śāktas were divided into two groups: the dakṣiṇācārīs or followers of the 'right hand path' and the vāmācārīs, followers of the 'left hand'.<sup>67</sup> Under the former he describes the public cult of the goddess, mainly in the forms of Durga and Kali; while the latter term refers to those who adopt a ritual 'contrary to that which is usual, and to what indeed they dare publicly avow': namely

the ritual known as the five Makāras, or the pañcatattva.<sup>68</sup> Wilson described it through the medium of brief extracts from a selection of Tantras.<sup>69</sup> His account is purely descriptive without analysis or reference to context, and its main source was oral report ('a very general belief in their occurrence'). He believed that the ritual was practised rarely -- far from using it for anti-Hindu propaganda, he sought to reduce the impact of vāmācāra by downplaying its importance:

It is contrary, however, to all knowledge of the human character, to admit the possibility of these transactions in their fullest extent; and... there can be little doubt of its being practiced but seldom, and then in solitude and secrecy. ...it is usually nothing more than a convivial party, consisting of the members of a single family...<sup>70</sup>

A decade later his attitude seems to have hardened. Most of his phrases that Avalon picks out for criticism were taken from two lectures Wilson delivered in Oxford in 1840.<sup>71</sup> In these he calls the texts themselves to witness against themselves:

There are other atrocities [than those perpetrated at Durga Puja] which do not meet the public eye. This is not an unfounded accusation... We can read the texts...veiled necessarily in the obscurity of the original language, but incontrovertible witnesses of the veracity of the charge.<sup>72</sup>

Here he was bracketing together the sexual ritual of the vāmācārīs, the animal sacrifices and sexual licence at that time associated with Durga puja, and 'the bloody sacrifices offered to Kali' -- by which he implied almost certainly the human sacrifices performed to that goddess described in the Kālikā Purāṇa.<sup>73</sup> This, taken together with the secrecy associated with vāmācāra added up to a potent mixture of blood, lust and hypocrisy. But this was the image of 'Tantra' and 'Śāktism' -- taken as a single phenomenon -- which was to dominate European perception until the writings of Arthur Avalon marked a turning in the tide of opinion. It is an image of the Śāktas which -- despite his struggle to accommodate other views -- remains strong in Payne's book.

Wilson's hardening of attitudes might have had something to do with the fact that by the 1840's he occupied the Boden chair of Sanskrit at Oxford, which had been set up with an expressly missionary purpose.<sup>74</sup> His successor there was

Monier-Williams, who called the Tantras 'the bible of Śāktism', and defined the latter as 'the worship of force...with a view to the acquisition of supernatural faculties...or to the destruction of enemies...'<sup>75</sup>

Unhappily a vast proportion of the inhabitants of India, especially in Bengal, are guided in their daily life and practices by Tantric teaching, and are in bondage to the doctrines inculcated in these writings...Its demoralising effect...cannot be doubted and indeed it can scarcely be doubted that Śāktism is Hinduism arrived at its worst and most corrupt stage of development.<sup>76</sup>

He equates this corruption with what he calls the undue adoration of the wives of Śiva and to the 'neglect' of their male counterparts.<sup>77</sup> This author's division of the 'Śākta sect' into dakṣiṇā and vāma branches is made to coincide with a greater or lesser emphasis on the feminine -- thus enhancing the notion of vāmācāra practices as 'extreme Śāktism'. Like Wilson and Burnouf he perceived it almost entirely as a system of magic; he calls mantra 'a spell or charm' and explains bīja, nyāsa, yantra similarly as magical concepts; the philosophy of language as a cosmogonic principle, which so attracted Woodroffe, is known to Monier Williams but does not affect his perception of the associated practices as 'magic'. Nevertheless, he also conceded that the Tantras are 'theoretically' very different and not all were of the character he had described.<sup>78</sup>

The French scholar A.Barth, in his Religions of India, (first published in French in 1881) described the philosophical notion of Śakti sympathetically, but regarded the Tantras as literature detailing the 'sensual and obscene observances' which formed the 'other side' of Śākta cults. For him 'a Cakta of the left hand is almost always a hypocrite and a superstitious debauchee', but he went on to note that 'among the authors of these contemptible catechetical books there were more than one who sincerely believed he was performing a work of sanctity'. Nevertheless 'No Hindu with any self-

respect will confess that he has any connection with the Vāmācārins'.<sup>79</sup>

It is significant perhaps that Monier Williams acknowledged an Indian source for his quotations from the Tantras: Gopāl Hari Deshmukh's Āgama Prakāśa; he quotes approvingly the strong condemnation of the magic practices of the 'Mantra Śāstrins' made by this 'enlightened Brahmana'.<sup>80</sup> Exactly who was influencing whom in such 'anti-Tantra' alliances is an open question. Another example is Mrs Sinclair Stevenson and her Brahmin informants who shared her horror of Vāmācāra.<sup>81</sup>

Avalon/Woodroffe strongly attacked Indian writers in English who condemned Tantra, dismissing them as the mānasaputra (mind-born sons) of the English.[SS:71] No doubt he was correct in that those he criticised adopted the language of the orientalist attack on Hinduism.<sup>82</sup> But revulsion from the sexuality and magic of Tantra in themselves do not need to originate with Western education. Disgust and ridicule are recorded in Sanskrit literature.<sup>83</sup> Moreover Tantrics when viewed as magicians evoke fear, as Padoux noted;<sup>84</sup> and it is necessary to remember that Tantra was often meant to shock. It is possible that to some extent the Western orientalist attitudes had themselves been influenced by Indian ones, and even Avalon himself makes the occasional passing acknowledgement of this point [PT/1:24]. The fact that English education had been introduced in India by people who were nearly all Protestants seems to have led Woodroffe to identify both foreign orientalist and Indian attacks on Tantra with Protestant attacks on Catholicism [PT/1:20].<sup>85</sup>

Prominent Indian writers in English tended to skirt around the subject of Tantra. Dinesh Chandra Sen, who wrote his history of Bengali literature in 1911, ascribed the Śākta cult of female divinities to 'the primitive Asiatic races': ie the non-Aryan inhabitants of India, whose cult had gradually been absorbed into Saivism, where it was 'Sanskritized' and 'Aryanized' into a 'refined and spiritual faith'. Some forms of it (he probably meant the pañcatattva) were possibly imported from China.<sup>86</sup> The theory of the

Brahmanical synthesis as an 'Aryanizing' of 'lower' races in India that is put forward here is essentially a Hindu version of the orientalist 'myth' of the Aryan race (see below).<sup>87</sup> The theory of the Chinese origin of the erotic rites was taken up by Woodroffe and Ghose (below p.257). Sen also described them as a degenerate form of Buddhism, and this was how he explained the pañcatattva and maithuna to the Marquis of Zetland.<sup>88</sup> This was not a modern idea: Prabodha Candrodaya, a 10th century Sanskrit play by Krishnamishra, ridicules the sexual immorality of Buddhist and Jain monks and promotes devotion to Visnu as its antithesis. Sen's view was shared by Pandit Haraprasad Sastri of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who was in charge of its manuscript search, and a prominent writer in Bengali.<sup>89</sup> The notion that Tantric sexuality had drained the Indian nation of its vitality was a common one, shared by Indians and Europeans alike.<sup>90</sup>

R.G. Bhandarkar whose Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and the Minor Religious Systems was published in 1913, did not either excuse or condemn: his scanty section on 'the Śāktas' contained a discreet description of the symbolism and worship of the yoni based on the erotic mysticism of the poem Śaundaryalahari but he does not make any analysis or commentary.<sup>91</sup> Rajendralal Mitra, who published de Koros' manuscripts (see above), in his book about daily life in ancient India makes several references to the Tantric texts - which he clearly dislikes - in the context of Śaiva and Śākta practices. However, he recognizes that the Tantras 'constitute the life and soul of the modern system of Hinduism', at least in Bengal.<sup>92</sup> Skirting euphemistically around the five makāras (he calls maithuna 'female society') he associates the Tantras with wine drinking pointing out that this is ordained in the daily prayers of a Kaula Tantric, although not necessarily associated with drunkenness on that account.<sup>93</sup> In his second volume he mentions human sacrifice which Mitra believed (unlike many European idealizers) could be found in the Vedic texts. He also believed it was widespread in the middle ages in India and even in recent times, and that it was associated with Durga



and Kali worship, and with vāmācāra.<sup>94</sup> Mitra, then, for the most part shared the image of the Tantras that Wilson and other orientalist had acquired, but he did not adopt their strong language or their superior tone.

The foremost Indian writer on Tantra was the 'insider' Gopinath Kaviraj, Principal of the Sanskrit College in Benares from 1924. His many influential books mostly in Hindi started to appear just a little later than those of Arthur Avalon.<sup>95</sup>

It would be superfluous to add to the examples given from scholarship prior to Avalon's publications, as he himself gives ample evidence throughout his writings of the prevailing attitude. Among his contemporaries he quoted obscure writers like the missionary Harold Begbie [SS:74] and the privately circulated monograph by Edward Sellon (see below p.250) as well as major scholars like Winternitz and L.D. Barnett. Edward Said's critique of orientalism is hardly more apt than when applied to attitudes to Tantra and Arthur Avalon would have agreed with him.<sup>96</sup> His condemnations attain a fine irony, as when commenting on Wilson's definition of a biṭṭa-mantra: 'We learn nothing from his definition "monosyllabic ejaculations of imagined mysterious import" beyond this -- that he had nothing else to say.' [PT/1,p.4] His accusations raged against 'smart and cocksure judgments' [SS:174] covering up for ignorance and lack of insight and of the quality he considered most important for studying the religion of another: empathy.

Apart from Csomo de Koros, few Western commentators before Arthur Avalon noticed anything 'mystical' in Tantra -- except when this word itself was used derogatorily. An exception was Louis de la Vallée Poussin and even he used the prevailing language as well.<sup>97</sup> But he was commended by Arthur Avalon for making the observation that Tantric concepts were of a 'metaphysical and subtle character'.<sup>98</sup> He pointed to the need to view rituals like the maithuna in their context, otherwise one could be led to exaggerate their

immorality -- a point used by Woodroffe when defending the pañcatattva [see SS:619]. De La Vallée Poussin (1896) was a short study of two Buddhist vajrayāna texts but he seemed to take little further interest after that. His teacher at the Sorbonne, Sylvain Lévy, whose interests were mainly historical and literary, ignored the Tantras in his own studies, although he was excited by Arthur Avalon's 'pioneering' venture into them.

To sum up: what European orientalist dislikd about what they perceived as 'Tantra' and which they identified as the religion of 'the Śāktas' were mainly three things: an intense ritualism which they perceived as magic mostly directed to worldly or utilitarian aims; that certain of these rituals promoted sexual licence and drunkenness; and that the worship of female divinities was associated with animal and even with human sacrifice. The combination of magic, lust and bloodthirstiness promoted a potent image. Ernest Payne despite have to cede many things to Arthur Avalon, still argued, in his last chapter entitled 'The Impermanence of Śāktism', that it was a degenerate form of religion which arose mainly in times of political and social instability.<sup>99</sup>

#### Attitudes to History: the 'Aryans'

Western writers admired the philosophy to be found in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and the Pali canon; but they placed a gulf between this and popular religion. This was related to the perceived division between 'Aryan' and 'non-Aryan' elements in Indian religion and culture. David Kopf has described how European scholars distinguished between a 'classical' or 'high' tradition believed to stem from the Vedas and originating in a 'golden age' of the Indo-Aryans, and cults of a subsequent period -- roughly defined as 'medieval' -- which were seen as degenerate: 'popular or tribal, orgiastic and corrupt'.<sup>100</sup> Not all European orientalist idealized the Vedic age or the Aryans (Wilson for example did not), but a powerful example of the duality in perception is given by L.D. Barnett, whom we have already encountered. Barnett opened his Antiquities of India (1913) in which he was so



vociferous in his condemnation of the Tantras, with a passage which epitomises orientalist idealization of ancient India:<sup>101</sup> He went on to present his own form of the 'classic' picture of Aryan society with its three divisions:

Its head was a foreign race of fairer skin and Indo-Germanic speech, warriors and priests proud and jealous of their blood and traditions; its feet was a mixed populace, of which the more civilized elements had learned something of the arts of peace from the Dravidians...while the lower strata were wallowing in savagery.<sup>102</sup>

Tantra in this view was a survival of, or a reversion to, that primitive savagery, and was associated with the original inhabitants of India prior to the Indo-Aryan invasions.

As has been pointed out by N.N. Bhattacharyya Vedic and Tantric ritualism and magic have many similarities.<sup>103</sup> But wherever the 'Aryan myth' held sway, they were perceived very differently.<sup>104</sup> Although Barnett acknowledged those Vedic rituals which involved taking an intoxicating drink (Soma), the sacrifice of animals - and the royal horse-sacrifice where the chief queen had to mimic copulation with the dead horse - he could portray all these without undue expressions of horror. They did not interfere with his highly idealized vision of Vedic society. While admitting a 'darker side' to Vedic religion he asserted that: 'it was nevertheless in its official aspect a fairly bright and respectable system'.<sup>105</sup> Of the Tantras, however, whose rituals he does not describe at all, he writes, in the words quoted at the beginning of my Introduction to the effect that: 'Even the highly coloured Yogic imagination pales beside the doctrines of some of the innumerable sects which have pullulated on the fertile soil of India,' most infamous of which were the Tantras.<sup>106</sup> (Yoga was also regarded as 'non-Aryan' in origin, and hence could come in for criticism.) Whether idealizing the Aryans or not, most scholars, Indian and European, considered that the Tantras were symptomatic of the supposed degeneration of Hinduism. The quotation above from Monier Williams expressed this perception.

Both Indian and European scholars, then, assigned to Tantra and Śāktism a lowly place within their scheme of cultural history, dominated by the orientalist theory of racial stereotypes. But it is interesting to see how differently Barnett and D.C. Sen see the 'great synthesis' between Aryan and non-Aryan which they both believed constituted the history of later Hinduism. Barnett saw this as degeneration: the civilized 'Aryan' culture was infiltrated and swamped by 'non-Aryan' elements. For Sen it was the opposite: the 'primitive' cults were 'refined' by being Sanskritized and incorporated into the 'Aryan' mainstream.

While the Vedic pantheon was predominantly male, Śāktism, the worship of female divinity, is associated with the numerous autochthonous local goddesses, and historically with the Dravidian culture which preceded the Aryan invasions. In the 1920s with the discovery of the Indus Valley civilization, some links with the ancient Near East were established.<sup>107</sup> Before that too comparisons were made between India's great Goddesses and those of the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome and the Near East. For nineteenth century Europeans the latter belonged to the 'Paganism' that was supplanted by the higher religions of Judaism and Christianity. Woodroffe however made a creative use of these connections (see below p.250).

The Tantric texts themselves claimed, for the most part, to derive from the Vedas, but this was in order to enhance their authority. But the prevailing Aryan myth - which affected the Western educated in India as much as it did European orientalists - meant that followers of the Tantras in India would not like to be associated with a 'non-Aryan' religion. In frequent attempts to defend the three most controversial of the five makāras -- meat, wine and sex -- Woodroffe and his collaborators pointed to precedents in the Vedic rituals.<sup>108</sup> Although this may well have been unpalatable to some readers, it shows how the authority of the Vedas and supposedly high civilization of the Vedic culture were strong enough to overcome suggestions of immorality.

The Avalon/Woodroffe books made an immediate impact, and in a short time 'Tantra' was elevated from its status as 'primitive', magical or degenerate, into a subtle philosophy that could stand alongside the foremost modern European thought. In the next chapter I shall look at the reactions to the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon in India and Europe.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sanderson 1988 p.660.
2. Goudriaan and Gupta 1981 (henceforth HTSL), p.7
3. Cited at SS:145. Śruti actually means 'what is heard', indicating the divine status of speech in both Tantra and Vedic tradition. Padoux 1990 p.34.
4. Goudriaan et al Hindu Tantrism p.15ff where the similarities and differences are discussed.
5. HTSL p.10, where they add to the list. See their p.116 and fnnt 17 for a list of the sat-karma, which are aggressive (or defensive) magic powers.
6. *ibid* p.4
7. *ibid* ps.20-2; Padoux in Eliade (ed) 1987 vol 14 p.275
8. 'There is a marked tendency to concretize speculative truths and to locate them in present and tangible realities.' [Hindu Tantrism p.50]
9. HTSL p.3; See Goudriaan in Hindu Tantrism ps.7-9 for a list of eighteen characteristic features.
10. 'The supreme, male Godhead (Śiva, Visnu or one of their forms) does not act by himself but only as inseparably associated with -- and through -- his energy, his śakti, the dynamic power that manifests, animates, sustains, and finally reabsorbs the cosmic manifestation.' [Padoux:1990, ps.43-4].
11. Sanderson op cit. Goudriaan et al Hindu Tantrism ps.5-11
12. For the different meanings of tattva see below chapter 7.
13. See MNT:V:22-23, translated in GLb:86. The name for the fourth element, mudrā, has many meanings. In Tibetan Buddhism it means "a seal", or a symbol or sign. It can also mean "woman" and its most familiar meaning in Tantra is the ritual hand gestures; it also designates body postures in kundalinī yoga. But I am informed by Francesca Fremantle that its meaning of "grain" of a certain kind, regarded as an aphrodisiac, is known from Vedic times.

## Notes to Chapter 1

14. For a summary of Tantrism see Padoux 1990 ps.30-57 (his second chapter); also in Eliade (ed) 1987 vol 14 ps.272-80: 'Tantrism'.

15. The claim was that it had been superseded by Śakti and Śākta and The Serpent Power. GLb (2):ix-x (preface to the 2nd edition).

16. See bibliography for a list of texts, their editors and approximate date of publication.

17. In 1971 Ganesh and Co brought out the translation of the Iṣopaniṣad and the two translations by Arthur Avalon in the TT series in one book under the name of Woodroffe. See bibliography

18. TT/1 preface ps.vi-vii

19. TT/2 ps.1-3.

20. Goudriaan and Gupta (HTSL p.133) point out that Kālī and Tārā, the most popular tantric goddesses are 'conspicuous by their absence'.

21. *ibid* ps.130-134. See below chapter 9 for Woodroffe's problems with this issue.

22. The eighth chapter. A copy of the translation by 'Avalon' is in my possession. For a succinct summary see HTSL ps.92-96. The KT is discussed again in chapter 8 below.

23. HTSL ps.134-5

24. śrī-cakra-sambhāra-tantra was its Sanskrit title: in Tibetan, the Demchog Tantra. The text in the TT series, however, was not the Tantra itself but a dhyāna based on it.

25. TT/7 vii-ix and Dawasamdup correspondence. Mr T Samdup told me he did not know what had become of the manuscripts.

26. *ibid* p.iii

27. The Saraswati Bhavan series edited from Benares by Gopinath Kaviraj which included some Tantras started to be published in the 1920s.

28. Zimmer 1984 p.253ff

29. Translated as Zimmer *op cit*. First published in German in 1926, Berlin.

30. Ency Relg vol 15, p.569

31. Pyarelal 1966 vol 1 book 2, p.228. 'Even amongst us there is the Tantra school which has influenced Western savants like Justice Sir John Woodroffe. I read his works in Yeravda prison'. He said this while defending his practice of sleeping with women while preserving 'brahmacārya'.

## Notes to Chapter 1

32. See the passage on Woodroffe's use of scientific concepts in chapter 8 below.

33. Theosophists and other occultists had heard of Kundalinī and the cakras but appropriated them to in their own systems. Leadbeater's The Inner Life, published in 1910, had described his own Kundalinī experience. Revised as The Cakras: a monograph, published in 1927, it was criticised in the third edition of SP (see below p/6).

34. Jung, 1966/ Vol.16: ps.334-5. Jung also quoted SS on other aspects of Tantra. See Coward 1985 for Jung's use of Indian ideas.

35. SS:ix refers to an early French translation of Hymns. Avalon 1983 (see bibliography) is a French translation of extracts of SS including Woodroffe's own lectures in that language, which he refers to in his preface to the third edition. (SS:vii). The editor of this translation also mentions translations of GOL and SP in the 1970's and a full translation of SS was promised. A German translation of SS was published in 1962.

36. He was a German Sanskritist and prolific scholar. See Glasenapp 1926 (ps.156-159) and his article of 1916 which show the influence of Woodroffe on his interpretations of Tantra and Śāktism. Glasenapp was a friend of Woodroffe and Ghose; in one letter in the correspondence it was suggested he write an introduction to a volume of the TT series.

37. in Chantepie de la Saussaye: Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte.

38. Payne op cit ps.1-3

39. See his ps 483-492, chapter on modern Hindu sects.

40. Waddell 1895. At SS:62 Woodroffe criticises his statement that 'Tantra' was 'restricted to the necromantic books of the later Śivaic or Śakti mysticism'; and at SS:68 he quotes his description of Vajrayāna Buddhism as 'silly mummery of unmeaning jargon and gibberish'. At SS:204 he cites Waddell's description of Yoga as a 'parasite containing within itself the germs of Tantrism' which 'cankered' Mahāyāna Buddhism (thus producing the 'monster outgrowths' of the Vajrayāna).

41. Eg:PT/1 p.3. For Hodgson see below

42. Payne op cit p.1

43. See below, p.215

44. ibid ps.p.18-19.

45. Bishop 1989 p.127

46. Said 1977 p.1

47.Bishop op cit ps.10-19

48.W.W.Hunter 1896. On p.280 he lists some scholars who drew on Hodgson's work.

49.Mitra 1882

50.Burnouf 1896 ps.1-5

51.ibid p.465ff

52.ibid p.466

53.He described them as 'les livres qui me paraissent le misérable produit de l'ignorance et de la crédulité la plus grossiere'. ibid p.470.

54.ibid p.481ff

55."On Buddha and Buddhism" in Wilson 1862, Vol 2, ps.229-65, p.320.

56.Duka 1885. Asiatic Researches vol XX. The Kangyur was the section containing the sacred 'scripture'; the Tangyur was commentary. De Koros concentrated on the former, in which the Tantric texts found a place.

57.Annales du Musée Guimet, vol 2 (1881) p.291ff. This is a French translation of the English original in Asiatic Researches, XX (1836). It contains brief factual summaries of the texts with little commentary.

58.Bishop op.cit p.19

59.Hodgson 1874 ps.12,15. Upadeśa were one of twelve classes of Buddhist scriptures he listed. It was some time after acquiring the exoteric scriptures before he was given access to the Tantras. Burnouf (op.cit. p.466) wonders whether this was from shame or because they were specially venerated.

60.Wilson 1862, vol 1, 'Prospectus'. Symonds 1986 p.104

61.Wilson 1828a; also 1862, vol 2 ps.1-39

62.1862, vol 2 p.4

63.ibid p.33

64.ibid vol 1 ps.8-9.

65.ibid p.250.

66.ibid p.248

## Notes to Chapter 1

67. *ibid* p.250. Vāma means 'left', though it is sometimes also taken to mean 'woman'.

68. His list is quoted from the Śyāmā Rahasya and translated as: 'Flesh, fish, wine, women, and certain mystical gesticulations'. Suitable Mantras (consisting of various unmeaning monosyllable combinations of letters of great imaginary efficacy') are added afterwards. *ibid* ps.254-256.

69. He cites verses from Śyāmā Rahasya, Kulārṇava and Śiva Tantras and the Kurma and Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇas. His description of the Śrī Cakra he says he has taken from William Ward, but adds quotes from the Devī Rahasya of the Rudra Yāmala to augment Ward's 'merely oral' account. See *ibid* p.258 and footnotes.

70. *ibid* p.260.

71. 'On the Religious Practices and Opinions of the Hindus' in Wilson 1862, vol 2 ps.40ff. For the section on the Tantras see p.77ff.

72. *ibid* p.78-9

73. See Payne *op cit* p.9.

74. Symonds 1986 p.104

75. Monier-Williams 1891 p.181

76. *ibid* p.184-5

77. *ibid* p.185 (*italics mine*)

78. Monier Williams 1894 ps.128-9

79. Barth 1906 ps.204-5

80. Monier Williams 1891 p.189 and *ftnt* 1, p.208

81. 1920 p.419 footnote 2. 'For the sake of truth' she declared 'it may be the terrible and austere duty of someone to investigate it...' She did not know this terrible duty had already been undertaken.

82. See PT/1 ps.21-24 where he quotes several extreme examples in illustration.

83. Dyckowski 1989 ps.14-17

84. Above: Introduction footnote 3.

85. See chapter 8 below for Woodroffe's views on Catholicism, Protestantism and Hinduism.

86. Sen 1911 ps.250-1

87.The same theory to account for the origin of Tantrism was put forward in Prabuddha Bhārata by an unnamed writer and reproduced in PT/2 p.11ff

88.My Bengal Diary: Feb 20 1920 vol 2 ps.23-4, Zetland Papers Mss Eur D 609/2

89.'It was always a puzzle to me that the pure metaphysical religion of Buddha could be made the medium of practising immoral and obscene rites'. Haraprasad Sastri: 'Abstract on a manuscript of the Kulālikāmnaya - a Tantric work in Gupta characters...' JASB, vol LXIX/1 (April 1900) ps.100-2

90.'If at any time in the history of India the mind of the nation as a whole has been diseased it was in the Tantric age'. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya An Introduction to Buddhist Esotericism, OUP 1932, Preface.

91.Bhandarkar 1913 ps.144-147.

92.R.Mitra 1881, vol 1, p.403

93.ibid p.404ff. In a chapter on 'Spiritous Drinks in Ancient India'.

94.ibid vol II, ps.105-112

95.Kaviraj, Aspects of Indian Thought, Burdwan, 1966. G.G. Mukhopadhyay A Great Savant: MMP Gopinath Kaviraj, Calcutta, 1990.

96.Said 1977.

97.See his Bouddhisme 1909, chapter 5.

98.Quoted by Avalon in PT/1 p.25 and SS:77.

99.Payne op cit p.128ff

100.Kopf 1986 p.144

101.'In India there is no twilight before the dawn...' The people of the Vedas had not had to struggle through the intermediary stage of 'barbarism', they were civilized from the beginning.[1913, p.1]

102.ibid p.3. Barnett's analogy of the head and feet recalls the famous purūṣa sukta in the Rg Veda [X:90].

103.1982 ps.168ff

104.Partha Mitter Aryan Myth and British Writings on Indian Art and Culture: paper read to a workshop on 'The Concept of Race in South Asia' at the School of Oriental and African Studies in December 1992. Mitter's paper shows how art theories were linked



## Notes to Chapter 1

to notions of race; but his analysis applies more widely; the 'Aryan myth' led to perceptions of later Indian history as one of degeneration due to racial intermixture.

105.Barnett op cit p.4

106.ibid p.17

107.See P. Kumar 1974.

108.See eg SS:140 and 103-113 (note by Brajalal Mukherji).

## CHAPTER 2

### ARTHUR AVALON THE ORIENTALIST: A Public Face and an Open Secret

After the translation of the MNT and the early editions of the TT series were published, European orientalists readily accepted Arthur Avalon as a new member of their community. The Tantra of the Great Liberation [GLb] made a great impact. No previous translation of a Tantra had been published in Europe, although an earlier English translation of the MNT had appeared in Calcutta, and several translations in Bengali had also been published before. [GLb(1):xi,xiii] Extracts from numerous press reviews printed in the later books reveal the admiration evoked both in India and abroad by the scholarship Arthur Avalon displayed, and his venture into an area of research previously almost untouched by Europeans.<sup>1</sup> Sylvain Levy in Paris commended Arthur Avalon for attempting to change the prevailing attitudes:

Mr Avalon is, so far as I am aware, a new comer in Oriental studies, but he makes his entrance therein with 'eclat'. His book brilliantly inaugurates the study of the Tantras, the literature of which occupies a front rank in the religious life of Modern India... Nevertheless, the learned in Europe have hitherto put them aside, and have neither published any Tantrik text nor translation of them. Western opinion has crushed them all under the weight of a common ill-fame... Mr Avalon has therefore set himself to work for the rehabilitation of this calumniated literature, and announces for early publication a series of works on the Tantra and its texts. As a commencement, he has selected the Mahanirvana Tantra...<sup>2</sup>

But the text as translated by Avalon was not a typical Tantra in many respects. It is believed by most modern scholars (as well as by some of Woodroffe's contemporaries) to be a late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century composition, although Arthur Avalon believed it to be genuinely ancient.<sup>3</sup> It was an important text at the time for the English educated, because it taught a 'reformed' or purified form of Tantra which appealed to members of the Brahmo Samaj, and it had been a favourite text of its founder Ram Mohun Roy. [GLb (1):xii]. It tones down the two most objectionable aspects

of Tantra from the 'modern' point of view: the pañcatattva rite involving wine drinking and sex to which it gives a rationalised interpretation (see Glb: 205]; and ritual worship to a large pantheon of deities ('polytheism'). After the opening chapter, which begins with the usual setting of a Tantra -- that of Śiva and Parvati discoursing on Mount Kailasa -- the MNT presents a typically tantric form of ritual and meditation with mantra and dhyāna which is focused on the supreme Brahman. This is something unknown in any other Tantra.<sup>4</sup> Its moral tone is strict, even "puritanical": it condemns drunkenness within and outside the ritual<sup>5</sup> and it prescribes that substitutes for the five literal tattvas should be used by most people in the kālī yuga.<sup>6</sup> Entirely missing from the translated text is a section on 'magic', especially the ṣaṭ karma, or six magical acts, which were usually an essential ingredient of a Tantra.<sup>7</sup> The MNT therefore was considered rather 'timid' by some Śākta Tantrics but was admired on that account by others, especially followers of 'reformed Hinduism' [Glb(1):xii]. It represented in fact a 'reformed' and purified Tantrism that appealed to followers of the Brahmo Samāij, partly because they believed it placed Brahman knowledge above ritual. Avalon disagreed, asserting that the MNT was traditional but reforming only what he calls 'abuse'. [ibid]

Nevertheless the translation still needed to be read against a considerable background of technical knowledge, and Sylvain Levy expressed his admiration at the new orientalist's textual competence and understanding, remarking:

In his work he has not made even the least demand on European learning. He has, on the contrary, been able to dispense with it without prejudice to his research. On the other hand, he shows himself to be familiar with a considerable number of Tantrik works. He cites them with profusion in the original Sanskrit, and derives from them the explanation of technical terms of which the dictionaries do not give us the meaning.

He went on to state that it was the introduction to the translation which was particularly valuable:

His translation is preceded by an Introduction of 150 pages, which is the most solid and exact account that has as yet been written on the doctrines of the Tantras, their ontology, mystical phraseology, worship, yoga, and ethics. All items of information given in this exposition are supported by the authorities he cites...<sup>8</sup>

In fact both the footnotes to the translation and the Introduction were more than those words imply. What Arthur Avalon had produced amounted almost to a new commentary on the text, a modern commentary not aimed at the initiate in a secret cult nor the pandit steeped in Sanskrit learning, but at the modern general public. Two Sanskrit commentaries were translated alongside the text, but these were recognised as insufficient for the general reader. Therefore, Arthur Avalon declared:

I have accordingly...written my own commentary, and added an Introduction, explaining certain matters and terms referred to or presupposed by the text which, as they require a somewhat more extended treatment, could not be conveniently dealt with in the footnotes.  
[GLb (1) p.xiv-xv]

Continuing in the same vein of modest understatement he described his Introduction not as an 'exhaustive treatment' but only as an 'extended note'. The enthusiasm and excitement Levy expressed were not misplaced: nothing like this had been available hitherto in English or any other European language on a Tantric scripture. For the foreign scholar and 'outsider' it was a door into a whole new world.

The contemporary missionary writer on Hinduism, J.N. Farquhar, had a very different attitude. He was not going to allow Arthur Avalon to change his own view of what he called the religion of 'the Left-hand Śāktas' which remained extremely negative.

These books [the Tantras] are probably the worst that Hinduism has produced, for they consist in the main of grossly superstitious rites, charms and diagrams, and meaningless syllables said to be instinct with supernatural power, with here and there horrible filth.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless Farquhar, who wrote and edited historical studies of Hinduism in which he attempted to take a more sympathetic approach than was usual hitherto among

missionaries, acknowledged that the MNT was an 'honourable exception' to this category. He welcomed Arthur Avalon's translation and introduction as a valuable contribution to knowledge. Farquhar lived for some time in Calcutta. Writing his review in 1915, he engaged in some speculation about the identity of the mysterious scholar and, unless he was "in the know", seems to have had an inspired guess:

The translator, who writes under a nom de plume, is clearly a European disciple of some pundit belonging to the Left-hand Shaktas; and he shows great sympathy for the sect. He is always ready to defend any of its doctrines and practices, even the most shameful...On the other hand, his faithful discipleship has brought him a wonderful understanding of the teaching and cult of the sect...and his introduction and commentary (is) of great exegetical value.<sup>10</sup>

Farquhar also commented favourably on Hymns to the Goddess. His reactions indicate a turning in the tide of attitudes towards Hinduism. In his case it was directly the result of accommodation to the new self-confidence and cultural self-assertion of Hindus which was associated with the early modern nationalist movement.<sup>11</sup>

Better placed than either Levy or Farquhar to judge the value of Avalon's work was Otto Schrader, director of the Theosophical Society's library at Adyar, Madras, and an orientalist who was himself working on the early Vaisnava Tantras. He reviewed the first Avalon publications at the end of 1913 for The Theosophist. As a fellow scholar of Tantra, who himself worked with an Indian pandit collaborator,<sup>12</sup> Otto Schrader was able to give an expert opinion. He pointed to the great importance of the MNT in the north of India, where some regarded it as 'the foremost of all'. Avalon's Introduction to his translation did not provide as much new information for Schrader as it had done for Levy, but he still commended it as 'by far the most valuable part of the book', which 'must be welcome to both the general reader and the orientalist'. He compared the translation favourably to its predecessor; although he pointed to 'a large number of small inaccuracies', he praised its 'elegance' and 'the profound knowledge with which it is

backed'. He was however puzzled by the system of transliteration, which did not take account of the fact that 'Sanskrit is not pronounced everywhere as it is in Bengal', and wondered why Arthur Avalon had not used the system agreed upon at the Geneva Congress of Orientalists in 1894.<sup>13</sup>

Like Levy and Farquhar, Schrader was wholeheartedly enthusiastic about Arthur Avalon's work, which he looked upon as a 'scientific' venture.

The Tantras have hitherto played in Indology the part of a jungle which everybody is anxious to avoid. It is therefore a matter of congratulation that at last somebody has made up his mind scientifically to explore the jungle.....That these books are likely to become a great boon, everybody will admit who knows to what an extent medieval and modern Hinduism are penetrated by Tantrism.<sup>14</sup>

Schrader reviewed Hymns to the Goddess and the first two volumes of TT in the same edition of The Theosophist, where he emphasised the value of Hymns for 'the science of religion'. Schrader criticised the Introduction to this book for having too many untranslated Sanskrit words in it -- a feature of many passages of the Avalon/Woodroffe books. (See below chapter 9). He praised Arthur Avalon for seeking assistance from 'gurus and pandits'. The study of Tantra or any other Śāstra, he stated 'demands absolutely the help of the authorised custodians of its traditions'.<sup>15</sup>

Schrader described the first volume of TT, the collection of Tantric dictionaries called Tantrābhidhāna as an extremely useful book 'which nobody who has once consulted it will like to be without again', and mentioned briefly the edition of SCN (TT/2) saying merely that it had been edited with 'very great care'.<sup>16</sup>

In 1921 when eight volumes of TT had been published Woodroffe made a gift of the series to the newly formed Association Française des Amis de l'Orient in Paris. The French orientalist association was formed by Masson Oursel, Sylvain Lévy and others in 1921 at the time of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Europe when he met several leading orientalists, and

when one of Levy's pupils helped to translate his poems into French. The atmosphere was one of powerful 'positive' or romantic orientalism. (See below chapter 4) Acknowledging Woodroffe's gift in its Bulletin the Association's first President, Masson Oursel, declared that it was an astonishing event to see a whole class of literature being opened up by one single scholar:

A chapter of Burnouf, some remarks of A Barth, various researches of Louis de la Vallee Poussin, constituted before 1913 all that was written on the Tantras, whose encyclopedic character, ritualistic nature and bizarre mysticism repelled the analysts. And then there appeared one after another the rudiments of a Tantric library for which we thank the scholarship and courage of an Englishman concealed under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon; texts, translations and historical studies in the form of prefaces ... a repertoire of tantric vocabulary.<sup>17</sup>

Although he considered 'a truly critical appraisal' of the new class of texts was not yet possible, he congratulated Avalon on 'the work of a pioneer and explorer', and continued in an enthusiastic vein to describe the new light which was now thrown upon the true meaning of the Tantras and the prejudices which were dispelled. Woodroffe himself was present on the scene: in October of 1921 he lectured in Paris at the end of his holiday in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Masson Oursel was in the chair, and again praised 'Arthur Avalon' in extravagant terms: despite being a pseudonym, this name would attract la gloire du savant, he enthused. Oursel knew who Avalon 'really' was of course, for all this was by way of introducing the speaker, who had just presented the gift of his splendid works on the Tantras.<sup>19</sup>

Another eminent European orientalist of the time whom Tagore made a point of visiting was Maurice Winternitz in Czechoslovakia.<sup>20</sup> His History of Sanskrit Literature had been published in German from 1907. In 1916 he had reviewed Arthur Avalon's works on Tantra in Ostasiatische Zeitschrift. That Avalon/Woodroffe set out deliberately to influence European orientalists is indicated by the space he gave to their comments and his attempts to answer them. Woodroffe included a translation of Winternitz's review in the third

edition of Śakti and Śākta, preceded by his own comments.<sup>21</sup> After a brief survey indicating the paucity of previous studies on Tantra, and welcoming Arthur Avalon's work on that account, Winternitz too concentrated on the MNT translation and introduction. Like others in the field, he regarded 'the Tantras' as the sacred books of a single sect called 'the Śāktas', and he had a low opinion of them which was only slightly modified as a result of studying the translation of the MNT:

If we have been accustomed, up till the present, to see nothing else in Śāktism...than wild superstition, occult humbug, idiocy, empty magic and a cult with a most objectionable morality, and distorted by orgies -- then a glimpse at the text made accessible to us by Avalon, teaches us that...behind the nonsense there lies hidden after all much deep sense and that immorality is not the end and aim of the cult of the Mother.[SS:119]

He went on to describe the non-dualist metaphysics of Śāktism, and conceded that mokṣa was an aim of tantric practice, although Winternitz still persisted in seeing magic as the main ingredient, and he dealt peremptorily with the 'Bijas and Mantras, the mysterious syllables and words and the magic formulas which fill these volumes' despite also acknowledging the 'mysticism of the Tantras'. In contrast to attitudes such as those of Payne, Winternitz was entirely sympathetic to Avalon for finding 'the highest expression for the divine principle in the conception of 'Mother', and supported his protest at the European attitude that it was a 'debasement' to conceive of the deity as feminine.[SS:131]

It is interesting to note the style of Woodroffe's reply to this review. As usual, Woodroffe criticised the choice of language, especially the use of derogatory words about 'magic' and 'magicians',<sup>22</sup> and he criticised him in a distinctly superior manner: 'The article does not show a complete comprehension of its subject-matter, nor was this to be expected.' Rather like a schoolteacher he awarded 'good marks' for signs of a better understanding:

Nevertheless, in reading this article one feels oneself in the presence of a learned mind which wills to be fair...Several appreciations are just...



Among those that were considered 'just' are precisely those points which Avalon himself always put forward: namely, that 'the Tantras Śāstras...are not merely some pathological excrescence on "Hinduism"...their metaphysics is that which is common to all other schools...'[SS:115-6]

Winternitz, whatever his difficulties in understanding Tantra, was at the time an eminent scholar of international standing. Granted that Woodroffe's comments were made at the time of the third edition of SS in 1927, when 'Arthur Avalon' was established as an expert on Tantra, one can still pause to reflect on where this confidence in his own superior knowledge comes from.

The extracts I have given from Sylvain Levy's and other reviews provides the answer: Arthur Avalon's textual knowledge was impressive. His position of authority was based on his superior knowledge of the tantric literature, which he was the first Westerner to study in any depth. But as a Western scholar he pointed out also that linguistic knowledge alone was not enough to interpret these texts in the way in which the 'insiders', the believers and practitioners, perceived and used them. This understanding was essential, he emphasised, when one wrote from the position he claimed was his own -- that of a sympathetic outsider:

In giving an account of Indian beliefs and practices, we, who are foreigners, must place ourselves in the skin of the Hindu, and must look at their doctrine and ritual through their eyes and not our own...The method I follow is that of the Indian commentator, who...adapts himself to the standpoint of the doctrine which he explains.<sup>23</sup>

So this was how Woodroffe as Arthur Avalon presented himself: he was not an Indian but a foreigner, a Westerner; he was a sympathetic outsider, an observer, not a participating believer; he was an orientalist scholar with a prodigious knowledge of textual material; he criticised the attitudes of fellow-scholars from his position as one of their number. His attitude was impartial, whereas others were biassed by credal or racial prejudice.

Understandably, it was the Indian reviewers who responded most warmly to his empathy with Hinduism. For many of them, Arthur Avalon's writing on Tantra was in striking and favourable contrast to that of other orientalist writers. Not only did he take a sympathetic attitude, but he appeared to understand from within. Pañchkori Bāndyopādhyāy, himself a writer in Bengali on Tantra, commented in the Bengali magazine Sāhitya:

We could never have dreamt that it was possible for a modern Christian Englishman to so fully understand such matters as the mode of Tantrik Sadhana...(He) has certainly learnt a great deal of the inner and secret doctrine of the Tantra...We have never heard even from any Bengali Pundit such a clear exposition of Mantra Shakti as the author has given in his introduction to the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra.<sup>24</sup>

Most of his article was reprinted in a chapter of SS and in PT/2.<sup>25</sup> It reveals that Pañchkori Bāndyopādhyāy accepted the close relationship between the MNT and the Brahmo Samaj, and considered that the text was suited to the modern age when the influence of older tantras had diminished:

It seems to us that, considering the form into which, as a result of English education and culture, the mind of the Bengali has been shaped the Mahānirvāṇa is a proper Tantra for the time. Rājā Rām Mohun Roy endeavoured to encourage regard for the Māhānirvāṇa Tantra because he understood this.[SS:25]

The fact that Arthur Avalon was both a foreigner and a distinguished person socially, would help in its promulgation: '...a cultured, influential, rich Englishman like Arthur Avalon, honoured of the rulers, has translated and published (it)...' [SS:26] (It seems Bandopadhyay, too, knew his identity) Although a foreigner Avalon had not, like some other orientalists, projected his own interpretations upon his material but had been faithful to the vision of the insiders.

Arthur Avalon has not spoken a single word to satisfy himself nor tried to explain things according to his own imagination. He has only given what are true inferences according to the principles of Śāstric reasoning.[SS:26]

He concluded: 'Will not the Bengali receive with welcome such a full offering made by a Bhakta from a foreign land?'[SS:26]

Thus he urges its acceptance as a text, brought about by the will of the World-Mother [SS:19], not as a contribution to "science" or to orientalist study of Hinduism. Panchkori Bandyopadhyay was an insider, a fellow disciple of Sivacandra Vidyarnava (see below p.194)

A more critical reception was given to the MNT translation in Calcutta's Modern Review, where a reviewer thought it superfluous for Bengali readers who had many cheaper translations in their own language. He thought Arthur Avalon was less critical than foreign scholars were expected to be and had not taken an historical approach. He criticised Hymns to the Goddess for uncritically accepting Śankarāchārya as the author of several of the hymns.<sup>26</sup> This reviewer referred to several of his own Bengali articles on Tantra. An unnamed critic who had accused Avalon of misrepresenting the Vaisnavas, was answered by Woodroffe in SS.<sup>27</sup>

On the whole the Indian reception to Arthur Avalon's books was even more enthusiastic than that of Western reviewers. We find that over and over again reference is made to the sympathy and the understanding of things Indian of Arthur Avalon, to his faithfulness in representing the Hindu tradition. Here was a foreigner who allowed himself to be a mirror of Hinduism, who did not impose his own interpretations and judgments, whether hostile or romantic. One reviewer contrasted him with 'poor Max Muller who...was compelled to study in the Vedas...the religion of Paley and Addison.'<sup>28</sup> 'He has commenced his work with a Hindu's heart, with a Hindu's regard, and a Hindu's faith, and so his translation is what it ought to be' wrote a reviewer in the Bengali journal Hitavādi.<sup>29</sup> In fact, he sounded rather like an Indian pandit himself, remarked both the Bankipore Express on the one hand, and The Nation of New York on the other.<sup>30</sup> The reviewer in the latter paper reacted strongly to the deification of the Feminine, calling Śākta Tantra 'a religion of suffragette monists': Woodroffe replied to this too in Śakti and Śākta.<sup>31</sup>

Other press extracts collected in SS (3) showed that Indian reviewers just like those abroad wholeheartedly accepted Arthur Avalon as a foreign scholar, an orientalist, but one with an exceptional understanding of India; and as a scholar, his equally exceptional fund of knowledge is frequently the source of admiration [SS (3):iii-xxvii].

This is still the image of Woodroffe as Arthur Avalon among many people in India today.<sup>32</sup> A more recent writer on Tantra, M.P. Pandit, commenting on Woodroffe's statement - cited above - about the need for a foreign scholar to 'place oneself in the skin of a Hindu', considered that Woodroffe himself had no need to do so:

For the one thing that strikes a close reader of his exposition is that he is truly an Indian Soul in a European body... The spirit of the original thought in Sanskrit drips through his transparent writing with a freshness that is invigorating.<sup>33</sup>

#### Mr Justice Woodroffe

In January of 1915, exactly two years after the publication of the first books of Arthur Avalon, Mr Justice Woodroffe of the Calcutta High Court delivered a lecture at the Dalhousie Institute in the city, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Chaitanya Library. It was entitled 'Creation as Explained in the Tantra'.<sup>34</sup> The extremely eminent audience included not only Lord Carmichael the newly appointed Governor of Bengal, but even the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Calcutta Cardinal Meulmann who had been a personal friend of Woodroffe's father. Other prominent citizens who listened to him included the Chief Justice Sir Lawrence Jenkins and several other High Court judges; among Indians there was Sir Gurudas Banerjea, barrister and leader of the 'Old Congress'. One of the class of formidable intellectuals who had fully assimilated European culture, Banerjea was also respected for his knowledge of Sanskrit.<sup>35</sup> Among several ICS officials present was Nicholas Beatson Bell, later to be Governor of Assam. He had studied some Sanskrit while he was an ICS probationer at Oxford around the same time that Woodroffe was

there, and that was perhaps why he was chosen to give a vote of thanks to the speaker.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps many of the other people felt out of their depth, although, politely: 'His Excellency said that he was quite pleased to learn a great deal from what Mr Justice Woodroffe had said.' The account of the gathering given in the daily Amrita Bāzār Patrika continued with Beatson Bell saying he now recognised that he must change his opinion of Tantra:

Sometimes he believed that Tantra was a sort of work that one did not like to read or place it on his table in case his wife or daughter happened to see it. Mr Justice Woodroffe however had entirely taken away that impression. They now came to know that it was of very great interest from the deepest philosophical point of view and he regretted very much that he had never read Tantra.<sup>37</sup>

So the same effect was being produced in Calcutta as on the European orientalist abroad -- or at the very least it was considered necessary to pretend that it was -- and many Indians declared themselves flattered. The Amrita Bāzār Patrika remarked: 'It is gratifying to note the high compliments thus paid to the Tantras and many Hindus will undoubtedly take much interest in the article written as it is by a European of the finest intellect.'

You could not possibly have hoped to find a more "respectable" gathering than the one at the Dalhousie Institute on Monday afternoon of January 18th, 1915, nor one more closely entwined with the British administration. Did it require courage to lecture before them on such a subject as Tantra? Perhaps: but it must be noted that Woodroffe presented himself before his audience as a scholar, not as a convert or initiate. He was firmly within the tradition of Orientalism in India, like Sir William Jones before him, to whom he was sometimes compared and who was also a Judge of the Supreme Court. The substance of the lecture was extremely technical, explaining the difference between the māyāvāda metaphysics of Śāṅkara and the ābhāsavāda of Śākta Tantra (see below chapter 7). It was full of Sanskrit terms with which some in the audience would be familiar but many would not. It represents the earliest of Woodroffe's

lectures and articles on Tantra, and it appears to mark his debut as an authority on the subject in the public arena.<sup>38</sup> The fact that he gave such a lecture only two years after the publication of the first books of Arthur Avalon, tends to contradict the suggestion that is sometimes made that Woodroffe took a pseudonym to avoid scandal.<sup>39</sup> After that, Woodroffe delivered the lectures on Tantra that were collected into Śakti and Śakta from the platforms of several literary and religious societies, while several articles under the pseudonym were published in magazines.

And so Sir John Woodroffe <sup>40</sup> stood forward in person, clothing the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon with his judges' robes, donating to him his social prestige and winning for him popularity with a great number of Indian people. For Woodroffe was already well known in Calcutta as an Indophile and a connoisseur and patron of Indian art. If it was the combination of foreign scholar plus profound textual knowledge which gave Arthur Avalon his status and authority as an orientalist, then when one mixes with this the ingredient of Woodroffe's public identity, already widely respected in many spheres of Calcutta life -- one can begin to glimpse why the writer of an article in Bhārat Varṣa in 1916 should consider that this one man alone had been able to transform public attitudes towards Tantra. The article was entitled 'A New Way of Learning Letters' and it consisted of a pictorial alphabet, each letter being illustrated with the photograph of some well-known figure of the Bengali literary world whose name began with it. When it reached the long 'U' vowel there was no Bengali name to fit, so the writer had to fall back on an English name instead -- long 'U' stood for 'Woodroffe' in Bengali characters. The article ran:

The Tantras are obscene, the Tantras are full of indecency...the Tantras are loathsome...Such loud words of condemnation were wont to resound without pause in the mouths of the English-educated class...Having received an English initiation and education they were cutting with their own hand the branch on which they were seated. At that moment Arthur Avalon (people say he is Mr Justice Woodroffe) broke their false pride and revealed the greatness of the Tantra and the English educated Babus commenced to rub their eyes.<sup>41</sup>

The writer was being ironical. He remarked that this after all was nothing new: the English-educated in India were only too eager to follow after foreigners even in being nationalistic, as for example the followers of Mrs Besant and the Theosophical Society. Annie Besant was taking a leading role in nationalist politics in 1916 and in doing this aroused both adulation and suspicion among the Indian public. The article however pays sincere tribute to Sir John Woodroffe's championship of Indian culture, which extended beyond his works on Tantra, and the writer finished by saying that everything he touched turned to gold.

#### The legend of Arthur Avalon

There are two questions concerning Woodroffe's pseudonym: why did he take one at all, and why did he choose one so enigmatic and redolent of legend?

In view of Woodroffe's public lectures on Tantra, it is scarcely surprising that the identity of Arthur Avalon seemed to become fairly well known even before the publication of Śakti and Śākta under his own name in 1918. In addition to the writer of the article in Bhārat Varṣa, we have seen that Pañchkori Bandopadhyay seemed to write as if he knew Arthur Avalon, while J.N. Farquhar seems to have heard rumours. In February 1918, just before the appearance of Śakti and Śākta, Woodroffe's Theosophist friend, James Cousins in Madras, made an enigmatic reference in an article for Modern Review as if he believed no-one had yet penetrated the mystery. Writing enthusiastically on the influence he believed Arthur Avalon's editions and translations would have in both 'East' and 'West', he wrote that their success:

...is all the time enhanced by the challenging phenomenon of a decried and abused Eastern scripture being championed with missionary ardour (albeit in the most judicial manner) by a writer whose name takes him outside India in race (though the suggestion of France in one magazine might be modified in front of Burne Jones' unfinished picture of Arthur in Avalon).<sup>42</sup>

Avalon was the Celtic island of the dead which was transformed in Tennyson's poem Morte d'Arthur into a place

of healing to which, after his last battle, the fatally wounded King Arthur was taken on a ship by three mysterious women:

.....I am going a long way  
With these thou seest.....  
To the island valley of Avilion;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard-lawns  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.<sup>43</sup>

This was the subject of a famous painting by Burne-Jones: Arthur's Sleep in Avalon continues the story where the poem leaves off and shows King Arthur in the island of Avalon, lying in an entranced sleep attended by maidens of typical pre-Raphaelite beauty. It was the artist's last painting and was unfinished at the time of his death in 1898.<sup>44</sup> James Cousins seems to be dropping a hint about the writer's nationality -- British -- and also perhaps hinting at Woodroffe's well-known interest in art. The words 'albeit in a most judicial manner' are another hint -- this time at his profession.

So 'Arthur Avalon' was named after a painting. This is quite important to know, for here we have a writer on an Indian esoteric system taking a name imbued with Western Esotericism. The name seems to hint at initiations and the possession of occult secrets. It is generally believed that the roots of the Arthurian legend lie in esoteric rituals and they were certainly perceived that way by Theosophists who appropriated the legend. Anyone who named himself after King Arthur or the mystic isle of Avalon would be thought to be identifying himself with occultism, in Theosophists' eyes. James Cousins was not the only contact with Theosophy. As we have seen, Woodroffe's wife Ellen was a member of the Theosophical Society, though according to the membership lists in the International Headquarters in Madras, her husband did not join it himself. Both the Woodroffes were acquainted personally with Annie Besant.<sup>45</sup>



Woodroffe in his writings appears familiar with and sympathetic to modern occultism, and it is quite possible that he could at some stage have been personally involved in Theosophy or some other Western occult society. But it is also just as easy to believe that he had not. The Theosophical Society was enjoying the peak of its influence in India during the first two decades of the century, when Annie Besant grew to prominence as a public figure. They called their system 'the higher Occultism', but associated 'Tantrikas' with 'sorcerers'.<sup>46</sup> Pointing to parallels with fashionable modern occultism could have been one more way of dispelling negative images. One of Avalon/Woodroffe's most persistent methods of removing the opprobrium from Tantra was through comparison with other, more familiar and acceptable systems of belief, such as for example, among Europeans, aspects of Catholicism.

The Avalon/Woodroffe books are in fact quite free from Theosophical terminology and several pages of SP are taken up with distinguishing Theosophical ideas about the cakras from the those of the Hindu texts [SP: 4ff] in a context where it is clear that Avalon regards the Hindu ideas as the correct ones. There is simply none of the syncretism or appropriation which might be expected from a Theosophical author.

It looks as if the pseudonym had no significance of its own after all: that it was perhaps a name selected at random because Woodroffe was thinking of one of his favourite paintings. The name, however, helped to promote his own legend: that of the Western adept who gained arcane knowledge through initiation in a mysterious oriental cult. This is the image the name on the books tends to evoke in the minds of modern Europeans -- an image, as it turns out, not so far from the truth. In so far as Arthur Avalon still has a readership in the West today, what impresses are the hints in his books of a deeper, secret knowledge of the insider over and above that of the scholar. It is the

fascinating image of the 'secret adept'<sup>47</sup> which his pseudonym enhances: an impression which can only be stronger today when 'Avalon' (Glastonbury) is the scene of contemporary New Age occultism. But it seems that this association was probably unintentional. To most of his Indian readers in his lifetime, 'Arthur Avalon' was just another European orientalist, but one with an exceptional understanding and sympathy with India, and his identity was something of an open secret in Calcutta. The Bengali novelist, Pavitra Gangopadhyāy, in his autobiography, described meeting Sir John Woodroffe at a party in Calcutta when Gangopadhyay was young. He was astonished to see a Sahib of the High Court wearing Indian dress:

But the next moment I remembered that this was the lover of India, Sir John Woodroffe. For two generations his family had been living in India and drank Indian culture to their fill. He loved India and embraced the Indian way of life with respect... Woodroffe studied and explained in an incomparable way the most esoteric of Indian sādhanas, that of the Tantric path. Under the pseudonym of Arthur Avalon he wrote books on Tantra, but in those days there was no doubt in anyone's mind as to the true author of those books...<sup>48</sup>

### The real Arthur Avalon

So if his identity was such an open secret, why did Woodroffe use a pseudonym? In fact, he gave the explanation just twice -- in the prefaces to the first and second editions of SS, where referring to his previous books, he declared that he had published them under the name of Arthur Avalon:

to denote that they have been written with the direct cooperation of others and in particular with the assistance of one of my friends who will not permit me to mention his name. I do not desire sole credit for what is as much their work as mine.<sup>49</sup>

So the person who really wanted to keep his involvement secret was not Woodroffe but someone else. Nor did the pseudonym refer to a team of collaborators -- the named editors of the individual volumes of Tantrik Texts for example -- but especially to one person.

We have seen that only two books came out under the name of Sir John Woodroffe in their first editions: these were SS and GOL. Both of them were collections of short articles and lectures. Two other books came out in collaboration with P.N. Mukhopadhyay. All the rest of the publications of 'Arthur Avalon', were directly to do with texts, either translations, editions or commentaries. So it seems clear that Woodroffe was acknowledging that someone else did the work that involved Sanskrit -- which represented the greatest part of it in terms of quantity at least, though later it was the essays in English which made Tantra more widely popular. Nevertheless with time the sole credit Woodroffe wanted to renounce was eventually given to him, and this unknown and apparently very self-effacing friend has been forgotten.

One reason why this was easy was because of a certain long-established relationship between European orientalists and their collaborators, whereby the latter received very little recognition. In fact, it seems probable that Woodroffe was being rather more conscientious than was normal in using a pseudonym to indicate the work of a collaborator. An example of this attitude can be seen in a review by the Theosophist-orientalist, Johan Van Manen, on TT/7, the translation from Tibetan by Lama Kazi Dawasamdub. Van Manen scarcely acknowledges the Lama, while Arthur Avalon attracts warm praise:

We owe indeed a debt of gratitude to Arthur Avalon, whose enthusiasm for and insight into the Indian religious and philosophical mind have unearthed this particular gem for us...As far as this first Tibetan text is concerned... he has been...fortunate in having been able to secure a competent collaborator to undertake the philological portion of the work, the translating and editing labour.<sup>50</sup>

Probably as strong a factor, though, was that once having made this acknowledgment of his anonymous friend in the preface to SS, Woodroffe never referred to him again and this remains the only place where he acknowledged that Arthur Avalon was anyone other than himself.<sup>51</sup> Thereafter

he seemed all the more ready to subsume Arthur Avalon's identity under his own. In subsequent publications he listed books that had come out under his own name along with those under the name of Arthur Avalon indiscriminately as 'works which I have published',<sup>52</sup> while the pseudonym was again used for SP and for the later volumes of TT. In Paris in 1921, as we have seen, he openly identified himself with Arthur Avalon and his books.

In 1937 two volumes of TT were published posthumously. One was the second edition of the first volume, the other a new work. The prefaces to both explained that Arthur Avalon had secured manuscripts for these volumes but had been heavily engaged in editing Śāradātilaka and Prapañcasāratāntra before his death at the beginning of 1936 had left the rest of his work unfinished.<sup>53</sup>

It is obvious that here the name Arthur Avalon referred to one person not to a team of collaborators, and that the pandit who wrote these prefaces did not consider that the person was Woodroffe, despite what was to me initially the mystifying reference to his death at the beginning of 1936. Whatever his degree of knowledge, it is unlikely that Woodroffe was able not only to go on editing texts but to collect manuscripts right up to the time of his death in retirement at Monte Carlo! Therefore there was one other person, a friend of Woodroffe's, whom I wanted to know more about when I visited Calcutta.

His name did not appear on the covers of the books but he was secretary of the organisation called Āgamānusandhana Samiti which published the Tantrik Texts. Arthur Avalon's name was given as the editor and its President was the Maharaja of Darbhanga, a well-known -- 'notorious' according to one account -- practising Tantric (see below, chapter 9). There were two joint secretaries, Sir John Woodroffe and someone who normally stayed very much in the background: Mr Atal Behari Ghose.

An address of seventy years ago was to be found in the membership lists of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.<sup>54</sup> From there, it was a fairly simple matter to trace the family of Mr Ghose to the address where his grandchildren now live.<sup>55</sup> Soon after meeting the family I was told by Ghose's granddaughter, Mrs Sumita Guha: "My grandfather wrote all the books except Śakti and Śākta." In chapter 9 I discuss to what extent her claim was accurate.

In the room which contained Atal Behari Ghose's large library of books on Tantra and other philosophical and religious subjects there stood the trunk which contained his collection of Tantric manuscripts. Among the letters found with the manuscripts were four addressed to Sir John Woodroffe from members of the public; accompanying one of these was a note from Ghose to Woodroffe which seemed to indicate that as late as 1918 -- the year in which SS and SP were published -- Woodroffe needed Ghose to translate for him even very simple Sanskrit quotations. It read:

Dear Sir John, I return the letter with the Sanskrit parts (except for the quotation from the Upanishad) translated. I do not translate this as you can get it from Max Muller.<sup>56</sup>

On the accompanying letter, English translations were inserted above Sanskrit passages in the same handwriting as on Ghose's note. The quotations together with Ghose's translations of them were subsequently incorporated into a chapter of the second edition of SS -- with nothing to indicate of course that the author had been unable to understand them without help. This hint as to how the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon's apparently very impressive knowledge of Sanskrit texts comes about, is pursued further in chapter 9 below.

The problem is not so much with the Tantrik Texts series, many of which had named Indian editors anyway. A question arises over the English writings: the various articles and

lectures which became chapters in SS and GOL, and the two long introductions: to SP and to the translation of the MNT. WAP -- which was written in collaboration with Mukhopadhyay -- has noticeably less Sanskrit. One reason why many people have believed that Woodroffe was a great orientalist scholar<sup>57</sup> is surely that it is difficult to see how anyone could have written even parts of SS, which was attributed directly to him, without a good knowledge of Sanskrit and this is even more true of GOL and the other books. Not only are many passages characterised by an immense, even superfluous fund of quotations, but in places it seems clear that for the author the language is a vehicle for the philosophical ideas he writes about.

Is it the case, then, that Atal Behari Ghose simply ghost-wrote everything ascribed to either Woodroffe or Avalon, thereby rendering Woodroffe a complete fraud? When M.P. Pandit said that Sir John Woodroffe seemed to have acquired an 'Indian soul' (see above) -- was that because "he" was indeed really an Indian, Mr Ghose of Calcutta? The reality seems to have been more complex than that, as I have suggested. The two men were friends, fellow disciples of the same Guru; Ghose was also Woodroffe's teacher, but in the colonial hierarchy it was Woodroffe who had the higher status. To some extent they merged their identities into 'Arthur Avalon' who wrote with the voices of both men as I suggest in chapter 9. Arthur Avalon was a larger figure than either of them alone could be. Atal Behari Ghose's grandchildren actually said to me: 'No-one would have taken any notice of Mr Ghose of Calcutta.' Nor would Woodroffe have carried the authority of textual knowledge which Ghose could lend to the fictional orientalist. As for the slight mystery over the death of Arthur Avalon coinciding with Woodroffe's: I discovered that by a strange coincidence all three of them died together. For the two friends and collaborators, having merged their identities

into the fictional orientalist, happened to die within a week of each other, in January 1936.<sup>58</sup>

I shall return to the Avalon/Woodroffe books in chapters 7-9. The next three chapters deal with the public face of Arthur Avalon: the role of Sir John Woodroffe on the stage of Calcutta cultural and political life in the first two decades of this century.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See SS (3) ps.iii-xxvii
2. Sylvain Levy in La Revue Critique, translated in SS(3) p.iii.
3. For a discussion of the date of the MNT see Urban (1995), p.55 and his footnote 2, for other references. Derrett 1977 argues for a late 18th century date. Avalon claimed to have seen an ancient manuscript of the text (GLb (2):viii); its alleged date -- not supplied in the first edition -- has probably been introduced because of the controversy. At SS:134-5 Woodroffe replied to Farquhar who in 1920 argued that the MNT had been written by its first commentator, Hariharānanda Bharati, the Guru of Ram Mohun Roy.
4. MNT:III. See GLb:33ff. Many Tantras acknowledge the absolute Brahman and are monistic in philosophical outlook, but tantric worship itself is not logically directed to the impersonal Brahman, which is beyond form and imagery. See Urban op cit ps.21-22. In the later chapters of the MNT the Goddess comes into her own.
5. MNT:VI:195-7 (= GLb:182) and MNT:VI:14 (= GLb:140).
6. VIII:171-174 (= GLb:230) In neither of these was it unique.
7. The ancient manuscript of the MNT which Avalon claimed to have seen but which he had not been allowed to use for translation included the sat karma in a second part. [GLb(1):xiii]
8. Levy cited in SS (3):iii.
9. Farquhar 1915 p.145
10. *ibid*
11. See Sharpe 1965
12. Schrader 1916, Preface.
13. The Theosophist Vol 35/I/part 1 (October 1913), ps.138-141. Ganesh updated the transliteration in their editions.

14. *ibid* p.138
15. *ibid* p.141-3
16. *ibid* p.143-4
17. Ourself, M: 'Dons de Sir John Woodroffe' in Bulletin de l'Association Francaise des Amis de l'Orient, vol 1, no.1 (June 1921), ps.57-8
18. SS:vii (Preface to the third edition)
19. Bulletin de l'Association Francaise... Vol 1 No.2 (December 1921) ps.10-11.
20. Tagore 1981 p.154
21. 'The Tantras and the Religion of the Śāktas' [SS:115-135.]
22. He gives the German which Winternitz had used.
23. SS(2) ps.vii-ix (Preface to the 2nd edition). This is NOT of course what a traditional Indian commentator does!
24. Bandyopadhyay 1913 ps.363, 364. Translated in SS
25. SS:18-26, and PT/2 ps.16-23.
26. B.C. Mazumdar in Modern Review vol.14/No.6 (December 1913) p.
27. SS(2) ps.ix-x. The reviewer had written in the Hindu Review.
28. Upendra Chandra Guha in Pratibhā, see SS(3) p.xv.
29. SS(3) p.viii.
30. SS(3) ps.xiii and xx.
31. SS(3) p.xxi; SS(DP):173, see below p.248)
32. Mr Keshab Sircar who generously helped me with Bengali translations in Calcutta was convinced that Woodroffe must have been a siddha in Tantra in order to have acquired his prodigious knowledge.
33. Pandit 1959 p.10
34. In later editions it has become 'Creation as Explained in the Non-dualist Tantras'. See SS:379-409
35. According to his contemporary the novelist Nares Candra Sengupta. Communication of Satyakam Sengupta.
36. Symonds 1986 p.189



37. 'The Tantrik Creation', Amrita Bāzār Patrika, Tuesday Jan 19th 1915 p.7.

38. 'Creation in the Tantra' is listed on a leaflet of publications of the AAS as Woodroffe's first public lecture on Tantra.

39. Kopf 1986 p.146

40. He was knighted in June 1915.

41. Pandulipi 1916 ps.137ff. This translated passage is from 'Press Notices' in TT/19 p.iii.

42. Reprinted in SS:718.

43. Idylls of the King, Macmillan, 1907, p.416.

44. The painting is reproduced in Harrison and Waters, 1989.

45. Communication by their son, James Woodroffe. The name Mrs N. Woodroffe occurs in the lists of new members in Calcutta in 1910 and although the initial is wrong "Ellen" might have sounded like "N".

46. Cousins in his article refers to Madame Blavatsky's Voice of Silence where she calls Tantrikas sorcerers (SS:720)

47. The title of Louisa Finn's article. See above p.23

48. Gangopadhyay, P. (1956). For pointing out this I am grateful to Satyakam Sengupta. For other occasions when Woodroffe adopted Indian dress see below chapter 6.

49. SS(2) p.x. This is the wording in the second edition, but SS(DP):xv places it under the preface to the first edition. The wording in the first edition ran:

I refer...to other works...which I have published under the name 'Arthur Avalon' with the assistance of others and, in particular, in co-operation with my friend R.R.: to give him his Rashi name, for his modesty will not permit me to mention any other. (SS (1) p.i)

I do not know what 'Rashi name' means, but this wording emphasises that it was one friend in particular.

50. SS:223 reprinted from The Theosophist, July 1919

51. In 1935 he does so again - in his review of Payne's book on the Śāktas. (See below p.236, footnote 11)

52. See for example GOL p.xii

53. TT/1 (1937) p.i (preface to the second edition); TT/20 p.i.

54. JASB vol IX (1913), p.xliv: 'List of Ordinary Members'. He joined in August 1912.

55. I was assisted in this, one memorable Sunday afternoon, by Mr Keshab Sircar of the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta, to whom I owe much gratitude for help with translations and for his friendship and encouragement.

56. See Appendix: Letter B1.

57. See Kopf 1986 p.146 where he calls Woodroffe 'one of the greatest of Orientalists'.

58. Communication of the Ghose family. Their obituaries appear together in Indian periodicals. See chapter 9.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE HIGH COURT JUDGE:

#### Popularity and unpopularity

In my Introduction I suggested four roles through which to view Sir John Woodroffe's life in Calcutta: the British Judge, the connoisseur of Indian art, the British supporter of nationalism, and the secret Tantric. Whether these different roles could be seen as contradictory, and how far this resulted in inner personal conflict is a matter of conjecture, but it is also the case that they interpenetrated; each could become an entrance into the others, and they all began in the High Court. It was a group of senior Judges who supported the Tagore brothers in the promotion of the art society; it was in the High Court among the Indian barristers and vakils that Woodroffe's image as a nationalist was fostered; and among the personnel of the High Court there were devotees of Tantric gurus.<sup>1</sup>

It was probably here that Woodroffe first encountered Tantra. In Pal's stories of Sivacandra Vidyarnava (see chapter 6 below), Woodroffe's name is linked with the High Court interpreter, Haridev Śāstri, who was an intermediary between him and the Guru. When gathering 'oral traditions' about Woodroffe at the High Court in 1991 I was told that his interest had been aroused by his court clerk who had been healed of a long-standing ailment by a Tantric guru. Another story ran that it was Woodroffe's wife who was healed of mental illness. It was not possible to pursue these stories; but the fact that memories of Woodroffe lingered at the High Court at all was significant. Of one thing moreover everyone who knew of him was quite certain: that he had been a Tantric. His name was linked to Atal Behari Ghose; and I was told of Ghose's house near Ranchi, where the two men were believed to practise Tantric sādhana together in secret. The house at Ranchi figured in the memories of the Ghose family and of James Woodroffe. (See chapter 6).

The High Court however was much more significant as the scene of Woodroffe's public role and the source of the prestige he could lend to those aspects of Indian life with which he identified himself.

'An Exemplary Judge'

The Statesman of Calcutta of Friday 1st September 1922, described the scene in the High Court on the previous day at the retirement of Mr Justice Woodroffe after eighteen years on the Bench. In a courtroom crowded with members of the public as well as the legal profession, Woodroffe was presented with an address written on silk-backed paper and enclosed in a silver scroll decorated with reliefs illustrating the arenas of Indian life in which he had been active. A miniature of the High Court building represented his judicial career; a cow being milked stood for his work for cow protection; the bīja representing the 'seed of the Tantras' and a pandit reading the Śāstras represented the writings of 'Arthur Avalon'. The short address was headed 'An Exemplary Judge'. It began with appreciation of his personality: '...you have by your suavity of manners, your attainments, and above all your sympathy with the people of this country, earned the esteem and gratitude of all who came in contact with you.' It referred to 'unfailing courtesy, strict impartiality...'. Then it briefly mentioned his contributions to legal literature before moving on to the heart of this extraordinary tribute, to:

...the good work done by you to our country in other spheres of action. The Indian Society of Oriental Art...will bear testimony to your solicitude in the cause of the neglected arts and crafts of the East and of Indian painting and sculpture. In the domain of religious philosophy, your labours have removed the ignorant obloquy from the Brahmanic Scriptures known under the name of the Tantras, and the erudition and scholarship you have brought to bear upon your exposition of this abstruse subject...  
...we cannot omit mentioning one other matter, viz. the fearless impartiality with which you repelled the aspersions cast on the civilization of India, with its historic past, and the thoroughness with which you have done it.<sup>2</sup>

All four of Woodroffe's public roles are brought together here, but at this time perhaps it was the last, defending the civilization of India, that was uppermost in people's minds. At the end of 1918 Woodroffe had published his Is India Civilized?, in reply to William Archer's India and the Future, a book whose attack on Hindu culture had outraged public opinion in the country. Woodroffe's book attacked westernization and what he believed was a political agenda behind Archer's views. He strongly affirmed India's spiritual heritage believing this gave it a special role in the modern world - essentially the same message as that of Vivekananda.<sup>3</sup> The strong statement in support of what was called 'the Hindu revival' led some to link him to the 'extremists' among the nationalist politicians (see below).

The scroll had been presented to him by the Vakils' association. To make such a tribute was quite unusual and had required special permission under the rules of the Home Department of Government. The only precedent was the retirement of a popular Indian Judge some years previously.<sup>4</sup>

The retirement ceremonies of most other prominent figures at the High Court, including judges, received only brief notices in the Calcutta Weekly Notes, whereas Woodroffe's covered several pages.<sup>5</sup> His popularity with the vakils and with Indian members of the Bar was long established, and it was for much more besides his Tantric books. The Address was far from mere flattery -- it conveyed their sincere liking. Nares Candra Sengupta, a barrister and prominent writer who knew Woodroffe at the High Court, recalled that this British Judge had a clique of enthusiastic admirers among the Indian members of the Bar. They were for the most part ignorant of Sanskrit and knew little of Tantra but they were impressed by his apparently deep learning in Sanskritic culture which to N.C.Sengupta's view he flaunted rather arrogantly. For these admirers Woodroffe's defence of Tantra was part of his Indian nationalism. Nirad Chaudhury, whose recollections cover the period of Woodroffe's life in Calcutta, made the same observation; <sup>6</sup> he believed Woodroffe's admirers at the High Court had little interest in his Tantric studies except that

they contributed to national self-esteem. Sengupta believed Woodroffe too conservative and that his support for tradition had a reactionary influence. He took issue with him in one of his own essays where he defended Ram Mohun Roy against Woodroffe's shallow dismissal of him.<sup>7</sup> Woodroffe's talks and articles on cultural nationalist themes were collected by one of his circle of admirers at the High Court who published them as Bhārata Shakti, a book which ran to three editions very quickly.

There were of course other prominent British supporters of Indian nationalism, some of whom also held high ranks in the administration. But the most obvious comparisons would be to a previous generation: to people like Sir Henry Cotton, and Woodroffe's own second cousin Alan Octavian Hume. The programme these men had favoured was that of the 'Old Congress' or the 'moderates', who believed in Indian representation and participation in government on democratic principles, but with India remaining within the Empire. Colonial self-government not complete independence was their goal.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the second decade of this century the political situation had by-passed this issue. Some limited self-government had been granted through the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 and this was extended in 1919 by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, but they did not satisfy Indian demands. Woodroffe was quite different from Hume and others of his generation. Torick Ameer Ali was probably right in his observation that Woodroffe had no real interest in politics as such. He expresses no interest in constitutional matters. Like Nivedita, Vivekananda's famous disciple, his passion for cultural and religious nationalism stemmed from his strong personal identification with Hinduism.

The second edition of Is India Civilized? was published at an exceptionally sensitive time: April 1919, the month of General Dyer's atrocity, the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre of unarmed Indian demonstrators -- the event which prompted Rabindranath Tagore to resign his knighthood. The political atmosphere was specially tense, and would get more so. The

Sedition Committee had published its report at the end of the previous year and had been implemented in the immensely unpopular Rowlatt Acts.<sup>9</sup> Woodroffe's book was very popular with the Indian press, a popularity no doubt enhanced by the hostile response it evoked in some sections of the British press in India.<sup>10</sup> If the publication of the book had anything to do with Woodroffe's retirement, then the vakils' gesture could also have been an act of defiance to the government of India, whose relations with the High Court were often strained. Woodroffe was leaving three years before the normal retiring age of sixty, but the reason for this is not easy to establish as the relevant papers have not been preserved.<sup>11</sup> In his own speech of thanks to the address of the Vakils he mentions 'circumstances which compel me to retire' but does not say what these were. Another retirement tribute paid to Woodroffe by the Vivekananda Society of Calcutta refers to Bhārata Shakti and Is India Civilized? and the 'displeasure' they had incurred from his own countrymen.<sup>12</sup> There are indications that Woodroffe had first intended retiring in 1919, which would have been soon after the publication of the latter book. Abanindranath Tagore wrote to Havell in September 1919 that Woodroffe had retired and he didn't think he would return to India.<sup>13</sup> Woodroffe had written to Lama Kazi Dawasamdub in 1917 of his intention to leave India as soon as the war would be over. A letter from the Chief Justice Sir Lancelot Sanderson to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford indicates that Woodroffe had said he might not return to India after his furlough of 1919-20.<sup>14</sup> In the event, he did return and remained a Judge for another two years. If this indicates his retirement was voluntary, it gives us no indication of what social or official pressures may have been on him. I was told by several people in Calcutta that it was widely believed that Woodroffe was forced to retire.

#### Legal Career

There exists no history of the Calcutta High Court. Its 125th Anniversary Souvenir contained reminiscences and a brief historical outline.<sup>15</sup> Otherwise, for the legal and

political background to Woodroffe's career there I have relied almost entirely on the Calcutta Weekly Notes (CWN), produced from 1895. The founder and editor throughout Woodroffe's time was a Bengali barrister named J. Chaudhury, and he expresses the attitudes of Indian members of the Calcutta Bar, an institution which had a strong nationalist record.<sup>16</sup> The CWN consists of a weekly news sheet (the 'Notes') containing commentary on current affairs from a legal point of view and items of news concerning High Court personnel; this is followed by a selection of recent trial records and texts of judgments.

We have seen how in 1889 the young John Woodroffe, newly called to the Bar at the Middle Temple, came to join his father in Calcutta. He was not a member of the Indian Judicial Service and therefore not strictly speaking an 'official' of the Raj. Most British Judges were either ICS officers belonging to the Judicial branch of the service, or barristers promoted directly from the London Bar.<sup>17</sup> The promotion of the younger Woodroffe to the Bench in 1904 from the local Calcutta Bar was greeted with enthusiasm by CWN.<sup>18</sup> We have seen that the young Judge began his career with an established reputation for scholarship on law.<sup>19</sup>

The High Court was divided into an 'original' and an 'appellate' side. The former tried criminal and civil cases originating in Calcutta, the appellate branch was the court of appeal for the whole province <sup>20</sup> (of Bengal until the partition of 1905 and of West Bengal and part of Bihar for a few years after that). It was usually the junior judges who presided at the sessions on the original side, but Woodroffe almost right away was sitting on appeal benches as well. These usually consisted of two or three senior judges and by far the greater portion of the cases were civil.

After his promotion Woodroffe seems to have been immediately popular with Indian members of the legal profession, who were nearly all advocates, attorneys or traditional vakils, Indian judges still being few in number. The editor of CWN mentions



him warmly on several occasions and seems to have had a special liking for him. He noted the unusually large attendance at a dinner given for Woodroffe by members of the Bar six months after his appointment as a Judge. Describing how Woodroffe was admired for his 'unostentatious manners, uniform courtesy, patience, devotion to duty ...' this appreciation at the beginning of his career is couched in language similar to that of the vakils at his retirement.<sup>21</sup> A few years later in 1908, the elder Woodroffe died and it was rumoured that the son might now retire, it being presumed he had come into a fortune. CWN urged Woodroffe against this on the grounds of duty: perhaps such 'pro-Indian' judges were scarce.<sup>22</sup> But in 1912 as we shall see below there came a difficult political case which seriously dented his popularity for a time.

#### The Political Background: the swadeshi years

The political temperature throughout Woodroffe's years on the Bench was high, and the first two decades of this century in Calcutta might seem to have been a specially difficult time for a British Judge with Indian sympathies. The year after his appointment saw the beginning of what was named by many of the British the 'Indian unrest': the period of 'swadeshi' agitation in Bengal sparked off by Lord Curzon's partition of the province in 1905. The 'extremists' among this movement were among the earlier modern nationalists. Swadeśi, meaning <sup>to one's</sup> 'belonging own country' was at first a generally pacific movement to boycott foreign goods and government controlled education. Along with this went rejection of industrialism and westernization manifesting first of all in the promotion of 'traditional' arts and crafts, reflecting a similar fashionable movement in England at the time. Many of the more pacific 'swadeshi' values were inherited in the following decade by Mahatma Gandhi, and became the centre of his ideology. But there was also a revolutionary side to the campaign, and these years saw the growth of more violent underground movements. There were assassinations and 'political' dacoities carried out by middle-class English-educated Bengali youth. They were accompanied in their turn

by trials for 'sedition' in the courts, by executions and deportations which created 'revolutionary martyrs'.<sup>23</sup>

Sumit Sarkar gives around 1908 as the time when the more passive, mainly cultural, swadeshi movement gave way to the more violent revolutionary one. Like other aspects of the swadeshi movement, the revolutionaries combined political with religious ideology, appealed to religious sentiment and adopted Hindu rituals and imagery.<sup>24</sup> The anusilan samitis ('self-culture clubs') which were set up as part of the pacific swadeshi movement, in some cases became revolutionary societies organizing terrorist acts. The later Sri Aurobindo was at this time a young revolutionary recently returned from England whose inspiration for English-educated young men is described by Nirad Chaudhury.<sup>25</sup> Aurobindo already combined his European political ideas with Hindu spirituality; he and his brother Barindra Kumar organised a revolutionary 'school' at Manicktolla, a suburb of Calcutta, where training in bomb manufacture was combined with Yoga. On April 30th 1908 the first two Bengali 'martyrs', Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chakri, went on trial at Muzafferpore in Bihar for throwing a bomb at what they had believed was the carriage of an unpopular district judge but which killed two British women instead.<sup>26</sup> The Muzafferpore bomb case was among the first 'political' trials in Bengal; it had long repercussions whose effects were later to engulf Woodroffe. In its wake a 'conspiracy' was discovered and arrests were made at Manicktolla and in the town of Midnapore where the two suspects lived. Aurobindo and his brother went on trial before a district court in October 1908, where Aurobindo was acquitted. His brother's case came before the High Court on appeal the following year (the Alipore Conspiracy case). Khudiram Bose had meanwhile suffered the death penalty.<sup>27</sup> Such 'political' cases were usually decided by district judges or magistrates, and only reached the High Court on appeal. At the end of 1908 the Criminal Law Amendment Bill set up Special Tribunals of three High Court Judges to try some political cases.<sup>28</sup> Even after that and even when the political atmosphere was tense, the greater part of the day-

to-day work of a senior High Court Judge was still concerned with appeals on civil cases. But when it came to 'political' cases, the Bench was subject to pressure from the British government in India which often complained the Judges were too lenient. Government criticism was echoed in both the British and the British-Indian press.<sup>29</sup> For its part, the High Court -- at least as far as its opinions were reflected in the CWN -- saw itself as a bulwark defending a fragile constitutional liberty against the encroachments of a powerful bureaucracy.<sup>30</sup> The insecurity created by 'revolutionary' or 'terrorist' acts invaded the precincts of the court itself: in 1910 a policeman was assassinated there.<sup>31</sup> Among the papers of Asutosh Mukherji, the most senior Indian Judge at the time, was a letter from the Home Department outlining the measures taken for his protection, which included four policemen to guard him day and night. Whether this was felt necessary for all High Court Judges is not clear from the letter; Asutosh Mukherji may have been under special threat not only as an Indian Judge, but especially because he was Chancellor of Calcutta University and had openly opposed the swadeshi education boycott.<sup>32</sup> Usually it was the District Judges and magistrates who were 'in the front line' as the most frequent targets of assassination. Strong pressure, even threats of violence, also came from the European community in India. (below p.111)

The Viceroyalty of Lord Hardinge (1910-16) continued to be turbulent. An attempt was made on the life of the Viceroy on the occasion of the Royal Durbar and State entry to the new capital at Delhi in December 1912. Hardinge in his memoirs describes Bengal and Calcutta on his arrival in 1910, as 'seething with sedition': dacoities and assassinations were 'an almost daily occurrence' in the city and its neighbourhood. Trials for 'sedition' were in progress and he was surprised by the number of prosecutions that had been instituted at the High Court.<sup>33</sup> He was critical of the government of Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal from 1912, for being unable to control the situation and urged him to take stronger measures. Lord Carmichael is recorded as

accepting these only reluctantly because of the 'widespread distrust of the police and CID' amongst the public. He is quoted as saying that 'one of the gravest features, ...of the situation here is the almost universal feeling of distrust -- I may almost say hatred -- of the CID amongst...Indians and Europeans alike.'<sup>34</sup> Nirad Chaudhury describes the years 1910-16 as a time when life was lived between two shadows: those of the conspiratorial revolutionaries on the one hand, and along with them the 'unavowed watch of the (police) spies'. Nevertheless, he thought these years had the appearance on the surface of being more stable than the previous ones.<sup>35</sup> Measures such as the 1915 Defence of India Bill (allowing for internments by special tribunals without appeal) and bills affecting a degree of press censorship aroused anxiety in the pages of CWN.<sup>36</sup>

There was a belief that armed insurrection was being planned in Bengal, and in September 1915 some Bengali insurgents armed by Japan were intercepted in Orissa.<sup>37</sup> Bengal, however, had by then ceased to be the centre of nationalist agitation. These years, just prior to the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the national scene were those of Annie Besant's ascendancy in India-wide politics, wielded from her position at the head of the Theosophical Society in Madras. Besant's ideal was self-government for India within a reformed and 'spiritualised' British Empire, something which put her at odds with many other nationalist leaders, especially Bal Gangadhar Tilak who was her main rival at the time. Nevertheless she was associated with 'extremism' in the eyes of the British administration. She too, like Gandhi and most other nationalists, combined political with religious goals, but in her case these were Theosophical.<sup>38</sup> In 1916 she and Tilak each formed their Home Rule Leagues and Annie Besant toured the country making speeches and rallying mass support. For a while she was extremely popular. The Calcutta newspaper Amrita Bāzār Patrika commented: 'Practically the whole of the educated Indian community has caught the cry of Home Rule in right earnest, first raised by this illustrious lady.'<sup>39</sup> Her ascendancy culminated in her

election as President of the Indian National Congress for the year 1917-18. Both of the Woodroffes, but especially Ellen, were personal acquaintances of Annie Besant, and Ellen shared her faith in the young Krishnamurti who was then being educated as the future Theosophical messiah.<sup>40</sup> The Woodroffes took her to the Ghose's house in Calcutta.<sup>41</sup> The Congress of 1917 at which she was elected President took place in the city. As was usually the case each year, Congress coincided with the annual convention of the Theosophical Society which was also held in the same location. James Cousins, Annie Besant's close associate, describes the intensely excited atmosphere in his memoirs. The crowds sang the unofficial national anthem Bānde Mātaram as they cheered Annie Besant from railway stations along her route. Various measures taken against her by the Government in Madras -- culminating in a brief period of internment earlier in the year -- had served immensely to enhance her popularity. Calcutta was full of conferences, platforms and speakers, because as well as the major INC and Theosophical Congresses, there were numerous smaller conventions as well, including the All India Cow Conferences Association, at which Woodroffe himself presided that year. James Cousins had come to know the Woodroffes through exhibitions organised by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, and he visited them when he came to Calcutta for the Congress of December 1917.<sup>42</sup> Woodroffe's friendship with Cousins and Annie Besant places him among radical 'British' <sup>43</sup> opponents of the imperial Government, of whom there were several other examples; among the better known perhaps was the clergyman C.F. Andrews, the friend of Gandhi and Tagore.<sup>44</sup> It was not altogether unusual for a British person in India openly to support nationalism: what was rather less usual was to be outspoken while at the same time holding a high position in the judiciary.

Annie Besant had reached her apogee in 1917. By the following year she had lost her influence in the INC. In July 1918 the Montagu-Chelmsford Report on Indian self-government was published but was followed almost immediately by the Sedition Committee report which led to the Rowlatt Acts (see

above). Congress was divided by the proposed reforms but those who rejected them won the day and Annie Besant, who reluctantly supported them, was isolated.<sup>45</sup>

Besant's 'star fell' on the national scene as that of Mahatma Gandhi rose. 1917 saw the first of his satyāgraha campaigns in India, in support of the indigo workers against the planters at Champaran.<sup>46</sup> The campaign against the Rowlatt Acts followed in 1919, and in the following years his non-cooperation movement gained ground throughout India growing into a mass movement which swept aside Annie Besant and her Theosophist followers, as well as the other leaders of Congress whether 'moderate' or 'extremist'.<sup>47</sup> By comparison, the agitation of the swadeshi period in the previous decade was a restricted affair involving only Bengal and the middle classes there.<sup>48</sup>

Woodroffe's time in India was the pre-Gandhian era. Gandhi's influence on him is conspicuous only by its absence, for the only impression recorded is a negative one. In one of his speeches Woodroffe rejects the asceticism and passivity which is associated with Gandhian ideology -- Gandhi did not appeal to śakti (see below). The language of Woodroffe's speeches and of parts of SS shares the flavour of Vivekananda and of the 'extremists' of the swadeshi period.

### 'Śakti' and Politics

The symbolism of Tantra, the notion of śakti and worship of the Goddess were appropriated by the Bengal revolutionaries of the swadeshi era. During this time many British supporters of imperialism saw Tantra in a particularly sinister political light as a branch of the Hindu religion which encouraged, or even worshipped, violence. The journalist Valentine Chirol's views expressed what was probably the normal British official attitude, in a widely read book:

Nowhere is the cult of the "terrible goddess" worshipped under many forms...more closely associated with Indian unrest than in Bengal. Hence the frequency of the appeals to her in the Bengal press.

What is more this political violence is specifically linked in Chitrol's mind with the erotic aspects of Śāktism:

In some quarters there has been some recrudescence of the Shakti cultus, with its often obscene and horrible rites and the unnatural depravity which was so marked a feature [in the murder of Mr Jackson] represents a form of erotomania which is certainly more common among Hindu political fanatics than among Hindus in general.<sup>49</sup>

He has just referred to 'secret societies' which placed their 'murderous activities under the special patronage of one or other of the...popular deities.' This seems to refer to the anúśilan samitis, the 'self-culture clubs' which were part of the swadeshi movement and in a few cases developed into underground revolutionary societies. The Dacca anúśilan samiti, to which Aurobindo and his brother belonged was by far the most active. It had a complicated system of vows to be taken before an image of Kālī.<sup>50</sup>

The concept of śakti, so integral to Tantra, also acquired a political meaning, and the Goddess (whether conceived as Durga or Kālī) was invested with new significance as a symbol of the Motherland. This nationalist 'Shakti' was most vividly portrayed in Bankim Chandra Chatterji's nineteenth-century novel Ānandamath about a band of politically militant sannyāsis. The song Bānde Mātaram, which became a sort of unofficial 'national anthem' of Bengal was composed by Bankim Chandra and later set to music by Tagore. During the swadeshi period it was banned and the whole concepts of śakti and the Goddess viewed with suspicion. Nirad Chaudhury describes the angry reaction of a local magistrate when taunted with the song by small boys in his neighbourhood.<sup>51</sup>

Bankim Chandra's novel was the inspiration for Aurobindo's 1905 pamphlet entitled Bhawāni Mandir promoting the cultivation of 'Shakti' as political strength, the strength of Mother India.

What is our Mother country?...It is a mighty Shakti composed of all the shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation. Just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one force... It is not till she [the Motherland]...takes shape as a

great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart...that...the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born.<sup>52</sup>

Also in 1905, Nivedita's article on Kālī the Mother presented a reinterpretation of the goddess as incarnated in the sword.<sup>53</sup> Bepin Candra Pal, another leading 'extremist' urged Bengalis to worship Durga as 'the visible representation of the eternal spirit of their race'.<sup>54</sup> Aurobindo's reading of violence into the Puranic imagery could be quite explicit and alarming, as in a famous editorial in the revolutionary newspaper Yugantar, which was quoted by Valentine Chirol:

Will the Bengali worshippers of Shakti shrink from the shedding of blood?...If you are firm in your resolution you can bring English rule to an end in a single day. Lay down your life but first take a life. The worship of the goddess will not be consummated if you sacrifice your lives at the shrine of independence without shedding blood.<sup>55</sup>

The term had a less violent meaning in swadeshi vocabulary: ātma śakti meaning self-reliance or self-help was integral to the movement; it was associated with passive resistance rather than with violence, but the association of Śakti with national self assertion and forceful action, was a consistent theme.

Woodroffe also used the concept śakti in a non-tantric context in the speeches and articles collected in his Bhārata Shakti, first published in 1917. What he meant by the term 'Shakti' in the title was closer to an immanentist interpretation of Śākta metaphysics than to any political terminology.<sup>56</sup> However he still used it of India as a nation: 'India is not a mere geographical expression...India is an Idea. It is a particular Shakti, the Bhārata Shakti, distinguished from all others by Her own peculiar nature and qualities.'<sup>57</sup> This was all in the course of his campaign against westernization in culture and it was a far cry from the westernized Aurobindo's revolutionary politics. But it was still used in the context of resistance to British influence and the book had a nationalist ring to



contemporaries, attested to by its reception in the Indian press.

So what was a British High Court Judge doing, apparently using the language of the 'extremists' of the nationalist cause and plunging into the defence of Tantra -- the most 'extreme' form of the Hindu religion on an imagined scale of degradation and violence? In looking at this question, we can perhaps make a distinction between the political temperature of the first and the second decades of the century in Bengal. By around 1915 when Woodroffe began delivering the speeches which went to make up Bhārata Shakti, the political climate was different from the 'heady' swadeshi days of the previous decade. The nationalist movement had become more India-wide with Annie Besant's influence, and after the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 the British had conceded more to Indian opinion.

Consequently the language of the 'extremists' had perhaps become familiar and less threatening in the British 'official' world, which had for some time anyway felt able to appropriate the pacific, cultural side of swadeshi (see chapter 4). At the end of 1917 when the Secretary of State, Sir Edwin Montagu, was touring India prior to drawing up his reform programme, he was invited to stand up at a dinner while Bānde Mātaram was sung: something which he readily did, describing it as 'that harmless wailing song'.<sup>58</sup> Some of the policies of the National Education Movement (possibly the most important of the swadeshi societies) were taken up by Asutosh Mukherji, Chancellor of the government-controlled Calcutta University, against which much of the agitation and boycott had been aimed. In 1917-18 a special commission under a visiting British expert, Sir Michael Sadler, was called in to investigate the problem of university education in Bengal and to address the grievances of the students.<sup>59</sup> Lord Zetland, Governor of Bengal in 1919, specifically stated that by giving a government grant to the Indian Society of Oriental Art he was encouraging the 'positive' (ie the cultural) aspects of nationalism.<sup>60</sup> So when Woodroffe as a

High Court Judge talked on public platforms about the need for Indians to identify with their cultural heritage and did so in the name of 'shakti', this was not as controversial in 1916-17 as it might perhaps have been a decade earlier. Nevertheless, his opinions were recognised by both admirers and critics, and by both Indians and Europeans as nationalist. In 1918 Is India Civilized? was a stronger statement than he had yet made. As one reviewer commented: 'It is rather unusual to find among the British members of the Indian Judiciary an apologist for the claims of the Neo-Hindu revivalists and their allies, the Extreme Nationalists.'<sup>61</sup> But that is what Woodroffe sounded like, if by 'extreme' support for violent action is excluded. Although in the mind of Valentine Chirol, 'extremism' and violence might be equated, and bracketed with religious fervour, this was not universally the case. As Sumit Sarkar points out, 'extremist' referred to a certain political programme, ie out and out independence as opposed to colonial self-government.<sup>62</sup>

Vasanta Kumar Pal reports a popular perception that Woodroffe had sympathy for the revolutionaries and let them off in court, but there is no evidence for this. In fact most of the available evidence points the other way and Woodroffe's publicly expressed nationalism does not seem to have made him stand out as more lenient than other British judges in the specifically 'political' cases: in fact the contrary seems sometimes to have been the case as we shall see.

#### Causes Célèbres

In the course of his years on the Bench Woodroffe was involved in two cases which attracted a lot of attention in the press, each for different reasons. The first occurred right at the beginning of his career in 1905 and was not a 'political' case, the second was so, and came in the middle, in 1912. A third, otherwise entirely obscure case, shows how Woodroffe passed into / local legend.

### A popular Judge: the case of the Kalki Avatar

The case of the Kalki Avatar of 1905 has found its way into contemporary historiography in an essay by Sumit Sarkar.<sup>63</sup> It was not the judgement so much as the details of the case itself which aroused interest. It concerned a ritual murder, but this was not in a tantric context. The Kalki Avatar was a Vaiṣṇava guru claiming to be the last incarnation of Viṣṇu, who had instigated the ritual sacrifice of one of his two 'untouchable' disciples by the other. The Guru was a Brahmin, who had been treated leniently by the District Court in contrast to the disciple. Woodroffe and his colleague on the special Bench of the Appeal court redressed the balance by giving them equal life sentences.<sup>64</sup> The verdict was widely approved in the press, helping to bring Woodroffe to public attention.

Sarkar notices with surprise that the judgement did not take advantage of the opportunity the case presented to attack Hindu superstition. He ascribes this to the political situation in 1905 suggesting that the judges wished to avoid antagonising the public.<sup>65</sup> Leaving aside the question as to whether any anti-Hindu comment would in fact have been expected from another Judge of the High Court, the attempt of the historian to find a generalised political motive has led him astray in this instance. This is one example of an incident where an individual's personality is relevant to the interpretation of the event. Sarkar simply did not know that he was writing about a British Judge who by this time either was or soon would be to all intents and purposes, a convert to Hinduism.

Whether it was this case which helped to promote his popularity, Woodroffe had a reputation as a Judge sympathetic to Indian tradition. His reputation may also have been based on more general qualities of humanity and common sense. He seems to appear at his best in cases which involved day-to-day conflicts between ordinary people where he attempted to bring reconciliation. One example

was that of a conflict between a woman who wanted to convert to Christianity and the rest of her family over the custody of her two sons. Woodroffe's compromise, aimed at keeping the children with their mother while preserving the influence of their Hindu relatives, won approval in the Indian press.<sup>66</sup>

### Debottarer Tān

There is an interesting example of Woodroffe turning into legend as a devotee, a bhakta Judge who was given divine aid in arriving at a miraculously just decision. The story is told by a poet called Kumud Ranjan Mallik, who learned it from a court journalist who used to visit him -- and so we see his poem emerge out of a local 'oral tradition' about Woodroffe. It does not seem to come from the circle around the Guru Sivaçandra, where Vasanta Kumar Pal's accounts originate, but concerns Woodroffe independently.

Debottarer Tān means 'the attraction of the devotee', that is, the attractive power of a bhakta's devotion which can compel the divinity to come to his aid. But the word is a pun, for it was also a legal term designating property which had been donated to a divinity, usually land on which a temple was built. In these cases the divinity, the devatā, was technically the owner of the property but there was need for a person to stand as a surrogate legal owner on the divinity's behalf, and this person was usually the priest at the temple, known as the sebait, who thereby enjoyed tenancy for life. The two terms were anglicised in legal terminology into 'debutter' and 'shebait'. This was an example of Hindu law which had been adopted by the British legal system, and features prominently in CWN.

'Debutter' cases were extremely frequent in the civil litigation before the Calcutta High Court, which protected the rights of the shebait; The poem was about a shebait who had been cheated out of his rights by a local zamindar who had lodged a case against him, bringing many witnesses on his side, while the shebait had no-one to speak for him. What follows is a translation of an extract of the poem from the Bengali. It was given to Samarendranath Bagchi, a

retired Judge of the High Court, by the poet's son, who told Mr Bagchi that although Woodroffe is not named in the poem, his father had originally entitled it Judge Woodroffe:

The Judge getting up at dawn hurriedly summoned the peškār<sup>67</sup> by sending his chaprassi with a message about very urgent business (zaruri darkāre)

He said secretly: 'Which Devatā has a beautiful figure and whose complexion is brightly white?'

Saluting him, the Peškār said 'He must be Śiva Maheśvara'.

The Judge in reply asked: 'I know that but what other name has he? Whose complexion is all-white and on whose shoulder hangs the plough?'

The peškār said: 'Now I understand, we call him Balarām'

The Judge said: 'Do you think he is called a man of anger?' (rāgi)

The Peškār said: 'He is angry at injustice (anyāya) and very much on the side of justice (nyāya)'

After the vacation the judgement was published, and the shebait was astonished. The zamindar had lost the case and he had won it.

The leading lawyers of the court were all charmed on reading the verdict and all said in chorus: 'How great was the Judge! How great was the Judge!. The judgement reads as if the Judge himself has witnessed everything with his own eyes!'

The Peškār rushed to the Judge and informed him of the happiness and appreciation of the people and the blessing of all.

Finding the Peškār so delighted, the Sahib said with a smile: 'For the sake of the Bhakta, do you know that the Devatā himself came to give witness?

The Devatā is true, I am only a humble copier. He is the true Mallick giving the order and it is he alone who is imperishable.

Now it is confirmed that the devatā is attracted (has an attraction (tān) to the devotee (devottar) And blessed are we both, the Judge and the Peškār. '<sup>68</sup>

Although it was the devotion of the temple priest which brought about the deity's intervention, the Judge too is portrayed as a devout and wise person, and one very

knowledgeable about Hindu iconographic tradition. The story is different from those told by Pal (below chapter 6), because here Woodroffe is shown as the wise person who instructs others, whereas Pal portrays him always as the humble pupil of the Guru. The incident shows that Woodroffe lived on in local memory, independently of his Guru or of Arthur Avalon's books.

#### An unpopular Judge: the Midnapore Appeal Case

I turn now to a very different sort of case. The CWN frequently portrays the High Court in an embattled position in relation to the British government of India. It sees the Court itself as a bastion of defence of the rights of the individual and of its own independence, against the encroachments of government. This becomes the dominant theme of the journal from the time of the partition of Bengal and the subsequent unrest.<sup>69</sup> Like other Judges, Woodroffe sometimes rejected confessions made under suspicious circumstances, and overturned on appeal convictions based on them.<sup>70</sup> Such instances were the main cause of friction between the High Court and the administration. Matters seemed to come to a head with the Midnapore Appeal Case of 1912, which was a civil case that had grown out of a criminal prosecution three years previously. It placed Woodroffe and his colleagues on the appeal bench at the focal point of the conflict between the judiciary and the government. Tension was particularly high because the case was one of a series of similar ones where the High Court had been accused of letting political 'terrorists' go free while some Judges had made accusations against police and magistrates of planting evidence and forced confessions.<sup>71</sup>

We have seen that in the wake of the trial and conviction of Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chakri a number of arrests were made in Calcutta and Midnapore, the home of Khudiram Bose's family and others involved in the manufacture of bombs in Calcutta. The District Magistrate of Midnapore, a Mr Douglas Weston, and two Indian police officers believed

that they had uncovered a conspiracy in the town to assassinate Weston. Over a hundred and fifty people were arrested in both towns including Aurobindo, his brother and his uncle. Most of those arrested in Midnapore were later released and only three young men were finally brought to trial: among them one Santosh Das in whose home the police claimed to have found a bomb. They were charged with conspiracy and convicted by the Sessions Judge of Midnapore in February 1909 to terms of transportation. However, in June of the same year this conviction was overturned on appeal at the High Court by the Chief Justice, Sir Lawrence Jenkins, and Asutosh Mukherji (The Midnapore Bomb case appeal of 1st June 1909). Santosh Das had made a confession which he later retracted in the High Court, claiming he had been put under pressure by Weston who had also arrested Das's elderly father, Peary Mohan Das. Meanwhile a police informer had retracted his evidence against the accused and was subsequently charged with perjury.<sup>72</sup> In their judgement on the appeal, the two High Court judges cast doubt on the very existence of a conspiracy in Midnapore - something which caused considerable consternation among official circles and an inquiry was instituted.<sup>73</sup>

There matters might have rested until the result of the government inquiry was published, but this was forestalled by Peary Mohan Das, the father of Santosh, who subsequent to his son's acquittal on appeal brought a civil suit for damages on account of his own arrest against the Magistrate Weston and his two Indian police inspectors. He claimed that the sole reason for his own arrest had been to put pressure on his son to confess. This had been what Santosh alleged in the appeal at which his conviction was overturned. The civil case (The Midnapore Damage Suit of 1911) was tried by Justice Fletcher.

Now Justice Fletcher already had a history in the eyes of the Government. It was almost certainly he (and definitely not the later 'nationalist' Woodroffe) to whom Lord

Hardinge referred in his memoirs as being a particular nuisance at the High Court.<sup>74</sup> Fletcher had been directly appointed to the Calcutta Bench from the London Bar in 1907 and almost immediately made himself unpopular with the authorities. In 1908 he imposed a Rs 500 fine on a District Magistrate (Clarke) for exceeding his powers of search in a 'political' case.<sup>75</sup> Even though this judgement was upheld by other Judges on appeal in 1909,<sup>76</sup> Clarke pursued it as far as the Privy Council, who finally overturned Fletcher's decision and cancelled the moderate fine he had imposed. Meanwhile in July 1909 (the very month after the Chief Justice and Asutosh Mukherji overturned the conviction of Santosh Das and his co-defendants), Fletcher won great praise in the Indian press for awarding libel damages to the nationalist activist Lala Lajput Rai against the Englishman newspaper. This was yet another cause célèbre.<sup>77</sup> The damages awarded were Rs 1500, a large sum in those days and once again opinion in 'official' circles and the English press was very angry against Fletcher. In this case, too, Fletcher's decision was upheld on appeal a year later, but this time the large sum he awarded in damages was very substantially reduced to Rs 100, thereby also reducing the political impact. Of the two judges on the appeal bench, one was Woodroffe.<sup>78</sup>

On 7 August 1911 Fletcher's judgement on the Midnapore damage suit was published; he awarded Rs 1000 in damages against Weston and his two subordinates.<sup>79</sup> His judgement was praised in CWN, but caused much embarrassment to the administration, especially as the two Indian police inspectors involved had meanwhile been promoted and decorated in the Honours List the previous year -- something which had caused questions to be raised in the Commons.<sup>80</sup> An appeal against Fletcher's decision was immediately set in motion and funded by the Indian government -- something which was also questioned in the Commons.<sup>81</sup> It was this, the Midnapore Appeal case which opened before Woodroffe and two other judges in April 1912.



The appeal hearing lasted until August that year and in the meanwhile, on 24 June 1912 the Privy Council published its findings on what was called 'Clarke's case' overturning Fletcher's decision of 1908 against the magistrate (see above). This was greeted with great enthusiasm in Britain and the British-owned press in India. It provided a pretext for further criticism of the High Court of Calcutta, but especially of Fletcher. Although his original decision in Clarke's case had been upheld by the appeal judges at the High Court, he was singled out as incompetent in reports of the Privy Council's decision. In the view of CWN, this was simply because he had 'not been swayed by executive influence' in coming to his decision.<sup>82</sup>

Then, on 17th August came the Judgement on the Midnapore Appeal case. Although two or three Judges would sit on an appeal, usually the most senior among them wrote the Judgement, the others commenting only where they disagreed. In this case, the Judgement was Woodroffe's. It was so long that it took several days to read out in court. Reduced to its barest essentials, it overturned Fletcher's decision to award damages for wrongful arrest to Peary Mohan Das on the grounds that, since a bomb had been found in his house it was logical for the police to arrest the owner. The alleged motive for the arrest -- to put pressure on his son to confess -- was dismissed as irrelevant. Woodroffe's Judgement went further: he criticised his colleague Fletcher in strong terms and, moreover, made it plain that he considered there had really been a conspiracy in Midnapore.<sup>83</sup> In this he seems to have been right. Binoy Jiban Ghosh, a nephew of one of the three accused writing long after the events, claimed that there was indeed a conspiracy and bombs had been manufactured in Midnapore, but not by Santosh Das or his companions. The police he claimed had planted evidence after failing to find the bombs made by Hem Chandra Das and Satyendranath Bose.<sup>84</sup>

However, some other, very subtle points were at issue in this by now extremely complicated case. Fletcher in awarding damages for wrongful arrest had followed the findings of the appeal judges who had overturned Santosh Das's conviction in 1909 because it was based on a confession which they declared invalid for two reasons: first because he had withdrawn it protesting undue influence (ie the arrest of his father) and secondly because it had obviously been influenced by the testimony of an informer who had later also withdrawn his testimony. The Chief Justice himself who had led the appeal bench had criticised the behaviour of the police in the case and strongly implied that the bomb had been planted on Santosh Das and his father.<sup>85</sup> This was merely an allegation however which remained unproved and the subsequent inquiry which had been instituted in response to the Judges' criticisms had not been published. The reason given for this was that it had been forestalled by Peary Mohan Das taking out a civil case against the police.<sup>86</sup> This meant that Woodroffe's Judgement in the appeal on the civil case was in effect a verdict on the guilt or innocence of the magistrate and police. When Woodroffe decided that the arrest of Peary Mohun Das was in order, since a bomb had been found in his house, this was in effect to overturn the verdict of the appeal judges who had quashed Santosh Das's conviction -- and one of these had been the Chief Justice himself. It was taken at any rate as a full vindication of the actions of the police and consequently the findings of the official inquiry into the affair were not published.<sup>87</sup> Woodroffe had given the administration everything they wanted. Weston was vindicated, and the slur on an ICS official and the police repudiated in the very court from which it had originated. Even better from the administration's point of view -- Justice Fletcher's judgement had been torn apart by one of his colleagues and his 'incompetence' exposed once again. The fact that it was the Chief Justice who on several occasions expressed concern at the conduct of the police could be passed over - - Fletcher was a much easier scapegoat.

'The Midnapore Case: Vindication of Mr Weston' declared the headline in The Englishman on August 19 1912. The rest of the British press in India was similarly enthusiastic. The response from the Indian press was a long and sustained howl of outrage. Overnight Woodroffe became the most unpopular Judge in Bengal. The India Office selection of items from Indian newspaper reports was dominated by the case for several weeks.<sup>88</sup> The CWN was severely critical not only of the decision but of the language and tone of Woodroffe's judgement which it considered to be flagrantly biassed.

The appellate judgement of Mr Justice Woodroffe in the Midnapore conspiracy case, for its inordinate length, its tone and temper, its wholesale condemnation of the Plaintiff's case and his counsel and witness, its almost unqualified acceptance of the plea advanced by the Defendants' counsel at the Bar, its unseemly observation concerning the judgment of a colleague on the Bench ... is unsurpassed in the history of judicial pronouncements in this country.<sup>89</sup>

It concludes with an expression of disappointment:

We have for many years entertained a very high opinion of Mr Justice Woodroffe as a judge and this judgment has, therefore, come upon us as a most painful surprise.<sup>90</sup>

It certainly was that, and other papers also expressed the same disappointment and surprise. The Amrita Bāzār Patrika commented:

We are sincerely sorry to be constrained to criticise in this manner the judgement of a learned judge who has the reputation of being pro-Indian in his feelings and tendencies. No wonder such a judgement should have produced an effect upon the Indian public which it is simply impossible to describe.<sup>91</sup>

Reading the judgement with a lay person's eye, the CWN's accusation of bias seems to be justified. It does not stop at simply overturning Fletcher's decision: it re-writes the entire story in a manner favourable to the administration's interpretation of events. We cannot know all the reasons, but some of them may have been response to pressure.

Woodroffe was allowed six months' emergency leave on 'urgent private affairs' immediately after the case.<sup>92</sup>

There is no record of the reason for this, but perhaps it was felt necessary to get him away from the heat of the situation, or perhaps the strain had overwhelmed him. Justice Fletcher had been under immense pressure two years previously and had applied -- unsuccessfully in his case -- not to have his annual leave postponed on account of the case. In supporting this application the Chief Justice, Sir Lawrence Jenkins, expressed fears for Fletcher's mental health and wrote of 'the discreditable ill-feeling to which he had been exposed'.<sup>93</sup> An example of the kind of pressure is indicated in another letter of Jenkins in 1909 on the occasion of the Lala Lajput Rai case, when he told Morley, the Secretary of State, that Fletcher had received a threatening letter 'and is anathema to the white man'. Jenkins himself at that time, because of his friendly relations with Indian people, was regarded as being 'in league with the agitators'.<sup>94</sup>

What Woodroffe's position was in 1912 we can only guess. August of that year was six months before the first 'Arthur Avalon' books appeared, but his interest in Tantra was public knowledge already, at least if we take account of an ironical reference in an Indian newspaper commenting on the Midnapore case.<sup>95</sup> Quite apart from that, one can detect through the pages of his books that although he took up the unpopular cause of Tantra, Woodroffe nevertheless disliked controversy and could be confused by it, while he liked compromise and often tried to appease critics. In this situation, pacifying the administration brought the whole affair to an end -- while antagonising them further might have brought more trouble upon the High Court. But this is only conjecture.

If Woodroffe's Midnapore judgement was surprising, what is even more so is how short-lived was his unpopularity. By 1915 the CWN was calling for his promotion to Chief Justice on the retirement of Sir Lawrence Jenkins. The call was echoed in a few Indian papers, although support for Asutosh Mukherji was stronger.<sup>96</sup> Woodroffe was not made Chief

Justice, except for a brief inter regnum lasting one week in 1915, but in that year he also received his knighthood and on approving this the CWN described his reputation as standing 'incontestably high'.<sup>97</sup> It seems that the Midnapore affair was quickly forgiven and forgotten, or accepted (in the words of one paper) as an 'aberration'. There is a brief allusion to it in the CWN account of Woodroffe's retirement, which seems to give him rather faint praise for his independence<sup>98</sup> and there is a marked contrast here with the fulsome praise for this quality bestowed upon the chief Justice Sir Lawrence Jenkins and his successor Sir Lancelot Sanderson. But otherwise by the time of his retirement, a decade after the Midnapore appeal case, Woodroffe's popularity at the High Court appears unchallenged. The whole of the writings of 'Arthur Avalon' and Is India Civilized? came in between. However, the importance of the Midnapore Appeal case for the government is underlined by the fact that Woodroffe received a personal telegram of congratulation from Lord Hardinge for the courage and 'independence' of his judgement.<sup>99</sup>

Had Woodroffe's support for Indian nationalism been the result of radical political thinking he might perhaps have been able to perceive more clearly the subtle battle for power in which he had been caught. As it was, he appeared to show little sensitivity to questions of constitutional and individual liberties, concerns voiced by the Chief Justice and others involved in this exceedingly difficult case.

Cultural nationalism, India as an idea -- the symbol of values lost in Western European modernity -- was what really concerned him, for this affected his own religious and emotional identity. Here too though, as we shall see, there were ambiguities.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Personal communication, Mr Somarendranath Bagchi, retired Judge.

### Notes to Chapter 3

2. The Statesman, Calcutta, 1st Sept 1922, 'Occasional Notes'. Also in CWN vol XXVI p.clxiii
3. Archer 1917 Both books are discussed in chapter 5 below.
4. NAI, New Delhi, Home Dept Public File No.1022.
5. CWN vol XXVI (1921-22) ps.clxii-clxiv
6. Chaudhury 1979 p.251.
7. Sengupta 1961 ps.136-7. For this reference and the information on his grandfather, I am grateful to Mr Satyakam Sengupta.
8. Sumit Sarkar 1973 p.36.
9. Bhattacharje 1995 Section A p.147. The Rowlatt Acts were the cause of the demonstration which triggered Dyer's action. They extended the provisions for detention without trial beyond the end of the War.[Ashe 1968, ps.184-5]
10. For a selection of press comments on this and Woodroffe's other nationalist books see under 'Press Reviews' in GOL (1) ps. v-xi.
11. The relevant files both in the Government of India Home Dept and the India Office are listed as destroyed.
12. Calcutta Review, Oct 1922, p.112
13. OIOC Mss Eur D736 Havell Papers, folio 2.
14. Chelmsford Papers, OIOC Mss Eur E264/42 letter dated July 8 1919. In NAI, Home Dept Judicial Proceeding No.390, Aug 1919, Sanderson says that if Woodroffe did come back in 1920 'it will not be for long, probably about a year.'
15. High Court at Calcutta: 125th Anniversary Souvenir, published by the High Court, Calcutta 1987.
16. Anniversary souvenir, p.59.
17. Sir Torick Ameer Ali: 'Echoes of British India' chapter 21. Ameer Ali Papers. OIOC Mss Eur C336/3
18. CWN Vol VIII p.149. 'The selection of Mr Woodroffe is very welcome as a recognition of local talent. It is certainly a pity that vacancies on the Bench are not more largely filled from the local Bar.'
19. CWN vol IX ps.144ff, is a review of the 3rd edition of Law of Evidence by Woodroffe and Ameer Ali. The editor believed most of the credit in the collaboration belonged to Woodroffe [CWN vol VIII p.164]. Woodroffe's Law of Injunctions (1900) is reviewed

in CWN vol V p.6.

20. Anniversary souvenir ps.66, 70.

21. CWN vol IX p.17. 'The unusually large gathering of the members of the Bar signified to the popularity of the young Judge...We must therefore congratulate the local Bar and Mr Justice Woodroffe that he has within so short a time made such an excellent impression on all sections of the profession. His popularity commenced on the Appellate Side of the Court where every Vakil who had occasion to appear before him, admires his unostentatious manners...' etc. There were still many European barristers, of course, but the majority of the members of the Bar were Bengali.

22. CWN vol XII p.233.

23. Sumit Sarkar 1973.

24. *ibid* ps.74, 313

25. Chaudhury 1976 p.247.

26. Bhattacharje 1995 Section A p.140

27. *ibid*. The first revolutionary 'martyr' in Bengal was hanged on August 11th 1908. Prafulla Chakri had committed suicide in jail. The Alipore Conspiracy Case (in which Barindra Kumar Ghose appealed against the decision of Beachcroft in the district court) came before the High Court in the following year. CWN vol XIV ps.1114ff.

28. CWN vol XIII p.44

29. eg see CWN vol XIII p.69 (June 18 1909): A quote from the Graphic of December 1908, a British paper: 'The High Court prides itself on its popularity with the native press and the sedition-mongers... The result is that the trials of offenders on serious charges of murder or conspiracy against the Government more often than not are a pure farce...The necessity of a summary tribunal for dealing with such cases is most urgent.' Asian Quarterly Review, vol 1 no.1 (April 1913), had article on the High Court of Calcutta entitled 'The Ulcer of Empire'.

30. One reason why the partition of Bengal was viewed with alarm in these pages was that it was feared the administration would have more control over the proposed new court at Dacca than it could exercise over the Calcutta High Court. See eg. vol X p.10.

31. Sarkar op cit p.482.

32. Papers of Sir Asutosh Mukherji, National Library, Calcutta. Letter from C.J. Stevenson-Moore, Ch Sec to Government of Bengal, 21st Sept 1911. Sinha 1966 p.143; Sumit Sarkar op cit p.170.

### Notes to Chapter 3

33. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst 1948 ps.14, 80-81
34. WAJ Archbold in Carmichael 1929 p.193.
35. Chaudhury 1976 p.309
36. CWN vol XIX p.97. (March 22 1915)
37. Bhattacharje 1995 Section A p.145
38. R. Kumar 1981; Taylor 1992
39. Quoted by Kumar op cit p.111.
40. Personal communication by James Woodroffe.
41. Personal communication of James Woodroffe and of the Ghose family.
42. Cousins 1950 ps.315-6
43. Cousins was an Irish nationalist. Woodroffe, Besant and Nivedita all had Irish Protestant ancestry.
44. P.C. Chaudhuri C.F. Andrews: his life and times, 1971 Bombay; Hugh Tinker The Ordeal of Love: C.F. Andrews and India, 1979 Oxford
45. The reforms inaugurated the system of 'dyarchy' where Indian elected assemblies took over certain areas of government but central power remained in the hands of the British. Kumar op cit ps125-6.
46. Bhattacharje op cit Section A p.146
47. ibid p.147; Brown 1972
48. Sarkar op cit ps.79, 371.
49. Valentine Chirol 1910 ps.18, 30
50. Sarkar op cit ps.313, 495.
51. Chaudhury 1976 p.240.
52. Quoted in K. Singh 1963 ps.70-71. Bhawani Mahisha Mardini is the goddess Durga of the Devī Mahātmya at war with the demons. She takes form out of the lesser śaktis who are the feminine aspects of the male members of the Hindu pantheon.
53. Sumit Sarkar op cit p.485.
54. ibid p.495
55. Quoted by Valentine Chirol op cit p.94.



### Notes to Chapter 3

56. 'The world was a manifestation of Divine Power (Shakti) and each man was himself...a fragment (amśa) of that great Power'. Address to the Friends' Union Club. See below chapter 5

57. *ibid* 1917 (1st ed) preface.

58. Sir Edwin Montagu 1930 ps.81-2.

59. Sinha *op cit* p.107

60. Dundas 1956 ps.124-6. See chapter 4 below.

61. Reviewer in the Madras Mail, cited at GOL (1) p.viii.

62. Sarkar *op cit* ps.33-4 distinguishes four trends within the swadeshi movement. Three are 'extremist' in the sense of being opposed to the 'moderates'.

63. Sumit Sarkar 1989

64. Sarkar *op cit* p.30.

65. *ibid* ps.31-2: 'There was no attempt...Christian missionary style, to classify the case as an instance of rank Hindu superstition, nor were there efforts to use the affair to discredit the bhadralok...Perhaps the judges wanted to avoid giving any impression of interference with religion. Political tempers were already rising in the context of plans for partitioning Bengal...'

66. OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal: Dainik Chandrika 2 June and Bangabāsi 5 June, 1915

67. Clerk of the court

68. Translation by Satyakam Sengupta. I am very grateful to the late Mr Somarendranath Bagchi who shared the fruits of his own research on Woodroffe with me in 1991. The story with the extract of the poem was published in Mr Bagchi's biography of Woodroffe serialised in the magazine Bhāvmukhe. (See below chapter 6).

69. The references are so frequent that it is superfluous to cite examples, but see CWN vol IX (1905-6), (the year of partition); vol X p.61 (no vested rights of the judiciary are safe from the encroachments of the civil service) and p.69 (complaints that magistrates placed themselves above the law).

70. Eg see CWN vol XI p.181 (May 29 1907).

71. CWN vol XIII ps.205-6 (June 14 1909: comment on the Nattore Mail Robbery Case) 'The methods of the police...seem to bear a marked family likeness...'

### Notes to Chapter 3

- 72.OIOC L/J&P/6/951 Judicial and Public Department Annual Files, 1909. (Subsequent references to the Annual Files come from the 1909 volume. All related papers were filed under the year in which the issue originated.); CWN vol XIII ps.198-9 and 229-30 (June 7 and July 12 1909).
73. *ibid*: notes and telegrams from June 1909; CWN vol XIII ps.229-30.
74. Harding op cit p.15
75. 'Clarke's case' CWN vol XI p.973 (19 June 1908)
76. *ibid* Vol XIII p.458 (12 Jan 1909)
77. CWN vol XIII p.895 (July 6 1909). CWN praises the judgement of Fletcher on Lajpat Rai's damages for libel: vol XIII p.237-8.
78. CWN vol XIV p.201-3 (June 6 1910). Trial report vol XIV p.713 (11 March 1910)
79. CWN vol XVI p.145; OIOC Annual Files: notes and telegrams from Aug 1911.
80. CWN vol XVI p.41 (Jan 8th 1912); OIOC Annual Files: 26 July 1910
81. OIOC Annual Files: Oct 1911.
82. CWN vol XVI p.205. 'Clarke's case' is also discussed on ps.197, 221-2. The report on the Privy Council's decision is on ps.865ff.
83. The text of the judgement is at CWN vol XVI ps.185-245 (17 Aug 1912).
84. Binoy Jiban Ghosh 1962 p.12.
85. CWN vol XIII ps.198-9.
86. Annual Files: 12 June 1909, 1st March 1910.
87. *ibid*: 7 Feb 1913.
88. OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal, Aug-Dec 1912.
89. CWN vol XVI p.261. (August 26 1912).
90. *ibid* p.265
91. OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal. (Reports L/R/5/39 p.518: Amrita Bāzār Patrika 21st Aug 1912.
92. NAI, New Delhi: Home Dept (Judicial Branch) Proceeding No.226 dated 26 Sept 1912.

### Notes to Chapter 3

93. Cambridge University Library, Hardinge papers Vol 50, f.63. Letter from Sir Lawrence Jenkins, Chief Justice, June 13 1911.

94. Morley Collection OIOC Mss Eur D573/46. Letter from Sir Lawrence Jenkins, 1909.

95. Nāyak 22nd August 1912 says the judgment was written out at Puri while Woodroffe was working on the MNT. OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal.

96. CWN vol XIX p.150 (31st May 1915). OIOC Reports on the Native Press, Bengal: Jyoti on June 3rd 1915 and Charu Mihir on June 8th, Hitavādi on 3rd July support Woodroffe. Support for Woodroffe might have been motivated partly from a desire for a precedent to be set by promoting someone from the local Bench.

97. CWN vol XIX p.153 (7 June 1915)

98. CWN vol XXVI p.162.

99. Hardinge papers, Telegrams: No.97. Dated Aug 18th 1912.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ART CONNOISSEUR: New and Old Orientalists

In India as in Ireland, nationalism was closely connected both with religion and a revival of the arts; together they comprised the 'Indian Renaissance'.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically perhaps it was among Europeans and in the heart of the British establishment in Calcutta, that Indian art first became fashionable. Appreciation of 'oriental' art became an arena where members of the European and Indian élites in the city came together with a common programme. This has been documented by Partha Mitter (1994). Tapati Guha Thakurta in her study of art and aesthetics in Bengal, defines what she calls a 'new orientalism' among European art critics at the beginning of the century, which was allied to Indian nationalist attempts to discover an authentic national tradition.<sup>2</sup> The Indian Society of Oriental Art (ISOA) was the pivot of this process, and Woodroffe was described as 'a leading spirit' of this organization from its foundation in 1907. He was one of a group of European art connoisseurs who supported Abanindranath Tagore's 'New Bengal School' of painting which was at the heart of ISOA's ideology and activities.

#### O.C. Ganguly

The second of the two pen-portraits of Woodroffe mentioned in my Introduction sets him in this cultural role. It comes from Ordhendu Kumar Ganguly (1881-1974) who devoted a short chapter to him in his memoirs.<sup>3</sup> Ganguly too was a founder member of ISOA and later on edited its journal Rupam. His cousin Surendranath was a pupil of Abanindranath and a painter of the New Bengal School. O.C. Ganguly eventually wrote over thirty books in English and Bengali on art history and criticism.<sup>4</sup> His memories of Woodroffe belong to his youth when as a young solicitor he knew the older man as a figure at the High Court.<sup>5</sup> But it was in 1914-15 that he

came to know him well, when they were respectively secretary and president of ISOA. Although he says that they came in close contact (ghaṇiṣṭh saṃparṣa) with each other at this time, his picture lacks the vivid personal touch that Torick Ameer Ali gives. Though writing many years later, there is perhaps flattery and certainly circumspection in his account. If he thought his older British friend eccentric in some ways he does not say so. He depicts him as a "Renaissance man", in the style of Sir William Jones and the early orientalists, a person with well-rounded knowledge in many spheres. After detailing his scholarship in Law, and then his Sanskrit learning, Ganguly describes Woodroffe as a perceptive art connoisseur (vicakṣaṇa kalārasika), with profound knowledge of the history of oriental art, and a sensitive patron of the New Bengal School who bought many of their paintings at ISOA's annual exhibitions. As a collector he was also interested in ancient Indian art and he thus gradually amassed an 'enormous' (virāt) collection, which Ganguly believed he took back to his home in 'Paris'.<sup>6</sup>

Woodroffe wrote reviews of ISOA's early exhibitions in the Indian press. Ganguly mentions one famous article - an appreciation of Nandalal Bose's painting Satī, published in the Japanese art journal Kokka, accompanying a coloured reproduction of the picture.<sup>7</sup> Woodroffe wrote several articles for this paper.<sup>8</sup> An understanding of Japanese and Chinese art was regarded as part of Woodroffe's expertise: it was high praise for him to compare the style of a painting by Ganguly's cousin Surendranath with that of a Japanese artist.<sup>9</sup> Japanese ideology about a unified 'orient' formed a significant element in the inspiration for ISOA, through the visits to India of the remarkable art historian and nationalist Kakuzo Okakura (see below).

#### New attitudes to Indian art

Partha Mitter has subjected European attitudes to Indian art to a penetrating analysis in his Much-Maligned Monsters (1977 henceforth MMM). Indian art had been denigrated in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when European

standards of criticism with their emphasis on accurate realism were taken as a universally applicable norm.<sup>10</sup>

Mitter divides historians of the art and architecture of the subcontinent in this period into two 'broad groups', which he labels the 'archaeological' and the 'transcendental'.<sup>11</sup> To the first, European classical and Renaissance art was the exemplar of taste against which all Indian art was by definition inferior; here he names two major figures, Henry Cole and James Fergusson, who wrote in the middle and later years of the nineteenth century. The second group was led by E.B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy, whose books date from the beginning of the twentieth. Mitter likens their re-evaluation of Indian art to the popularity of European Gothic which gained ground with the Romantic movement. Indian, like Gothic, art was held to represent a more spiritual and imaginative ideal than the 'mere' imitation of nature of classical Greece, or the European Renaissance.<sup>12</sup> It is to the ideas of the latter group that Guha Thakurtha refers by the term 'new orientalism'.<sup>13</sup>

It was not that previous European writers never admired Indian art; but as Thakurtha shows, orientalist admiration had been confined hitherto to the 'applied' arts -- to decorative design and handicrafts. This was art with a functional or religious purpose -- therefore it was not placed in the category of 'fine art'.<sup>14</sup> Hence enthusiasm for a revival of an Indian artistic tradition was at first associated with a late nineteenth century 'arts and crafts' ideology and anti-industrialism. This was also the milieu in which the swadeshi movement arose: the Dawn Society, one of the earliest and most active of the swadeshi organizations, had a strong crafts ideology and encouragement of handicrafts was one of its major facets. Founded in 1902 by Satis Mukherji it was under its auspices that swadeshi stores were first opened, selling local handmade products. Havell and Woodroffe both had connections with it. Havell was active in promoting the hand spinning wheel, later adopted by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>15</sup> For a short time Woodroffe cooperated with Gaganendranath Tagore to promote the sale of local

handicrafts, a venture set up by Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal and patron of ISOA.<sup>16</sup>

Ernest Binfield Havell (1864-1937) was a member of the Indian Education Service. He was superintendent of the Madras School of Arts from 1884 and of the Calcutta Government Art School for ten years from 1896 until his retirement from India in 1906. His interest in preserving Indian handicrafts against the threat posed by European manufactured goods was eventually transformed into a 'crusade' aimed at the restoration of an Indian 'fine art' tradition. Rejecting the idea that Indians needed to turn to European models for an artistic style that was 'higher' than the merely decorative, Havell made a revolutionary move with his decision in 1904 to start selling off the Government Art School's collection of European paintings and to purchase in their place examples of Indian art.<sup>17</sup> The action caused a storm of protest among the Western-educated classes of Calcutta who saw it as an attempt to deprive them of access to 'fine art'.<sup>18</sup> Havell was fully supported by Lord Curzon. The Viceroy who above all others embodies the image of imperialism at its most dominating and self-assured, was also an enthusiast for the revival of Indian artistic traditions,<sup>19</sup> a factor which perhaps augmented the suspicions of some citizens of Calcutta. Havell's articles criticising the prevailing British attitudes towards Indian art started appearing at the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> His two major books, Indian Sculpture and Painting (1908) and The Ideals of Indian Art (1911) were published after his return to England. A severe mental breakdown caused him to be permanently retired from India in 1906, an event which was connected by some of his Indian friends with his dabbling in Tantra (see below chapter 6).

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), born of a Ceylonese Brahmin father and an English mother, spent his childhood and early adult life in England.<sup>21</sup> His first visit to the Indian subcontinent took him to Sri Lanka in 1902 as a geologist, but he was immediately conscious of what he believed to be the deterioration of Sinhalese culture in the face of Western

industrialism. A disciple of William Morris in England,<sup>22</sup> Coomaraswamy's first major book, Medieval Sinhalese Art (1908), set against the modern industrial world an idealised 'traditional' society located in the Kandyan kingdom of Sri Lanka prior to British colonisation. The Indian Craftsman followed in 1909. By then, for Coomaraswamy 'India had emerged from a craftsman's paradise to an ancient homeland of a most sublime and independent tradition of fine arts'.<sup>23</sup> Nostalgia for the European Middle Ages was linked in Coomaraswamy's world view with his vision of 'traditional' Indian society, where religion created the social framework and was the major inspiration for art. India and Sri Lanka were living examples of such a society, the antithesis of Victorian industrialism.<sup>24</sup>

Coomaraswamy's first visit to India was in 1907, and from 1909-1913 he travelled frequently between that country and England. He joined the circle around the Tagores and became involved in ISOA. Encountering the swadeshi fervour at its peak, he wrote essays on art and nationalism.<sup>25</sup> In 1910 he lectured in Woodroffe's house on Rajput Painting, later to be the subject of his book of 1916,<sup>26</sup> where Coomaraswamy detached Rajput (Hindu) painting from the Islamic Moghul tradition to which it had links. He put it forward as the more genuinely folk art, as well as the more religious in inspiration, opposing it to the aristocratic 'secular' court art of the Moghuls.<sup>27</sup> Nandalal Bose's Satī gave expression to ideals of Indian womanhood put forward in essays by Coomaraswamy where the act of satī was idealised.<sup>28</sup> Here Woman represented the refined spiritual essence of Hindu culture; this use of the act flew in the face of reformist emphasis on its barbarity.<sup>29</sup>

#### 'Old' and 'New' Orientalists

In England, the clash between old and new attitudes to Indian art came to a head <sup>in</sup> 1910, a year which Mitter regards as a watershed.<sup>30</sup> It was largely due to the influence of Havell who in February of that year delivered a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts in which he put forward his ideas about a



'fine art' tradition in India. This provoked a strong reaction from the chair of the meeting, Sir George Birdwood, at that time the major British writer on Indian handicrafts.<sup>31</sup> Birdwood's deprecatory language<sup>on Indian art</sup> caused the meeting to break up in disarray and provoked a letter to The Times of London, in which a group of leading intellectuals publicly dissociated themselves from his views and expressed their appreciation of the art of India. His 'infamous' description of an image of the Buddha which had caused the furore, ran:

The senseless similitude, by its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs, knees and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionate purity and serenity of soul.<sup>32</sup>

This is familiar territory. The language of contempt for Indian art was akin to <sup>that</sup> of the orientalist discourse on Tantra. Like Arthur Avalon on Tantra, Coomaraswamy had opened his work on Indian art with a collection of condemnations from other authors and used them as a point of departure for his defence.<sup>33</sup> So did Havell in 1908, though by the second edition of his Indian Sculpture and Painting these passages were omitted as he considered changed attitudes had made them less relevant.<sup>34</sup>

Partha Mitter quotes a famous statement by Ruskin on the corrupting qualities of Hindu art due to its distortion of Nature:

It either forms its compositions out of meaningless fragments of colour and flowings of line; or if it represents any living creature it represents that creature under some distorted and monstrous form. To all the facts and forms of nature it wilfully and resolutely opposes itself; it will not draw a man but an eight-armed monster;...<sup>35</sup>

Ruskin's statement was made in 1859, soon after the so-called Mutiny. James Cousins, recalling it in 1918 commented that: 'According to him [Ruskin], the whole Indian race was guilty of the crimes of the mutineers and those crimes were the outcome of the nature of Indian Art.'<sup>36</sup> Along with such prejudices, Cousins considered, there ran distrust of the

imagination, of mysticism and symbolism. The 'facts of nature' which Ruskin insisted on, Cousins acerbically commented, 'were actually emotions that he could understand...the little truth that he himself was capable of apprehending.'<sup>37</sup>

Like Ruskin, Sir George Birdwood, who wrote in the 1880s was a fervent admirer of Indian handicrafts; but like Havell and Coomaraswamy he appreciated their religious inspiration, and saw spirituality as of their essence: Hindu life being 'absorbed...in the unseen realities of man's spiritual consciousness'.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless he still shared Ruskin's ambivalence about the popular expressions of Hinduism, writing of the 'evil influence' of the Puranas on Indian art:

The monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India.'<sup>39</sup>

Alongside the changing aesthetic theories and fashions in Europe which Mitter traces, therefore, what marked out 'new' from 'old' orientalist attitudes was a different reaction to India itself, and especially to Hinduism. It is interesting that behind Ruskin's condemnations quoted by Cousins, can be traced a reluctant admiration allied to fear: Ruskin acknowledged the superiority of Indian decorative skill but specifically linked it to vicious moral qualities.<sup>40</sup> Cousins writing sixty years later by contrast glosses over a possible aesthetic disappointment with the New Bengal School painting by appealing to lofty philosophical expressions of 'fundamental unity'.<sup>41</sup> When commenting on the socially satirical sketches of Gaganendranath Tagore, which clearly disturbed his rather anodyne image of the new 'Indian' art, Cousins claimed that the subject of all the Indian painters was an abstraction called 'life'; they did not enter its 'dark places' as 'fault finders' but expressed the 'deep compassion of the sense of unity which is India's contribution to the thought of the world'.<sup>42</sup> Cousins followed Havell in finding the true location of 'Indian' art in the realm of the spiritual.<sup>43</sup> This indicates how far in

the years since Ruskin, Hindu culture had ceased to seem threatening in Britain, and was becoming for a significant number of people an ally in the conflict with Western modernity and empiricism.

For when Havell rejected the established norms of Western art criticism it was because he considered them narrowly realist. The emphasis on 'naturalism' denied the imagination as well as 'the Spirit'. He urged that Indian art could only be understood in relation to Indian ideas and goals. By identifying these as 'spiritual', he placed them above and beyond the material world in a realm where perfectly accurate representation of outer reality was irrelevant. He did not deny that Indian art could portray outer reality, but pointed to the philosophy of Vedānta, with its doctrine of māyā as more significant:

Indian art can be realistic in the European sense, but his philosophy regards all that we see in Nature as transitory, illusive phenomena and declares that the only Reality is the Divine Essence or Spirit'.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond the sphere of māyā stood the Yogic ideal of the divine form which underlay the images of deities, especially the Buddha image, rather than the strict adherence to anatomy of Western art. In the yantras of tantric ritual Havell saw, not the magic diagrams perceived by other Western writers, but abstractions expressing what was beyond imagery. No longer consigned to the 'primitive' and 'superstitious' Havell had placed these instruments of Tantric ritual in the vanguard of European thought. Hindu iconographic art, he declared, 'like modern criticism joins mathematics with aesthetics'.<sup>45</sup>

So Indian art was different from that of the West because it portrayed the spiritual realm, while the latter was purely materialistic. To the former was assigned the 'higher' values of intuition and idealism over against the 'realism' of the latter. While newly applied to art criticism, this was an adaptation of the nineteenth-century Indian idea of complementarity between the supposed practical or empirical values of the West and those of the 'spiritual East'.

Instigated by Keshub Chandra Sen and P.C. Mazoomdar and widely popularised in both India and the West by Vivekananda and later by Rabindranath, it has been seen as a response by Indian thinkers to the Western projection of a unified 'Asia' as a counterweight to European civilization,<sup>46</sup> or as Europe's 'Other'.<sup>47</sup> Whereas the 'old' orientalist assigned higher value to Europe, the 'new' orientalist accompanied some nationalists into a 'reversal of hierarchies between East and West'.<sup>48</sup>

As we have seen, the 'old' orientalism viewed India through a theory of decline which placed its greatness in a past which could be regarded as 'classical'. This was the result of prevailing racial theories about the Aryans and the results of their mixture with other peoples.<sup>49</sup> The effect was to enable them to devalue the Hindu culture which had superseded the supposed 'Aryan' age and the equally idealised early Buddhist period.<sup>50</sup> The shift of emphasis in Havell's ideas was subtle but significant. Like other European Orientalists, Havell sought a 'golden age' in India's past but he located it in the Mauryan and Gupta period -- the latter especially being a quintessential Hindu one when Hinduism's 'glory' spread through South East Asia. Like Coomaraswamy he subordinated the Islamic period to it, and managed to claim Akbar as an 'Aryan'. Havell idealised the Aryans but here too in a way that was closer to the way in which Hindus themselves did. He saw them in mythical terms, as Mitter suggests, but as a race whose qualities underlay, and blossomed in, subsequent Indian history. He saw the Vedic age as containing the essence of later Hinduism and believed in the 'great synthesis' whereby Buddhism (and all else that was considered of value in Indian history or culture) was absorbed within Brahmanism, the carrier of Aryan tradition.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the 'older' type of orientalist tended to see later Hinduism as the result of the decline of the 'Aryan' race into 'barbarism' and 'superstition'.<sup>52</sup>

Like Havell, Coomaraswamy also linked art to Yoga, but in his case he expounded upon the connection between iconographic

art and dhyāna, the mental construction of divine images in meditative practice.<sup>53</sup> This was something also noticed by Heinrich Zimmer, who had read Arthur Avalon's translation of Sivacandra's Principles of Tantra and used it to argue for a completely separate aesthetics for Indian art.<sup>54</sup> That Woodroffe's Guru had links with Coomaraswamy and Havell is something claimed by Vasanta Kumar Pal (see below chapter 6); there is little direct evidence of Sivacandra's influence on either critic's art theories - though a 1905 reference by Havell to Kali symbolism and to the MNT sounds as if <sup>he</sup> could have consulted Woodroffe or Ghose if not their Guru.<sup>55</sup> But in any case, whether Sivacandra's influence is present or not, Havell, who was less of an ideologue than Coomaraswamy, can be located at least as close to Hinduism, as to Neo-Platonism or Theosophy where Mitter and Thakurta situate him.<sup>56</sup> Coomaraswamy, Mitter calls 'the last of the Neo-Platonists' and explains him entirely as a Western thinker.<sup>57</sup> Mitter and Thakurta tend to treat both art theorists as if they were sealed off mentally from the Indian environment. Yet as we shall see in chapter 6, Havell like Woodroffe practised sādhana and followed Hindu gurus; and Coomaraswamy is said to have asked to be formally received into Hinduism.

Havell on art and Woodroffe on Tantra bear a resemblance to each other. They both stressed the remoteness of European consciousness from the inner world of Indian ideas and the consequent need for a European scholar to 'place himself at the Indian point of view'.<sup>58</sup> Both considered they had a mission to woo the Indian bhadrāloka away from prejudices against their own culture implanted by Europeans: they both ardently espoused the despised and rejected in Indian culture. Both were also personally involved in the practice of Hindu sādhana and believed in advaita vedānta. Woodroffe however did not share Havell's enthusiasm for imperialism.<sup>59</sup>

The 'new orientalism' of Havell and Coomaraswamy elevated 'East' over 'West'. What was 'eastern' was the more 'spiritual' and it was in preserving and expressing this higher and purer realm of the spirit that Indian artists

could be true to their own racial inheritance and produce 'nationalist' art. For these ideas were still imbued with what Mitter calls the 'racial romanticism' which was fashionable in Europe at the time.<sup>60</sup> The resurgence of a true 'Indian' art was believed essential for the regeneration of the nation.

#### Abanindranath and the 'new Bengal School'

The new art movement in Calcutta grew out of the relationship between Havell and Abanindranath Tagore. When they met in the late 1890s, the latter had already started experimenting with an 'Indian' style drawn from medieval miniatures and the art of Ajanta. Havell publicized him in articles published in Britain from 1902 and invited him to teach at the Government Art School, where Tagore gathered around him a circle of pupils.<sup>61</sup> They produced self-consciously 'oriental' art by blending traditional Indian themes and styles, with some Japanese and Chinese influence, but with a strong residue, nevertheless, of European naturalism.<sup>62</sup> Abanindranath and his followers were soon involved in an ideological battle with other Bengali artists and critics who preferred the European style of 'academic' art with its techniques of naturalism and opposed the new school's claim to be exclusively 'Indian'.<sup>63</sup> The work of Abanindranath and his 'New Bengal School' appealed to the British establishment however in their endeavour to encourage 'Indian-ness' in art, at the same time as it reflected the nationalism of the swadeshi movement in its early years. In 1903 Abanindranath's The Passing of Shah Jahan won a silver medal at Curzon's Delhi Durbar exhibition;<sup>64</sup> in 1904-5 his Bhārat Mātā 'more than any other, fixed the epithet nationalist to his recreation of an Indian style'.<sup>65</sup>

#### The Indian Society of Oriental Art

An oriental art exhibition was first held in 1902 on the premises of the Landholders' Association, an organisation of Bengali zemindars to which not only the Tagore brothers but also, for some reason, Woodroffe and his friend Norman Blount belonged. The Japanese art critic Kakuzo Okakura was in

Calcutta at the time and lent some Japanese prints for the occasion which were displayed alongside paintings by Abanindranath. Abanindranath organized the first formal meeting of ISOA in 1907, after Havell had left India, but the inspiration for the society grew out of the informal art club which he had founded at the Government Art School.<sup>66</sup>

The majority of those listed as attending the first meeting of ISOA were European, three of them High Court Judges, including of course Woodroffe himself. Among the Indians, four were members of the Tagore family. ISOA, despite its emphasis on Indian national expression in art, was closely entwined with the British establishment. Lord Kitchener (chief of staff of the armed forces in India) was its surprising choice as first president. Woodroffe succeeded him, to be succeeded in his turn by another High Court Judge (Holmwood) and after that by Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal. Woodroffe served on the first committee of the society and was one of the most active and influential members in the early years.<sup>67</sup> ISOA remained an élite organisation -- according to one account it only had 120 members by 1916 and only 47 of them were Indian <sup>68</sup> - but it quickly became influential in its attempts to propagate the new nationalist art. Over many years a colour plate reproduction of a painting by a member of the New Bengal School was the frontispiece of every edition of Ramananda Chatterji's Calcutta journals Modern Review and Pravaśi.<sup>69</sup>

After 1907 the newly formed society rented a house in Park Street. Exhibitions were the main activity and Woodroffe's enthusiasm seems to have been their driving force at first.<sup>70</sup> The paintings of the Tagore brothers and their followers always took an important place alongside examples of ancient and medieval Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese art.<sup>71</sup> The first on a large-scale was held in February 1911 as part of the United Provinces Exhibition and was organised by Coomaraswamy.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile 1910 saw the formation of the India Society in London, by a group of people who supported Havell in his conflict with Birdwood at the Royal Society of Arts; <sup>and</sup> links were immediately established with ISOA. The new Society's president, the dynamic William Rothenstein, toured India in the winter of 1910-11 setting off with letters of introduction from Havell to Woodroffe and Abanindranath. This momentous visit was to result in a friendship with Rabindranath Tagore which led to the poet's 'discovery' by the West, his 1913 Nobel prize and his elevation as an international figure and icon of 'oriental' spirituality.<sup>73</sup> In 1914, the year following his first European tour, ISOA held exhibitions in Paris and London, the former being organized by the two Karpeles sisters, daughters of a French businessman in Calcutta and admirers of the poet.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile ISOA's exhibitions in Calcutta became a major feature of the winter social scene and attracted crowds from all over the country.<sup>75</sup> Reviews in the Indian and foreign press helped to educate the public on 'oriental' art. Before long they attracted the attention of James Cousins in Madras. Annie Besant's close friend and colleague, who was editor of the Theosophical Society's paper New India, thereafter became an enthusiastic and influential supporter of the movement. After accepting a personal invitation from Woodroffe to visit Calcutta to view the exhibition held there in January 1916, Cousins arranged for it to be transferred to Madras, where it was displayed at the premises of the Young Men's Indian Association, a Theosophical organisation. Cousins implies that it was through the influence of ISOA that Annie Besant and the Theosophical Society were first brought to a wholehearted encouragement of a nationalist style of Indian art.<sup>76</sup>

Cousins -- always enthusiastic -- covered up what was perhaps a slight disappointment at the physical environment of the exhibition rooms in Calcutta in 'what ordinarily would have been a large shop or office on a main thoroughfare of the city'. But: 'good taste had turned bareness into an



exquisite attractiveness that, on a first glance, had a curious delicacy and reserve...' Being an Irish nationalist, he perceived affinities with the situation at home. He considered he was...

witnessing that exciting and incalculable thing such as I had experienced in the Irish literary and dramatic revival, the reawakening of a gifted nation to recognition of its artistic past in one of the arts, and to realisation of its ability, in the persons of some of its nationals, to emulate, and in some phases to equal, ancestral achievement...<sup>77</sup>

'Ancestral achievement' was the leitmotif to this nationalist art movement. Racial theories that the 'spirit' of a nation or race could alone be expressed through its culture and through no other are strongly reflected in Woodroffe's Seed of Race and Bhārata Shakti (see next chapter). Applied to art as to philosophy, this meant that imitation of another race was doomed to failure and productive only of mediocrity.<sup>78</sup>

Along with Woodroffe's, several other European names were connected with ISOA as prominent members and influential connoisseurs. Norman Blount, an English jute broker working for the firm of Sinclair Murray and Co, seems to have been a close friend of Woodroffe, for their names are linked continually by Abanindranath and others.<sup>79</sup> Blount was the first joint secretary of ISOA, along with Abanindranath. He and Woodroffe were frequent visitors to the Tagores' famous 'southern verandeh' and the artist is said to have asked Blount's advice on his paintings.<sup>80</sup> Another founder member of ISOA was Hjalmar Ponten Moeller, one of two Swedish businessmen who were described as very active in the early years.<sup>81</sup> Both businessman and diplomat, he looked after his country's embassy in Calcutta and lived in the city until his death in 1944.<sup>82</sup> Moeller was a friend of Woodroffe and of Atal Behari Ghose and we will hear more of him later in chapter 6. Another founder member of ISOA whose name crops up several times is that of Edward Thornton, an engineer whom Abanindranath describes as one of his best friends.<sup>83</sup>

European women took lessons in Indian art in the informal club run by Thornton after hours at the College, and one of them contributed some flower paintings done in the style of Indian miniatures to one of the very early exhibitions.<sup>84</sup> This possibly reflects the 'invisibility' of women's art, for the role of the European men in ISOA was firmly cast in that of support for Indian artists: as connoisseurs, financial sponsors -- 'consumers' not producers -- and sources of approbation. Many of them, most notably Woodroffe and Blount, were holders of prestige and 'expert' knowledge by which the new school could be measured.<sup>85</sup> Not all the relationships recorded by Abanindranath were positive. There was half-concealed bitterness in his reminiscences of Lord Carmichael and a visiting 'royal friend' -- perhaps the Prince of Wales.<sup>86</sup> But Lord Carmichael was said to be on extremely intimate terms with Gaganendranath Tagore, whose charismatic personality seems to have attracted many into this circle.<sup>87</sup>

Completely different from the other Europeans was Nivedita. Although not among the founder members of ISOA, *her* championship of Indian art as an aspect of nationalism was an early influence. Her articles and book reviews in the first decade of the century publicized the ideas of Coomaraswamy to which she gave an added Indian emphasis, making art into a 'highly conscious vehicle of nationalism'.<sup>88</sup> Nivedita exerted an influence over Abanindranath's young pupils, as well as casting something of a spell over the master himself. Abanindranath describes how he met Nivedita for the first time at a reception in Calcutta for the visiting Kakuzo Okakura, and some time afterwards he invited her to an ISOA party where she made a dramatic impression. He recounts how he introduced her to Woodroffe and Blount at this party, who seem not to have known her by sight before that.<sup>89</sup> This indicates that despite sharing a belief in nationalism and neo-Hinduism, Woodroffe and Nivedita did not meet within the circle of Vivekananda's disciples. Woodroffe had contacts with other disciples of the Swami later on, for he was for a time President of the Vivekananda Society in Calcutta.

(below p.242) Nivedita died in 1911 before any of the books of Arthur Avalon were published and when ISOA was still a comparatively new organisation.<sup>90</sup>

### Kakuzo Okakura

Kakuzo Okakura came to India with Mrs Josephine Macleod at the end of 1901 to meet Vivekananda, whom he described as the 'very personification of Asian or Oriental ideals', and stayed till 1903. His purpose was to visit Bodh Gaya which he wished to restore as a Buddhist pilgrimage site. There is a suggestion that he might possibly have been an agent for the Japanese empire.<sup>91</sup> Whether true or not there was a strong current of Japanese nationalism underlying his pan-Asian philosophy. During his first visit he completed his Ideals of the East. The book put forward the picture of a unified civilization of the Orient that was far superior to the materialistic culture of modern Europe. Asia was 'one', united by 'that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal which is the common thought inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world.'<sup>92</sup> Okakura's personality inspired the nationalism of the young Bengalis he met, as recounted by Surendranath Tagore,<sup>93</sup> as much as it fed the 'positive orientalism' of the art movement with its dichotomy of 'spiritual east' against 'materialist West'. Okakura recognized India as the matrix of Asian culture, and the homeland of Buddhism, but he considered that Japan alone had preserved the greatness of Asia whereas India and China had succumbed to foreign invasion. Nivedita, in her introduction to Okakura's book, shifted the bias towards India emphasising the greatness of Hinduism, to which she subordinated Buddhism.<sup>94</sup> What was held in common was a new vision of the 'orient' no longer as a lost civilization of antiquity, but a living culture whose superior wisdom could resist the colonisation of the West. Japan's status as a symbol of Asian resurgence was enhanced in 1905 with its victory in the Russo-Japanese war. That year Okakura published his second major book The Awakening of Japan where he proclaimed the secret of Japan to lie in its ability to assimilate Western

knowledge without sacrificing its spiritual and cultural independence.<sup>95</sup>

Interestingly, Okakura had been influenced by an American professor of Philosophy, Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, who had combined a personal conversion to Buddhism with a passion for Japanese art as collector and connoisseur -- rather in the mould of Woodroffe himself in India, and Havell; and like Abanindranath, Okakura founded an alternative art school which aimed to be independent of European academic structures, the Nippon Bijutsuin school.<sup>96</sup> Two Japanese painters were sent in succession by Okakura to teach the students of Abanindranath. The master himself returned for a second visit in 1913, just before his death.<sup>97</sup>

#### A charmed circle

ISOA was part of an élite and privileged world, inhabited by the 'cream' of both Indian and European society and one of highly self-conscious aestheticism. Abanindranath describes a glittering social scene, with sumptuous parties where pān was served to Indian guests in European homes. Lectures were also held in private houses, including that of the Woodroffes, whose aesthetic sensibility was reflected in their Calcutta homes. We have seen that Sir Torick Ameer Ali described his stay with them at Camac Street as 'a week of gracious living' (above p. 22 ). Others had similar reactions. In 1910 Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote to William Rothenstein on the eve of his Indian tour: 'You will find Woodroffe a splendid person, a real student and thinker, and one who knows how to make his immediate environment beautiful.'<sup>98</sup> James Cousins and his wife Margaret found their visit to the Woodroffes 'a memorable experience when they returned to Calcutta in 1917 for the INC Congress (above p. 96 ). They were motored by Woodroffe 'to his commodious and artistic home', where the couple recorded that 'the day ended with intuitive fitness' at dinner with the Tagore brothers after which they 'retired with the atmosphere of art and beauty and high philosophy'.<sup>99</sup> A decade earlier another Woodroffe home was mentioned by Cornelia Sorabji, the only

female lawyer at the High Court. She was not a member of ISOA but was part of the social circle of the 'memsahibs' of Calcutta. She mentioned Woodroffe's 'lovely house' in a letter to a British friend in 1906.<sup>100</sup>

The Woodroffes in 1912 were able to introduce the French Buddhist traveller Alexandra David-Neel to an enchanted 'oriental' world such as she felt most tourists would never be able to penetrate. Good fortune, she wrote in her letters to her husband, had introduced her to the Woodroffes who were 'charmants'. They had brought her to 'some very rich Hindus' for an evening of Indian music. She was impressed by the atmosphere which was like The Thousand and One Nights with the musicians seated, Indian-fashion, on a great mattress on the floor decorated with brocades and cushions and surrounded by works of art. Among them 'the masters of the house moved about in white robes with borders of Kashmir silk' <sup>101</sup>

Music was as important as art. A couple of months later she was invited to a musical 'afternoon' by the Woodroffes themselves. Tea served in the garden was followed by music in the salon. David-Neel fell into a rapturous philosophical reverie over the dream-like strains of the Vīṇā. Once again, it was not the sort of music that the mass of tourists in the city heard -- even though she felt the company did not compare with those who visited the Tagores. It was a mixed gathering of course, with 'rānīs' dressed in golden muslin among the women guests. She found herself seated next to a Bengali poetess. After the Vīṇā came Western music, played by the Director of the Calcutta Conservatory, accompanied by Mrs Woodroffe on the piano. Then, after most of the guests had departed, a select few were invited to remain while the vīṇā player returned and enchanted them for the rest of the evening. 'La musique hallucinée recommence...' provoking much philosophical and generalising comparison with the Western music which had preceded it. Among other things, not only was the 'Eastern' more dream-like, it was also more sensual.<sup>102</sup>

Evenings with a vīṇā player are recaptured by Abanindranath in his memoirs, this time at the Tagores' famous mansion: 'And once again Blount Sahib, Woodroffe Sahib and some of our own enthusiasts for national music having met together, I brought a vina player from Madras.' Orange, sherbet and pān were kept in ready supply. At night 'when the roar of the city stopped, the children of the house had gone to sleep, the work of all the servants was done and there was peace on all sides, then the vina would arise...' Count Herman Keyserling, the Austrian philosopher was there on one occasion, we are informed.<sup>103</sup> Keyserling himself recorded the scene in his travel diary of 1911, where the 'oriental' music gave rise to much the same sort of dreamy mystic reverie as it had done for David-Neel.<sup>104</sup>

### Jorāsanko

The magic of this élite world of 'oriental' culture had its heart in the mansion of the Tagore family at Jorāsanko in north Calcutta at number 6 Dwarkarnath Tagore Lane, home of the poet Rabindranath, while his cousins Abanindranath and Gaganendranath lived opposite at number 5. Coomaraswamy's biographer says that he 'entered a charmed circle early in 1909 when he joined the Tagores at...Jorasanko'.<sup>105</sup> Whether or not they were the 'très riches hindous' to whom the Woodroffes had taken Alexandra David-Neel on her arrival, two months into her time in Calcutta she was already comparing the Woodroffes' circle unfavourably with that of the Tagores (see above). A visit to the Tagores seems to have been essential for any distinguished foreigner who wanted to encounter 'Eastern' culture, whether in the field of art, music or literature. Lord Zetland, newly appointed Governor of Bengal in 1917, was entertained to a production of Rabindranath's The Post Office at Jorāsanko performed by members of the family;<sup>106</sup> and in the same year his private secretary took the visiting Secretary of State Montagu, 'to see the three Tagore brothers and their paintings'.<sup>107</sup>

Rabindranath's son, Rathindranath Tagore, described the famous 'southern verandeh' where his artist cousins held

court 'like Oriental monarchs' receiving visitors and students while they worked at their painting. He also recalled 'many an unforgettable evening' in the drawing room, no doubt the same ones Abanindranath describes: 'There would be a few lovers of art and music reclining in meditative poses on spacious divans with lights dimmed listening to the melodious strains of the Veena.' He would watch silently from an 'obscure corner' the 'distinguished foreigners' who formed the company.<sup>108</sup>

Rothenstein too described the household in his memoirs: 'a delightful house, full of lovely things.'<sup>109</sup> He used to leave 'as though there were an inch of air between my feet and the ground. Where indeed could I find such company as I met there?...These are the precious hours of life, the hours spent with exciting minds, when one's best self, too, is evoked.'<sup>110</sup> Responding to Havell's letter of introduction, Woodroffe had joined the visiting art critic for Christmas at Benares in 1910. Havell informed Rothenstein that Woodroffe was acting at the time as both president and vice-president of ISOA: 'He is one in ten thousand,' Havell wrote 'a born artist - and one of the few strong men at present belonging to the Anglo-Indian administration - with none whatever of the usual Anglo-Indian prejudices.'<sup>111</sup> 'Sir John Woodroffe' recorded Rothenstein in his memoirs 'of all the Englishmen I met in India, showed most desire to plumb the depths of the Indian spirit. With a pandit he was studying the Tantric writings on which he became a learned authority.'<sup>112</sup> But Rothenstein who made so many friends wherever he went, does not seem to have come closer to him than that.

The Tagore home had not always seemed 'oriental'. Dora Ross visited it at the very beginning of the swadeshi era: '21st Aug 1905: Today we paid a visit to a typical Bengali family, the well-known Tagores of Calcutta.' They were 'received with great kindness and old-world courtesy...One felt that the charm of Hindu family life was here seen at its best'. All the men wore Indian dress, but the drawing room had 'every form of Victorian horror rampant'.<sup>113</sup> Even then, it

seems, the Tagores were already on display as a 'typical' Bengali Hindu family. But this was before the influence of swadeshi values had led them thoroughly to redecorate and refurnish their home. The poet's son Rathindranath confirms that the family house had originally been furnished in the conventional Victorian style, until Abanindranath and Gaganendranath applied their talents to it. Their greatest success was with the drawing room which was transformed into 'a magnificent example of semi-oriental treatment - decorated with the choicest collection of paintings and Indian art-ware, a room that has been the envy of connoisseurs from the world over'.<sup>114</sup>

Woodroffe was such a frequent visitor to Jorasanko that a special room was kept there for him to use as he pleased.<sup>115</sup> Whenever he appeared people in the family would say 'Sahib has come!' -- which always meant Woodroffe not anyone else.<sup>116</sup> James Woodroffe recalled many Indians visiting their home, including Rabindranath Tagore, but in 1930 when the poet visited Oxford and both James and his father were living there, he could not remember them meeting. Woodroffe's friendship however was mainly with the artist brothers Abanindranath and Gaganendranath. Rothenstein complained that although Woodroffe knew the Tagores well, when he met him at Benares he did not speak to him about the poet.<sup>117</sup>

In chapter 2 I referred to the party attended by Pavitra Gangopadhyay where he saw Woodroffe wearing Indian dress (above p.77). His host that night was almost certainly the High Court Judge Asutosh Chaudhury, who was related by marriage to the Tagores. He was a member of both the Landholders Association and of ISOA. The self-consciously Indian ambience of the party which Gangopadhyay describes is all the more striking when we are informed that Asutosh Chaudhury was a member of a class of Bengalis caricatured as the Inga Bhanga Samāi -- people who were entirely anglicised in their manners and customs.<sup>118</sup> As Rathindranath Tagore pointed out, however, this did not mean they were 'anti-



national': on the contrary they formed the backbone of what was known as the 'Old Congress'. Sumit Sarkar mentions Asutosh Chaudhury's active role in the swadeshi era when he was one of the leaders of the National Education Movement, but like Rabindranath, he was alienated by the violence of the revolutionaries.<sup>119</sup> As a representative of an older wave of nationalism, Chaudhury like Rabindranath himself was a critic of Gandhi and actively opposed his visit to Calcutta in 1918.<sup>120</sup> Woodroffe, who shows little consciousness of Gandhi in his writings, appears to have assimilated himself to the world of the élite Bengali western-educated nationalists; he seems to fit easily into the pacific, cultural nationalism of the swadeshi era with its extension into political 'extremism' over the years without overt support, at least, for violence. We have to pause for thought, however, over his friendship with Gaganendranath who, I was informed, was particularly close to Woodroffe and was also believed to be secretly in league with the revolutionaries.<sup>121</sup> Whether, if this was so, Woodroffe the High Court Judge would have been aware of it we do not know, but the suggestion hints at the complexities that may have lurked beneath the surface of this social world of friendships between members of the Indian and European (especially British) élites.

#### The Marquis of Zetland

Lord Ronaldshay, Marquis of Zetland, succeeded Lord Carmichael as Governor of Bengal in 1917 and followed his predecessor in giving keen patronage to ISOA. He was also genuinely fascinated by Indian philosophy, holding discussions with pandits and other scholars<sup>122</sup> and himself writing on Indian culture. He acknowledged Woodroffe as 'the greatest living European authority' upon Tantra, but remained unconvinced by his defence of it.<sup>123</sup> In 1919 he offered ISOA a government grant which they cautiously accepted. In this as we have noted he believed he was encouraging the 'positive' as opposed to the 'negative' aspects of nationalism. It was accepted with reservations.<sup>124</sup> According to Zetland the society was languishing by this time

- possibly because of the war <sup>125</sup> - but there was said to be a 'slackening of the ties between the Indian and European members' after 1915, when Abanindranath left the Government art school following disagreements with Percy Brown, Havell's successor, and the Tagores devoted themselves to their newly formed cultural club based in the family home.<sup>126</sup> This might also have reflected the fact that 1916 was the last year in which Woodroffe was President of the Society. He was not on the committee which consulted with Lord Zetland about the government grant.<sup>127</sup> This may have been because he was out of the country on furlough, but it seems possible that he had withdrawn from the scene by then. He was very busy with the Tantrik Texts by 1916, according to his correspondence with Dawasamdip; and most of his lectures and essays on Tantra were written between 1917-22. By 1922 when he retired, it was said that he had become 'notoriously absent' from social engagements in Calcutta -- which certainly seems to have been in marked contrast to his enthusiastic and active involvement up until the middle years of the previous decade.<sup>128</sup>

Woodroffe continued writing and speaking, however, and his three books on Indian culture and education appeared in the second half of the decade. They reflect the cultural milieu of the art movement and were as popular at the time as his Tantric writings, because of their nationalism. Woodroffe was imbued with the 'positive' or 'romantic orientalism' which inspired the art movement, and the contemporary racial theories about the essence of a race being expressed in its culture. He sometimes points to Japan as an example of an Asian nation which has been able to assimilate the influence of the West without 'losing its own soul'. In his Is India Civilized? Woodroffe presents the reader with a 'spiritual' orient set over against a materialist Europe, with its matrix in India. The superior, spiritual culture is India's heritage and her destiny is to bequeath it to the rest of the world, which has lost its soul to modernism. Woodroffe also reflects the nostalgia for a pre-secular European society of thinkers like Coomaraswamy. Westernization and modernism are

to be resisted as the twin enemies of true culture, which is always spiritual. I turn to these cultural writings in the next chapter.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1.Cousins 1918a) ; Sarkar 1973 p.497.
- 2.Thakurta 1992. p.8, p.163: the new orientalist and nationalists 'veered closely together'.
- 3.Gāngopādhyāy O.C 1969, ps.86-91.
- 4.Ganguly K.K.(ed) 1986.
- 5.It was O.C. Ganguly who recounted the story of how Woodroffe junior demolished his father in court one day. (above p.13 )
- 6.Gāngopādhyāy op cit p.90. By 'Paris' he means France where Woodroffe finally retired. James Woodroffe said the collection was looted during the second world war.
- 7.ibid p.91. It was reproduced by the Japanese process of coloured wood blocks.
- 8.Mitter 1994 p.
- 9.Gāngopādhyāy p.90.
- 10.Mitter 1994, p.350. Art appreciation 'was predicated on a universal language of art'.
- 11.Mitter MMM p.256.
- 12.ibid p.260.
- 13.Thakurta op cit p.146-7
- 14.ibid ps.53-64.
- 15.ibid. Sumit Sarkar op cit ps.101, 105ff
- 16.Personal communication of Dr Saumaren Bhaumik, of Rabindra Bharati university, Calcutta.
- 17.Thakurta op cit ps.149-154
- 18.ibid, p.211ff. The Bengalee of 21st March 1905 wondered 'would students henceforth be taught nothing but designing and moulding clay figurines?' 'Are higher branches of art and painting to be banished?'
- 19.Government Art College Centenary Volume p.29. See also Dennison Ross 1953, p.139: He 'would not have anything English or quasi-English' at the Delhi Durbar of 1902, since 'India...has an art of her own.'

#### Notes to Chapter 4

20. Havell attacked 'British Philistinism' on Indian art in The Nineteenth Century, Feb 1903. Thakurta p.156.

21. Lipsey 1977.

22. *ibid* ps.19-20

23. Thakurta *op cit* ps.159-162

24. 'He (the image maker) did not choose his own problems but like the Gothic sculptor obeyed a hieratic Canon...not (a) ...philosopher or aesthete, but a pious artisan'. Coomaraswamy Dance of Siva 1985 p.25. Quoted by Mitter MMM p.279

25. Essays in National Idealism (1909) and Art and Swadeshi, (1911). Both collections of essays and previously published articles. Lipsey *op cit* p.76, p.89.

26. 'ISOA: Its Early Days' in JISOA, 1961, p.99.

27. Thakurta *op cit* p.166.

28. Satī: a vindication of the Hindu Woman (1913). See *ibid* p.286.

29. *ibid* p.191.

30. Mitter MMM ps.269-70

31. Birdwood's The Industrial Arts of India, was first published in 1880.

32. Mitter MMM p.269. (Lipsey p.70 explains he was looking at a photograph of an Indonesian stone sculpture of a dhyāni Buddha from Borobudur. Its soft features and smooth rounded limbs reminded him of a certain kind of pudding.)

33. Lipsey p.60

34. Havell 1928 p.34

35. Mitter MMM p.245. It was Ruskin who especially taught that 'Nature -- natural form -- was the source of beauty' (Lipsey p.57) -- a dictum against which Coomaraswamy, Havell, and others of a later generation rebelled.

36. The Theosophist vol 40 (Oct 1918 - March 1919) p.297 (a reply to a reviewer of his own Indian Renaissance). Mitter also makes this connection [MMM p.240, 247-8]

37. Cousins 1918 p.146.

38. Birdwood 1988 p.2

39. *ibid* p.125

40. Cousins 1918 ps.119-120. Mitter MMM ps.247-8
41. Cousins op cit ps.85-6
42. ibid p.107
43. See Rupam No.11 (July 1922) p.100. Cousins generalising on the difference between the neo-Bengal School and the art of the West declares 'every one of them expresses soul', whereas Western art expresses 'muscularity, vigour, emotion'.
44. Havell 1928 p.8. 'Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic and transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet' [p.10]
45. ibid ps.12-24.
46. Hay 1970 ps.21-3, 51.
47. Said op cit
48. Thakurta p.158
49. Mitter The Aryan Myth. Above chapter 1 p.51-2
50. Mitter MMM p.258
51. Havell 1905 p.61; 1918 ps.148-157, <sup>where</sup> and ps.179-80/ he disagreed with Fergusson by saying the śikhara of the Hindu temple was an 'Aryan' feature precisely because he viewed it as a Śaiva symbol. (Compare this with L.D.Barnet above p.7 ) See also Thakurta ps.177-179; on p.181 Thakurta sees this view of Havell's as 'orientalist' and 'essentialist' - no doubt, but it was how Hindus also saw things.
52. Havell's view of the Brahmanical synthesis is similar to that of D.C.Sen. Above chapter 1 p.49-9
53. Dance of Siva, p.21-2; 'The Theory of Art in Asia' in The Transformation of Nature in Art, 1974 ps.3-57. See also Thakurta p.178
54. Zimmer op cit ps.22-24 et seq. Zimmer's whole chapter closely follows Sivacandra.
55. Havell 1905 ps.112-3. This of course was long before Woodroffe's books. Havell's account of Śāktism in the 2nd edition of Indian Sculpture and Painting (1928) draws on GOL.
56. Mitter MMM ps.272-3, 274. Thakurta p.158.
57. MMM ps.278 and 277.

#### Notes to Chapter 4

58. See Havell 1928: ix-x. Havell's form of words recalls Woodroffe's about placing oneself in the skin of the Hindu. (Above, chapter 2 p.68)

59. Woodroffe would not, like Havell, have urged that the British Empire should become 'Aryan' in order to save itself. [Thakurta p.181.]

60. MMM p.268

61. Thakurta p.154ff

62. They still used perspective, and chiaroscuro to give the illusion of solidity, for example, until a time when they deliberately abandoned these to produce flat 'decorative' art believed to be a more truly Indian style. [Mitter 1994 p. ] Thakurta lists six ingredients of Abanindranath's style including Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau trends. op cit p.227.

63. Thakurta ps.211ff

64. ibid p.243

65. ibid p.258-60

66. See A.K. Bhattacharya 'The Indian Society of Oriental Art in Retrospect' in JISOA 1981-3 (75th Anniversary number) p.148

67. ibid p.145

68. Modern Review Vol 19 (February 1916), p.255.

69. JISOA, 1961, p.99. Tapati Guha Thakurta informed me that reproductions are all that remain of the New Bengal School. Most of their paintings were bought by private collectors. A reproduction in Modern Review (February 1909) of Surendranath Ganguly's 'Ganesa writing the Mahābhārata' was from a painting in the possession of Woodroffe. It had been taken by him to England, but its present whereabouts are not known.

70. 'ISOA: Its Early Days' in JISOA, 1961, ps.96-7. (Extract from Tagore and Chand op cit ps.117, 119-120). Abanindranath describes the enthusiasm with which Woodroffe collected articles from all over the Indian subcontinent.

71. The exhibitions are described in Mitter 1994 ps.317-328.

72. Lipsey op cit p.87.

73. Datta and Robinson 1995 p.164. M. Lago 1972 ps.19-20. Havell's lecture to the Royal Society of Arts was the beginning of a 'cultural chain reaction' that brought Rabindranath to the attention of the West (p.2). The visit is recorded in Rothenstein 1931-39 vol 2

- 74.Mitter 1994 p.324.
- 75.Rathindranath Tagore 1958 p.90
- 76.Quoted in JISOA, 1961, ps.101-3
- 77.ibid p.102
- 78.Writing in Kokka, Woodroffe expressed the hope that the Indian people would 'regain their artistic heritage and realise that their duty is not to borrow from others but to give of their own.' Quoted in Mitter 1994 p.315.
- 79.Up until his death, James Woodroffe was in touch with Blount's grandchildren in New Zealand, but unfortunately the family cannot remember much about their grandfather.
- 80.Gangopadhyay op cit ps.101-2.
- 81.'ISOA: Its Early Days' in JISOA, 1961, p.98.
- 82.18th March 1944 Ānanda Bāzār Patrika. (short obituary notice)
- 83.Tagore and Chand op cit p.116. It was Thornton who bought Nandalal's famous picture, Sati, and sent it to Japan for reproduction through the Japanese method of colour block printing.
- 84.'ISOA: Its Early Days' in JISOA, 1961, p.96.
- 85.Thakurta op cit p.278: 'Such an organisation [ISOA] underlined the extent to which the whole phenomenon of 'national art' had come to rely on the support and accolades of the European Orientalists.'
- 86.'Reminiscences' in JISOA, 1961, ps.46-7 (Translated from Tagore and Chand op cit)
- 87.Viśvabhāratī Quarterly, New Series IV/1 (May-July 1938) p.13
- 88.Thakurta ps.174-5. See for example Modern Review Jan-Feb 1907 'The Function of Art in Shaping Nationality'.
- 89.'Reminiscences' in JISOA, 1961, ps.45-6. (Translated from Tagore and Chand op cit p.136)
- 90.Woodroffe is not mentioned in any of her published letters.
- 91.S.N. Dhar ps.1392-3 and p.1476, footnote 92
- 92.Thakurta ps.167-9
- 93.Viśvabhāratī Quarterly New Series II/2 (1936), ps.65-73. (Okakura Number)

- 94.Thakurta ps.170-175
- 95.ibid p.169
- 96.ibid p.168
- 97.A. Tagore and R.Chand op cit ps.135, 137.
- 98.Towndrow 1951 p.17 (Letter dated 18.9.1910)
- 99.J and M Cousins 1950, p.316.
- 100.Sorabji Papers, OIOC. Mss Eur F165/21-25 Letters to Harrison Faulkner Blair, letter dated March 15 1906. She reminds her correspondent that she has already described the Woodroffes' house 'last year' but alas the letter in question seems not to have survived.
- 101.Alexandra David-Neel 1976 p.97 (Letter dated 21st January 1912).
- 102.ibid p.110-113. (14th March 1912). As a contrast to this social world she had described a more formal garden party given by a Maharani to entertain the Viceroy Lord Hardinge and which David-Neel attended with Mrs Woodroffe and Mrs Moeller. Here she found 'no cordiality', the Indians bored, the English preoccupied with preserving their dignity as 'whites'. Mrs Woodroffe, she said, 'didn't look as if she was enjoying herself'. ibid p.103-4.
- 103.A. Tagore and R.Chand op cit p.73.
- 104.Keyserling: Travel Diary of a Philosopher vol 1. p.335. He is full of the 'romantic/orientalists' idealization of Hinduism.
- 105.Lipsey op cit p.79.
- 106.Marquis of Zetland My Bengal Diary vol 1 p.107. Entry for Christmas Day 1917.
- 107.Montagu 1930 p.85
- 108.Rathindranath Tagore op.cit. ps.89, 90-1.
- 109.Rothenstein op cit vol 2 p.249.
- 110.'Gaganendranath Tagore' in Viśvabhāratī Quarterly New Series IV/1, p.4 (1938 Gaganendranath Tagore memorial volume)
- 111.Towndrow op cit p.15. Letter dated Aug 6 1910.
- 112.Rothenstein op cit p.
- 113.Ross 1953, p.131 quoting his wife's record of her stay with Sir Denzil and Lady Ibbetson in 1905.



Notes to Chapter 4

114.Rathindranath Tagore op.cit p.91.

115.Saumaren Bhaumik communication

116.Sobhun Ghose communication.

117.Rothenstein op cit p.249

118.Rathindranath Tagore op.cit p.8; Nirad Chaudhury 1976 ps.403-4. Gangopadhyay does not name his host but calls him a 'barra sahib' and a Judge of the High Court. There were few Indian High Court judges at this time.

119.Sumit Sarkar op.cit ps.171-2 records that Asutosh Chaudhury and Hirendranath Datta (also reported to be a friend of Woodroffe) were prominent in the swadeshi movement and were leaders in the National Education Movement; but they threatened to disaffiliate schools that had links with the (more revolutionary) Samities. For Rabindranath's disillusion, see ibid p.62-3. An article on Asutosh Chaudhury in Modern Review, July 1960 ps. describes his soirées at his house in Ballygunge.

120.Marquis of Zetland: My Bengal Diary. OIOC Mss Eur D 609/1, Vol 2, ps 66-7: Entry for November 27 1921, notes that Asutosh Chaudhuri was released from his Presidentship of the Bengal Legislature because he wanted to organize opposition to Gandhi at the forthcoming Congress at Nagpur.

121.Communication of Saumaren Bhaumik at Rabindra Bharati university. Bhaumik as a very young man was briefly a student of Abanindranath.

122.Ronaldshay 1956 ps.129-30

123.Ronaldshay 1925 ps.148-9

124.Ronaldshay 1956 ps.124-7. Gaganendranath expressed fears of government interference and explained he had trouble persuading his brother Abanindranath on this score. [OIOC Mss Eur D601/5 Zetland papers: Letters from Gaganendranath Tagore; June 1918]

125.Cousins 1918 p.89 gave the war as the reason for their being a gap in the annual exhibitions.

126.A.K. Bhattacharya in JISOA 1981-3 p.151

127.Marquis of Zetland: My Bengal Diary, p.257. Entry for Sept 7 1919.

128.Rupam No.12 (Oct 1922) p.144 JISOA continues to this day; it once again has offices in Park Street, Calcutta, and still holds annual exhibitions. Unfortunately it has preserved very few records.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DEFENDER OF HINDUISM

#### 'India is an Idea'

This chapter is about three books on culture in which Woodroffe attacked westernization and the 'de-nationalizing' effect of English education. Education is the main theme of Bhārata Śakti and Seed of Race. Is India Civilized? is a more general book in defence of Hindu tradition.

#### Bhārata Śakti (BS): Woodroffe on public platforms

'India is not a mere geographical expression...India is an Idea' wrote Woodroffe and he called it 'a particular Śakti, the Bhārata Śakti'.<sup>1</sup> The title was given to a collection of short writings and of speeches to various gatherings which Woodroffe was invited to address. Its three editions appeared between 1917 and 1921, compiled and edited by Nolini Mohun Chatterji, one of Woodroffe's admirers, who wrote that the addresses were of great value 'at a time of mental and political unrest'.<sup>2</sup> Their popularity for nationalist feeling is reflected by appreciative reviews of BS in the Indian press and by the fact that several of the addresses had been published or summarised previously in the Bengalee -- the daily paper edited by Surendranath Bannerjee, the nationalist politician.

The second edition includes Woodroffe's reply to questions put to him by the Sadler Commission which visited India in 1917-1918 to inquire into the system of higher education. There was much talk at the time of Indian youth being 'deracinated' -- alienated from their Indian cultural heritage because of Western education. This was a debate which had started over a decade previously during the swadeshi era, when the Indian National Education Movement first organized its boycott of government-controlled schools and colleges.<sup>3</sup> The question was now no longer associated with political extremism and it was becoming official government policy that Indian culture needed to be

represented in the education system. No longer self-confident about the value of bestowing their Western culture on India, as the 'Anglicists' of the previous century had been,<sup>4</sup> the British authorities sought a range of opinions from representative figures both Indian and British. Thus the notions about race which shaped ISOA's ideology had a wider influence: to be authentic, each must be 'true to his own'. Woodroffe constantly expressed this theme and in his reply to the questions put by the Commission, he opposed government control of education describing its westernizing influence as 'deracializing, devitalizing and deforming'.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless with his instinct for compromise or 'balance' he did not like to play the radical and claimed he did not deny the value of Western education altogether; he sought, he claimed, to take a 'middle path'.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of the three books discussed in this chapter is the same and is reflected in most of the addresses in Bhārata Shakti. His attack on westernization recalls that of some modern writers, for he condemns imperialism for colonizing the mind of the colonized.<sup>7</sup> But he does this in the name of a racial ethics in which each must be true to his 'type' and perfect it for the benefit of humanity. Indians therefore must 'be Indian, and shape themselves as such by the study of the literature, art, philosophy and religion of their ancestors.'<sup>8</sup>

The earliest of the talks included in Bhārata Shakti was a summary of Woodroffe's presidential address to the Annual General Meeting of the Ram Mohun Roy Library in Calcutta, on March 20th 1915.<sup>9</sup> Addressing a gathering which must have included many members of the Brahmo Samaj - the philosopher Dr Brajendranath Seal introduced the speaker<sup>10</sup> -- Woodroffe's talk nevertheless reflected some reservations about the man regarded as the founder of Hindu modernism. Perhaps it was a paradoxical position for the pseudonymous 'Arthur Avalon' to be in, considering that he had only recently published the translation of Sivacandra's Tantratattva, which was largely aimed against Brahmos and

other modernisers. On the other hand, Avalon had also recently translated the MNT, which was a favourite text of Ram Mohun and of the Brahmo Samāj. Woodroffe acknowledged the complexities of the Raja's religious beliefs: 'He was like a piece of shot silk which shows a different colour according to its position and the light'. But he dismissed him as a religious thinker saying that his greatness lay mainly in his role as a patriot and social worker.<sup>11</sup>

Woodroffe expressed reservations about the Raja's legacy as the first Indian to further the cause of Western education. He defended his universalism, noting that this was in contrast to contemporary nationalist sentiment.<sup>12</sup> He also felt himself on firm ground when praising the Raja's opposition to satī and his championship of women -- but then this was something uncontroversial. He praises Ram Mohun for his 'tenderness to the poor', yet sounds generally cautious himself about social reform. He tells three stories in this short address, two of them to illustrate the ambivalence of reform. One of these was the Taoist allegory of the Rulers of the Southern and Northern Oceans who attempted to assist Chaos by giving him seven orifices for seeing, hearing etc like men have. 'But when they dug them for him he died'.<sup>13</sup> Reform involved dangers of turning people away from their 'type' or svabhāva - the Hindu term which Woodroffe uses elsewhere which probably corresponds to what he means by 'type'. He ended his address diplomatically by praising Ram Mohun as a 'true Muni' in the sense of an independent thinker.<sup>14</sup>

The address reflects the contradiction in Woodroffe himself, who seems to have been regarded as an ally on occasion by modernisers and secular reformers as well as by more conservative supporters of the Hindu revival. He felt akin to Ram Mohun in his humanism and universalism, yet distrusted him for his 'protestant' rejection of aspects of tradition. In his introduction to Sivadandra's book Avalon had made a specific comparison between Sivadandra's defence of Hindu orthodoxy and 'a Catholic protest against "modernism"' [PT/1

p.31] Perhaps Woodroffe's Catholic background had led him to identify instinctively with his Guru Sivacandra's attack on the Brahmo Samāj.

A year later Woodroffe addressed the Friends Union Club, a student organisation. This was on 30th May 1916. At a time of ferment in the colleges of Calcutta, Woodroffe introduced his address by saying that 'students had lately been severely spoken of'. This was not surprising as only a little while before, in February of 1916 an unpopular European teacher had been physically attacked in Presidency College.<sup>15</sup> Students were suspected of having revolutionary sympathizers amongst their number and indiscipline was regarded as a problem. Far from criticising them for this, Woodroffe declared he was 'not alarmed at their condition' and though they had faults, these were connected with qualities of energy and self respect.<sup>16</sup> The teacher, Mr Oaten, had been attacked after making racially insulting comments.<sup>17</sup>

A summary of Woodroffe's address to the students was published in The Bengalee, and reprinted in BS.<sup>18</sup> Woodroffe had urged them to be true to their religious and racial 'type' and the speech criticised Indians who had become 'so anglicised that they had almost lost their Indian soul'. In this talk Woodroffe described India as a living survival of the great civilizations of the past; but that was not all -- it was also a powerful force to influence the future:

India is not the mere subject of academic talk, but is a living force. India is still feared where she is not loved. Why again? Precisely because she lives. Because she is potentially powerful to impose her ideas upon the world.<sup>19</sup>

India's culture had been preserved because of her 'world purpose'. This was the 'new orientalism' of the art movement and of Okakura. It was also the message of Vivekananda and Nivedita, and quite distinct from the kind of orientalism which saw Indian culture simply as an interesting relic of the classical past.

It was also in this speech that Woodroffe applied the term Śakti in an incarnational sense, both individuals and nations being fragments (amśa) of the divine Power. What India needed at present was a 'Religion of Power' where each recognised this and consequently asserted himself for 'his own good and that of the country'. He set this against the 'other side of the Spirit' -- that is, ascetic withdrawal from the world. In the manner of Vivekananda, who urged the virtues of 'manliness' upon Indians,<sup>20</sup> he called on them to 'dispel all present weakness and sloth' and assert their will vigorously. 'We are what we have made ourselves in the past. We shall be what we will to be'.

Despite the similarities to Gandhi in his rejection of Westernization, it is interesting to note how "un-Gandhian" Woodroffe's 'Religion of Power' is. Writing in 1916, just before the Mahatma became a major figure in the whole of India, Woodroffe urged the virtues of active social commitment, but he called this the pravritti path ('turned towards' the world) and contrasted it with the religion of Jesus which he equated with that of the 'world-renouncer' and which he called nivritti dharma -- 'turned away' from the world. The former was the path for ordinary people; it was the way of 'Power'. Jesus's way was only for the few. 'On the Pravritti path we are power and develop power'.<sup>21</sup> There is here no Gandhian admiration for the Sermon on the Mount and non-resistance to evil. On the contrary, Woodroffe quotes with approval a Christian bishop who is reputed to have said that a state founded on these principles 'would not last a fortnight'.<sup>22</sup>

The other speeches in the book reiterate the call to Indians not to abandon their 'Indian soul'. A speech delivered to the annual meeting of the Calcutta Mudrassa is the only instance where Woodroffe's attitude to the Muslim strand of Indian culture is recorded. The Mudrassa, of which Dennison Ross had been the Principal earlier on, provided 'traditional' Islamic education alongside Western learning, on a similar pattern to the Sanskrit College for Hindus.<sup>23</sup>

Woodroffe's message to Indian Muslims was the same as that to Hindus: that they must be true to their own 'type' and perfect it for the ultimate good of the whole, but in this speech there is perhaps more emphasis on the value of Western learning and rather less on the dangers of too much 'imitation' of the West. He also urged them to recognize their 'Indian-ness' which distinguished them from 'brother Muslims of other races' and to accept their common interests with other Indian communities.<sup>24</sup> He was speaking in a similar vein to the Hindu-led Congress, where Muslims and Hindus had recently made common cause at the 1916 convention, partly mediated by Annie Besant.<sup>25</sup> Like many other Hindu nationalists, Woodroffe believed that the Muslim and Christian communities could be assimilated into the Indian national identity but defined that identity primarily in relation to Hindu culture.

An invitation from an institution which was outside the official system came from the Mahakali Pathśāla, a Hindu school for girls conducted on strict orthodox lines. It was founded by an interesting woman known as Tapasvinī Mataji. Born in 1835, the daughter of a Mahratta prince, she had fought alongside the famous Rani of Jhansi in the Mutiny before fleeing to Nepal where she performed strict sādhana for thirty years -- thereby earning her title 'Tapasvinī'. She came to Calcutta in 1890 and founded her school in 1893. Prominent figures were invited to preside at its annual prize-giving ceremony, including in previous years, Vivekananda.<sup>26</sup> Woodroffe was invited in July 1917. His speech began by commending the education of the girls in their own cultural tradition, but he soon delivered some strong criticism of the school for allowing their pupils to abandon their education for the sake of early marriage. Once again he invoked the notion of śakti, this time in the cause of women's emancipation, as Annie Besant had also done. Citing the Śākta doctrine that all women are the earthly embodiments of the Goddess, he urged them to 'Honour woman', and 'remove all customs which stand in the way of her true freedom and advancement. If you do not your race will pass

away by the will of that great Shakti...' He finished by quoting in Sanskrit a Tantric stanza: 'Woman is God, Woman is life'; and ended with what sounds like a note of passion, emphasising the words 'Life itself'.<sup>27</sup> It is the only occasion on which Woodroffe is recorded as making an unequivocal public criticism of any Hindu institution, custom or practice. He usually hedged any reference to 'abuses' of Hinduism with generalising remarks about similar problems in the West, or 'elsewhere'. Here he does not. This shows how questions affecting the position of women were of prime significance to Woodroffe whose wife was a supporter of the suffragettes and a friend of Annie Besant.<sup>28</sup> One of the factors which attracted him to Śākta Tantra, he always claimed, was the high status it accorded to women. Woodroffe's championship of Hinduism often has a kind of 'chivalrous' appearance: subliminally, perhaps, he was defending the Mother. This perhaps reflects the feminine role of India in colonial consciousness,<sup>29</sup> though here it probably has as much to do with his wife's feminism.

Woodroffe's speech was reported appreciatively by Ramananda Chatterji in Modern Review, a periodical which supported social reform. Sir John Woodroffe 'whose sympathy with and knowledge of Indian thought and life are deep and real' was here welcomed as an influential voice endorsing the cause of reform to a conservative section of Hindu society.<sup>31</sup>

The second edition of Bhārata Shakti included Woodroffe's first presidential speech to the All India Cows Conferences Association, one of the smaller conferences which took place during the 1917 Congress in Calcutta. Despite Torick Ameer Ali's amused reference to it (above p.20) this society did not present itself as an extremist Hindu movement for cow protection. Its motivation was proclaimed as economic and humanitarian, its aim to promote humane treatment of cattle generally and to reduce the slaughter of milch cows. Woodroffe's address was entitled 'Food is Power - Agriculture'.<sup>32</sup> 'Power' carried philosophical connotations,



being śakti, but this is the only place in his writings where it was translated into economic and practical terms - although 'Personally I believe that there is no question which does not ultimately touch religion'. Woodroffe announced a six-point economic programme and underlined the non-sectarian character of the organisation.

Woodroffe had been invited to preside over the organization by a group of founding members, many of whom were connected with the High Court, and he was succeeded in the position by another British Judge (Justice Greaves) a few years later. Woodroffe while president organised a nationwide survey of the condition of cattle which formed the basis of a memorial to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford in 1921. The report itself was published in 1926.<sup>33</sup> In 1920 Woodroffe succeeded in persuading the Corporation of Calcutta to ban the slaughter of milch cows -- a measure which was overturned in 1923 by the Bengal Legislative Council after he had left India.<sup>34</sup> Woodroffe's work for the welfare of cattle was represented on his retirement scroll by engravings of a cow being milked and of a farmer and his plough, to indicate its bearing on agriculture; but the Cow Conferences Association also presented him with a second silver scroll on their own account.<sup>35</sup>

Another organisation which invited Woodroffe to be its Patron on its formation in June 1919 was at first sight a surprising one: the Indian Rationalistic Society would not seem to be a likely group of people to approach a well-known writer on religion. The first issue of its Bulletin declared:

We, the members of this society feel convinced that science supplies us with the most reliable knowledge attainable about nature...we believe it is our duty to stand by the practical conclusions to which it inevitably leads...that ideas and institutions which are concerned with problems which come within the range of science should be judged by the data which it furnishes...<sup>36</sup>

Yet six months after the first publication of Is India Civilized?, the society considered itself extremely fortunate to secure Woodroffe as their patron. 'His name will give the

undertaking an importance in the public eye which it would otherwise secure only by years of patient work.' Language familiar from Woodroffe's writings recurs in the Bulletin: references to the 'fight' against 'mental lassitude and physical languor', belief in the 'great principle of evolution' being 'activity...not passivity'; 'An active mind should be creative...it should create new powers...' Looking more closely, we see the name of Nolini Mohun Chatterji again -- Woodroffe's admirer and editor was President of the society. He hosted a farewell dinner for him on his departure for England on furlough in August 1919. Among the long list of those attending were several Muslim names, including Torick Ameer Ali. A few days later, on 28th August, they all saw him off with flowers from Howrah station.<sup>37</sup> Woodroffe accepted the position of patron in June of 1919, suggesting that he had so far kept private his intention not to return to India after this particular furlough.

A lecture Woodroffe delivered to the society before his departure, entitled 'The Gayatri as an Exercise of Reasoning' was published in the September edition of the bulletin and showed clearly that, to him at least, 'rationalist' in the Indian context meant something rather different from the 'rationalism' of European philosophy.<sup>38</sup> The first section of the article defined the limits of reason as a means of knowledge for supersensual realities or ultimate truth: the Self (Ātman or Brahman) can never be an object of ordinary knowledge. The lecture is a straightforward one on neo-Vedanta philosophy, with an emphasis on spiritual and psychical experience as the proof of realities beyond the senses. The second part of the lecture is a meditation on the Gāyatrī Mantra concerning seven ascending states of consciousness. The lecture was reprinted in Garland of Letters. It is interesting that Woodroffe claims he was at first at a loss over a subject for his lecture, until he came upon a 'note' provided for him some time ago on the Gāyatrī.<sup>39</sup> I discuss in chapter 9 such

instances of Woodroffe's skilful use of material supplied to him by others.

Nolini Mohun Chatterji seems to have been a gifted speaker himself who could fill a lecture hall every week on subjects such as 'The economic independence of women', 'Science and Morality', 'Science and Vedānta'.<sup>40</sup> The son of a Western-educated father who nevertheless remained a devout Brahmin, he was said to have made 'vehement denunciations' of his ancestral cult. A critic in the bulletin pointed to him as representing a 'type' of those overcome by excessive admiration of Western science and culture.<sup>41</sup> He thus sounds exactly the sort of person against whom Woodroffe directed his exhortations not to lose their 'Indian soul'.

It is evident that through all the fervour with which he defended Hindu tradition and especially Tantra, Woodroffe still attempted to hold on to humanist values of tolerance and universalism -- reflected in his ever present desire to compromise, not to be seen as 'extremist' in any sense. A notice in Modern Review detected a likeness in Bhārata Shakti to the Positivists of the last century and Herbert Spencer -- a surprising comparison for a book by an author so much more immediately identified with the revival of Hinduism.<sup>42</sup> It is worth pondering a little more deeply. Woodroffe's admirers at the High Court can be taken as exemplified in Nolini Mohun Chatterji. In the report of the Sadler Commission, Woodroffe is reported as saying that Indian students suffered 'a paralysing inner conflict'.<sup>43</sup> Young Indian men who were deeply imbued through their education with Western ideas which they admired, and yet who also felt deeply rooted (perhaps more than they knew consciously) in their own culture, seem to have responded to Woodroffe as someone who could mediate between their two worlds. Whether he did so more than superficially remains an open question, but it seems his language could capture the spirit of both 'tradition' on the one hand, and of popular Western ideas. His lectures in which he reinvented Śākta-tantric metaphysics in terms of contemporary science (below chapter 8 p. 267ff),

would certainly have made a strong appeal to Nolini Mohun Chatterji and his friends in the Indian Rationalistic Society.

The role of Woodroffe as mediator can be seen in Chatterji's selection of his addresses in Bhārata Shakti, which reflects not only the concern to preserve the Hindu cultural heritage, but also what was no doubt the reassuring message that this culture could be fluid enough to adapt to changing circumstances, to grow and change. The image, as Woodroffe put it, 'is an organic one, like an amoeba feeding'.<sup>44</sup>

This was an evocation of an image provided long ago by his unconventional headmaster, Lord Petre,<sup>45</sup> who had applied it in a psychological sense to the education of the individual child, while Woodroffe applied it to a collective entity, the race or culture. The 'amoeba' was translated by Woodroffe into the bija, what he called 'the seed of race' in his book of that title published in 1919, in which he attempted to express the idea of a racial soul.

#### The Seed of Race

This book may have come about through the influence of P.N. Mukhopadhyay, Woodroffe's friend and mentor who later became Swami Pratyagātmanand Saraswati. Mukhopadhyay himself gave addresses on education. He <sup>had been</sup> a mathematics Professor at the National College of Calcutta which was a non-governmental university set up by the National Education Movement during the swadeshi era.<sup>46</sup>

It is possible they came to know each other through Woodroffe's address to the students of the Friends Union Club, for the summary of that talk published in The Bengalee prompted Mukhopadhyay to write to Woodroffe, attracted by his idea of a 'Religion of Power'. Woodroffe's letter in reply was then forwarded by Mukhopadhyay to the paper, and this too subsequently also found a place in Bhārata Shakti. In the letter he addresses Mukhopadhyay 'Dear Sir', implying they may not have known each other before.<sup>47</sup>

Both the letter and his book The Seed of Race attempt to define what Woodroffe calls the 'collective samskāras of the race': 'There is a Bija but it is difficult to seize and define though one can feel it without difficulty,' he wrote to Mukhopadhyay. The word bīja meaning 'seed' has a special meaning in Tantra, but here Woodroffe adapted it to a different context. He wanted to express something like the essence of a race and its connection to its culture, which he believed could be distinguished from what he saw as 'foreign accretions'. By this he meant primarily what he regarded as excessive westernization in the Indian context. A race/culture should be able to assimilate foreign elements without losing its essential identity. Its bīja - 'seed' - should be 'like an amoeba feeding': the foreign substance ceases to be foreign and becomes part of the amoeba itself.<sup>48</sup> Woodroffe also used bīja here in its philosophical context: the 'drop' -- bindu which divides into bindu and bīja (GOL:136, below p.227) - is the first condensation of the cosmos out of the divine mind, and it contains, or is identical with, the samskāras which are the latent impressions, or memories, of past universes. Consequently 'a particular racial consciousness' is a defined stream in the cosmic manifestation: 'A particular part of the general Cosmic Memory realises itself as a Race with its beliefs, practices and social institutions.'<sup>49</sup> If this appeared to concretize these practices and institutions, Woodroffe wanted to assert that 'what is important' is the samskāra itself, the essence, not the particular forms in which it is invested at any time: ie. What mattered was the 'General Memory or Spirit of the race', not necessarily any particular social institutions or beliefs.

According to one reviewer Seed of Race despite its Hindu terminology was merely about 'recognition of the forces of racial heredity'<sup>50</sup> This was true only up to a point, for the concept of 'race' in this book does not suggest the idea of biological inheritance. Woodroffe does not distinguish between a race and a culture; but what he really means by it, as he reveals eventually, is closer to culture -- ie Aryan

culture, of which Hinduism or Brahmanism is the developed product.<sup>51</sup> This subsumed the body: 'The Seed of Race today is thus the Indian Samskāra which has produced the minds and bodies of the Indian people of our time.'<sup>52</sup> But Woodroffe has equated 'Aryan culture' or 'Brahmanism' with the Indian race as a whole, excluding implicitly the non-Hindu communities in India. Whether intending to or not what he ended by defining as a 'race' was what shortly afterwards came to be called Hindutva, the collectivity of Hindus.<sup>53</sup>

Race was a widely discussed issue at the time. The idea of the existence of a 'racial soul' found its way into the psychology of C.G.Jung as the 'racial Unconscious'. The racial ethics to which Woodroffe gave expression, concerned with each race perfecting its 'type' for the benefit of humanity, was the theme of the first Universal Races Congress of 1911, held in Europe. Annie Besant was there and spoke 'for' India, as did Brajendranath Seal. The event was strongly criticised by a writer in Modern Review.<sup>54</sup>

In The Seed of Race Woodroffe expressed views which would be characterised as 'racist' today. He wrote of different racial 'stocks', some 'high' and some 'extremely low' which went to make up the Indian nation and regarded this racial mixture as 'probably' - for Woodroffe as usual tries not to be dogmatic - the cause of its present degeneracy. What is more, he regarded the alleged dangers of racial mixture as a justification for the caste system, saying this was something 'overlooked by European critics' of the system.<sup>55</sup> In Is India Civilized? he praised several times the 'wonderful system of Varnashrama Dharma'.<sup>56</sup> This appears inconsistent with Woodroffe's praise of Tantra for its supposed ability to transcend caste (below p.249). His acceptance here of the general view of the 'degeneracy' of India is also inconsistent with the affirmation of 'Hinduism as it exists today' in his writings on Tantra; for this perception of decline was directly related to the glorification of the 'Aryan' past and the Vedic age. However this alliance

between the prevailing racial doctrines of Europe with those of Hindu caste ideology was not at all unusual.<sup>57</sup>

Woodroffe does Battle with William Archer: Is India Civilized?

The future fate of the Indian (meaning Hindu) race or culture was the theme of the book which Woodroffe wrote in reply to William Archer's <sup>58</sup> India and the Future and which won him so much popularity with the Indian public (above chapter 3). It was republished in Delhi in 1971 as India: Culture and Society, originally the title of its first chapter. Its original title -- which Woodroffe opened his book by describing as absurd -- was a direct response to Archer, who had described Indian culture as 'barbarism'. This term had a technical meaning in 18th century Enlightenment thought and designated a society which was developing towards 'civilization' but had not yet arrived at it.<sup>59</sup> But Archer seemed to enjoy using the word, and the flavour of his book can be indicated by the passage which Woodroffe quoted at the opening of his own first chapter:

Barbarian, barbarism, barbarous -- I am sorry to harp so much on these words. But they express the essence of the situation...There are of course many thousands of individuals who have risen and are arising above it (barbarism), but the plain truth concerning the mass of the (Indian) population -- and not the poorer classes alone -- is that they are not civilized people.<sup>60</sup>

Archer's India and the Future was certainly a bad book and a strange one which seems deliberately designed to cause offence while at the same time proclaiming its author a 'friend' of India. Woodroffe occupies much of his own book by replying point-by-point to his opponent's extremely abusive comments on Hindu culture, sometimes with a fine irony reminiscent of Arthur Avalon's commentary on orientalist language in the preface to Principles of Tantra. And it was viewed by him as part of the same cause, for Tantra was usually attacked as a prime example of the 'degradation' of Indian culture,<sup>61</sup> and Woodroffe describes Archer's prejudices as representative of a certain 'type'.

Archer was neither an orientalist nor a Christian missionary (Avalon/Woodroffe's more usual targets) but a self-proclaimed Rationalist who regarded even the wearing of the Cross by Christians as superstition,<sup>62</sup> so his reaction to the religious culture of Hinduism with its profusion of imagery can be imagined. His main target was Indian art which -- strangely in view of his prejudices -- he claimed once to have liked; indeed, he said, it had even 'cast a spell' on him once, until he reacted against it. It is very interesting to see that Archer blamed his own reaction on what he described as the excessive adulation of Indian art and culture promulgated by Havell 'and the sturdy little phalanx of India-worshippers'.<sup>63</sup>

Woodroffe himself was a member of the 'sturdy little phalanx' against whom Archer was reacting. We have evidence here, not only of Havell's influence in Britain, but of a renewal of the battle between the 'Orientalist'

and the 'Anglicist'

which the latter had won decisively for a period in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> The 'new' orientalists of the art movement had it seemed provoked in their turn a new reaction against things 'oriental'.

Archer's book provoked outrage in India, similar to the furore caused later on in the 1930s by Katherine Mayo's Mother India. His opinions are merely abuse. 'Abuse' is the right word because in Archer's mind India is a victim who can get nothing right, who is always inferior from every aspect, and who is subjected over and over again to what can best be described in psychological terms as 'verbal sadism'. Its author counted himself a liberal politically, who saw the modernisation of India as part-and-parcel of the independence process. In itself this was far from being an unpopular or unusual position right from the times of the 'Old Congress' who always had strong links with English Liberals. In later chapters (for example, one on education) when the abuse has spent itself Archer is even able to make a few genuinely perceptive remarks.<sup>65</sup> But the tone of most of the book is



so abusive that it is very difficult to carry away from it an impression of anything else the author may have wanted to say. It is easy to see how Woodroffe would have been goaded by it to leap to the defence of the culture with which he identified himself, and equally understandable that he should greatly increase his popularity with the Indian public by doing so. Is India Civilized? won appreciative reviews in the Indian press, where 'fairness', 'lucidity', 'insight' are frequent adjectives. There is a contrast with the more adverse comment that appeared in English papers in India "A.G. Widgery, reviewing both books in Indian Philosophical Review, condemned them equally, implying that the battle created more heat than light: 'Let us say frankly that we consider both Mr Archer and Sir John Woodroffe in this episode a nuisance...' "67 But it was unjust thus to equate Woodroffe's book with Archer's, implying it was equally intemperate.

Widgery's review objected among other things to Woodroffe's generalisations about 'East' and 'West'. But although Woodroffe does generalise in this way, his book is more than an expression of romantic orientalism. Nor is it specifically a political book about Indian nationalism. One of the interesting factors of this 'gladiatorial' contest is that both of the British protagonists assume that Indian independence is inevitable.<sup>68</sup> What was at issue was Westernization and the future of India's Hindu culture. Woodroffe contended that Archer had a political motive in attacking the latter because of fear that an independent India, which would be equal and yet 'other', would exert an influence over Europe. Woodroffe saw Westernization as an alternative means of control when political power over Asia had been relinquished by the European nations.<sup>69</sup>

With whatever political overtones, this book is primarily an attack on Westernization and its associated secularism. It aims at the preservation of an essentialised 'religious' culture of (Hindu) India in the face of what its author sees as the aggressive materialism which he places opposite it --

writing of 'the dark, terrible and efficient West'.<sup>70</sup> Tantra is barely mentioned. Instead he writes of 'Brahmanism', which he calls a branch of 'Bharata Dharma' -- eschewing the word 'Hinduism' -- of which Buddhism and Jainism are other branches, and of which the Śākta teaching is one expression. While this statement implicitly excludes the Muslim and Christian elements from Bhārata Dharma, or 'Indian' religion, its purpose is to define a position for the Śiva-Śakti doctrines within the broader framework of 'Brahmanism'.<sup>71</sup> Indian non-Hindus however are mostly ignored or subsumed under the category of 'the East'.

The history of contact and conflict between 'East' and 'West', between Europe and Asia in global terms, is the starting point of the book. Such conflict is a necessary part of the process of evolution, which is interpreted as a spiritual process: the increasing manifestation of Spirit in humanity.<sup>72</sup> There is no doubt on which side of the struggle 'Indian' culture stands. 'India has taught that the Universe is in its ultimate ground Spirit.'<sup>73</sup> The visible and material world -- the world of 'forms' -- is a projection of the divine in greater or lesser degrees. At the level of 'brute force' the West, with its stronger grasp of material reality, has won a temporary ascendancy, but this is relegated to the lower levels of the cosmic manifestation. The Tantric doctrines of three 'bodies' or 'levels' of existence of all phenomena -- the 'gross' (outward or material), the 'subtle' (mental) and the 'causal' (absolute or 'spiritual') -- are applied to nations and cultures. With the increasing 'spiritualisation' of humanity, the gross (sthūla) forms of conflict in terms of warfare and colonial domination will pass away, but then the focus of conflict will pass to the cultural or 'subtle' level. By a process of cultural Darwinism, what is of most value in the different cultures of the world will triumph while the less valuable will be eliminated. In this struggle it is the duty of each race collectively, to 'maintain its own'. 'Failure to do so is the biological sin,' he writes.<sup>74</sup> The aim of evolution is 'complete Humanity' which is the same as Divinity, of

which 'perfected man is the highest earthly form.'<sup>75</sup> The process has barely begun, except for certain 'Illuminate Masters of Humanity' who have appeared in every race.'<sup>76</sup> This reference to 'Masters' does not suggest Theosophy, so much as connotations of Comte's 'Religion of Humanity' which was so popular with Western-educated Indians of the 19th century. This book asserts love and altruism as the motive forces through which Humanity will raise itself to the higher levels of the Spirit, where conflict will no longer be a biological necessity. This does not sound occultist and is a contrast to his books on Tantra where Avalon/Woodroffe rarely refers to altruistic love as a virtue in the individual. Nevertheless the emphasis of Is India Civilized remains strongly on collectivities like race, or abstractions, like 'the Spirit'.<sup>77</sup>

The theme of IIC is conflict -- on the physical plane of warfare and on the spiritual plane of culture. No doubt this reflects its time: just after the end of the First World War, when great political changes were in the offing. Its attitude to conflict reflects that of the Gītā, although that non-Śākta scripture is rarely mentioned. Warfare is inevitable, part of the destiny of the cosmos fixed by the impersonal forces of the saṃskāras and of karma. There is nothing here of Gandhian pacifism and non-violence. Whereas the Gītā taught that the individual could free himself from this process through the spiritual detachment of niṣkāma karma (selfless performance of duty without desire), Woodroffe is less interested in the individual than in the destiny of the race: whether the Indian race, or the wider human race. Humanity can be freed from its past through individuals exercising their wills to live sincerely by whatever light of truth has been given them through their racial/cultural inheritance, and by developing love, altruism and tolerance. He sums up the teaching of 'the East' as that of India:

India has taught that the Universe is in its ultimate ground Spirit; that what is material is the expression of the Eternal Spirit in time and space; that Man is essentially either that self-same Spirit, or a part of,

or akin to it; that the Universe is governed by a Just Law which is the very nature of its true expression; that all Life is sacred; that Morality is the law of humanity, which is the master of its destiny and reaps only what it has sown; that the universe has a moral purpose, and that the Social Structure must be so ordered as to subserve it; and many another sublime truth which is the warrant of Her high civilization, which may yet bear fruit not only in India, but throughout the world, thus justifying her claim to be the Karmabhumi.<sup>78</sup>

In this general cultural sphere as well as with the specific issue of Tantra, Woodroffe tended to write as if power and agency resided only with the West. A threat was presented by the Western politician, missionary or orientalist, by whom Indians could be seduced into losing their 'racial soul'. He refuses to concede the opposite side of the matter: that the trends towards 'reform', or modernisation of Indian culture were often driven by Indians themselves, from the time of Ram Mohun Roy onwards into his own time.<sup>79</sup> Yet the language he uses in these three books reflects that used by Bengalis of his time, especially the constant calls for 'vigour', 'awakening'<sup>80</sup> and the need for 'power' or śakti. It is paradoxical that Woodroffe, who mostly declared himself opposed to the Brahmo Samaj, nevertheless expressed many ideas which stemmed from them. The universalism and tolerance he claims as his most important values were also the stated ideal of most Brahmos, as were the Positivist ideals of human spiritual progress. So was the duty of being 'true to type'. Dvijendranath Tagore, leader of the Ādi Brahmo Samāj, had also criticised 'imitation' (of the English) and declared that each should hold to his own, in language very similar to that used by Woodroffe.<sup>81</sup> There are some striking similarities to the nineteenth-century writer Bhudev Mukhopadhyay who also condemned 'imitation' and loss of cultural identity leading to lack of self-respect, but who also said that a tradition could change 'within the laws of its own being'.<sup>82</sup>

As I shall show was the case with his Tantric writings, here too Woodroffe wrote and talked like a Bengali intellectual. Many of his ideas could be characterised as 'orientalist' in

the positive or romantic sense, but these could also be called nationalist. It depends on how he is to be situated. Woodroffe studied from Indians as much as some of them seemed happy to learn from him. It was a kind of mutual reflection. Perhaps this is why even some of those who criticised Annie Besant and the Theosophists for presuming as Europeans to lead them in their own nationalism, seem to have accepted Woodroffe.<sup>83</sup> The editor of CWN noted that he had gathered around him a very wide circle of friends from every community in the country, and 'notably from amongst the intellectuals of Bengal'.<sup>84</sup>

In this same tribute however, the editor of CWN said that he did not personally always agree with Woodroffe as an exponent of Hindu culture, although 'we always appreciated the sympathetic spirit with which he interpreted it to the world'.

There were other Indians who were cautious about Woodroffe. I have already cited the example of Nares Candra Sengupta. Ramananda Chatterji's Modern Review strongly praised Bhārata Shakti but was more cautious about Is India Civilized?, fearing it could encourage a 'blind racial vanity'.<sup>85</sup> The historian Jadunath Sarkar, although he praised Woodroffe's Guru Sivacandra Vidyarnava as well as Vivekananda, resisted his contemporaries who opposed westernization. He strongly criticised Woodroffe's influence in a Bengali essay.<sup>86</sup>

There is no doubt that Woodroffe identified with nationalism - which was all of a piece with his racial theories and his quest to preserve the distinctness of Hindu culture. He did not, like Annie Besant or Havell, believe in a 'spiritual' India within a reformed British empire. He carefully avoided direct political statements. But writing in 1922 in reply to a British reviewer of IIC, he described the effect of westernization as 'the so-called "unrest" which alarms some and is as refreshing as the Dew of Dawn to others.'<sup>87</sup> Very few other British people in India under the empire would have

made such a statement. In the same preface he stated that 'Resistance is the characteristic of a Self'<sup>88</sup>

In his quest to preserve the Indian 'Self' one wonders how he identified his own British one. Did the 'paralysing inner conflict' which Woodroffe noted in the Indian student ever affect him? Woodroffe told Indians not to imitate European manners or ways of thought, while he himself seemed to feel free to adopt Indian ones. Woodroffe did not act in a way that was 'true' to his racial 'type'. Was he aware of this, or was he influenced by some unconscious racial superiority, that made him believe it was in order for an Englishman to imitate another, because his identity was secure: he could never cease to be English?

Wearing Indian dress at a party (above p.77) could be seen as a 'political' statement, deliberately flouting the mores of British-India, or it could be nothing more than simply 'dressing up'.<sup>89</sup> But that was not the only occasion on which he did so. Woodroffe regularly wore Indian religious dress, the saffron robe and rudrākṣa beads, and even allowed himself to be photographed in it. We see Sir John Woodroffe leading what looks like a double life. One identity is public, British and official: the Judge, the scholarly orientalist, the patron of Indian art. This is the identity which delivered the public lectures. The other is secret, Indian and Tantric. Yet the two interpenetrate, for the prestige of the public figure added lustre to the religious associations of the Tantric. We will turn to that Tantric identity in the next chapter.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1.BS(3) p.viii (Preface to 1st edition)

2.BS(3) p.ix (Preface to 2nd edition)

3.Sumit Sarkar 1973 ps.150ff, especially p.154. The charge against Western education was that it did three things: it denationalized; it secularized and alienated from religion; and it made servants of the Raj and imitators of the West. Criticism of the official system 'had been mounting for more than

a generation before 1905'.

4.Stokes 1959 p.xiii et passim

5.BS(3) ps.75-83

6.Seed of Race [henceforth SOR] (2), p.5.

7.Compare Ashish Nandy 1988

8.BS(3) p.50

9.'Education, Patriotism, Freethinking': BS(3) ps.62-72. This was reprinted from The Bengalee 21st April 1915 p.2.

10.Seal was first a Brahmo, then a secular humanist. His book on Ram Mohun Roy 'the Universal Man' was published in 1933. His book of 1915 was cited by Woodroffe in SP (See below chapters 7 and 9)

11.ibid ps.63-4

12.ibid p.66

13.ibid p.69-70 The real moral of this story is that each must be allowed to be true to his own nature and not be distorted by standards imposed by others. He cites it as a plea for tolerance, but also uses it to question the idea of social reform.

14.ibid ps.71-2

15.The Bengalee of May 18th 1916 gives the attack on Mr Oaten the previous February as one reason for the setting up of a committee of inquiry into Presidency College.

16.BS(3) p.49. The club also seems to have been called the 'Sun Rise Club'.

17.Datta & Robinson 1995 p.198

18.'Imitation and Independence' BS(3) ps.46-53.

19.ibid p.48

20.Tapan Raychaudhury 1988, p.252. 'After his return from the West he preached a gospel of manly virtues, an ideal of western-style worldly achievements, as the first step towards national regeneration.' Indira Chowdhury Sengupta points out that this was in reaction to British stereotyping of Bengalis as weak and effeminate. See Chowdhury Sengupta in Leslie (ed) op.cit.

21.BS(3) ps.59-60.

22.ibid p.58

23. Dennison Ross 1953 p.97.

24. 'Indian Islamic Culture' BS(3) ps.84-87

25. Raj Kumar op cit p.110

26. S.N.Dhar 1975, p.972 and fnnt 153.

27. 'Education of Women' BS(3) ps.91-95

28. Personal communication of James Woodroffe.

29. See Nandy op cit

[No footnote 30]

31. Modern Review vol 22/no.1 (July 1917), p.110. He 'gave some very wise and much needed advice to the managers of that orthodox school for girls'.

32. BS(3) ps.1-34

33. Chatterjee, Nilananda (ed) 1926.

34. ibid

35. Personal communication, James Woodroffe.

36. Bulletin of the Indian Rationalist Society, [henceforth BIRS] vol 1, no.1 (June 1919), pl. See Kopf 1979 p.48 for the ethical values which the idea of science represented for Bengali thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

37. BIRS vol 1, no.5, p.102

38. ibid vol 1, no.4, ps. 57-71

39. 'The Gayatri as an Exercise of Reasoning', reprinted in GOL ps.287-310; see p.295

40. BIRS vol.3, no.10 (April 1922), p.277.

41. ibid vol.3, no.6 (?) (November 1921): ps.169-70

42. Modern Review Nov. 1917, p.534. 'Sir John Woodroffe by his straightforward, altruistic and courageous exposition reminds one of the race of thinkers headed by Spencer and the positivists of the last century -- a race which is now prominent by its absence.'

43. Universities Commission Report, chapter 7 ('The Student in Bengal'), p.128.

[No footnote 44]



Notes to Chapter 5

45. The title of the school magazine was The Amoeba.
46. Sumit Sarkar 1973 p.167-8.
47. BS(3) p.54-61. The date (June 1916) and heading have been omitted in the 3rd edition.
48. *ibid* p.55-6
49. SOR (2) ps.8-9.
50. Asian Quarterly Review (London) vol 16/no.47 (July 1920), p.532-2.
51. SOR (2) p.17
52. *ibid* p.19
53. See Robb (ed) 1995, especially Jaffrelot ps.327-354 on the idea of the Hindu race; and Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta ps.282-303 on 'The Effeminate and the Masculine in Bengal' where she describes how the idea of 'common Indian race' was developed in Bengal from the mid-nineteenth century. Peter Robb's introduction 'South Asia and the Concept of Race' discusses the question as to whether there was a pre-colonial idea corresponding to 'race' in India, ps.1-76.
54. Modern Review vol 9/no.4 (Oct 1911), ps.400-1
55. SOR (2): ps.16-17.
56. IIC (3) ps.121, 136
57. Chowdhury-Sengupta in Robb op.cit ps.284-5; Mitter Aryan Myth, especially p.81 on Birdwood. Compare Wood 1929, p.315, 324. Annie Besant believed in an idealized caste system promoting the development of the Aryan 'type'. [Raj Kumar op cit ps.57-8]
58. Archer was an English theatre critic who wrote his book after spending just three weeks in India. He bears no relation to, and should not be confused with, the William Archer who was an ICS official and wrote on Indian folk art during the 1920s.
59. Papers of Sir Asutosh Mukherji, National Library, Calcutta. Letter from 11 May 1916 from O'Malley of Bengal Sectarialat. Mr Oaten, the teacher at presidency College who had been attacked by students (above p.152), had used the word 'barbarian' in its technical sense but this had been 'misunderstood' by the students.
60. Quoted in IIC (3) p.1. Vivekananda had already called European civilization barbarian. See Raychaudhury op.cit. p.273.
61. Fortunately William Archer did not appear to have heard of Tantra or his book might perhaps have been considerably longer.

## Notes to Chapter 5

62.Archer, 1917. His second chapter contains some of the most choice examples of his style.

63.ibid p.223.

64.See Stokes op cit. C.A. Bayly identifies a series of 'neo-orientalists' who appeared long after the debate seemed to have been settled in the 1830s. See Arnold 1997.

65.For example, he does not think Bānde Mātaram seditious and 'it should be the motto not only of the schoolroom but of the secretariat'; and he noted the need for widespread primary education.(ps 268-9).

66.See 'Press Reviews' in GOL (1) ps. v-xi.

67.IPR Vol 2 No.3 (January 1919) p.274.

68.Both books were written during the First World War. Woodroffe revised IIC for a second edition just after the war was over.

69.'Cultural assimilation is thus a perfected form of conquest initiated by force of arms...The cultural assimilation acts as a compensation for lost political control. ..The cultural conquest is so complete as to render political control...unnecessary..' [IIC (3) ps.93-4]

70.ibid p.120 (He is quoting the sociologist Benjamin Kidd)

71.ibid ps.268-9.This theme is also in Śakti and Śākta in the chapter entitled 'Bharata Dharma' [SS(DP): chapter 1]

72.ibid p.22.

73.ibid p.346

74.ibid p.68

75.ibid p.272

76.'...incarnations of the Humane Ideal in and evolved by man's mind, have taught the unity of all being and have anticipated in their presence the yet unfolded future of mankind.' ibid p.115

77.Altruistic love hardly ever features in his books on Tantra. Ethical injunctions from the Tantras on individual practitioners to do good are only quoted as part of his apologetic purpose -- to argue that the texts are not unethical. Eg KT 12:63 translated in SS:93 which says that the Sādhaka 'should do good to others as if they were his own self.'

78.IIC(3) ps.346-7

79.Or if they do he considers they have been 'seduced' by Western education.

Notes to Chapter 5

80. Note the title of the journal of Vivekananda's followers Prabuddha Bhārata - 'Awakened India'

81. See David Kopf 1979, especially ps.182ff.

82. Tapan Raychaudhury, op.cit. ps.26-103. 'His purpose was to protect his society from servile imitation and inform it with self-confidence based on sober appraisals of western life in relation to traditional Indian values.' (p.26).

83. For example, the writer of the review in Bhārat Varṣa quoted above chapter 2. Reviews of Woodroffe in Modern Review are usually very favourable, but Annie Besant comes in for criticism.

84. CWN, vol xxvi (1921-22) p.clxii

85. Reprinted in GOL (1): p.vii.

86. This latter information was supplied to me by Mr Keshab Sircar in Calcutta, but unfortunately I do not have the reference. Jadunath Sarkar 1951 ps.123-4, 139-40.

87. IIC (3) p.xxv. Preface to the third edition.

88. *ibid* p.xiii

89. There are examples of Europeans doing this. Ernest Wood (a Theosophist and principal of the Sind National College) delighted in getting himself turned out of first-class compartments through being mistaken for an Indian. [Wood 1929 p.279, 343] Mrs Kate Tibbits, another Theosophist and wife of an ICS officer, sat on the ghāts of Benares wearing a saffron robe. [1929 p.67; 1912 p.214]] The incomparable Alexandra David-Neel wore the sari, and also wore the orange robe of the sannyāsi; she even boasted of having lain on a bed of nails and presented herself to a group of astonished tourists. [1954 ps.28, 201-2]

## CHAPTER 6

### THE SECRET TANTRIC

Most of the later editions of the Avalon/Woodroffe books have as their frontispiece a photograph of Woodroffe wearing a white dhoti and carrying a water jar. He is standing beside the wall of a temple. It was not just any temple -- he was at Konarak, the ancient ruined Sun temple, an archaeological site discovered in the nineteenth century. It was well-known for its erotic sculpture which is displayed prominently along its outer walls. Konarak was most probably the site of an ancient Tantric cult devoted to Surya, the Vedic Sun god.<sup>1</sup> The remains of its temple represent one of the high points of Hindu architectural and artistic achievement. There was a link here between Woodroffe's two Indian worlds of art and Tantra. Woodroffe wrote about Konarak, romantically describing its surroundings close to the sea: the scene was one 'which I have known and enjoyed for many years', and he was taking a sad farewell to it in 1922.[GOL:xiii-xiv]

Woodroffe had shown the photograph to O.C. Ganguly. 'At that time' comments Ganguly in his memoirs 'no other highly educated Englishman was seen wearing our dhoti.'<sup>2</sup> Ganguly tells us that it was Woodroffe's habit to go to Konarak nearly every weekend. He would take the train to Puri immediately upon leaving the High Court on a Friday and travel from the station by palki. Ganguly has given this information in the context of Woodroffe's regular practice of visiting historical and religious sites <sup>3</sup> -- something perfectly 'respectable' for a Sahib to do, if the motive was antiquarian curiosity. Abanindranath also mentions the fascination for Konarak of Woodroffe and his friend Blount, which inspired him to visit it too.<sup>4</sup> The artist Nandalal Bose claimed that Woodroffe and his friends went there to perform tantric sādhana (see below). Just what went on at Konarak we cannot know for certain; it was an archaeological site, not a living temple, but whatever else these visits meant to Woodroffe his dress proclaimed that while there he assumed the Indian identity he urged upon others - in his

case this was a kind of escape from his European identity and his social position in British India.

Although he describes himself as a disinterested scholar in his books, there is plenty of evidence that Woodroffe was much more personally involved in Tantra than that, according to the testimony of many people who knew him, or knew of him, in India. He does not seem to have talked about Tantra to Ganguly but the younger man discusses this aspect of Woodroffe's life by drawing on rumours and on other people's writings.<sup>5</sup> He portrays it as part of his role as Arthur Avalon -- whom Ganguly accepts without question as Woodroffe. He tells us that shortly after becoming a Judge Woodroffe studied Sanskrit and he gives the name of his teacher as one Asutosh Shastri Mahashoy. I have not heard of this name elsewhere; a little later on he calls Haridev Sastri, the High Court interpreter, his Sanskrit teacher.<sup>6</sup> Having learned Sanskrit, Ganguly says Sir John became immersed (nimagna) in the study of an abstruse and neglected branch of Indian knowledge and esoteric practice (gabhir sādhanā), namely Tantra Śāstra. He tells us that according to what some people thought, (kār o kār o mate) Woodroffe and his wife were initiated, and their guru was 'the famous sādhikā, Sri Sri Jagadambikā Ambā Saraswati'. 'But recently it has become known,' he adds, that they were initiated into Tantra by Sivaçandra Vidyārnava, whom Woodroffe first met through Haridev Sastri.<sup>7</sup> It may be that Ganguly, who published his memoirs in 1969, had just come across Vasanta Kumar Pal's story of Woodroffe's initiation by Sivaçandra which was serialised in a magazine from 1966-8.<sup>8</sup> The information he gives -- that Woodroffe did puja to an image of Durga daśabhuja śinhavāhinī ' which he took back to England with him; that he and his wife used to do pranāṁ to the Guru and his wife by touching their feet, Indian style -- has been taken from Pal's account.<sup>10</sup> Ganguly however gives slightly more importance than Pal does to Atal Behari Ghose -- 'a vakil who was expert in Tantrasāstra' -- for he says that it was with his help that Sir John read widely in the Tantras and did serious research. However he still credits

Sir John with translating and editing ten books on Tantrasāstra, through which he earned a permanent place among the best orientalist scholars (prācyavidyār panditamahale); and says that no Judge since Sir William Jones had attained such a level of Sanskrit learning.<sup>11</sup> Once again Woodroffe's enthusiasm for Tantra is assigned a place within 'respectable' orientalism and is described here almost as a natural progression from his Sanskrit studies. Sanskrit scholarship here serves as a cover: the 'profound' (gabhir) subject of Tantra is associated with study (adhyāyan) and 'research' (gabesanā); Woodroffe's enthusiasm for it is indicated by the word nimagna, immersed or 'drowned'.

Ganguly gives the time he is writing of as 1914-15<sup>12</sup> -- a period when we can be sure, on the evidence of their son James, that Ellen Woodroffe was living with her husband in Calcutta. If he really was spending every weekend at Puri and Konarak at this time, we have to wonder whether she accompanied him. Ellen Woodroffe's initiation in Tantra alongside her husband was confirmed by the Ghose family who said, however, that later on her attitude changed and she became anxious as his involvement deepened, fearing he would not return to England. They suggested it was she who wanted him to retire early, and part of the reason, they thought, was a growing social ostracism among British society. (see below and footnote 17)

#### Photographs and Rumours

Another photograph, of which I obtained a copy in Calcutta, was also taken at Konarak. It shows three men seated on the steps of the temple, all in Indian dress: Woodroffe, Atal Behari Ghose, and another European identified by the Ghose family as H.P. Moeller, whom we have already encountered as a prominent member of ISOA (above p.132).<sup>13</sup> He had been initiated into Vaisnavism and he also studied Tantric texts with Ghose. There were signed portrait photographs of Moeller and his wife in the Ghose family house and he seemed to have been a close friend.

A trip to Konarak by the three men and perhaps their wives (or at least Mrs Ghose) was the subject of a letter from Woodroffe to Ghose. On this occasion the visit seems to have been undertaken in some kind of relationship with Johnson Hoffman, the Calcutta photographers. Woodroffe wrote the letter shortly after their journey carefully dividing up the money each person owed to each on account of it.<sup>14</sup> He mentions a Mr Wurthle and his 'carts' for which they could obtain reimbursement from Hoffman's. Mr Wurthle is recorded by Thackers Directory as being in the employ of Johnson Hoffman in the year 1912. The reference at the end of the undated letter to the printing of SCN as well as the address at the top also point to this year.<sup>15</sup> The carts, presumably, were used to take the group from Puri station to Konarak instead of palkis. Johnson Hoffman had by 1915 published a collection of albums of Indian architecture <sup>16</sup> and it is possible that Woodroffe and his friends on this occasion had been commissioned by the firm to photograph the temple on their behalf. If so, this could be another example of a 'respectable' activity in the eyes of British society coinciding with a more secret, tantric purpose -- and for dressing up' in an Indian identity. Whenever the photograph of the three men was taken, at some time it came to be published in a Bengali magazine and is said to have caused a furore among the British in Calcutta.<sup>17</sup>

Pal mentions Woodroffe's weekly visits to nearby Puri,<sup>18</sup> not Konarak, and the Ghose family told me that Moeller too used to join them there. Puri itself of course, unlike Konarak, is a living pilgrimage site for both Tantrics and Vaisnavas. Pal, who wrote his articles in the late 1960s, says that Woodroffe was still remembered locally, meditating on the beach there.<sup>19</sup> A priest at the Jagannāth temple of Puri, Sadāśiva Mitra, was one of the editors in the Tantrik Texts series and a correspondent of both Woodroffe and Ghose.<sup>20</sup> Atal Behari Ghose also owned a country house at Chaibassa near Ranchi, in what was then a secluded area in Bihar. This was the house where High Court rumour said Woodroffe and Ghose practised Tantric sādhana (above p. 86 ) According to

the Ghose family the two friends used to go there to study texts, as did Moeller and his wife. Ranchi featured in James Woodroffe's memories too, but simply as a place where his parents and Mr and Mrs Ghose took holidays together on which he was taken along. It is possible that the Puri and Chaibassa visits were simply family habits 'innocent' of tantric purposes -- but rumour reported them in a different light, and the photographs at Konarak added strength to the rumours.

The other European whose name we have seen frequently in association with Woodroffe's was Norman Blount (above p.132) He too went to Chaibassa. He and his wife appear on a photograph taken outside the house in an album recording a tour of Kashmir in 1914, in which the Woodroffes, the Ghoses and Blounts along with some other visiting Europeans, made up a party. According to the artist Nandalal Bose, one of the pupils of Abanindranath, it was Blount who along with Woodroffe and Havell practised tantric sādhana at Konarak:

There were three people, perhaps, Havell, Woodroffe and their friend Blount. They went to Konarak and did Sādhana, Tantrik Sādhana. From what they saw in Tibetan thankas they carried on with the joining of Purusa and Prakriti and other such secret practices. They wrote bij mantras and their explanations on the backs of dharma thankars. Possibly it was through their Guru Atal Babu that they tried to practise bij and bheda. Day and night their only thought was sat-cakra-bheda.<sup>21</sup>

'Sat-cakra-bheda' means Kundalini yoga -- something Woodroffe himself denied having practised.<sup>22</sup> The reference to secrecy, to what was seen in Tibetan thankas and the 'joining of Purusa and Prakriti' might be intended to imply sexual rituals or yogic practices involving sex.<sup>23</sup> The intensity of their enthusiasm is also once again indicated.

This passage in Nandalal's reminiscences leads up to the story of Havell's madness, which led to his retirement in 1906. It was believed by some that this was the result of unwise dabbling in Tantra or magic!

On the staircase of the art school there was a Tibetan Buddha image kept in a glass case. Seeing this image as he went to and fro on the staircase, Havell would become



plunged in trance, sitting in a meditation posture. After a while he became even more beside himself and uncontrollable. In the end, not seeing any alternative, Abanibabu [Abananindranath] wrote a letter to the Fort. Three Sikh soldiers came and took Havell Sahib away. This was the fatal fruit of the unsuccessful Tantrik sādhana of Havell, the lover of Indian art.<sup>24</sup>

Abanindranath tells the same story, but does not mention Tantra. Although respectful of Havell he also considered him gullible and easily influenced by 'worthless'<sup>25</sup> sannyasis. Havell's wife complained to him that her husband was too deeply involved in Yoga and was ready to learn meditation from 'any sādhu he meets'. Eventually one of them turned up at the art school and became a frequent visitor to Havell's flat. He offered him a myroloban fruit with the promise that it would bring him eternal youth, and Havell was gullible enough to accept it. Abanindranath did not say this was the cause of his madness but he offered it as a possible explanation.<sup>26</sup>

A colleague of Nandalal Bose at Viśvabhāratī University, Santi Niketan, passed on some other information about Woodroffe and his wife Ellen to Bhupendranath Datta, Vivekananda's brother, who reprinted it in his biography of the saint:

Sir John Woodroffe and Lady Woodroffe were the disciples of Śrī Jagadambamba, a Deccanese Bhairavi. By taking initiation (Diksha) from her, Woodroffe and others used to practise Tantric sadhana. Besides these persons, Śrī Atalananda Saraswati and Śrīmatī Gouramba Garu were their fellow disciples.<sup>27</sup>

We can see that O.C. Ganguly had heard a similar story (above p.176).

The Ghose family told me that Woodroffe received two initiations, one from Sivacandra Vidyārnava and another from a bhairavī (a female Tantric) called Jayakali Devi, who was also Ghose's Guru.<sup>28</sup> The names Atalānanda Saraswati and Śrīmatī Gouramba Garu refer to Atal Behari Ghose and his second wife whom the Woodroffes knew and who was called Gaurammā. Atalananda Saraswati is the name used by Ghose on the Sanskrit title pages of his editions of ST and PST in the Tantrik Texts series. If this suggests that the Woodroffe and Ghose couples

took part in a cakra practising the vāmācāra tantric rituals, we will see later from the memoirs of Alexandra David Neel what form it might have taken.

We have seen that Nandalal refers to 'Atal Babu' as the Guru of Havell, Woodroffe and Blount. Writing to Bhupendranath Datta, he calls Atal Ghose the Tantrik Guru of Havell.<sup>29</sup> But possibly he meant that he was the śikṣā guru -- the teacher of textual knowledge -- not the dīkṣā guru who gives initiation and is a spiritual guide, because there is no suggestion anywhere in their correspondence that Woodroffe saw Ghose as his Guru, indeed as we shall see in chapter 9 their relationship was quite the opposite. Nor did the Ghose family claim that he was a Guru, which they certainly would have done if he had made such claims himself. What does emerge is that Atal Behari Ghose had a circle of European friends and students whom he instructed about Tantra. In later life his influence extended even wider (see below chapter 9). He appears to have been an extremely influential mediator of traditional knowledge.

Although Ghose himself does not appear to have been a member of ISOA, it seems several of his European students were. It begins to look as if the art society had a secret Tantric side to it -- at least as far as some of its European members were concerned. Pal claimed that Sivacandra lectured on the spiritual interpretation of Indian art to Havell and Coomaraswamy in Woodroffe's house (see below) and that Havell passed on the teaching in his books. Even if Pal was exaggerating the extent of his Guru's influence, there is still, for him as well as for Nandalal Bose, a perceived connection between the Indian art movement and Tantra, and the link in the chain is Woodroffe. Bhupendranath Datta on the other hand, in his biography of his brother Vivekananda, tries to argue for the Swami's and Nivedita's influence on Havell and the whole art movement. But in order to do this he has to counteract another 'tradition': namely the influence of Tantra and of various 'pandits' over both Havell and Woodroffe.<sup>30</sup> It seems to be understood that some of the

Europeans who were interested in Indian art were also involved in Tantra. This was not the case, however, with the Indians who were prominent in the movement. Both Abanindranath and Nandalal Bose express disapproval of Havell's dabbling in such areas and as we have seen blame it for his madness. In Santi Niketan I spoke with Dhiren Krishnadeb Burma, a former pupil of Nandalal. He confirmed that Woodroffe was involved in Tantra and expressed very strong disapproval. He said that Woodroffe had become unstable and 'unable to continue his duties' as a result of his practices; but it is possible that here he had confused Woodroffe's story with Havell's for I have come across no other reference to madness in connection with Woodroffe himself.

These stories of Woodroffe and his European tantric friends circulated among people connected with the art movement. There was another source of 'oral tradition' concerning Woodroffe: the stories of his Tantric initiation by the charismatic Guru Sivadandra Vidyarnava which circulated among the saint's disciples. These stories were collected by Vasanta Kumar Pal and found a place in his biography of Sivadandra. Pal remains the major source for Woodroffe's initiation, tantric practice and devotion to his Guru, but he assigns a minor role to Atal Behari Ghose. By contrast, the other 'tradition' seems to place more importance on Ghose's role, and does not mention Sivadandra. O.C. Ganguly has clearly been influenced by both. As Ghose was also a disciple of Sivadandra, these two currents of 'oral tradition' do not conflict. What is interesting is that there are two, adding to the authenticity of the picture of Woodroffe as a practising Tantric.

#### Vasanta Kumar Pal

Vasanta Kumar Pal was a railway Guard and a humble disciple of Sivadandra. Although some of his stories of Woodroffe's meeting with his Guru and subsequent initiation have been romanticised, Pal is careful to cite when he can the names of other witnesses, mainly fellow disciples, many of whom were

still alive at the time he wrote. Pal was no longer alive in 1991 when I visited Calcutta, but I met there a retired Judge of the High Court, Mr Samarendranath Bagchi, who was a Tantric practitioner whose guru had been a disciple of Sivacandra. Fascinated by Pal's stories about Woodroffe he had written his own biography of the saint's prestigious foreign disciple. This was serialised in a Bengali magazine, Bhāvmukhe. Despite his favourable position in having also been a High Court Judge like Woodroffe, Bagchi's account relies very heavily on Pal, being mostly religious and philosophical commentary on it with only a little extra information from other sources.<sup>31</sup>

Mr Bagchi had visited Vasanta Kumar Pal, who told him he had first met Woodroffe and his wife when they were travelling on the Chittagong Mail. To the Mail Guard's great surprise, a Sahib, barefoot, wearing a saffron robe and a necklace of rudrākṣa beads, got out of a first-class compartment and wanted to buy a copy of The Statesman newspaper. Woodroffe told him that he and his wife were on their way to Kumarkhali -- Sivacandra's birthplace where he had one of his ashrams -- to pay their respects to 'our most revered Gurudev', and he responded warmly when Pal introduced himself as a fellow disciple. According to Mr Bagchi, a close friendship developed between the two men but Pal does not claim this in his book, nor does he appear to have received any of his information directly from Woodroffe himself.

Woodroffe's link with Sivacandra in Pal's account is always Haridev Sastri, the High Court's Sanskrit interpreter, who introduced him to his Guru. This connection is borne out by a brief notice in The Bengalee newspaper a few days after its report of the saint's death, when it mentioned that the Judge had sent Haridev Śāstri to the Guru's family with a generous gift of money.<sup>32</sup> Yet in his introduction to his translation of Sivacandra's Tantratattva 'Arthur Avalon' does not write of him at all in the style of a disciple writing about his Guru. He simply presents him to the public as an example of 'a well-known Tantric Pandit...who...knows no English'. (PT/1

p.31), Neither is there any indication in the preface to the second volume, published only shortly after the saint's death, that this was an event over which, according to Pal, Woodroffe had experienced intense grief (see below).[PT/2 p.1]

#### The Guru, Sivacandra Vidyārnava

Kumarkhali, Sivacandra's birthplace was then a village in East Bengal, now a town in Bangladesh. He was born into a family of Brahmin Tantrics and was educated in the traditional fashion as a pandit at the Bhatpāra Tol. Later he had ashrams at Kumarkhali and at other places, including Calcutta and Benares. He was famous for his oratory in Bengali which drew large crowds, and also as a poet, but especially as a Tantric saint who performed sādhana in the crematoria and conducted elaborate rituals. He acquired an enthusiastic following among the urban bhadralok, as did his older contemporary Ramakrishna.<sup>33</sup> Unlike him, however, Sivacandra had great literary skill which was revealed in several books including volumes of poetry, and he edited a magazine.<sup>34</sup> Like Ramakrishna, he was also an ardent bhakta of the Mother, whom he called, however, not Kālī but Tāra and Sarvamangalā. Along with other traditionalist figures including the prominent 'reactionary' Hindu revivalist Śaśadhar Tarkacuḍāmani,<sup>35</sup> and Gopal Krishna Goswami, who departed from the Brahmo Samaj in favour of a passionate Vaisnava devotionalism<sup>36</sup>, Sivacandra founded the Sarvamangalā Sabhā. This organization attempted not only to unite Śākta Tantrics in Bengal and elsewhere but also to build bridges between Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas, the two main sects of Bengal. He also had connections with the Bauls who were on the fringes of society, and invited the famous Baul saint, Lalan Faquir to sing at his ashrams.<sup>37</sup> Avalon's translation of the Guru's Tantratattva gives an insight into his Śākta Tantric practice, which was equally devotional as it was ritual.

This book defends Śākta Tantrism against its detractors from whatever direction: orthodox ('Vedic') advaitins who

renounced the senses, Vaiṣṇava sectarians who condemned Śāktism, and modernist reformers such as the Brahmo Samaj. Against the latter he argued passionately and cogently in defence of ritual and image worship in the face of their 'Protestant' rejection of both. He ringingly affirms Tantric practice in the crematoria and the acquisition of 'magic' powers in a passage where his powerful oratory and poetic skill come through strongly in the translation.<sup>38</sup>

Although traditionalist, Sivacandra was not simply 'reactionary' as his reception of the foreigners Woodroffe and Coomaraswamy shows. According to Pal, he persuaded the Brahmins of Bhaṭṭapara Tol to perform a ceremony to formally accept the foreigner Coomaraswamy into Hinduism, and he had 'discovered' a suitable rite for this in the Śāstras.<sup>39</sup> Bagchi too commends Sivacandra for his openness to a foreigner -- in fact this is one of the themes of his story. It seems too that Sivacandra was part of a process of domestication of Tantra: encouraging its adoption as a path for the ordinary householder couple was a kind of modernising. His own śakti in the sexual rituals was his wife -- this fact is noted many times by Pal, Ray and Bagchi -- and Woodroffe as a disciple was initiated along with his own wife. So was Mr Bagchi.

#### The Making of a Religious Legend: the Guru and the Judge

Vasanta Kumar Pal's biography was the source not only of Mr Bagchi's articles, but also for the chapter on Sivacandra in S.N. Ray's Bhārater Śādhak, a collection of lives of modern saints.<sup>40</sup> These three accounts -- Pal, Bagchi and Ray -- consequently tell the same story, and it begins in the High Court shortly after Woodroffe became a Judge. Woodroffe's identity as a Judge is mentioned many times in these accounts, emphasising the importance of his social position for the prestige it conferred on his guru in the eyes of humbler disciples.

According to Pal, Woodroffe first heard of Sivacandra through Haridev Sastri when the Judge needed an expert interpretation

of a particular point of Hindu law, and Haridev Sastri, the Court's Sanskrit interpreter, recommended his own Guru who was consequently summoned to Calcutta from Benares, his main place of residence. Thus the first meeting between the renowned Guru and the famous Judge-disciple took place in Court, where Woodroffe was immediately impressed by the saint's sastric learning.<sup>41</sup> This is quite probably a piece of romance, for where else, in the popular imagination, could such a meeting take place? Pal gives no date for the encounter but if his claim that Woodroffe subsequently introduced Havell to Sivacandra is true, then he would have had to meet his guru before 1906 when Havell left India. Mr Bagchi gives dates between 1906-7 in his version.

Pal says that it was after meeting Sivacandra that Woodroffe started to study Tantrasāstra and to collect manuscripts from all over India and Tibet.<sup>42</sup> He does not mention Atal Behari Ghose at this point but in an epilogue to this section, he adds that Woodroffe's interest in Tantra might first have arisen through joining Ghose's Āgamānusandhana Samiti [AAS].<sup>43</sup> According to S.N. Ray, Woodroffe was already studying Tantric texts before his encounter with Sivacandra, as a result of having met Atal Behari Ghose and other scholars through the AAS. Woodroffe however recognized the need of an expert Kaula practitioner to provide him with a deeper understanding, and on being informed of Sivacandra's visit to the court grasped the opportunity.<sup>44</sup> According to Ray, Woodroffe did not question him in court, but invited him to his private house in Calcutta, where immediately the English Judge was powerfully impressed, not just with the Guru's learning but with his appearance:

Woodroffe was entranced at the first meeting by the appearance of this Tantric Acarya. He seemed the living image of Tantrik learning and Sakti sadhana, his eyes like very sharp knives, his hair very long. He had a bright red tilak on his forehead and red sandalpaste smeared there. Around his neck were rudrākṣa beads and other stones. And (he wore) a saffron robe. So Woodroffe kept looking at this figure almost as if in a trance. Long discussions on the Tantra began. Whatever question Woodroffe put to him, Sivacandra seemed to solve with lots of examples from the Sastras and Woodroffe was amazed. He thought that this kind of mind

does not occur from just scholarly engagement in texts. There was something supernatural in the power he had as he interpreted and dispelled doubts from Woodroffe's mind.<sup>45</sup>

Bagchi begins his account with a discourse upon the relationship between Guru and disciple, with references to the writings of Gopinath Kaviraj and Aurobindo. He follows this up with Woodroffe's moving testimony to his Guru after Sivacandra's death (see below). Bagchi presents Woodroffe as a gifted disciple, already prepared by his previous incarnations, whose Guru Sivacandra recognized him at the propitious time. He agrees with Ray that Woodroffe had already acquired textual knowledge of Tantra through meetings with scholars at the AAS, among whom the name of Atal Behari Ghose is only one of several. All three authors have probably confused the AAS (which was only a publishing company) with the Varendra Research Society, a historical association to which Ghose belonged, for they also refer in this context to the historian Aksay Kumar Maitra, its Director (see chapter 9 below). Bagchi says Woodroffe was inspired by Maitra to learn Sanskrit and Tibetan.<sup>46</sup>

Bagchi emphasises the inferiority of mere scholarly knowledge compared to spiritual intuition which comes through initiation by a true Guru. He builds up to the section on the disciple's first encounter with the Guru, which is headed 'An Unexpected Revolutionary Event in the Environment of the Court'.<sup>47</sup> The 'revolutionary' (vaiplavik) event is the powerful influence Sivacandra exerted on Woodroffe's mind: this is the real moment of initiation, known as śaktipāt, the descent of Śakti (or of 'grace'), and not the outward ritual which followed it some time later. Bagchi has Woodroffe say to Haridev Śāstri after Sivacandra has gone away: '...can you tell me why all of a sudden Sivacandra's image appears again and again before my mental eyes and strangely enough at that very time some invisible power overwhelms me...' <sup>48</sup> Bagchi's account here is the most elaborate of the three. Being a retired Judge himself, he could enhance the scene in court: he knew that the Judges sat on the bench in pairs, and he has Woodroffe discussing with his co-judge and with counsel the



necessity of calling Sivacandra as an 'expert witness' (viśesaīṇa sākṣi); he has him giving evidence in court for three full days, in Sanskrit, answering Woodroffe's questions through Haridev as interpreter.

### The Initiation - Śaktipāt

The three stories continue with Woodroffe's first visit to Sivacandra's ashram at Benares accompanied by the ubiquitous Haridev Śāstri. The Guru was in the middle of a long puja to the Mother when his distinguished visitors arrived and so they were made to wait in an adjoining room for three hours. Bagchi specifies that it was the night of kālīpuja and gives the year as 1906.<sup>49</sup> Something dramatic happened to Woodroffe: according to Pal it was as soon as he entered Sivacandra's house:

Woodroffe said: just as I entered the house of Sivacandra I felt something like an electric shock through my body. I felt as if the world was spinning and receding from me. My mind stopped and I lost all the senses of the outer world. A little while later a white Omkara in the form of lightening and decorated with Maya-bija and Matri-bija mantras was floating in front of my eyes. I stood there speechless in wonder and was made to sit down by Haridev perhaps at a sign from Sivacandra.

Since then a change had come over him. 'I felt a mental magnetic attraction towards Sivacandra and his face full of tejas is ever illuminated in my mind since then.'<sup>50</sup>

According to Ray and Bagchi this experience happened to Woodroffe when he first met the saint again.<sup>51</sup> The ability to induce a change of consciousness by look or touch is a recognized power of a 'true Guru' (Sadguru). The ability to make a disciple swoon is called Vedhādīkṣā by Avalon.<sup>52</sup> Woodroffe's experience is like a Tantric variation on Vivekananda's experience of being touched by Ramakrishna's foot.<sup>53</sup> Pal gives a source for this story: it was reported by Haridev Śāstri to a leading disciple, the secretary of Sivacandra's Sarvamangalā Sabhā, a certain Danbari Gangopadhyay. Whether it happened like that or not, the point of the story is to show that Woodroffe received the highest form of initiation - the direct transmission of a

state of mystical awareness from Guru to disciple. Bagchi cites Gopinath Kaviraj and other sources to make his point that this was Woodroffe's real initiation: the moment when the disciple's Kundalinī was awakened and his 'animal state' -- paśubhāva was transformed, removing the obstacles to clear vision.<sup>54</sup> It proves that Sivacandra was the Madguru.

After this dramatic occurrence, Sivacandra and Woodroffe discourse on Tantra for four hours during which Sivacandra emphasise the importance of the Guru for attaining true knowledge. But strange to say, in view of all that has supposedly preceded it, Woodroffe still has doubts whether Sivacandra really is the right choice of guru. Therefore Sivacandra orders him to seek out other sādhus all over India. Woodroffe accordingly gathers a team of informants around him and sets off for the Himalayas, accompanied still by the faithful Haridev Śāstri. His meetings with three cave dwelling yogis are recorded at Rishikesh, Hardwar and Guptakashi, and then with a fourth in Darjeeling. Very ancient and living in continuous samādhi, these holy men come out of their trance state to discourse with Woodroffe and to tell him, one and all, that his true Guru is Sivacandra.<sup>55</sup> For the fourth story -- that of a Bengali sadhu who lived at Darjeeling -- Pal quotes a source: a magistrate called Jagdish Chandra Sanyal had told him of it.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps in part Pal's imagination was caught by hearing of photographs of Himalayan holy men seen in Woodroffe's home in England (see below). The story suggests that Woodroffe was well known to have a wide acquaintance among saints and pandits and this was something Pal could not ignore; interpreting it, he casts Woodroffe in the role of the 'scientific' modern doubter who cannot accept Sivacandra's word until it is tested out and miraculously confirmed.

With all his doubts finally resolved, Woodroffe at last asks Haridev to arrange for Sivacandra to come from Benares to Calcutta to formally initiate himself and his wife Ellen. The saint was received at the Woodroffes' home and taken into the bedroom (śāyanakakṣa) where the married couple were

instructed in the tantric rites.<sup>57</sup> This was the first stage of the 'Gradual' (krama) form of initiation; the full initiation (mahāsamrāj abhiśekha) was to come later -- this was called siñchan ('sprinkling') and was performed by Jayakali Devi, since for this the guru had to be a woman.<sup>58</sup> According to Ray and Bagchi, Sivacandra lived with the Woodroffes for some time, giving them instructions in yet more rituals and dhyānas (meditations), but Pal simply says the Guru was a frequent visitor whenever he came to Calcutta. He informs us that Woodroffe's Tantric worship was performed to an image of Durga Simhavaḥini; and that whenever he was at home he would go barefoot, wearing saffron clothes and a garland of rudrākṣa beads. He used to touch the feet of Sivacandra and his wife like a Hindu.<sup>59</sup> Pal gives us another witness - Pandit Radhavinod Vidyavinod, who in an article giving his personal reminiscences of Sivacandra wrote: 'Justice Woodroffe heard from his Sanskrit tutor Haridev Śāstri that Sivacandra Vidyārnava was the greatest living Sadhaka...and became a disciple of him with great faith (parama śrāddhā).<sup>60</sup> Pal also quotes this pandit's childhood reminiscences of Sivacandra's gatherings, and of the awe he felt not only of the great saint's personality but also because of his prestige as 'the Guru of the Chief Justice [sic] of the High Court, Sir John Woodroffe'.<sup>61</sup>

#### The disciple spreads the Guru's message

To outsiders who witnessed or speculated -- the members of the art movement and also Alexandra David-Neel (see below) -- Woodroffe's Tantric status is indicated by ritual practice; but to the insiders -- the circle of Sivacandra's disciples - - its most important feature is devotion to the Guru. Woodroffe is portrayed as a humble and devoted disciple. Even his writings as 'Arthur Avalon' are portrayed as his initiation gift to the Guru (gurudaksina) undertaken at the bidding of Sivacandra. The Guru, wrote Pal, requested that instead of giving riches (of which Woodroffe had much to bestow) he wanted him to spread knowledge of the tattva (religious principles) of the Mother. Again: Woodroffe wanted to write a biography of his Guru, but instead

Sivacandra told him to write a biography of the Mother, and so he started to translate his Guru's book Tantratattva. Pal seems to be quoting when he casts Woodroffe in the role of Vivekananda to Sivacandra's Ramakrishna in spreading his Guru's message to the West.<sup>62</sup>

#### Havell and Coomaraswamy

Pal's story appropriates every aspect of the prestigious disciple's fame in the name of his Guru Sivacandra. Not only was his writing on Tantra simply the propagation of the Guru's teaching, carried out in response to his command, but the art movement in which Woodroffe was prominent, and his famous friends involved in it, are also seen as extensions of the field of Sivacandra's influence. According to Pal, both Havell and Coomaraswamy were introduced by Woodroffe to Sivacandra from whom they learned the Hindu theories of art and crafts (cārukalā, śilpavidyā) which they passed on in their books. He paints a picture of Sivacandra lecturing in Sanskrit to Havell and Coomaraswamy in Woodroffe's home, with Woodroffe and Haridev as interpreters.<sup>63</sup> This scene was not possible chronologically, as the two art historians were not present in Calcutta at the same time. Nandalal Bose recalled that Havell and Woodroffe used to read the Puranas (the Tantras are not mentioned in this context) with 'pandits'<sup>64</sup> and we have seen that Havell's wife used to complain about his interest in 'yogis' so it is quite possible that Sivacandra may have been among their number. There is a distinct likeness in Coomaraswamy's art theory, to Sivacandra's teaching on yogic vision (below chapter 8 p.266); and Havell has perhaps learned from him the meaning and use of the yantra in Tantric ritual (see above p.26). Pal's claim is therefore quite plausible in general -- if not in the specific form in which he tells the story. Here, too, as elsewhere in his book, Pal appears to be quoting the opinions of others: he says 'I have heard...', and either he is repeating rumours, or the testimony of those closer to Sivacandra and Woodroffe than he was himself.<sup>65</sup>

## Mourning

So far, only the broad basis of the story of Woodroffe and Sivacandra is well-established: the fact that Woodroffe was perceived as an initiated disciple by many people, both within and without the circle around Sivacandra. The details of the story -- the meeting at the High Court, the initiation experience, the lectures to Havell and Coomaraswamy -- could be embellishments. But with the death of Sivacandra at the end of March 1914 we encounter events whose witnesses were prominent people still alive or only recently deceased at the time when Pal was writing. Pal describes a condolence meeting (śokasabhā) held by the people of Calcutta, which was organized by the dramatist Amritalal Basu and attended by Hemendraprasad Ghose, a leading nationalist and editor of the journal Baṣumati. It was the latter who told Pal the story of what happened when some of those attending were asked to speak:

In the meeting Sir John Woodroffe was so overcome with grief that he couldn't utter a single word and tears were streaming down his cheeks all the while and he was crying just like an orphan child but there was no sound issuing from his lips. And seeing him in such a pathetic and tragic situation nobody in the meeting that day could restrain their tears as well.

Eventually Woodroffe managed just to scribble a note on a piece of paper and handed it to Amritalal Basu to read out. Pal quotes it in Bengali:

At one period of my life I was searching for the true path and my searchings took me to many places without any positive direction or destination in mind...I felt that there was no guru alive on this earth and that thought made me very restless. At that very moment the man who first showed me the path and whose company - the company which was blessed by the gods - calmed my mind and directed it to the path of self realization, saved me from utter destruction. To that man, the great man amongst all men, the king among all the kings, my Guru, God's gift to humanity, Sivacandra, to the feet of that person I offer all my humble prayers and humble offerings. Blessed be the Guru. <sup>66</sup>

Pal does not say how the note was preserved. There is no mention in The Bengalee or Amrita Bāzār Patrika -- two major English language dailies in Indian ownership -- of a high British official making such a public display of himself.

However they do mention a crowded condolence meeting held at Kumarkhali, not Calcutta, organized by Jaladhar Sen, editor of Bhārat Varṣa, where people made speeches about the deceased saint. Amrita Bāzār Patrika makes a reference to some speakers being visibly moved which 'struck a responsive chord in the audience'.<sup>67</sup> There is little reason to <sup>doubt</sup> this story: Pal is not repeating unasccribed rumour. He received it from Hemendraprasad Ghose, a well-known personality, presumably at the same time as further testimony of the famous editor which Pal gives on another matter (see below).<sup>68</sup>

### Śrāddha

Because Sivacandra's family were poor, Pal claims Woodroffe took over part of the funeral rite for his Guru. The story continues with the end of the period of ritual uncleanness following the death (aśaucānte), when Woodroffe held a feast for selected Brahmins and Tantric sādhakas. Brahmin cooks prepared the food, the prescribed gifts were given, of money, ritual cloths and copies of the scriptures. All this was organised with the help of the ever-present Haridev Śāstri. Once again, Pal provides a list of those who were invited, a list which includes several well-known names of the contemporary tantric world, among them Jyotindranath Panda, most prominent of the disciples of the famous deceased tantric saint Vamakhappa; he was sebait (temple priest) at the cemetery of Tārapith -- the scene of Vamakhappa's tantric sādhana and a well-known pilgrimage site in West Bengal.<sup>69</sup> Another well-known name was Swami Sadānanda of the Ramakrishna Order. Pal says Woodroffe invited them all 'to Calcutta'; he does not say it was to his home. In 1914 Woodroffe was listed in Thacker's Directory as resident in Alexandra Row, round the corner from the house at Number 4 Camac Street where Sir Torick Ameer Ali visited him (above p.21).

One can only guess what the reaction of the British neighbours would have been to see Tantrics in full regalia travelling to Woodroffe's gate in what was a very select area of the city. But it is possible that Woodroffe could have held the feast elsewhere. After feeding his guests,

Woodroffe discourses with them on Tantra and wins their admiration for his knowledge and wisdom. How could he, a foreigner and a 'Christian' acquire such insight? Modestly, Woodroffe gives all the credit to his guru Sivacandra.<sup>70</sup>

Some time later Pal reports another meeting organized by Woodroffe, this time a small intimate gathering of close disciples of the deceased saint. The list of those attending has many of the same names as the śrāddha guests, but this time includes Hemendraprasad Ghose again, and Pañckori Bāndyopādhyay, a journalist and writer on Tantra in Bengali, whose review of Avalon's book has been mentioned in chapter 2. (above p.70 ). They all exchanged memories of their relationship with their Guru Sivacandra, but this time Pal does not go into details.<sup>71</sup>

Thus in describing all three occasions following upon the death of Sivacandra, Pal lists the names of many well-known figures of both the secular and religious-tantric contemporary scene. Pal's story of Woodroffe and Sivacandra appears to be a hagiographical romance based on real facts passed on by other disciples and admirers of the Guru; and these belonged to his large following among the Calcutta bhadralok as well as more 'traditional' sections of society.

#### The Disciple in later life

Another prominent person -- it is not stated that he was a disciple -- whose reminiscences find a place in Pal's account was Rabindranath Mitra, India's first Home Minister after independence, and one of the ICS trainees to whom Woodroffe lectured in Oxford after retiring from India. His story about a visit to Woodroffe's home while a student and a conversation he had with him there about his Guru Sivacandra, was passed on to Pal through Hemendraprasad Ghose to whom he had told it. The story thus comes to us third-hand, but Pal carefully records that Bhupendranath Datta also heard it along with him; and he adds the name of another person to whom the same story was told, a university professor who was a close friend of Rabindranath Mitra.<sup>72</sup>

On being invited to Woodroffe's drawing room for tea, the student Mitra was surprised to see on the walls pictures and framed photographs of Hindu divinities and saints, including one of Sivacandra Vidyarnava with his wife. In other rooms of the house, he saw other pictures, of pilgrimage sites and sādhus living in caves. 'It was as if I were standing in some Indian temple or in any Indian sādhak's ashram', commented the visitor. Woodroffe spoke of 'his Guru Sivacandra' who was an enduring presence in his life. He told Mitra of many experiences of the Guru's 'kṛpā' (compassion) shown to him both before and after his death. These were appearances to him in visions and dreams, bringing guidance and consolation. He said that on several occasions this happened to him in the High Court while he was trying difficult cases. (One wonders if the Midnapore appeal case was one of these occasions).<sup>73</sup>

#### Woodroffe's sādhanā

Mitra does not actually state that Woodroffe still performed Tantric puja to his image of daśabhuja Durgā which Pal says he took back with him to England. But from the tone of his story, it seems that he thought Woodroffe in Oxford was still entirely Hindu in his attitudes and feelings. Plucking up courage, the student shyly asked the former Judge how, with his different cultural background, he had managed to accept and adapt to a Guru who was a Tantric. Woodroffe replied that Sivacandra had acknowledged this difficulty and had not asked him to submit to the practices of the path of vāmācāra or vīrācāra as he was not suited to them.<sup>74</sup> Therefore he would be initiated through divyācāra only. The Guru was responsible, said Woodroffe, for choosing the method of initiating the disciple, and in doing so took into account his background and inclinations -- his personal disposition. This theme is prominent in the Avalon/Woodroffe writings. One of the reasons he gives for commending the Tantric path is just such alleged insight into and tolerance of individual differences of background and temperament -- something he designates in his books by the Sanskrit term adhikāra (see below chapter 8 p.260).



Now Divyācār -- the highest of the three paths of sādhana according to the Tantras -- traditionally signified the practices of those who had gone beyond the stage of taboo-breaking vāmācāra rites by transcending social distinctions as well as personal like and dislike. Sivacandra's use of the concept to enable Woodroffe to bypass vāmācāra was not traditional. Mr Bagchi, whose own Tantric Guru was a disciple of Sivacandra was not allowed off so easily. He had to perform his sādhana in the graveyard -- which he intensely disliked -- for a whole year until his Guru allowed him to stop the visits, to the disciple's great relief. But presumably even a powerful personality such as Sivacandra could not coerce a high-ranking European like Woodroffe at that time.

#### Alexandra David-Neel

The final word on Woodroffe as a Tantric can be given to Alexandra David-Neel, who visited the Woodroffes in 1912 (see above chapter 4). She describes Woodroffe as being openly a Śākta and devotee of Kali who practised rites to the goddess. She mentions successive (krama) initiations called abhiṣekhas. She contrasts her own attitude, which she claims is that of the detached scholar, with Woodroffe's which was that of the 'dévot'.<sup>75</sup> Many years after her visit she described a domestic ritual performed by the couple where Woodroffe worshipped his wife as his śakti, Tantric fashion, before they made love. She does not name the couple she is writing about -- even though she says she is writing many years after their deaths -- but it is obvious to whom she is referring in a book first published in 1951:

If I dared to mention such a delicate subject, I would reveal that I have known a European, well educated and belonging to the highest society of his own country, who was a Śākta...He took part in mystic cakras of an irreproachable purity. As for his wife, with whom he seemed very much in love, he looked on her as representing the goddess and before their intimate relations, he worshipped her as one worships the image of Shakti in the temples, presenting before her flowers, ritual lamps with many tiny flames and burning incense all the while chanting hymns in Sanskrit.<sup>76</sup>

David-Neel does not claim to have witnessed this scene, but only that it was told to her during confidences made in a spirit of innocence and 'd'une gravité toute religieuse'. It made her wonder how such a prelude did not inhibit love-making -- but the three children of the marriage proved that this was not so. Initiates, she continued, would understand, all the same, that the couple were not seeking true spiritual illumination through the rite, for properly speaking the tantric maithuna should not result in procreation."<sup>77</sup>

David-Neel may have added this aside because a little earlier she has just averred that Woodroffe actually confessed to her that he saw Tantric ritual as a sort of magic that would bring him material benefits. Nothing of such an interest emerges in his books, but both the Ghose family and people I met at the High Court thought that Woodroffe had been fascinated by the alleged supernatural powers of Tantrics. As David-Neel's biographers remark, 'she was not given to praising her rivals'<sup>78</sup>: in fact she was usually disparaging about almost everyone. Despite what she said about her own attitude of 'detachment', she and Woodroffe were alike, for both combined the roles of orientalist, convert and initiate."<sup>79</sup>

David-Neel had also made remarks about magic during her 1912-13 visit, expounding in a letter upon 'this unhappy mentality'. She claimed that 'there are English officials who secretly become disciples of Hindu sorcerers'.<sup>80</sup> In the same letter she had just described Woodroffe as a 'dévot' who had been captivated by Tantra au delà des limites qu'on eut pu prévoir, so presumably she included him in her comments about the disciples of sorcerers. One wonders who else she had in mind -- perhaps some of Woodroffe's European friends? Or was she implying that the fascination with Tantra was more widespread? If so, then our stereotypes of the typical servants of the British Raj are sometimes wide of the mark. David-Neel herself was a strange mixture of the 'superior' rationalist and the willing believer.

She has written: 'He took part in mystic cakras of an irreproachable purity.' Just what that meant is illustrated by the story of her own participation in a so-called divya cakra -- presumably belonging to the divyācāra path in which Sivaçandra initiated the Woodroffes. It was an entirely 'respectable' version of the pañcatattva rite. She had been initiated by a Guru -- she does not say who this was -- and invited to participate by a Western educated, middle class Indian couple. The atmosphere was opulent and refined. Each male participant brought along two śaktis: his bhogyā Śakti -- partner of 'enjoyment', ie the sexual partner -- had to be his lawful wife; she sat on his left. On his right sat his puja Śakti, another woman who represented the Goddess. David-Neel attended in the latter capacity and was worshipped in an ārati ceremony with music and lights. She was presented with offerings which were definitely not meat, fish and wine, but a kind of sweet and what she thought was mildly fermented fruit juice, or perhaps rice-wine.<sup>61</sup> She was very curious to see what the fifth 'tattva' would consist of. It consisted of the man wrapping himself fully clothed in his wife's capacious sari and the couple remaining immobile for a long time, presumably rapt in meditation.<sup>62</sup>

She does not claim the Woodroffes took her to this cakra, for she says the couple she accompanied were Indian; nor do we know whether the guru was Sivaçandra. But in any case, if Sir John and <sup>Lady</sup> Ellen Woodroffe did sit in tantric cakras, perhaps with Mr and Mrs Ghose, then it is highly likely that this was the kind of cakra it was. Sobhun Ghose passed on the family's image of Woodroffe: that he was sattvic. The highest of the three guṇas, sattva is inevitably associated with divya bhāva (the highest state of mind or feeling). Sobhun translated it (wrongly but interestingly) as 'puritanical'. Woodroffe continued Sivaçandra's work of domesticating and 'purifying' Tantra. His writing on the subject is in fact very sexually 'pure'; pure, even to the extent of appearing naive on occasion. In his books his inspiration is predominantly mystical and metaphysical. Nevertheless we can assume Tantric affirmation of sexuality

appealed to him; this is hinted at in his writings, sometimes concealed behind affirmation of the senses in general and of embodied life in this world -- as opposed to the renouncer's rejection of them. Such an ethic could have been welcome to a British person at the turn of the century, wrestling with the legacy of a Victorian upbringing and a Catholic education.

### Epilogue

Woodroffe's obituary in Bhārata Varṣa stated that no-one knew how he first became attracted to Tantra.<sup>83</sup> Pal claims it was the overwhelming charisma of Sivaçandra as a Guru. Woodroffe himself claimed it was the very abuse levelled at Tantra which presented a challenge to him to investigate it impartially.<sup>84</sup> In the second edition of Śakti and Śakta he distanced himself from his personal commitment to Tantra, emphasising the values of tolerance;<sup>85</sup> and he told the founder of Ganesh and Co in the 1920s that he was an outside observer and not a practitioner.

There is a sentence in one of his letters to Ghose which needs to be taken into consideration. It was written late -- in 1934 when he may have felt his Indian life lay far behind him. It concerned the Maharaja of Patiala, who had made a promise to purchase the copyright of the TT series. Maharaja Sir Bhupender Singh, the ruler of the largest Sikh kingdom in India, would seem to be an unlikely Tantric, but he appears to have had a Tantric guru. However, he reneged on his commitment. Discussing the reasons for the rebuff Woodroffe first considered political difficulties to be the cause, but finally he wrote to Ghose:

As regards P[atiala], the only rational explanation which presents itself to me is that his Guru has forbidden him to have any communication with me. You may ask why: and the answer would be that I have not been initiated. [Letter A17, appendix. Emphasis mine]<sup>86</sup>

Even if we imagine that Woodroffe had not wanted to tell the Maharaja about having been initiated many years ago, he is still unlikely to have denied it in a letter to Ghose of all people. The only other explanation is that it means

Woodroffe had not accepted initiation from this particular Guru, and this is how I take it. For despite his disclaimers the arguments in favour of Woodroffe's practising some form of Tantric ritual (and therefore almost certainly having accepted initiation) are overwhelming. It was clearly believed in by many people who witnessed his life in India. Some of these witnesses are independent of each other: Alexandra David-Neel, the members of the art movement, and the circle of Sivacandra's disciples. There are other sources of 'oral tradition' too, circulating among people at the High Court of Calcutta until today. Vasanta Kumar Pal, the major channel for stories about Woodroffe, although he romanticises his account, is careful to name the sources for important aspects of his story and many of these were prominent people who could easily have contradicted what he wrote if they had wanted to.

The year following this letter - some time in 1935, the year before his death - Woodroffe was re-baptised, the reason given being that there was some doubt as to whether his infant baptism was valid.<sup>87</sup> This is puzzling. Although the original rite had been performed in an Anglican church in Calcutta it seems odd that he was not re-baptised when his parents converted and he was sent to a Catholic school. In 1934, Ellen Woodroffe had been received into the Catholic Church.<sup>88</sup> According to her son, this had nothing to do with her husband's Catholic background: on the contrary he thought it was the other way around, and that Ellen's conversion, which had come about through a Catholic woman friend, had influenced her husband. James thus saw his mother's influence on his father's religious life in both directions: towards Theosophy and Hinduism to begin with, and back again to Catholicism in the end. It should not be assumed, however, that the re-baptism necessarily implied a wholehearted rejection of Tantra. It could simply be another example of Woodroffe's use of the notion of adhikāra: the rites of the Catholic church being deemed 'appropriate' for the European race which had evolved them. Later we shall see that Woodroffe continued faithfully (even if a little

impatiently) to promote the publication of Tantrik Texts right until the end. Presumably he would not have done this if he was really beginning to experience serious 'repentance' for his tantric past, although a desire to honour commitments already entered into might have overruled such feelings, if he had them.

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Looking at Woodroffe's half-secret, half-open conversion to Tantra and that of his European friends in the art movement in the context of ISOA's ideology, we can see a relationship with the new fashionableness of India and things Indian, which arose among 'new orientalist' circles at the same time as an Indian identity was becoming important in nationalism. This was during the period when Rabindranath Tagore was just beginning to become the figure par excellence who incarnated Indian-ness as a spiritual image for Europeans, and soon afterwards, in the twenties he was to be feted in Europe almost as an icon.<sup>99</sup>

We have seen how for Havell and Coomaraswamy Indian art along with all other aspects of its culture, dealt with transcendence, with a world closer to divine perception than that perceived by ordinary senses. The modern West was stylised in the opposite manner: as the place of 'gross' materialism, alienated from its spiritual roots in a lost medieval Catholic culture. To identify with India was already to become more 'spiritual' -- to ascend from the mundane modernity of the West -- to identify with Tantra even more so. For anyone, Indian or foreign, to take tantric initiation was to cross a boundary into an esoteric, 'other' world; but for a European it was a step much further and deeper into 'Indian-ness' than most others of their kind would, or could, go. This is not to suggest a merely superficial quest for a self-image. It could be looked upon as providing initiation in a genuine psychological way, by bestowing on the individual an inward sense of a changed and more 'spiritual' identity.

Woodroffe's four roles in Calcutta life interpenetrated and sometimes contradicted each other. The Judge of the High Court lent prestige and social respectability to the world of the secret Tantric, at the same time as 'Arthur Avalon' denied this very connection. The secret leaked out because of Woodroffe's actions: allowing himself to be photographed in Indian religious dress actually transgressed a Tantric rule that an initiate should not be photographed.<sup>90</sup> The Indian dress - depending on one's viewpoint - upheld Woodroffe's public platform declarations on the value of Indian identity - or contradicted this very injunction when it was phrased in terms of a 'racial type': for Woodroffe was not 'true' to his 'type'. His re-evaluation of Tantra was in tune with the image of 'spiritual' India in the positive or romantic orientalism of the art movement, and both were part of the 'Indian Renaissance' of which Cousins and others wrote. For Woodroffe (if not for Havell) such views also went along with strong support for Indian nationalism, which might have been in tension with his position as a Judge.

In his own day the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon's status as a foreign orientalist was crucial to his authority and influence. Later on the situation was the reverse. It was the hint of secret 'inside' knowledge, the suggestion that the author had received authentic initiations, which gave his work authority for subsequent generations, especially in the West.<sup>91</sup> In the last section I return to <sup>the</sup> content of the Avalon/Woodroffe books, to what they present as Tantrasāstra, the religion contained in the Tantras, or Śaktivāda, the 'doctrine of Śakti'.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1.Desai 1975.

2.Gangopādhyāy op cit p.91

3.ibid

4.Tagore and Chand 1985 ps.174-5. He mentions their intense fascination (jhok) for Konarak on p.172.

5. Gangopadhyay ps.89-90
6. ibid p.89
7. ibid
8. See bibliography
9. 'with ten arms' and 'riding on a lion'.
10. Gangopadhyay p.89
11. ibid p.90.
12. ibid p.91
13. I am grateful to Mr Krishna Ghose of Calcutta for having a copy made for me.
14. Letter A(2), appendix
15. SCN -- TT vol 2 -- was published in 1913. Thackers Directory gives Middleton Row as Woodroffe's address in 1911-12. 'Alexandra Court' has been inserted in his handwriting, while 'Middleton Row' is printed.
16. An Asiatic Society of Bengal Council minute for 31 March 1915 records that Johnson & Hoffman had provided the society with a list of albums containing photos of Indian architecture. (Archives of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1 Park Street, Calcutta.)
17. This was told to me in 1991 at the High Court at Calcutta, although I could find no written references to it. Several other informants in Calcutta confirmed the Ghoses impression that the Woodroffes were eventually ostracised socially by Europeans. James Woodroffe told me that at the time he remembered them in India (1914-18), his parents had few European friends but many Indian ones. The photograph was published in Basumati in 1936 in an obituary of Woodroffe but I was told it also appeared while Woodroffe was still in Calcutta.
18. Pal op cit p.83
19. Pal op.cit p.83
20. There is a letter to Ghose, in which he mentions writing to Woodroffe to answer some questions he had put to him.
21. Mangal 1982 p.66.
22. See below chapter 7 p.232.



23. Puruṣa and Prakṛiti are the male and female polar opposites in the dualist metaphysics of Sāṃkhya. But they also stand for the God and Goddess and sometimes the human male and female. Their union in an inner, mystical sense is the object of Kundalinī Yoga but this was sometimes attained through practices involving a sexual partner.

24. Mangal op cit p.67. In a letter to Bhupendranath Datta Nandalal told the same story but instead of a Buddha, it was the images of Hindu gods and goddesses that caused Havell to sit before them in tantric postures. Translated in Viśvabhāratī Quarterly, vol 34, nos.1-4 (May 1968-April 1969), p.17ff.

25. baje - good-for-nothing.

26. Tagore and Chand 1985 p.113. Nandalal Bose also mentions a sannyasi and the anxiety of Havell's wife.

27. Datta 1954 p.312.

28. This information is given also by Pal [op cit p.178], who claimed Sivacandra arranged for Woodroffe's initiation with her. Jayakali Devi was also guru to Atal Behari Ghose (see chapter 9).

29. Datta op cit p.309.

30. ibid ps.309-312.

31. Bagchi 1982-85. The story about the 'Judge and the Peśkar' retold in my chapter 3 was original to Mr Bagchi. Otherwise Bagchi's sources other than Pal seem to be Who's Who aided by his own rich imagination.

32. The Bengalee, April 1st 1914.

33. Pal op cit. Jadunath Sarcar 1928 p.123. Compare Sarkar, Sumit: 'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and His Times" in Economic and Political Weekly, July 18 1992, ps 1543ff for Ramakrishna's appeal to the urban lower middle class.

34. The magazine was called Śaivi. His most famous volume of poetry was called Gītāñjali. See Ray 1985 p.313 for a list of his publications.

35. Raychaudhury 1988 p.35

36. Kopf 1979 ps.219ff

37. Pal op cit ps.82, 146.

38.PT/1 p.204. 'In every Indian cremation ground the refulgent and divine halo of Bhairavas and Bhairavis is yet to be seen mingling with the light of the flames of funeral pyres...'

39.Pal p.105.

40.S.N.Ray 1985 ps.290-346.

41.Pal p.54.

42.ibid.

43.ibid p.69.

44.Ray p.329

45.ibid p.330

46.Bagchi may have confused Maitra with Ghose. Bhāvmukhe Vol 36, no 7.

47.Bhāvmukhe vol 36, no.8, ps.259-60. Bagchi entitles his whole account: aghatan ghataner ālokik rahasya: Woodroffer dikṣā (Woodroffe's initiation: an unusual mysterious, supernatural occurrence). The unusual nature of the event in Mr Bagchi's view was due to Woodroffe's being a foreigner and a 'Christian'. (All references to these articles are to offprints in my possession where the pages are not always numbered clearly.)

48.ibid

49.Bhāvmukhe vol 36, no.9; Pal p.55, Ray p.331. The visitors are treated with slightly more honour in Bagchi's account for they are given special seats and allowed to watch the puja.

50.Pal op cit p.58.

51.Bagchi vol 36 no.9; Ray ps. 331,332.

52.See SP:84/ft2. Vedhādīkṣā - whereby the disciple swoons under transference of power from the guru -- such a guru is hard to find. Vedhādīkṣā is mentioned in KT:14:37.

53.S.N.Dhar 1975 ps.93-4

'The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience. With my eyes open I saw that the walls of the room along with everything within it was whirling away till they vanished into naught and the whole universe with my individuality was rushing out as it were to merge itself in some all-encompassing void.'

54.Bagchi vol 6 no.9, quoting Gopinath Kaviraj Tāntrika sādhanā o siddhānta.

55.Pal ps.58-64, 67; Ray ps.333-336. Bagchi is the only author to give a date for these pilgrimages: the long vacation of the High Court in 1907. Bhāvmukhe vol 36, no.10

56.Pal p.67.

57.ibid p.64. According to Keshab Sircar, who helped me with translations, this indicated the complete Indianization of Woodroffe. The Guru was taken into the heart of the couple's marriage.

58.ibid p.178.

59.ibid p.65

60.ibid ps.64-5

61.ibid ps.90-1. 'Tantrācārya Śivacandrē smṛti tārpane' appeared in Gaurabhāvinī, Māgh-Caitra 1363.

62.Pal p.172 Pal draws on many sources, both named and unnamed and one cannot always be sure when he is writing in his own voice or another's.

63.ibid p.105

64.Cited in Datta op cit p.309.

65.Pal p.105.

66.ibid ps.102-3

67.Amrita Bāzār Patrika, April 2nd 1914: 'A Condolence Meeting'.

68.Hemendraprasad Ghose's paper Baśumati was a weekly journal in 1914, but copies of it from that time are hard to come by and I haven't seen it. The monthly journal did not start until 1922-3. Hemendraprasad Ghose's diary is kept at Jadavpur University, Calcutta, but much of it -- including the volume covering 1914 -- is not available for research. Bhārat Varṣa began in 1920.

69.Pal p.104. Woodroffe may have met Vāma Khappa; it was he who perhaps told him to seek out the Mother of the Universe. (See Introduction p.13 )

70.ibid

71.ibid p.118-9

72.ibid p.173.

73.ibid ps.173-179

74. ibid p.176. 'Vāmācār vīrācār tomār calibe nā...
75. David-Neel 1976 vol 2 p.254 (Letter dated 13th August 1913).
76. David-Neel 1954 ps.140-1. Translation mine.
77. It is supposed to involve coitus reservatus. Agehananda Bharati however disagrees. The Tantric Tradition, London, 1956 p.278.
78. Foster and Foster 1989 p.89
79. David-Neel was soon to travel in Tibet as a Buddhist nun.
80. David-Neel 1976 vol 2 p.258. (Letter of 13th August 1913)
81. See ITS:120 for a list of prescribed substitutes for the five tattvas given in the tantric texts. Sweets are usually a substitute for wine, not meat. MNT 8:171-2 (Glb p.230) has the 'three sweets' (milk, sugar, honey) as a substitute for wine. Rice wine was one of the three 'excellent' kinds of wine. MNT 6:2 (Glb p.138). The MNT suggests meditation on the Goddess or on the mantra given at initiation in place of the fifth tattva for those whose minds are weakened by lust. (8:174). The use of substitutes is usually regarded as paśvācāra -- the practice of the lowest grade (those who are not strong enough for vīrācār). In traditional divyācār the outward tattvas are internalised as various states and attitudes, and is the path of those who have no more need of ritual. (See SS:605)
82. David-Neel 1954 ps.146-154. She contrasted this with two cakras which she spied on secretly. One was an orgy; the other was equally 'pure' when it came to the fifth tattva, but involved the sacrifice of a goat and partaking of real meat and wine. ibid ps.154ff. Actual sacrifice of a goat or other animals is prescribed even in the MNT. [6:107-8]
83. Vol 23/2 (1936), p.461. Its editor was Jaladhar Sen (above p.193) who knew Sivacandra's circle.
84. SS:78. 'Following the track of unmeasured abuse I have always found something good'.
85. SS(2) viii-x. Passages from the prefaces to the 1st and 2nd editions as printed in SS(DP) have been changed about.
86. ~~Letter number A/17, appendix Italics mine.~~ In 1929-30 Patiala was in severe political trouble concerning accusations of oppression of his subjects, which led to an inquiry by Government. But these would not be the political difficulties referred to by Woodroffe in 1934.
87. Personal communication by James Woodroffe.

88.Gorman: 'Woodroffe'

89.See Rathindranath Tagore op cit ps.125-6,161-2, where he describes his father's astonishingly enthusiastic reception in Europe on his tours of 1924 and 1926.

90.Communication of Sobhun Ghose, and of informants at the High Court

91.Woodroffe 1983 (trad. M.Shibata), p.7. The preface to this French translation of extracts of SS described Woodroffe as one of the rare Europeans who had received authentic initiations.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ON TANTRA

In the last chapter we saw that Woodroffe was an insider to the Tantric tradition when he wrote his books. He learned it from Indian practitioners and he practised some form of it himself. Chapter 2 suggested that his lack of Sanskrit did not give him direct access to the texts, an issue which will be discussed in chapter 9 below. It meant that he was entirely dependent on others as channels, and these for him were not European orientalists, but Indian mediators of the tradition. 'Arthur Avalon' wrote under the tutelage of Woodroffe's Bengali friends and teachers, and sometimes by dialogue with his Indian readership. His books achieved a much clearer perception of the systems of belief and ritual called 'Tantric' than those of previous European orientalists. Nevertheless, while presented as the work of a sympathetic 'outsider' examining the subject in an unbiased way, the books of Avalon/Woodroffe are mostly the apologetics of an 'insider' concerned to update and shape the Tantric tradition in the contemporary environment. The next chapter deals with some issues connected with this apologetic purpose.

In the present chapter I attempt to outline his construction of the area of Hinduism he called Tantraśāstra and relate it to the picture that emerges in some modern scholarship. Although he usually avoided using the word 'Tantra' for reasons discussed below, Avalon/Woodroffe still considered he was writing about a specific group of concepts, rites, symbols making up a defined and coherent whole - which he presented as the religion of the Śāktas, a sub-group within wider Hinduism.

The volume of scholarship on Tantra (or 'Tantrism') is as prolific now as it was scant in Woodroffe's time. Besides the standard surveys I have cited in chapter 1, a useful though not comprehensive bibliography is to be found in Alper<sup>1</sup>. This chapter is not a comprehensive study of Tantra,

and for the sake of simplicity I have followed closely two modern studies which I have found specially useful. André Padoux's Vac (1990), a study of the doctrine of the Word, revisits in greater detail the area which Avalon/Woodroffe entered in his books, especially in GOL. His second chapter is also a useful survey of Tantrism. Alexis Sanderson's illuminating articles on the history of the Tantric cults and their literature (Sanderson 1985 and 1988) throw much light on what were for Woodroffe the vexed questions of the relationship between Tantra and the Hindu mainstream, and the role of horrific symbolism and transgressive rituals. It also becomes possible to perceive Woodroffe's writing itself as an extension in the early twentieth century of the process of domestication which Sanderson defines.

On the theological and ritual world of Śaivite Tantra - 'Kashmir Śaivism' - I have drawn on two other recent writers, Dr Debabrata Sen Sarma (1990) who is a disciple of the influential Gopinath Kaviraj - and Gavin Flood's study of body and cosmology (Flood 1992, 1993). For Kundalinī Yoga, Eliade (1958) is still a 'classic' and more recently Liliane Silburn (1983).

#### Defining 'Tantra'

André Padoux addressed the question of defining Tantrism in a 1981 review article. The problem arises because of the difficulty in distinguishing it on the one hand from Śāktism, since the worship of Śakti is central to Tantrism, and on the other from general Hinduism from the time when Tantrism flourished and became a 'pan-Indian mode' around the eighth century. Arthur Avalon initiated this discussion, for as Padoux notes here and elsewhere in his writings, Avalon claimed that 'the adjective Tantric is largely a Western term'.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Avalon was intent on dismantling the image I have discussed in chapter 1 of a homogeneous sect or group of sects involved in degenerate practices. Consequently he attempted to remove what had become an offensive term -

'Tantra'- from the vocabulary of discourse and to redefine the area he was writing about within wider frames of reference.

In the opening page of the first edition of SS he suggested Āgama as a generic term, since the Āgamas included the Tantras:

For what does Tantra mean? The word denotes injunction (Vidhi), regulation (Niyama), Śāstra generally or treatise...We cannot speak of 'The Treatise' nor of 'The Tantra' any more than we can or do speak of the Purāṇa, the Samhitā. We can speak of 'the Tantras' as we do of 'the Purāṇas'. These Tantras are Śāstras of what is called the Āgama. [SS/1 p.1; DP:54-5]<sup>3</sup>

By the same logic, however, Āgama would also be invalid. In fact Avalon used many other terms as well: Āgamaśāstra, Tantraśāstra, the Śākta Tantra, merely avoiding the word 'Tantra' on its own. Even here, his writings give the appearance of inconsistency because 'Tantra' does occur in his books. What seems to have happened is that Woodroffe and his collaborators used it freely at first but around 1917 decided to reject it because of its negative associations in orientalist writings.<sup>4</sup> Arthur Avalon set out his reasons in two articles published in Prabuddha Bhārata, a journal of the Ramakrishna Mission, and therefore aimed at readers influenced by the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda. 'What are the Tantras?' was followed by 'The Significance of the Tantras' and they were amalgamated into a single chapter in SS. [SS(DP):54-69]

Avalon points to the practices of the Vāmācārīs (ie. the pañcatattva and other controversial rituals) as the crux of the matter, as he sees it:

The secret Sādhana of some of the latter...has acquired such notoriety that to most the term "The Tantra" connotes this particular worship and its abuses and nothing else...Now it is this Kaula doctrine and practice, limited probably, as being a secret doctrine, at all times to comparatively few, which has come to be known as "The Tantra". [SS(DP):61-2]



He has pointed out that such 'aberrations' were also to be found in the West and adds that, furthermore, they were not characteristic of all followers of 'the Āgamas':

This is but one division of worshippers who again are but one section of the numerous followers of the Āgamas, Śaiva, Śakta and Vaisnava. Though there are certain common features which may be called Tāntrik yet one cannot speak of "The Tantra" as though it were one entirely homogeneous doctrine and practice. Still less can we identify it with the particular practices and theories of one division of worshippers only.  
[SS(DP) 62]

The wording in the original article -- slightly different from that in SS -- shows more clearly how he was struggling against the image of 'Tantra' as a single extremist sect of the Śāktas that indulged in disreputable practices:

The antinomian Sādhana of the latter... has acquired such notoriety that to most the term 'The Tantra' connotes this particular worship and its abuses and nothing else... Now it is this extremist doctrine and practice ...which has come to be known as 'The Tantra'. Nothing is more incorrect. This 'left wing' is but one division of the Shaktas... Still less can we identify it with the particular practices and theories of one sect only." <sup>5</sup>

His insistence that not only Śāktas but also Vaisnavas and Śaivas were followers of Āgama 'took the heat off' the former, so to speak. He added that the Tantric texts were concerned with wider matters than simply ritual practice and included such things as science, medicine and law, [ibid, p.62], a point developed elsewhere by pointing to a 'double framework' whereby Tantric Hinduism mirrored Vedic forms in every sphere [SS:147].

He returned to the issue of definition in the second of the two articles, repeating the assertions made in the preface to Principles of Tantra (above chapter 1), that the negative image of Tantra was propagated by the language of Western orientalism:

According to a common notion the word "Tantra" is (to use the language of a well-known work) "restricted to the necromantic books of the later Śivaic or Śakti mysticism" (Waddell's Buddhism of Tibet, p.164). As charity covers many sins, so "mystic" and "mysticism" are words which cover much ignorance. "Necromancy" too looms unnecessarily large in the writers of this school.

It is, however, the fact that Western authors generally so understand the term "Tantra"....<sup>6</sup>

He went on to say that he was not concerned with the 'dangerous practices' of 'inferior persons' but with 'the practices which govern the life of the vast mass of the Indian people' and that these were to be found 'in the Tantras of the Āgamas of the different schools which I have mentioned'. [ibid, p.63]. This illustrates how Arthur Avalon situated 'Tantra Śāstra' within wider Hinduism (a term which he also sometimes rejected as a Western one). As he put it later on: 'The Tantraśāstras or Āgama are not some pathological excrescence on "Hinduism" but simply one of its several presentations.' [SS:115] And: 'He who has not understood Tantra Śāstra has not understood what "Hinduism" is as it exists today' [SS:169]

Here he had recognized the phenomenon noted above, that Tantra had been a 'pan-Indian mode' for many centuries.' This was the result of the process described by Alexis Sanderson (1988) as 'exotericization', whereby elements of what originally belonged to taboo-breaking cults practised by renouncer-ascetics, were gradually absorbed by the Hindu mainstream. Thus the Hinduism of the ordinary householder had over centuries acquired more and more Tantric features. (See below)

Woodroffe nevertheless had no doubts about the specificity of the subject he was writing about and he defined the area both ritually and doctrinally. In the first of the two articles in Prabuddha Bhārata, he listed characteristic features of what he called 'the Āgama'. His list is far from exhaustive and is very technical but he summarises it by stating: 'Where there is Mantra, Yantra, Nyāsa, Diksā, Guru and the like, there is Tantra Śāstra', thus defining the phenomenon by its characteristic ritual elements, as most scholars have done since. [SS:61] We have seen how H.H. Wilson had recognised some of these long before (above p.45). As long as some other term such as Āgama or Tantraśāstra was used, Woodroffe did not deny that he was writing about a specific area of

Hinduism that shared also with vajrayāna Buddhism certain distinctive features.[TT/7 p.iii] In one instance he was forced to concede that the term 'the Tantra' was used in Bengal and that this may have 'misled' some Western writers. [SS:460]

Padoux himself in his review article decides that there is indeed, as he puts it 'a Tantric specificity' which he defines not by a list of characteristic features but by particular doctrinal concepts and above all by certain values, attitudes and aims -- a 'weltanschauung'. First he quotes favourably a definition by Madeleine Biardeau who described Tantra as an attempt 'to place kāma -- desire -- in every sense of the term, in the service of deliverance...not to sacrifice this world to deliverance, but to reintegrate it...within the perspective of salvation.' Padoux then adds to this his own summary:

Tantrism has recourse to a complex of ritualistic, psychic, and corporal practices that make use of elements of this world and of the body in particular, practices and notions that correspond to a certain conception not only of the godhead, conceived as polarised into masculine/feminine, but also of the universe and of man, both being immersed in that divine power. As a result, the quest for liberation is fundamentally nothing but a tapping, a using, or even a manipulating of that power. Tantrism, thus, closely associates a doctrine, an aim, a 'weltanschauung' and certain practices which are grounded in that doctrine...<sup>8</sup>

Tantra as Woodroffe encountered it was, like most religious phenomena, the product of a complicated development through time and the meaning of the word changed in the process, but he would not have disagreed significantly with Padoux's weltanschauung.

#### Śakti: the Goddess

The 'power' of which Padoux writes is of course śakti, the most quintessential concept of Tantra, which led to the increasing significance of female divinity. Tantra's extensive pantheon of goddesses are regarded as expressions, emanations in hierarchical order, of the one Śakti, usually conceived as the consort of Śiva, but with strikingly

independent power. The typical Tantric images of the Goddess show Her seated or standing upon one or more corpses, which are those of Śiva and sometimes other male divinities. Historically this can be seen as a statement of the triumph of the Goddess in her cult over the male divinity she has supplanted.<sup>9</sup> Metaphysically it is interpreted as a symbol of the active power of divinity represented by Śakti being upheld by the transcendent Śiva who is so passive with regard to this world that He appears corpse-like. Viewed either way the Goddess has gained in significance over her consort as far as this world is concerned. Woodroffe presented his readers with this metaphysical interpretation of an image which in varying forms can be seen everywhere in Bengal, especially at the time of the Kālī puja festival. Kālī stands astride an inert Śiva; she holds in her hands an axe and a severed head; she has a long, lolling red tongue; she wears a belt of human hands and a necklace of severed heads - interpreted as the varṇamāla, the 'garland of letters' which is the source of mantras. Woodroffe wrote:

The scene is laid in the cremation ground (Śmaśāna), amidst white sun-dried bones and fragments of flesh...Here the 'heroic' (Vira) worshipper performs at dead of night his awe-inspiring rituals. Kālī is set in such a scene, for She is that aspect of the great Power which withdraws all things into herself at, and by, the dissolution of the universe. He alone worships without fear who has abandoned all worldly desires, and seeks union with Her as the One Blissful and Perfect Experience. On the burning ground all worldly desires are burnt away...She stands upon the white corpse-like body of Śiva. He is white, because he is the illuminating transcendental aspect of consciousness. He is inert, because he is the changeless aspect of the Supreme and She, the apparently changing aspect of the same... [SS:517-8]

Ernest Payne in his own book on the Śāktas referred to in chapter 1 above, quoted this passage in order to illustrate Woodroffe's naivety. Believing its transparency so obvious as to need little comment he dismissed it by saying: 'All this means little more than that it is now felt necessary to have some ideal explanation of the more repulsive features in the description of the Goddess.'<sup>10</sup> To this Woodroffe replied in his own review of Payne's book that he had not invented this explanation but was only repeating what was presented in

the texts themselves.<sup>11</sup> Woodroffe was quite correct. The cremation ground - śmaśāna -- is the great sacred space of Tantra, the conceptual as also often the actual place of transformation for the sādhaka, whether seeking liberation or supernormal powers. The imagery of death and eroticism, alongside the metaphysical interpretations both belonged to the phenomenon that Woodroffe knew as 'Tantra'.<sup>12</sup>

The iconography was the outcome of the historical process analysed by Sanderson (1985 and 1988). The symbolism of the severed heads and the cremation ground relate to the origins of Tantrism in the ancient Śaivite cults of the Kāpālikas ('skull-bearers') and other sects of ascetics who sought supernormal power through rites performed to Śiva in the fear-inspiring form of Bhairava, who was associated with death, pollution and sexuality: that is, with all that was kept ritually at bay by the purity rules and caste restrictions of the orthodox Brahmanical system.<sup>13</sup> The Feminine was also located in this realm of the excluded, and hence was associated with its power.

While tantric elements have permeated the Hindu mainstream, Sanderson shows how Tantra itself was from the beginning an esoteric affair, initially restricted to the domain of renouncer-ascetics. From whatever sect they emerged -- Śaivite, Vaisnavite or Buddhist -- the Tantrics held the same relation to the orthodox practice: they transgressed boundaries and infringed the rules whether ritual or ethical, Thus the Kāpālikas made offerings to the deities of 'impure' substances such as blood, meat and alcohol, and engaged in caste-free sexual intercourse in rituals which took place in the cremation ground -- the most inauspicious and polluted of all places.<sup>14</sup> However, two processes were at work: on the one hand a movement towards further esotericism, on the other a reverse process of domestication or what Sanderson calls 'exotericisation' whereby the esoteric sects were reincorporated into the orthodox mainstream, but with their rituals 'purified'. The effect of this was that gradually what was considered orthodox in Hinduism acquired more and

more Tantric features, the same deities being worshipped, retaining much of their iconography, but being conceived in milder forms and without the transgressive practices.<sup>15</sup> Thus the Śaiva Siddhānta, the basic Śaiva mainstream in south India, though socially conforming and caste-observing, has as its texts the twenty-eight Śaiva Āgamas -- originally anti-Vedic -- which were among the earliest of the scriptures first classed as Tantric. Here Śiva is worshipped as Sadāśiva, whose iconography preserves some of the accoutrements of the cremation ground but the image of the deity 'lacks the aura of terrifying and ecstatic power which is emphasised in his manifestations in the tradition of Bhairava ('the Fearsome')'.<sup>16</sup> Bhairava too, however, became domesticated in the cult of Svacchandabhairava which represented the orthodox Śaiva mainstream in Kashmir at the time of Abhinavagupta and his disciples. Here scented water was offered to the divinity instead of wine.<sup>17</sup>

It can be seen then how there was scope for confusion as to what was or was not regarded as genuinely 'Tantric', especially as the more esoteric sects used the exoteric public cult as a lower or outer level from which one could enter their secret initiations.<sup>18</sup> This situation is reflected in the famous maxim quoted by Woodroffe: 'At heart a Śākta, outwardly a Śaiva, in gatherings a Vaisnava, in thus many a guise the Kaulas wander on earth' [SS:160-1].<sup>19</sup> It is the situation reflected in the seven ācāras (grades of ritual practice) listed by Woodroffe from the Kulārnavatantra, which place the Kaulas at the top of the esoteric hierarchy, with Vedācāra at the bottom; [SS:152-3 and 243],<sup>20</sup> and the threefold division of worshippers into paśu (animal or unspiritual),<sup>21</sup> vīra (heroic) and divya (divine). [SS:p.163] The first grade is the ordinary worshipper in the public cult, who is bound by convention, the second the practitioner of the esoteric rituals, the third has transcended the need of either.

Sanderson proceeds to show how within the Śaiva tradition the Feminine -- the Goddess and her retinue of subsidiary female

divinities -- became related to increasing degrees of esotericism. He describes a situation whereby sects continually bifurcated, with more esoteric variations of a cult arising from within it. The many lists and groupings of Tantras which occur in this literature, of the kind reproduced uncritically by Woodroffe [eg. SS:149-152] are thus to be seen as maps which place the text in which they occur at the summit of the esoteric hierarchy. As we ascend through these levels, Sanderson explains, 'we find that the feminine rises stage by stage from subordination to complete autonomy.'<sup>22</sup>

The basic structure of a Tantric cult comprises: the deity (usually a form of Śiva or Bhairava), seated alone or embracing his consort, and surrounded by circles of lesser divinities who are considered to be emanations of one or both of the central couple. These āvarana devatās -- 'covering divinities' -- are assigned places in the deity's maṇḍala ('enthroning diagram') within which he/she is worshipped and which represents the cosmos. For purposes of ritual, it can be inscribed on the ground, or on metal, stone or wood.<sup>23</sup> Conceptually, it is often a cremation ground, which is regarded as a pīṭha ('seat') of the divinity's power.

Sanderson shows how in the various sects which emphasised the Goddess, this pantheon was feminized by stages.<sup>24</sup> First, in the cult of the yoginīs the attendant divinities became female; then the 'union' (yāmala) of the central divine couple was emphasised; finally this couple was replaced by one or more goddesses either reigning alone or with subordinate male consorts: here we are in the cults of the triple goddess (Trika) and the various cults of Kālī.<sup>25</sup> In her supreme form as Kālasamkarṣinī, the Destroyer of Time, her iconography presents us with one of the prototypical images of a Tantric deity, images which also permeate Vajrayāna Buddhism:

Conventionally beautiful but holding such Kāpālika emblems as the skull-staff (khatvāṅga) and the severed head (munda), wearing a tiger skin dripping with blood, trampling the body of Kāla (Time) beneath her feet, she

holds a trance-possessed Bhairava in a two-armed embrace in the centre of a vast, many-circuited mandala of goddesses enclosed by cordons of male servant-guards and an outer ring of cremation grounds. In the elaborate form of worship both the goddesses and the guards embrace consorts.<sup>26</sup>

In still more esoteric forms she is not beautiful but 'a hideous emaciated destroyer'. The shift towards the Feminine and the more terrific corresponded with an increasing emphasis on non-dualism in philosophy: the deity representing the non-dual Absolute appearing inimical at first to the ego-consciousness.<sup>27</sup> In the southern Tantric sect called Śrī Vidyā however, the Goddess Tripurasundarī or Lalitā kept some of her gruesome accoutrements but acquired others that were not so -- like her flowery arrows to inspire passion -- and became beautiful, erotic and benevolent.

This is one explanation for the violence and eroticism of Tantric imagery, Buddhist or Hindu. There are others: the deities can be seen as representing the violence of human passions harnessed in the service of Liberation. Among the methods (upāya) of transformation of consciousness described by Abhinavagupta, one involved the upsurge of sudden violent emotions such as anger, fear, desire etc.<sup>28</sup> The Tantric divinities also often have a history as local or tribal deities incorporated into the Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheons.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the feminine was consistently associated with what was considered more esoteric, more transgressive, and more fearsome. Although Sanderson does not state it this way, the implication is that because the cults of the male forms of the deity tended to become domesticated first, the female forms were left to represent what was wild, uncivilized, and excluded. It also underlines how despite the feminine imagery, the Tantric cults were predominantly male-oriented and that part of their esoteric secret was to do with the mastery of the Feminine, of sexuality, pollution and death, which were all linked and located in the realm of the excluded.



It was the Kaula movement however, by which the Śākta sects too were domesticated and refined, which was to give to Tantra its quintessential aspect of 'spiritual' sexuality. The word comes from Kula meaning primarily 'family' and referring to the eight families of the yoginīs, female spirits who originally formed the retinue of Bhairava.<sup>30</sup> The Kaulas transformed and internalized the mainly magical sexual rites of the earlier sects of the cremation ground into a system of erotic mysticism where orgasm itself was seen as a vehicle of illumination or spiritual experience.<sup>31</sup> Thus they exemplified the weltanschauung described by Padoux as definitive. In accordance with microcosm-macrocosm correspondence, sexual union was also seen as a recapitulation on the individual level of the cosmic union (maithuna) of Śiva and Śakti.<sup>32</sup>

The Kaulas aestheticised the ritual, although the true place of performance remained conceptually the pollution-carrying environment of the cemetery or cremation ground and it still contained the basic Kāpālika offerings of alcohol, meat and sex. There were two ritual systems, one of which involved sexual practice and one which did not -- ~~the~~ called the kula prakriyā and the tantra prakriyā respectively -- prescribed in the twenty-ninth chapter of Abhinavagupta's Tantrāloka.<sup>33</sup> In the tantra prakriyā an elaborate ritual is prescribed with the typical Tantric elements, aimed at purifying and divinizing the body, mind and senses and ending with external worship in which meat and alcohol were offerings. The purpose was to show that the adept had transcended distinctions of 'pure' and 'impure'. To this in the Kula prakriyā was added ritual sexual intercourse with a consecrated partner -- the dūtī, yoginī or Śakti.<sup>34</sup> The kula path also had a tendency to transcend and minimalise ritual, concentrating on spontaneity, possession (āveśa) and intuition as immediate means of experiencing the ultimate unity of Consciousness, which was the aim of the practice.<sup>35</sup> In the course of time the basic three offerings were expanded to include five elements: the well-known pañcatattva<sup>36</sup> which were the cause of much of the notoriety of Tantra in

Woodroffe's time. We will see how he dealt with the issue in the next chapter.

The male adept's sexual partner in the ritual represented or was considered to be possessed by, the spirit yoginīs who were part of a Tantric deity's maṇḍala. These consecrated women were considered the male adepts' spiritual superiors and the vehicle for transmitting the tradition (āmnāya), and initiation was passed to an adept through the partner of his Guru. The most important qualification for a yoginī or śakti was that she should be initiated -- whether the wife of the adept or not -- but in the 'respectable' form of Tantra which was acceptable among Woodroffe's middle class acquaintance she was the practitioner's wife. Woodroffe, however, was aware of another tradition that the śakti should be parakiyā -- 'the wife of another'. [SS:610] In this latter case, the distinction is maintained between the ordinary household life with the dharmapatnī, the wife married by orthodox rites, and the partner in the ritual who belongs to the esoteric domain.

The most famous Kaula was of course the great Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (fl.975-1025 CE). By his time secret societies practising the cult were widespread among the social elite and the court in Kashmir, for the sect now had a wider social base than the circles of ascetics and appealed to ordinary householders.<sup>37</sup>

#### 'Kashmir Śaivism'

Abhinavagupta's exegesis and synthesis of various schools of Śākta and Śaiva thought and practice, formed the basis of a metaphysical idealist Tantrism that spread outside Kashmir to other parts of India, especially South India and Bengal. He and his disciples produced commentaries upon the older texts, the anonymous Āgamas and Tantras, in the light of Śaivite non-dual (advaita) philosophies known as spanda ('vibration')<sup>38</sup> and pratyaभिज्ञा (recognition),<sup>39</sup> in which cosmological speculations were intricately connected with yogic practices and tantric rituals.<sup>40</sup> This was 'Kashmir' or 'northern'

Śaivism' although the later texts placed more emphasis on Śakti.

Woodroffe was one of the first European writers to become captivated by Kashmir Śaivism which Flood has described as 'stupendously vast and intricately precise, and also a teaching of salvation...a cosmological soteriology'.<sup>41</sup> Here notions about sexuality are interwoven into a wider complex of cosmological ideas which can be viewed from a number of different perspectives according to which factor is given prominence, but most important among them is mantra. The Goddess is speech, and the cosmos an emanation through both sound and language. Light and its reflection form another complex of symbols. Śiva is radiance (prakāśa) and Śakti His reflection (vimarśa) -- paired concepts which also convey the sense of Consciousness and what it reflects upon: Śakti becomes the cosmos, making the manifest world a reflection of the deity and at the same time the product of his thought.<sup>42</sup>

#### 'The Doctrine of Śakti'- Śaktivāda

This doctrine of divine polarity was set over against the advaita doctrine of Śankarāchārya, in which the sole ontological reality and transcendence of Brahman is not compromised by his having anything to do with either creating or manifesting a cosmos. This 'work', according to Śankara's teaching, is not really an act at all, for the existence of the manifest world is the result of illusion, or primal ignorance (avidyā). The cause of this illusion -- māyā -- has an undefined ontological status, described as: 'of the nature of neither IS nor IS NOT'. Neither is Māyā conscious, or personified - 'it' does not partake of the sat-cit-ānanda that is Brahman. Śakti however in the Tantras while pervading and becoming the manifest cosmos also shares in the ontological status and pure consciousness of Śiva -- 'She' is cit or caitanya, 'essentially Divine and Spiritual'.<sup>43</sup>

Saivite non-dualism thus differed fundamentally from Śankara's advaita vedānta. In place of the inactive Brahman, was placed Śiva as Supreme Lord and Free Agent (svatantra

kartā), who through His Absolute Freedom (svātantryā) causes himself to appear as the universe. Śakti is identified with His five powers or aspects: consciousness (cit) and bliss (ānanda) are also attributes of Brahman, but Śiva in the Āgamas and Tantras has three more: will (icchā), knowledge (jñāna) and action (kriyā). The first two of the five were identified with His supreme state 'before' the manifestation of a cosmos; the last three, through which 'creation' or manifestation occurs, became particularly associated with Śakti. Will, Knowledge and Action are Her three forms [SS:361] -- the famous triple Goddess with whom many other triads in mind or cosmos were homologised.<sup>44</sup>

### Tattva

Śiva is the divine Subject, the supreme 'I' (aḥamta) from which all human sense of identity (aḥamkāra) emanates,<sup>45</sup> and Śakti is his self-reflection (vimarśa). The cosmos is the object of Śiva's knowledge (which is also self-knowledge), in increasing degrees of objectification -- ie of separateness from Himself -- in each successive stage of its evolution or unfolding. These stages are the cosmic planes called tattva, a word which literally means 'that-ness' and denotes a reality, a fundamental phase of manifestation, a 'real state'.<sup>46</sup> Within the individual they are states of consciousness, and parts of the body and mind, for the evolution of the cosmos is both an outer and an inner event, or both a material and a mental or psychical one.<sup>47</sup> There were twenty-four tattvas in the ancient Sāṃkhya system of cosmology, but to this essentially atheist system the Śaivite and Śākta Tantras added twelve more representing the divine Śiva-consciousness gradually evolving or transforming itself into the dualistic perception of an outer cosmos. These thirty-six tattvas form an ascending and descending series of planes leading from 'earth' or the material world perceived by outward-directed sense perception, through the subtle origins of these perceptions in consciousness to the ultimate source of the manifest cosmos in the 'pure', ie. non-dual consciousness of Śiva or the Godhead. The higher or purer tattvas are inhabited by different kinds <sup>of</sup> beings who exist in

the state of consciousness to which the tattva or level corresponds. The Yoga practitioner's ascent through them is a return journey towards Śiva-Consciousness.<sup>48</sup>

### Ābhāsavāda

Thus Kashmir Śaivism retains an impersonal non-dual metaphysics while leaving room for a more personal divinity. Śiva is closer to a deity in the theistic sense than Brahman: He projects the universe as an act of His divine Will, although it is also a reflection of Himself. The universe is not a creation out of nothing, but an emanation, a projection out of its latent state within the Śiva-Consciousness. Padoux describes this 'realist idealism', where the cosmos

... is emitted as a throbbing, radiating light as a shining forth or a luminous projection, which is then reflected on ever lower levels, where gradually losing its initial power and radiance, it will gradually reveal all the cosmic levels down to the lowest one. But while in the course of the process the manifestation condenses... progressively losing its initial freedom and light, it does not... cease to share in the effulgence, the consciousness and life of the primary principle... The light is just obscured, never does it cease to be present, for otherwise the world would be inert (jada).<sup>49</sup>

This is the doctrine of ābhāsa which means 'shining forth'.<sup>50</sup> The word in Śankara's metaphysics implied an illusory reflection, but here it is used to express the universe as a theophany.

It was metaphysical Tantra, not the erotic rites, which Arthur Avalon emphasised. In Woodroffe's first public lecture on 'Creation' (above chapter 2 p.71) he attempted to grapple with this Śaivite and Śākta doctrine of 'creation' or cosmic emanation, which made use of Śakti as a principle uniting the Absolute with the material world. He presented what he called Śaktivāda as a reconciling third position transcending the opposition between the uncompromising monism of Śankarāchārya, and the dualism of the Sāṃkhya philosophy which placed 'spirit' (Puruṣa) and 'world' (Prakṛti) in separate categories.<sup>51</sup> The theme became one of great

importance to him and he devoted many pages of his books and lectures to it.<sup>52</sup>

Śaktivāda was thus presented as a form of non-dualism, or advaita -- which gave it prestige for those influenced by neo-Vedānta -- but one that did not teach that the world is illusion. It allowed for the reality of the senses since the world derives reality from Śiva whose experience it is, 'and Śiva's experience is not unreal' [SS:362]. Therefore it withstood criticisms aimed by Westerners at Śankara's doctrine of 'illusionism', which Woodroffe called Māyāvāda. The doctrine of Śakti was not world-denying or ascetic -- therefore it was not 'weakening' but had 'a strengthening pragmatic value' [SS:364] Vivekānanda had called for such virtues in his modernised interpretation of Vedānta. There was another advantage which perhaps was more interesting to Woodroffe personally: the concept of Śakti could be presented as a kind of principle of Consciousness or Life-force pervading matter -- expressed in Sanskrit philosophical terms by saying that matter is not jada - not inert. Hence the doctrine could be presented in terms of contemporary Western philosophies of science which attempted to unite the categories of matter and spirit (see below p.272) As Woodroffe summed it up: 'The Natural and the Spiritual are one.' [SS:408] To him, this is what 'the doctrine of Śakti' primarily meant.

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'The Garland of Letters': the Cosmos as Mantra

We have seen that Ernest Payne could not take seriously the assertion that the gruesome iconography of Kali could be genuinely symbolic of abstract principles. The passage he quoted was from a short essay entitled 'The Necklace of Kali' which was included in Woodroffe's Garland of Letters as well as Śakti and Śākta. Here he explains that the Goddess's necklace of skulls represented the varṇas or bījas, the 'letters' or cosmogonic syllables of the Sanskrit 'alphabet'. This transformation of her symbolism in Śaivite and Śākta metaphysics was what primarily interested Woodroffe. Garland of Letters (GOL) opens in its first chapters with the

doctrine of the Word or Vāc in the Vedas and Tantras, leading to an explanation of bīja as what Woodroffe calls 'natural name' -- or rather 'approximate natural name', the nearest that the human ear can perceive to the divine creative 'Word' (śabda) which gives rise to the cosmos.[GOL:70ff] The bījas are formed from the letters combined with the nasal anusvāra and recited as monosyllabic mantras: the entire alphabet being recited this way mentally 'unwinds' the cosmos into manifestation, and if recited in reverse 'rewinds' it again into dissolution in Śiva-Consciousness which is its source. This is because the bījas express the tattvas, and hence the elements of mind, body and cosmos.<sup>53</sup> Combinations of them also express deities. A chapter entitled 'Bīja-Mantra' describes how strings of these syllables make up the specific mantras which represent the divinities.[GOL:257ff]

Chapters 10-21 of GOL represent the Studies in the Mantra Śāstra, which describe this mantra-cosmogony. Here we meet also with the world of Śrī Vidyā, a sect of Kaulas whose worship is focused upon the triple Goddess Tripurasundari (also called Lalitā) residing in her maṇḍala called the Śrī Yantra, at the heart of which is the inverted triangle called kāma-kalā. Śakti in her three forms, the letters or varṇas in three groups, reside along its three sides, expressing the fact that this triangle is the 'root of all mantras'. [GOL:184]

Consciousness, sound, light and erotic symbolism are intricately combined in this complex imagery. The word kāma -- desire, which Woodroffe usually translates, not incorrectly, as 'will' -- is not intended to lose its erotic connotation. Kalā means both 'part' and 'manifestation'. The Goddess is the supreme Kalā, the manifestation of the unseen Śiva, and as the cosmos emanates she diffuses herself as sixteen lesser kalās who are her aspects and subordinate divinities residing in her maṇḍala.<sup>54</sup> Within the kāmakaḷā triangle is the dot, bindu, from which the cosmos emanates. Bindu has many referents. It is born from the sexual union (maithuna) of the God and Goddess: the inverted triangle is

the symbol of the yonī, the bindu a drop of the semen of Śiva. But bindu is also the single point which is the condensation of Śiva-consciousness about to expand into the world of multiplicity.[GOL:130] Bindu is the anusvāra, the nasalization of the single-syllable bīja mantras, and it emerges out of its resonance which is nāda, 'the first resonance of the Supreme Word'.<sup>55</sup> It is the vibration (spanda) which is the first and last movement of the cosmos. It is everlasting and imperceptible sound, called anāhata ('unstruck') and only to be heard by yogis in trance, but it is approached through the resonance which follows upon the pronunciation of a bīja mantra, and of the pranava ('OM').<sup>56</sup> In yoga, which reverses the process of creation or emanation, the sound of the mantra is gradually reabsorbed back into the initial energy of vibration, which in turn is absorbed back into the silence of supreme consciousness.<sup>57</sup> The three points of the inverted triangle of kāmakalā thus represent bindu and bīja, the sound and the mantra, with nāda the resonance between them.<sup>58</sup> Nāda is also the 'union and mutual relation' of Śiva and Śakti (that is, their 'sexual' relation).<sup>59</sup>

Sound in this synaesthetic world of Tantra, is also light and consciousness. Bindu is also a drop of light<sup>60</sup> which is reflected in ever widening circles as the central triangle of the śrī yantra unfolds into the maṇḍala which is the body of the cosmos. The whole universe is contained in potential within the kāma-kalā, expressed by the letters in three groups, along with other trinities around its sides.<sup>61</sup> Just as the bindu expands into the triangle, so the triangle transforms itself into the maṇḍala. It is like a great source of light and sound which is radiated outwards in echoes and circling reflections. The śrī yantra is composed of forty-one triangles arranged in four concentric circles around the central one. These are surrounded in turn by two circles of eight and sixteen lotus petals. Beyond these are three circles of plain lines and the whole is enclosed in a yellow square with four entrances representing the earth-plane, or the fully manifest cosmos.<sup>62</sup> The circuits of the



maṇḍala including the central point, the bindu, are nine, and together they make up the nine stations of the Goddess. These correspond to groups of the thirty-six evolving tattvas. They are also lokas, worlds or cosmic planes inhabited by the kalās who are lesser śaktis making up the retinue of the Goddess in her maṇḍala.<sup>63</sup> The tattvas and the divine worlds they represent are correlated to four stages of speech; from the transcendent or ineffable, through two levels of subtle or mental speech to audible language.<sup>64</sup>

The unity of the world in Consciousness, its source and end, is the dominant theme of GOL as of all the Avalon/Woodroffe books. The author's interest is not only metaphysical but also experiential, as frequent references to sādhana imply. To 'realise' a Mantra is to pierce to the subtle 'Light' form of the Divinity whose Sound-form it is. The aim, as of all Tantric practice, is to pass from the 'gross' (material, here audible) world to the subtle forms behind it, and thence to the Supreme Speech (Śabda Brahman) whose 'meaning' is the whole cosmos.<sup>65</sup>

#### Tantric Yoga and Kuṇḍalinī, the 'Serpent Power'

The body in Tantra is itself a maṇḍala,<sup>66</sup> and the outer circuits of the śrī yantra correspond to the six bodily centres, the cakras, while the kāmakalā is situated in the seventh cakra at the crown of the head, which is thus the centre of the cosmic maṇḍala. [SP:128] In Tantra there is an intricate connection between cosmology and yoga because the human mind and body is seen as a reflection of the cosmos. Mantra plays an important role in Kuṇḍalinī yoga which is understood as a recapitulation within the individual sādhaka of the evolution and dissolution of the cosmos, but especially the latter. Hence it is also called laya yoga.<sup>67</sup> It is a return to the source, from human to divine Consciousness, by an ascent through the cosmic levels or tattva. These are present in the human body in the six cakras - 'circles', 'centres', 'regions'; [SP:114] or 'wheels'<sup>68</sup>. Also known in the SCN as padma - 'lotus' - they

are conceived there as flowers with bīja mantras on their petals.<sup>69</sup> The cakras and the nādis ('arteries') which branch out from them are 'subtle organs' of a system of yogic anatomy, imperceptible to ordinary senses, but 'real' to yoga experience. The 'mystical physiology' of which they are a part concerns the divinization or cosmicization of the body.<sup>70</sup> As Flood points out the concept of the evolution of the tattvas in Kashmir Śaivism implies that the cosmos itself is perceived as a kind of collective body, or a hierarchical series of such bodies, all reflections in greater or lesser degree of Śiva: or rather 'grosser' or more 'subtle' condensations of the Consciousness of Śiva; these collective bodies are also therefore worlds (loka), to which the cakras correspond, each ruled over by a divinity. Consciousness being seen as primary, the body itself is an expression and product of Consciousness, not the other way around as is the predominant conception in contemporary Western culture.<sup>71</sup>

The cakras are visualized as lying within the spinal cord. The system of six described by the SCN placed them<sup>as follows</sup> at the base of the spine (mūlādhāra), just above the penis (svādhīsthāna), at the navel (manipūra), in the heart (anāhata), in the throat (viśudha) and between the eyebrows (ājñā). [SP:141] The body besides being a mandala is also a great Mantra, and is produced by mantras. [SP:166]. The phonemes or bījas are visualized as being distributed among the cakras thus 'spelling out' the body, mind and senses as a manifestation of Śakti, just as the cosmos is. They thus give rise to: first -- in the ājñā cakra -- the three levels of the mind (the antaḥkaraṇa : buddhi, ahaṁkāra and manas), then in the other five bodily cakras, the faculties and organs of sense perception (the indriyas), with the five subtle elements which are their fields of operation (the tanmātras)<sup>72</sup> and the five 'gross', ie material, elements (the bhūtas) which correspond to the latter: ether, air, fire, water and earth.<sup>73</sup> Only with these last, the elements, does the system concern itself with the material world. As Avalon points out, the order of 'creation' or evolution (śoṣṭi) is from subtle to gross, from the imperceptible to

the perceptible; consciousness appears first, then matter. The order of Kundalinī yoga, which is a process of involution, is the reverse, the gross is dissolved into the subtle and that into the still more subtle.[SP:82] Many other parts of the body, or aspects of the mind and cosmos -- a multitude of referents, physical, mental and spiritual are loaded into this system.<sup>74</sup> As well as unifying various different symbolic schemes, this is a way of placing the entire cosmos within the body through visualization.

The cakras are seats of the conscious energy called Kundalinī, who is the divine Śakti dwelling in the individual mind and body. She is called 'the coiled one' (kundāla) [SP:1-2] <sup>75</sup> The concept descended from a very ancient idea present in the Vedas, of Ahīrbudhnya, the cosmic serpent encircling the universe, guardian of treasures of immortality. She is a reservoir of immense power. Unawakened, her 'poison' is what binds man in samsāra; awakened by Yoga, she unwinds herself and her 'poison' becomes nectar, the source of liberating knowledge, power and conquest over death.<sup>76</sup> She is fire <sup>77</sup>, sexuality [SP:224] <sup>78</sup>, supreme Consciousness [SP:245-6] but, above all, Speech and Breath. Her body is composed of letters -- the bījas and mantras [SP:165-6, 226];<sup>79</sup> and she is prāṇa, the breath of life, in its five-fold division. [SP:73-4, 77]

In normal outwardly directed waking consciousness, Kundalinī is 'asleep' in the lowest of the cakras, the mūlādhāra, where she lies coiled around the entrance to the central yogic 'canal', the sūṣumnā. Her sleep is the 'bondage of the ignorant'. [SP:245] The sūṣumnā is the centremost of the three principal nādis of the yogic anatomy and is conceived to rise within the spinal cord: this is identified with Mount Meru, and is the cosmic axis.<sup>80</sup> On either side of sūṣumnā lie two other nādis, idā and piṅgalā, the channels of the in-breath and out-breath. [SP:110-1]<sup>81</sup> Kundalinī is awakened by a combination of mental and physical practices: primarily by prāṇāyāma combined with certain postures, by mantras and visualization.<sup>82</sup> By these means the vital breath, prāṇa

which is identical with Kuṇḍalinī, ceases its in-flow and out-flow which sustains normal consciousness and is forced into the central channel, suṣumnā, and drawn upwards through the body.<sup>83</sup> At the summit of suṣumnā - at the crown of the head, which means also, at the summit of the world-axis - is the seventh and highest cakra, which is not of the body: sahasrāra, the lotus of a thousand petals.[SP:143-4]<sup>84</sup> This is the abode of Śiva, it is the goal of Kuṇḍalinī's ascent through the body, and the place of Śiva's love-union (maithuna) with Śakti. This is also a kind of inner sexual union for the Yogi.[SP:238-240] Here one has entered the higher tattvas, the planes of divine, pure (śuddha) or non-dualist Consciousness both beyond and prior to the cosmos. Kuṇḍalinī's ascent is an unwinding or reversing of the process of cosmic evolution; her descent again is its re-creation.[SP:241]

As she ascends Kuṇḍalinī 'pierces' each of the six cakras on her way, activating and then dissolving them into herself.[SP:237-8]. At each she brings certain supernormal powers (siddhi) and various kinds of bliss.[SP:293] Final Liberation is attained at the sahasrāra but this is only one goal of the practice -- and perhaps not the main one. Another kind of Liberation or mukti, implying agelessness and power to die at will is achieved by those who can keep kuṇḍalinī at the supreme cakra permanently. This is one meaning of the frequent claim that tantric practice brings both yoga - in the sense of renunciation and self-control - and bhoga - enjoyment or success in this life as well as beyond it. This Avalon recognises as an important part of the goal for most practitioners, for he points out that if Liberation alone is sought other and simpler forms of yoga achieve this aim.[SP:288, 293-5]

Avalon himself interprets the claims about yoga and bhoga being reconciled in terms of general values of world-affirmation, and the non-separation of the categories of 'spirit' and 'matter' -- one of Woodroffe's favourite themes.[SP:290-293] This sidesteps the issue of acquiring

powers, or siddhi. It is clear that the author of the introductory chapters to SP has an ambiguous relationship to the subject matter. Although he stresses the 'spiritual' aim of this yoga as opposed to acquiring occult powers, or the practice of sexual magic,<sup>85</sup> he does not always sound convinced. Asserting the 'scientific' purpose of his work he insists this is value-free -- he is not advocating the practice of kundalinī yoga. [SP:22] He states that he has not practised it himself and can give no directions for doing so. [SP:24]<sup>86</sup> It seems that over time Woodroffe's doubts grew stronger. By 1927 in a foreword to another writer's book on Kundalinī, he wrote: 'What may be its value is...a matter upon which I am not so sure as I once was'. While other forms of yoga were 'of certain worth' to him, he confessed that the value of Kundalinī yoga from what he called the spiritual aspect 'is not now so clear to me'. Furthermore he felt that in his own book he had undervalued some adverse criticism of this form of yoga.<sup>87</sup> This seems to refer to remarks by 'a Brahmo author' which in the first edition of SP were placed in the Introduction, but later transferred to chapter 7, where they have more weight. Despite answering the critic, Arthur Avalon clearly agrees with some points he makes about concentration on the lower centres which are associated with sexuality and the passions. [SP:283-7]

The saṭcakra system of the SCN was the one which had become standard in the later texts, but it was not the only one: there were others with more or fewer centres, the earlier texts seem to mention four. Being based on visualization, the number 'varies according to need', although most texts are agreed on the main centres in the navel, heart, throat and head.<sup>88</sup> The system of six in the locations given in SP seems to have arisen in the Western Kaula tradition of the worship of Kubjika (an early name for Kundalinī, which means 'crooked').<sup>89</sup>

Correlations between the yogic system and Western physiology of the sympathetic nervous system were the subject of speculation among Woodroffe's contemporaries. The cakras were

identified with the various nerve plexuses and the sahasrāra with the upper cerebellum, the ājñā with the pineal gland and so forth, and the nādis (currents or channels of energy) became 'yogic' nerves or arteries. [SP:103-115, 147-158] The chapter on the 'Centres or Lotuses' in SP opens with such an attempt at correlation. Several books on the brain by Western scientists are cited, but the main inspiration for this section was a recently published book by Brajendranath Seal: Positive Sciences of the Hindus <sup>90</sup>. This book included quotations from an article that had appeared in the previous century in Calcutta Review entitled 'The Physical Errors of Hinduism' which ridiculed the notion of the cakras, among many other things.<sup>91</sup> The article, though derogatory, interestingly revealed how much anatomical knowledge there possibly was in the Tantras -- a fact emphasized by Seal, who averred that the Tantras had discovered that consciousness resided in the cerebro-spinal system and the brain.<sup>92</sup>

Passages in Avalon's chapter appear to move indiscriminately between the Western scientific and yogic terminologies suggesting that he accepted the identification between them. However, he eventually expresses caution, even disagreement, emphasising the point that the cakras are to be located in the 'subtle' and not the 'gross', ie. material body.[SP:158-161] He writes: 'to connect or correlate and to identify are different things;' and himself defines the cakras as 'extremely subtle vital centres...'-- the 'subtle forms of that which exists in gross form in the physical body...' which 'vitalize and control the gross bodily tracts...in these respective regions'. [SP:161] By making the cakras invisible to 'gross' (sensual) perception, he nevertheless is able to allow them the 'ontological status' which later Western writers denied them.<sup>93</sup> For Eliade they were 'images expressing transmundane experiences'<sup>94</sup>, but for Arthur Avalon they were more actual than that. He recognizes that certain aspects are possibly symbolic and guards against too much literalism: '...one must be constantly on guard against falling into a possible trap - namely taking the prescribed methods of realization for actualities in the common sense of

that term. The former are conventional, the latter are real'[SP:92]. He thus accepts certain features as symbolic - for example, the numbers of petals to each lotus, and the letters on them -- but he has no doubt that the cakras themselves are in the category of actualities. 'There are...certain facts of objective and universal reality. Thus, for example, there are certain centres (Cakra) in the spinal column.'[SP:95]

It was natural that the incursion of Western science into contemporary consciousness should lead Indian thinkers to attempt to unite the yogic with the scientific anatomy. Avalon's placing of the cakras and nādis of the Kuṇḍalinī system in the realm of the 'subtle' as centres of consciousness, was a form of compromise, moving away from too literal identifications which could leave the Hindu system vulnerable. But recognition that the latter system was symbolic and related to visualizations in sādhana<sup>95</sup> need not obscure the fact that for its practitioners it was also objective. Inaccurate in terms of modern scientific facts, the yogic anatomy was considered 'scientific' in its day. The divinized body which was the goal of sādhana was still the living physical body which the practitioner possessed, which thus united him to every level of the cosmos. The very physical methods used to arouse Kuṇḍalinī -- the postures, the notions of forcing or 'churning' the prāṇa <sup>96</sup> -- shows that what was at issue was a quasi-physical force, which was nevertheless also identical with imperceptible and non-material power.

All the thirty-six tattvas together with all that they contain or represent along with the stages of speech, and many other aspects of the divine and human realms are thus symbolically distributed among the six cakras in the human body plus the seventh at the crown of the head. Outwardly, they are present in the nine circuits of the śrī yantra. Tantra has the appearance of a many-pointed search for origins, a constantly repeated attempt to discover the most subtle point of emergence of the perceptible from the

imperceptible. The growth of the embryo in the womb from the implantation of the male seed ", the growth of individual consciousness out of the universal divine Consciousness, the growth of spoken language out of the unheard (anāhata - 'unstruck') Word, and the evolution of the universe out of the divine creative idea (sr̥ṣṭi kalpana, GOL:197) -- all are homologised in a highly complex interweaving system. English words like 'evolved' and 'growth' need to be qualified, however, because here 'evolution' represents a fall, a separation from Wholeness [GOL:150; SS:31] while involution or dissolution means return to the divine Source: a return which, when permanent, becomes Liberation. The loading of many referents into the symbolic systems of the śrī yantra and the cakras of the human body has a special role in the quest for the non-dual Absolute; it is one way in which the multiplicity of the world of experience can be compacted and dissolved into unity. In the 'gnostic' philosophy of Tantra as well as of other branches of Hinduism, the simple and homogeneous source is always 'higher' than its complicated and evolved manifestation.

This chapter has dealt with 'Tantra' presented by Avalon/Woodroffe as an interconnected whole. The next chapter which relates to particular themes focusses on Śakti and Śākta, which contained Woodroffe's lectures to Vivekananda's followers.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1.1991 ps.392-435

2.Padoux 1981 ps.347, 350

3.The second and subsequent editions interpolate a passage on the derivation of the word 'Tantra' from the root tan, 'to spread'. At first 'Tantra' was used for any kind of treatise; it gradually acquired the meaning of a religious text of a particular kind.

4.The Bengali translator of Tantratattva ("Principles of Tantra") was apparently happy with the term and it is used by Arthur Avalon in his preface to the first volume. In his first public lecture on Tantra Woodroffe himself still used the terms 'Tantric' and 'Tantra' but in the version of that lecture in SS(DP) chapter 19, these have been mostly replaced by 'Śākta' and



'Śākta Tantra' respectively. See SS:379ff. The title of the lecture was originally Creation in the Tantra, retained in the first edition of SS.

5. Prabuddha Bhārata, Vol 22 p.39 (March 1917). Underlining mine. 'Left wing' refers to Vāmācāra. The original article makes comparisons here with other 'antinomian' sects in the West in a passage which in later editions of SS is removed to a special chapter on the pañcatattva.

6. *ibid* p.72 (April 1917) See Waddell, L.A. 1895. This passage has not been changed in SS(DP):62. As is often the case in SS the editing is clumsy and the junction of the two articles makes for repetitiveness.

7. Eliade 1958 p.200

8. Padoux *op cit* p.351

9. Sanderson 1988 p.675

10. Payne *op cit* p.23

11. JRAS, 1935, ps.385-387.

12. Compare Abhinavagupta's description of the 'cosmic cemetery' where the individual ego is 'incinerated': Tantrasāra 29:183-185, translated in Flood 1993 p.274.

13. Sanderson 1985 ps.199ff, see his description of the fearful Kāpālīka ascetic, smeared with ashes and adorned with human bones at p.201.

14. *ibid*. See also Flood 1992

15. 'The general trend...was to purify the rites by taking in everything except the elements of impurity. This left the essential structure [of a Tantric sect] intact: one worshipped the same deity, with the same complex of emanations or subordinate deities, mantras, deity-enthroning diagrams mandalas, and ritual gestures and postures (mudras). The spread of the Tantric cults in Indian religion is largely the history of this process of domestication and exotericisation. [Sanderson 1988 ps.661-2]

16. *ibid* p.668.

17. *ibid* p.700; 1985 p.205 footnote 125

18. *ibid* p.661

19. He quotes it in Sanskrit from the Kulārnavatantra [KT:11:83] but its origin is Jayaratha's Tantrālokavivēka. [Sanderson 1985 p.205.] Woodroffe -- rather timidly? -- acknowledges that this might refer to 'secrecy and adaptability to sectarian form' but

interprets it to mean that outward forms are irrelevant to one who has pierced to the heart of all sects. For Kaulas, see below.

20. Citing KT:2:7,8.

21. The term paśu is one of the three fundamental realities in Śaivism: paśu, the individual soul, pāśa the bonds which limit it, and paśupati, the Lord of the Bound, or Śiva. [Dhavamony, p.119]

22. Sanderson 1988 p.669

23. *ibid* p.661; Goudriaan et al 1979, ps.112-3, and photographs following p.156.

24. Sanderson 1988 ps.670ff

25. ...the Śaiva entered a world of ritual in which these last restraints on Śakti dissolved. He was consecrated in the cults of deities who presided in their mandalas over predominantly female pantheons and who passed as he ascended to the left from Bhairavas with consorts, to Goddesses above Bhairavas, to the terrible Solitary Heroines (ekavīrā) of the cults of Kālī. [*ibid* p.670]

26. *ibid* p.675

27. She represents: 'the ultimate Self which the 'I' cannot enter and survive' [*ibid*, p.675]

28. Flood 1992 ps.55-6

29. Padoux 1990 [henceforth 'Vāc'] p.36. The autochthonous origin of Tantric deities is noted by most writers on Tantra, but this in itself is not an explanation for their retention through time, and their role in the evolving Tantric cult.

30. Sanderson 1988 p.671, 679ff. Kula also referred to the body and from this acquired a philosophical meaning where it was equivalent to the totality of phenomena and thus, more or less, to Śakti. Hence it was eventually seen in a polar relation to akula meaning Śiva. [Goudriaan and Gupta HTSL ps.44-5]

31. *ibid* ps.679-80; 1985 ps.202-3

32. Flood 1993 p.82

33. Flood's chapter on the two ritual systems summarises Abhinavagupta's chapter. *ibid* ps.269ff. So does Silburn 1983 ps.207-239.

34. Flood *op cit* ps.269ff

35. Sanderson 1988 ps.681-2

36.The word tattva means 'element' or 'true thing'. It also has a cosmological meaning.

37.Sanderson 1985 ps.202-3

38.'The innate dynamism of the divine nature', Dyckowski 1989, p.20-1; Sanderson 1988, p.694.

39. ibid p.695: 'Recognition' of one's identity with Śiva. Its core text was pratyabhiññāhṛdaya: 'Concise Verses on the Recognition of the Deity' by Utpaladeva.

40. ibid ps.690ff

41. op cit p.ix

42. Padoux Vāc p.77; Sen Sarma 1990 ps.17-18

43. Sen Sarma 1990 ps.21-2

44. ibid ps.22-24, 32-37. icchā -- will -- includes sāṅkalpa (imagination or conception). jñāna - knowledge -- refers to knowing objects as being in Himself -- ie. nondual knowledge. Kriyā, action, is the act of objectifying, ie manifesting, all that makes up the world as an object outside of Himself. In Śiva this is a deliberate act of will. In Brahman, agency in this sense is only apparent, part of the illusion of māyā. [see SS:361]

45. ibid ps.24, 38. The divine identity is quite different from this human ego-sense for it is characterised by absolute Freedom (svātantryā) beyond the limitations which define the individual soul (jīva). There are five characteristics of the Divine Nature of Śiva which are restricted in the human soul by five corresponding limitations (kañcukās). But these limitations are part of the process of cosmic evolution which is the progressive diminution of divine fullness. [ibid p.38]

46. ibid p.30. See also Sen Sarma 1987.

47. Flood 1993 p.46

48. Avalon/Woodroffe gives accounts of the thirty-six tattvas in many places, for example in SP chapters 2 and 3, and in GOL chapter 10 (ps.93ff). They are described in a detailed and rationalized form in Chatterji (1914). The thirty-six are divided into three groups, the pure (divine), the mixed, and the impure (material or perceptible); the Sāṃkhyan series of twenty-four constitute the latter group, the twelve extra ones added by Kashmir Saivism belong to the first two groups. See also Padoux Vāc.

49. Vāc ps.79-80. Some of the Sanskrit terms placed in parentheses in the passage have been omitted here.

50. Ābhāsavāda : 'objective appearances are fundamentally grounded in consciousness, which causes them to 'shine forth'...' [ibid p.92 footnote 17].

51. These are loose translations of the terms. For Sāṃkhya see G.J. Larson 1969

52. SS(DP):379-408. He also discusses it in chapter 17 (ps.348-364, and chapter 18 ps.365-378 and throughout his books.

53. Padoux Vāc p.84: 'Each phoneme is related to an aspect either of Śiva's energy (the first 16 tattvas) or of the cosmic manifestation (the remaining 20)'. (Padoux also shows how erotic experience is correlated with the varṇas or letters. See ps.267-8, 277-282)

54. GOL:175ff, 205ff; Padoux Vāc ps.89-91. The number sixteen is related to the divinities of the phases of the moon, the nityās.

55. Padoux Vāc p.97

56. Ibid p.106, and his footnote 56. Nāda is the ardha-candra, the crescent, below the dot in that syllable. [GOL:121]

57. Vāc ps.78-9, 94.

58. ibid ps.96-119. GOL:114-142 (on nāda and bindu) and ps.175-184 (on kāmakalā).

59. GOL 114. Bindu is also the white drop, the semen, and bīja the red drop, menstrual blood: see KKV, verse 6 (Rawson's translation), in Rawson 1971, ps.127-8. Avalon denies this association angrily at GOL:129, but accepts it at SP:46. (Padoux p.108 footnote 65 has bindu as menstrual blood and nāda as semen)

60. Padoux Vāc ps.113-4

61. GOL:175ff. The triple Goddess is will, knowledge, action: fire, sun, moon etc.

62. It is reproduced on the covers of all Avalon's books published by Ganesa.

63. GOL ps.205-213 is a chapter on the kalās. GOL does not deal with the full Śrī Yantra but it is described in Avalon's introduction to the Tantrarājatāntra, and in SP. Kāmakalāvilāsa (TT/10) is an extremely succinct text describing this cosmic symbol in 55 verses. 'In this brief, often cryptic but widely respected Tantra the whole mechanism of yantra, mantra, Devata and the meaning of Sādhana are summarized' (Rawson 1971 p.128)

64. Parā, paśyanti and madhyamā, and vaikharī respectively. See GOL:32 where they have become four śaktis of śabda (Speech).

## Notes to Chapter 7

65.GOL:154, 220. Śabda - 'Speech' is related to artha the object denoted by it, which here are identical, thus uniting the opposites of perceiver and perceived.

66.Eliade 1958 p.244

67.See SP:48 'The Worlds are dissolved (Laya) from time to time for all beings. The perfected Yogi dissolves the Universe for all time for himself. Yoga is thus Lāya.'

68.Silburn 1983 p.41ff. The wheels are set turning by the ascending prāṇa through the sūṣumnā. Silburn's sources are the Kashmir Śaivite texts and especially Abhinavagupta, where the system is slightly different from the SCN.

69.See plates I-VII from SP:317ff

70.Eliade op cit ps.233-236. Padoux Vāc ps.124-5

71.Flood op cit ps.xiv; 1-6

72.Woodroffe calls them cumbrously 'generals of the sense particulars'. They are: sound, touch, form and colour, taste and smell. See SP:125

73.See table at SP:141-2. For these 'lower' or 'impure' levels of creation - which correspond to the twenty-four tattvas of Sāṃkhya philosophy - see Larson G.J.1969

74.See SP:114-127 and the table at SP:141-2.

75.SP:35 explains more about why she is coiled.

76.Silburn op cit ps.29-30

77.Eliade op cit p.246 says intense heat is evoked on her awakening. The original title of SP was to have been 'The Six Cakras and the Serpent Fire'.

78.See Eliade op cit ps.248-9 for the relation of breath to semen.

79.Śāradātilaka:1:13 is cited several times: 'It assumes the form of Kundali and abides in the body of all breathing creatures manifesting itself by letters in the form of prose and verse'. [see SP:100 and footnote 5]

80.SP:174. For the cosmic dimension see Eliade op cit p.235.

81.They are correlated with the three rivers Ganges, Jamna and Saraswati.

82.See the chapter on 'Practice' in SP, esp ps 203-215, the various āsanas, mudrās and bandhanas as well as prāṇāyāma, and see the illustrations of the bandhas in the appendix'.

## Notes to Chapter 7

83.Eliade op cit p.245. Prāṇa is drawn upwards through the sūṣumnā like a needle draws a thread.

84.See Eliade op cit p.243. In other texts the highest cakra is either at the crown of the head or at a place twelve finger lengths (dvādaśāṅta) beyond it. Silburn op cit ps.47-8.

85.SP:13 and ftnt 1; and p.19.

86.And see SS:679.

87.Vasant G Rele 1927 Foreword.

88.Flood op cit p.258; Padoux Vāc ps.144-5 and footnote 168. A slightly different system is given in the Śāradātilaka [TT/16 & 17] which has only four cakras correlated with the four levels of speech, [Padoux p.142] The texts cited by Liliane Silburn had five (excluding the svādhīsthāna). There were other schemes that had 9, 12 or even 16 cakras. At SP:152 Avalon notes one with over twenty.

89.Dzykowski 1989.

90.London 1915. (First published as an appendix in B.S. Sarkar: Positive Background of Hindu Sociology, from where Avalon took his notes. (see footnotes to SP:104, 113). Another example of contemporary interest in this topic is Vasant G. Rele's book to which Woodroffe wrote the Foreword mentioned above.

91.Vol XI (1849), No.XXII ps.436-440.

92.See Brajendranath Seal 1915 ps.218-9.

93.Flood op cit p.259 citing Bharati 1976 p.94

94.Eliade op cit p.239

95.Flood op cit p.257

96.Silburn refers to manthana which she translates barattement des souffles op cit p.60.

97.This is described in the PST. See introduction to TT/19

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### 'ŚAKTIVĀDA':

#### Woodroffe on Śākta Tantra

Vivekananda's 'Practical Vedanta' lies in the background of Avalon/Woodroffe's modernized Tantra. Woodroffe was President for a time of Calcutta's Vivekananda Society and between 1917-18 he delivered lectures to them which formed the bulk of his first edition of Śakti and Śākta.<sup>1</sup> Like Vivekananda, his philosophical position was that of advaita, non-dualism or monism interpreted in a positive form that did not treat the world as illusion. Like the Swami, too, he believed that advaita expressed one underlying unity of all religions. The path of the Tantras is presented as one means towards the realization of advaita as the experience in the individual of union with divine non-dual Consciousness in the trance state of samādhi. But Woodroffe's concern with metaphysical questions is also directed towards affirmation of 'this world', of sense experience, of matter seen as permeated by Śakti.

Vivekananda had roundly condemned Tantra or 'Vāmāchār' in his lecture at the Star Theatre on his return in triumph from the West, as well as on other occasions.<sup>2</sup> The challenge which Avalon/Woodroffe faced was to integrate the Tantric strand into modernized Hinduism which was influenced by the Protestant-Rationalist rejection of 'idolatry' and by sexual puritanism. The emphasis of neo-Hinduism is on 'spiritual experience',<sup>3</sup> and this is where he placed his own emphasis.

I shall present the first part of this chapter under headings related to themes from lectures in Śakti and Śākta, most of which relate to its apologetic purpose. The final section deals with Woodroffe's use of Western science.

#### Doctrine or Practice?

While contradicting the notion of 'Tantra' as a fringe sect indulging in orgiastic rituals, Avalon insisted on its

position in the mainstream of Hindu life and thought through the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. In a lecture in the series delivered to the Vivekananda Society ['Tantra Śāstra and Veda', SS:70-115], Woodroffe claimed that he had 'never properly understood the Vedānta' until he had studied the Tantras and their ritual.[SS:80] The purpose of the ritual was 'to gain realization' which he called aparokṣajñāna (knowledge of the unseen). In another shorter address to the society [SS:457-462] he said that Sādhana brought 'knowledge to gain liberation', and distinguished this from intellectual or book knowledge: it was 'actual immediate experience' (sākṣātkāra).[SS:458] He called it 'spiritual experience' which one can only acquire by 'adopting some definite means'.[SS:461-2]

This spiritual experience was 'Brahman-knowledge' -- the truth, by actual experience, of the great Upanisadic sayings: 'Thou art That', 'I am Brahman'. [SS:81] Thus the Śākta Tantra was 'the Sādhana Śāstra of Advaitavāda'. [SS:80] This was its true aim, not the acquiring of occult powers (siddhi) which could be an obstacle.[SS:79-80] Thus the Tantric goal was the same as that of general neo-Hinduism, with the emphasis on spiritual experience rather than on mokṣa, liberation, as such.<sup>4</sup>

Woodroffe frequently repeated the formula: 'Tantraśāstra is a sādhanā śāstra', and moreover the 'chief Sādhana-śāstra for the orthodox Hindu'[SS:80] -- the Vedic rites having mostly passed away.[SS:458] The term sādhana covers yoga, meditation and ritual, and its aim is transformation of the practitioner. Woodroffe quoted his friend P.N. Mukhopādhyāy, who proclaimed that Tantra offered a practical system that 'not merely argues but experiments.' [SS:66, 461] He also cited 'a Tibetan Buddhist' (in fact Dawasamdub) who claimed that the Tantras were regarded more as scientific discovery than as revelation.[SS:460-1] He liked to reiterate that the test of truth is experiential:



The authority of a Śāstra is determined by the question whether siddhi is gained through its provisions or not...The test is that of Ayurveda. A medicine is a true one if it cures. The Indian test for everything is actual experience. It is from Samādhi that the ultimate proof of Advaitavāda is sought. [SS:142. Emphasis in original]

Avalon/Woodroffe makes this point so frequently and emphatically that it may have influenced later scholars to restrict definitions of Tantra to its ritual or sādhana and to deny the significance of distinct doctrines. Thus Alper (1991) who has just pointed out that the influence of Woodroffe on later generations is possibly more widespread than realized, himself then states: 'What defines Tantra is practice (sādhana) rather than thought'.<sup>5</sup> Agehananda Bharati who defined Tantra as 'psycho-experimental speculation' denied that there was any Tantric philosophy 'apart from Hindu or Buddhist philosophy, or to be more specific, from Vedāntic or Māhāyāna Buddhism'.<sup>6</sup> But, as Padoux has pointed out, 'there is no religious or 'magic' practice that does not reflect an ideology.'<sup>7</sup> Without the specific doctrines that underlie them, there would be no point in the use of mantras and other elements of Tantric ritual.

Woodroffe on the other hand devoted many pages of this and other lectures to the Vivekananda Society to the doctrinal conformity of Tantra with the rest of Hinduism, by which he meant primarily that it affirmed advaita, but also that it shared many other essential beliefs.[SS:89-92] But there are also suggestions of doctrines that he found specifically in the Tantras: the 'subtle philosophy' that a friend had written about which he thought applied to 'some doctrinal teaching, presentments, methods...' which were an exception to his statement that nothing entirely new was to be found in the Tantras [SS:81]; the 'philosophical and religious aspect' which he found personally important [SS:79]; the 'essential concepts' which Louis de la Vallée Poussin was praised for finding to be 'of a metaphysical and subtle character'[SS:77]; and his discovery that: 'the Tantras contained a remarkable philosophic presentment of religious teaching, profoundly applied in a ritual of psychological

worth'[ibid] -- which suggests that he would not have disagreed with Padoux's point about ritual and doctrine being closely intertwined.

### Tantra and Veda

Even so, Woodroffe devotes a large part of this lecture to assuring his listeners and readers that doctrinally the Tantras were in accord with 'Veda'. He cited numerous references from the Tantras to show that these texts claimed to be based on 'Veda'[SS:84-~~5~~] and that they regarded themselves as the expression of Vedic truth that was suitable for the Kali Yuga [SS:90]

While appearing to relate to history, the question of whether the Tantras stood in the Vedic tradition really concerned questions of authority, authenticity, and morality. Through the process of 'exotericization' described by Sanderson, deities and scriptures which were once classed as 'Tantric' became 'Vaidik', in the sense that their followers conformed to varnāśramadharmā and avoided practices considered impure. Just as the terms 'Tantra' and 'Tantric' are rather ambiguous in scope, so 'Veda' and 'Vedic' do not necessarily refer strictly to the contents of texts. For Woodroffe's listeners and readers in India, the word vaidik was synonymous with orthodoxy in doctrine and practice and social respectability. To insist that the Tantras were opposed to the Vedas was to declare them heterodox. Sentinath's Iyer's letter discussed in chapter 9/<sup>below</sup> shows how one member of the public protested over an implication that the twenty-eight major Śaivāgamas were non-vedic.

Woodroffe brings out in his lecture that by 'Vedic' was meant first and foremost conformity with advaita vedānta, with Upanishadic monism. (See SS:85-88 in which he declares -- p.87 -- 'Advaitavedānta is the whole day and life of the Śākta Sādhaka') He interprets 'Veda' in the abstract sense of knowledge or 'ultimately Spiritual Experience'. [ibid, p.81]. Conformity with advaita vedānta seems in itself to provide reassurance to his readers that Tantric practice is

not immoral, as when he defends the pañcatattva by declaring that it is a practical application of advaitavāda [SS:99-100]

Another line of 'defence' against the 'charges' [SS:99] of heterodoxy or immorality (the two being equated) was to draw parallels between Tantric rituals and Vedic ones, pointing out that animal sacrifice, consumption of alcohol, and even maithuna can be found in the Vedas and Brāhmanas. [See Brajalal Mukherji's appendix SS:103ff].

Questions over the actual historical origins of the Tantra Śāstra and of Śāktism are brushed aside in this lecture. [SS:70] Woodroffe himself seems personally to have accepted the theory favoured by most Western orientalists that these were 'non-Aryan'; but he was perhaps aware that this would not be welcome to some of his Indian readers or teachers, especially to Tantric 'insiders'. In another lecture belonging to the same period we shall see how he tackled this issue (see below).

#### Tantra and Śāktism

When Avalon did use the word 'Tantra' in his writings he usually qualified it by writing of 'the Śākta Tantra'. He did this not in order to associate the two terms but rather the reverse (above p.212) We have seen in chapter 1 how for most orientalists previous to Arthur Avalon the identification of Śāktism and Tantra had increased the notoriety of both. His contemporaries also equated the two. In 1920, J.N. Farquhar surveyed the Tantric texts under the heading of 'literature of the Śāktas';<sup>8</sup> so did Maurice Winternitz in his history of Sanskrit Literature;<sup>9</sup> and Haraprasad Śāstri wrote: 'The term 'Tantra' is very loosely used...But it really means the worship of Śakti or female energy'.<sup>10</sup> After Avalon, scholars were more inclined to distinguish Tantrism from Śāktism in the sense of worship of feminine deity as supreme Godhead. Among the first to do so was Von Glasenapp (1936). In practice however the Tantra which Woodroffe encountered in Bengal was also Śāktism.

The most famous example of a Śākta devotee is of course Ramakrishna, the saintly bhakta of Kālī. Kālī is very much a Tantric divinity, being the most important of the ferocious forms of the Goddess. Her gruesome iconography did not prevent her from being also perceived as a benevolent mother and saviouress. Ramakrishna is sometimes regarded as a Tantric as well as a Śākta saint because of his devotion to Kālī and because he learned Tantric sādhana for a time from a female Guru, his bhairavī. There is evidence, however, that this Tantric experiment proved distasteful to the young Ramakrishna leading to his strong condemnation of Tantra later on.<sup>11</sup> Ramakrishna declared that his exploration of Tantra was motivated by the same quest which led him into exploring other forms of "sādhana" including versions of Christian and Islamic devotion. His purpose was to prove the equal validity of all paths to the goal of samādhī. This is more of a neo-Vedāntic attitude rather than a traditional Śākta or Tantric one.

Another famous example of a Śākta saint, whose memory was very much alive at Woodroffe's time, is the eighteenth-century poet Rāmprasād Sen. He is regarded as a Tantric, although he placed devotion above ritual as the highest means to approach the deity.<sup>12</sup> For an example of someone who was both a Śākta devotee and also a Tantric ritualist, we can turn to Sivacandra Vidyārṇava himself. Sivacandra displays himself in his Tantratattva with all the characteristics of a fervent bhakta saint in the mould of Ramakrishna, and this is also how he is portrayed in his biography by Pal. But Sivacandra was also very particular as to the importance of ritual and he was known for his performance of elaborate Tantric forms of puja. He also practised sādhana in cremation grounds.

As for Woodroffe himself, he was attracted by the idea of the feminine aspect of God: '...a beautiful and tender concept of the Śāktas is the Motherhood of God' [SS:170] and he shows how the Goddess's more fearsome aspect can be integrated with this idea:

The Divine Mother first appears in and as Her worshipper's earthly mother, then as his wife; thirdly as Kālikā, She reveals Herself in old age, disease and death...Lastly She takes to herself the dead body in the fierce tongues of flame which light the funeral pyre. [SS:171]

According to the Ghose family, Woodroffe displayed a deep personal devotion to The Mother: they said he would not even wear sandals which had writing on them, because that required treading upon letters, her symbols. However, such emotions do not come over in his writings where his interest seems purely intellectual and philosophical. Socially, too, he considered the worship of the feminine aspect of divinity valuable for promoting progressive attitudes to women, and credited the Śāktas with being opposed to the rite of *sati*, on the evidence of passages from the MNT. He brought out these social implications:

A high worship therefore which can be offered to the Mother today consists in getting rid of abuses which have neither the authority of ancient Śāstra, nor of modern social science and to honour, cherish, educate and advance women (Śakti) [ibid:172]

'Striyo devāḥ striyaḥ prānāḥ' he quoted - the same quotation as in his strongly worded speech to the Mahākālī Pathśāla (above chapter 5 p.154). Yet here he proceeds in the following pages to declaim against an association of Śākta philosophy with what he calls 'sociology which is concerned with gross matter'; and he eventually manoeuvres himself into making a sweeping statement that: 'The doctrine of Śakti has no more to do with "Feminism" than it has to do with "old age pensions" or any other sociological movement of the day.' [SS:174] The reason however is that he has been stung by criticism from a reviewer -- the 'American Orientalist critic' who had called Tantric philosophy 'religious feminism run mad' [SS:173].<sup>13</sup> Reaction to his critic has pushed him into an extreme position. Nevertheless - other than where they affected women - Woodroffe reveals little interest in questions of social equality.

### Woodroffe's summary of Śākta Tantra

These passages on the divine Mother occur in a chapter entitled 'Shakti and Shakta', which was first delivered as a lecture in May 1917 to the Howrah Literary Association, and later published in Modern Review. [DP chapter 6] The passage about 'Feminism' is followed by a succinct summary of five 'characteristic features' of Śāktism.<sup>14</sup>

The characteristic features of Śākta-dharma are thus its Monism; its concept of the Motherhood of God; its unsectarian spirit and provisions for Sūdras and women, to the latter of whom it renders high honour, recognising that they may be even Gurus; and lastly its Sādhana skilfully designed to realise its teachings. [SS:174]

Although here Woodroffe carefully avoids the word 'Tantra', the Sādhana of which he writes is of course Tantric sādhanā, presented as the spiritual practice of a doctrine called śākta-dharma.' Woodroffe seems to have had little contact with low-caste Hindus and his preceptor Sivacandra was a Brahmin; so although he claimed that Tantric rites were socially egalitarian in being open even to the lowest castes [ibid:172; PT/1 ps.77-8] he did not elaborate on this as much as on other aspects, and probably only pointed it out because it enabled Tantra to be seen in a socially progressive light. His third point, what he saw as Tantra's unsectarian spirit, is something which certainly was important to him personally. Woodroffe comes over as someone who placed a high value on tolerance in religious matters (perhaps a reaction to his father's ardent Catholicism?) but he possibly idealised Tantra in this respect. We sometimes see him toning down instances of intolerance among his collaborators, and he almost apologises for the strong tone of parts of Sivacandra's work.<sup>15</sup>

It is the first and last features of this list to which he gives most attention in his writings: Tantra's conformity with advaita philosophy and the psychological value of its sādhanā as a means to achieving the unitary experience which is the proof of that doctrine.

### Woodroffe's historical hypothesis

In this same lecture Woodroffe attempted to deal with questions of historical origin, despite Arthur Avalon's avowed contempt for orientalist preoccupation with such matters -- something which might have reflected the feelings of Ghose.<sup>16</sup> He states:

For when we throw our minds back upon the history of this worship we see stretching away into the remote and fading past the figure of the Mighty Mother of Nature, most ancient among the ancients; the *Ādyā Sakti*, the Dusk Divinity, many breasted, crowned with towers whose veil is never lifted, Isis...Kali, Hathor...[SS:137].<sup>17</sup>

In what was perhaps a tactful manner, Woodroffe has emphasised the attraction and romance for him of the ancient lineage and universality of the Goddess. Later in the lecture he argues for the 'non-Aryan' origin not only of Śāktism but for much of Tantra too.

As he often did, he used material from a book he had been reading: this time by an obscure writer called Edward Sellon who drew comparisons between various Hindu sects and the mystery cults of European antiquity.<sup>18</sup> Sellon's interest as well as his language was typically 'orientalist' in flavour; his book places the Hindu cults, as it were, in a museum alongside the works of European classical and other ancient art he often refers to. For Woodroffe by contrast it is the parallels with antiquity which serve to add lustre to the modern living cult, and he appears impressed, even proud of the ancient roots of Śakti-worship in the passage just quoted.

Woodroffe presents his historical thesis in a careful way, aware no doubt that to argue that the Tantric tradition had an origin separate from the Vedic was not merely a question of history, but affected the authenticity of the texts. However, the idea he wanted to counteract was that the Tantras were of recent origin. As was so often the case, the pañcatattva was the focus of the problem. Woodroffe suggests:

Perhaps the pañcatattva Ritual followed by some of the adherents of the Tantras is one of the main causes which have operated in some quarters against acceptance of the

authority of these Scriptures and as such responsible for the notion that the worship is modern.[SS:139]

This is the crux of the matter, as far as 'insiders' were concerned, for here 'modern' equals not only 'unauthoritative' but also 'degraded'. It is in this context that Woodroffe draws parallels between Tantric rituals and practices to be found in the Vedas themselves:

If the subject be studied it will, I think, be found that...those worshippers who practise these rites are (except possibly as to Maithuna) the continuators of very ancient practices which had their counterparts in the earlier Vaidikāra. [ibid]

The qualifying phrase in brackets was not present in the first edition. But it seems that before long Woodroffe and Ghose discovered another way around the problem of maithuna - - the suggestion that it might be 'foreign' and imported from China or Tibet [SS:140], a theory discussed in three chapters including the one on 'Cīnācāra' which were added in the second edition. [DP chapters 8,9,11]

Woodroffe then goes on to discuss questions of age and authenticity. While the Western Orientalist and 'outsider' might approach -- or claim to approach -- questions of date and authorship from a purely factual historical point of view, Woodroffe recognised that this was not what concerned 'insiders'. What he does is to attempt a reconciliation between the historian and the believer: first he distinguishes between the date of a written manuscript and the age of the tradition which informs it (SS:140) then he argues against a too literal interpretation of authorship (SS:141). Finally he reiterates his point that the proof of authenticity is experiential and practical: 'The authority of a Śāstra is determined by the question whether Siddhi is gained through its provisions or not'. [SS:141-2] Given this, and a 'spiritual' and non-literal definition of inspiration, Woodroffe suggests that the authority of a scripture does not need to be affected by historical questions about its date. 'This is the way in which the question of age and authority is looked at on Indian principles,' he concludes (SS:142). In fact it is not traditional. Woodroffe here is devising an



imaginative method of dealing with the question of scriptural authority in the light of orientalist uses of history.

At SS:145-148 Woodroffe develops a theory of the historical origins of Tantra, but the argument is a curious one. He cites an obscure reference to show that followers of the Tantric texts called yāmālas claimed that their tradition actually preceded the Vedas: each of the four Vedas being said to have developed out of one of the four yāmālas (SS:148) <sup>19</sup>; and he proceeds to take this literally. He has just drawn attention to what he calls a 'double framework' in the body of Hinduism whereby the Tantric tradition mirrors the Vedic one in every sphere: in scriptures, rituals, initiations and mantras, even in medicine and law there were Tantric equivalents to Vedic forms (SS:147). From these two points he draws out his hypothesis that Tantra was in fact a separate religion, distinct from the Vedic one, and possibly older as well:

...it indicates that there were originally two sources of religion one of which (possibly in some respects the older) incorporated parts of, and in time largely superseded the other. And this is what the "Tāntriks" impliedly allege in their views as to the relation of the four Vedas and Āgamas. (SS:148)

He goes on to present the theory of the non-Vedic or non-Aryan origin of Tantra and the subsequent synthesis that took place, in which it was mostly the Vedic rituals which were superseded. He concludes by suggesting that in the history of Tantra:

the beliefs and practices of the Soil (emphasis mine) have been upheld until today against the incoming cults of those "Aryas" who followed the Vaidik rites and who in their turn influenced the various religious communities without the Vaidik fold.[SS:149]

So the theory of the non-Aryan origin of much of present-day Hinduism <sup>20</sup> and the eclipse of the Vedic religion through the influence of non-Vedic cults has been placed before the 'insiders' in a tactful way, carefully pinning his theory onto a Tantric textual source. The language is quite different from that of European orientalists who used such theories to argue for the degeneration of later Hinduism.

For here the mighty 'Aryans' are dethroned and the phrase 'of the soil' suggests, at least the possibility of valuing the primitive -- something which became fashionable with later historians, especially those of a Marxist slant.<sup>21</sup>

That Woodroffe was here putting forward his own opinion and not that of any of his collaborators, is suggested by the tentative tone which creeps into his writing: 'These are speculations to which I do not definitely commit myself'. [SS:148] The theory, or hypothesis contradicts the notion of Tantra following in the direct tradition of the Vedas which is put forward in other portions of the Avalon/Woodroffe writings.

#### ON RITUAL

##### Defending the 'Indefensible': the Pañcatattva

When Avalon declared that its sādhana was the most valuable aspect of Tantra, he did not claim to refer to the pañcatattva; he meant all other aspects of Tantric practice -- dhyanā, mantra, ritual worship with images and yantras, yoga. Woodroffe is usually considered to have de-eroticised Tantra. While privately he seems to have accepted the sexual ritual, at least within marriage, publicly his attitude was a mixture of denial and attempts to justify. He considered that it was the pañcatattva which deprived Tantraśāstra of authenticity in the opinion of the public, and he returns to the theme repeatedly as if it was a nuisance to him that would not go away:

The notoriety of the Śākta Pañcatattva ritual with wine and women has thrown into the shade...every other [topic] including the valuable philosophical presentment of Vedānta contained in the Śākta Tantra...It is necessary...to at least touch on the matter because as against everything one says about the Tantra, there is raised the express or implied query "That may be all very well. But what about the infamous Pañcamakāra"? Anything said in favour of the Śāstra is thus discounted in advance. [SS:590]

These words occur at the beginning of a chapter devoted to the rite in Śakti and Śākta. Originally this was part of the previous chapter on 'Śākta Sādhana' and was one of the series of lectures of 1917-18 to the Vivekānanda Society.

Therefore, like the two magazine articles that dealt with the negative images evoked by the term 'Tantra', it would have been aimed at an audience composed mostly of middle class English-educated followers of the Swami. It is obvious that Woodroffe found difficulty in defending the Tantric ritual that appeared to give religious sanction to intemperance and sexual immorality. His attempts to justify it can seem self-contradictory and his arguments spurious, even sometimes ludicrous.<sup>22</sup> Hence he can write in one and the same chapter: 'It is Śiva in the form of the universe who enjoys, and the manifested bliss is a limited form of that Supreme Bliss' [SS:626] and in another place of eradicating 'poison': 'Poison is the antidote to poison. This is the right treatment for those who long for drink or lust after women' [SS:632] -- although it must be admitted that both these strands of argument are to be found in the texts themselves. On the one hand he defends the pañcatattva by declaring its purpose to be a cure for lust: an attempt to control what he calls the 'physical appetites' not by 'a forced abstention but a regulated use' [SS:626]. On the other hand, he reassures us that the rite is disappearing and is of historical interest only, 'with other ritual customs of a past age' [SS:647].

The point, when he eventually comes to it, is that the pañcatattva far from being marginal was, according to the texts, essential for worship of Śakti.[SS:603] Even the "respectable" MNT says:

O Ādya! the five essential Elements in the worship of Śakti have been prescribed to be Wine, Meat, Fish, parched Grain, and the Union of man with woman. The worship of Śakti without these five elements is but the practice of evil magic. That Siddhi which is the object of Sādhana is never attained thereby... [MNT:V:22-23, GLb p.86]

The MNT itself deals with the five makāras by analogy to the five elements, thus making them symbols for the offering of the universe to the Goddess in a rather beautiful passage paraphrased by Woodroffe.[SS:603] Continuing to follow the text he points out that the five were not always offered literally. Only the vīra, the 'hero', the second grade of

initiate was considered fit for them. Woodroffe lists some of the substitutes that can be offered by the paśu, the initiate in the lowest grade who is not considered spiritually strong enough for the literal tattvas [SS:608]. On the other hand for the divya, the highest grade, they were understood symbolically, as inner yogic operations or as kinds of spiritual knowledge.[SS:606-7]

The quotations from the MNT were added in the second edition of SS, in which there were many interpolations. The original lecture as printed in the first edition was more straightforward.[SS(1) ps.143-168] It began by distinguishing between what Woodroffe calls 'general principles' and their 'particular application' [DP:590-1]. The principle he explains as regulation of the 'physical appetites of man' by the tantric method which was anti-ascetic: by transforming the feelings and attitudes (bhāva) of the paśu (the ordinary person) into those of the vīra (the 'hero'). The latter experiences all his actions as those of Śiva because he has transcended, or is schooling himself to transcend duality; he knows 'that it is the One Śiva who appears in the form of the multitude of men and who acts, suffers and enjoys through them' and Śiva is 'Bliss itself'. Thus 'It is a fact that right sexual union may, if associated with meditation and ritual, be the means towards attainment of liberation' [SS (1):160; DP:626-8]<sup>23</sup> In the same way the vīra takes wine knowing that he is one with it: 'I myself offer...to myself'. This is what Woodroffe had previously called 'a practical application of advaita' [DP:99-100]. (The other three tattvas or makāras not presenting the same degree of difficulty, are mentioned only briefly.) The 'notions of the Paśu' are described as the reverse of those of the vīra; they are dualistic and so the paśu makes a distinction between 'God' and 'His handiwork' [SS(1):160; DP:629] Hence he has feelings of shame and considers that his 'natural functions' of eating, drinking and sex must be kept apart from his religious observance. Not so the vīra or true Tantric.

Woodroffe considers the practice (the 'application') of less interest and importance than the principle.[ibid] No doubt the principle alone provided fewer problems. Here again he falls back on Vedic precedent, pointing out that meat and alcohol once had a place in Vedic rituals but were subsequently excluded under Buddhist influence and that Tantrics were therefore simply following earlier tradition [SS (1):161; DP:630]. He then claimed that the ritual was being domesticated in modern times. He hints: 'It is capable of application according to the modern spirit without recourse to Chakras and their ritual details in the ordinary daily life of the householder within the bounds of his Dharmashāstra'.[ibid]

However, Woodroffe could not altogether deny what he called the 'antinomian' aspects of Tantric practice: that the partner in the sexual ritual was often not the practitioner's wife but 'the wife of another' (parakīyā) and that the highest grade of Kaula was one who was free to act according to his own will (svecchācārī) -- ie that he was said to be above good and evil, and social conventions. [DP:619, 624] Here Woodroffe does not attempt to justify but resorts to comparative material to show similarities in the history of European religion, especially in Christian 'heresies'. [SS(1):164-6; DP:633-642] He admits that in India too such doctrines sometimes led to 'abuses', but quickly balances this concession by condemning the evils of contemporary Western society, and claiming that the 'abuses' by Tantrics had been exaggerated in order to make them a weapon to attack Indian religion.[SS(1):165-6; DP:644-5] He concluded his lecture however by cautiously distancing himself from the pañcatattva:

All this again is not to say that I counsel the acceptance of any such extreme theories or practice...It is necessary for me to so guard myself because those who cannot judge with detachment are prone to think that others who deal fairly and dispassionately with any doctrine or practice are necessarily its adherents and the counsellors of it to others. [SS(1):166-7; DP:646]

Finally he asserted that the true principle of Tantra is self-control, and that the true vīra is one 'who has

controlled his passions...and has sacrificed lust and all other passions.' [SS(1):167; DP:648]

In the second edition many interpolations and re-arrangements of the material served to highlight the inconsistencies. While adding considerably to the comparative material from European 'heresies' Woodroffe also tried to distance Indian Tantra from them and to emphasise that it was anti-libertarian. Thus the rather puritanical tone of most of the chapter was enhanced. What can be called the homeopathic theory of the pañcatattva is given more emphasis: the idea that 'Poison is the antidote to poison' is actually part of a quotation from Pandit Jaganmohan Tarkālankāra's notes to the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, a nineteenth century interpretation of a modern text. [DP:631-2]. Similar arguments are to be found in the Kulārṇava Tantra, which Woodroffe also quotes in this chapter, but in that older text there are other passages (alluded to at SS:616) which carry a different flavour. His treatment of these will be discussed in chapter 9 in the context of Woodroffe's relationship to texts.

If Woodroffe's arguments sometimes appear spurious, they are no more or less so than arguments put forward in the texts to justify a ritual which was already old when many of the texts were written. Woodroffe's most perceptive comment is that: 'The true Sādhaka does not perform the ritual for the purpose of drinking wine...but drinks wine in order that he may perform the ritual'. [DP:613] The same would be taken to apply to sexual intercourse. The very fact that substitutes for the literal five tattvas were sometimes prescribed reveals the intrinsic importance of the rite itself.

In other places in his writings, Woodroffe shows how, whatever ambiguous feelings he may have had about the practice of the pañcatattva, he appreciated the anti-ascetic ethic it implied. He presented affirmation of the reality of the world as one of the great advantages of Śaktivāda. By implication this includes the senses and sexuality, as opposed to the position of the 'Renouncer' who denies them.

Both Vivekananda and his master Ramakrishna had placed a higher value on celibacy than on the life of the married householder.<sup>24</sup>

In the short chapter called 'Matter and Consciousness' Woodroffe writes of the vīra in highly idealized terms with overtones of Western occultism:

The Vīra or heroic Sādhaka does not shun the world from fear of it. But he holds it in his grasp and wrests from it its secret. Realizing it at length as Consciousness the world of matter ceases to be an object of desire. Escaping from the unconscious drifting of humanity which has not yet realized itself, He is the illumined master of himself, whether developing all his powers, or seeking liberation at his will.[SS:347]

#### Tantra and Roman Catholicism

In the chapter on pañcatattva a specific comparison is made between the wine and mudrā (grain) of the pañcatattva with the bread and wine of the Christian Eucharist [DP:613] In the first edition the word 'sacrament' is actually used [SS(1):163]. Elsewhere Avalon had written: 'Tantrik Hinduism is in its more common aspect, essentially of a sacramental and ritualistic character' [PT/1:20] This made it seem suspicious to those influenced by Protestantism -- and this was true of most of those who had introduced English education to India.[ibid]

There can be little doubt that his Catholic education prepared Woodroffe to envision Tantra as a mystical religion conveyed through ritual and imagery, and that this placed him at a distance from writers who were influenced by Protestant and/or Rationalist prejudices against 'idolatry'. The Catholic tradition of devotion to Mary the Mother of God made Vivekananda call Italian Catholics Śāktas.[SS:176] Despite her often gruesome imagery the Tantric Goddess can be seen as a tender Mother, while Our Lady in the Catholic Church, though not strictly divine, is often treated as such in practice. To Protestants on the other hand all of this would be dismissed as polytheism or paganism.

Woodroffe expressly compares the outer forms of Tantric practice to the Catholic ritual which he calls sādhana: 'Thus amongst Christians, the Catholic Church, like Hinduism, has a full and potent Sādhana in its sacraments...' There follows here a long and interesting list of external similarities, [SS:175-6] which he concludes by drawing a specific parallel between the Christian sacrament and the wine of the Tantric rite:

In the Eucharist the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ appearing under the form or "accidents" of those material substances; so also Tarā is Dravamayi, that is, the "Saviour in liquid form".[SS:176]

The point he claims to make here is simply that eating and drinking during ritual are not inconsistent with the 'dignity' of worship, 'since Christ instituted his sacrament at a meal'. Woodroffe is careful not to identify the two: 'Whilst however the outward forms in this case are similar, the inner meaning is different'. He only expressed the hope of expanding on these 'interesting analogies' some day.[ibid] With regard to Our Lady, he uses Hindu terminology to express the differences between Śāktism and Catholicism: 'Whilst, however, the Blessed Virgin evokes devotion as warm as that which is here paid to Devi, she is not Devi for she is not God but a creature selected as the vehicle of His incarnation (Avatāra).' [SS:176] Woodroffe with his fine tuning to metaphysical intricacies does not allow himself to be carried away by comparisons at a superficial level.

Yet clearly for him Catholicism and Hinduism stand together on one side of a religious divide, while Protestantism is placed on the other -- and he affirms the former strongly:

It is because of its powerful sacraments and disciplines that in the West the Catholic Church has survived to this day, holding firm upon its "Rock" amid the dissolving sects, born of what is called the "Reform"...All things survive by virtue of the truth in them. The particular truth to which I here refer is that a faith cannot be maintained by mere hymn-singing and pious addresses. For this reason too Hinduism has survived.[SS:177]

Ritual in Tantra however occupies a very different place from that of the Catholic Church, which sees its sacraments as



universal and absolute. In another chapter Woodroffe describes the 'Brahmanic' position as mid-way between the Catholic and the Protestant, able to acknowledge the value of both: recognizing both the need for ritual and the necessity for its transcendence at higher levels of spiritual discipline.

Its [Brahmanism's] view is that all men need Ritual, but in varying degree and various kinds, until they are Siddha, that is, until they have achieved the end which Ritual is designed to secure. [SS:436]

Ritual is an art [SS:435, 464], and a psychological tool which is described in a quasi-scientific way which is closer to Western Occultism than to Christianity. The Mind is treated as a quasi-physical force which can be shaped by, and can exert power through, concentration on prescribed images (dhyāna). Most important of all, rituals and the images associated with them are not universal -- choice can be made between them, according to the spiritual capacity (adhikāra) of the practitioner, as to their usefulness as different methods of achieving the goal of spiritual knowledge. This is not in accord with Catholic claims for its sacraments, nor is Avalon's assertion that each race must evolve the ritual forms suitable to it -- which is another facet of the idea of a person having adhikāra for some rituals and not others.<sup>25</sup> It was mainly this that Woodroffe had in mind when he praised what he saw as the tolerance of Hinduism, and especially of the Śākta Tantra, for making allowances for individual psychological and racial differences. 'One goal may be reached by many paths. What is the path in any particular case depends on considerations of personal capacity and temperament, race and faith.' [SS:66] The idea of certain people having adhikāra for certain rituals played a useful role in defending the pañcatattva, as it was argued that the rite is only enjoined on those to whom it is psychologically and spiritually suited. We saw in chapter 6 (above p.195) how Woodroffe used this idea to justify his own non-participation in vāmācāra.

Woodroffe stated that 'Christianity is dualism' [GOL p.5] in a passage where he pointed out the differences between

Christian and Hindu Tantric doctrines of the Word. Unlike some neo-Vedantists he never obliterated differences in an attempt to produce a syncretistic system. Nevertheless like Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta, Avalon's 'neo-Tantra' is hegemonic. Christianity, being 'dualism', is subsumed within it as a valid but by implication lower religious stage leading towards the same goal as Hinduism - that of 'non-duality'. All rituals are relativised as they are subordinated to this end, which is defined as a state of mind or being -- in non-dual terms as becoming one with Divinity, or transcendent Being.[SS:467-8]

#### Tantra as Magic and Occultism

When Woodroffe described Tantra Śāstra as 'the Sādhana Śāstra of Advaitavāda he declared its goal to be 'spiritual experience', Brahman-knowledge or mokṣa. He distinguished this from the acquisition of 'Powers' [SS:79] while admitting that Tantric ritual magic, along with vāmācāra, was one of the chief reasons for its unpopularity.[SS:92] There are similarities between Woodroffe's way of handling the magic of Tantra and his treatment of its sexuality. He universalises it [SS:95 'Magic is common to all early religions']; and points to its existence in the history of the West [ibid: the witchcraft trials of medieval Europe], and in the Vedas [SS:94 the Athārvaveda]; he emphasises the good intentions of the texts which condemned magic for harmful ends [SS:92]. Last but not least there was the 'recrudescence today' in the West of renewed interest in magic in the more fashionable and scientifically respectable forms of modern 'Occultism' and of interest in the paranormal.[SS:95-7]

Woodroffe called Tantra 'the storehouse of Indian Occultism' [SS:79; SP:3], and the traditional Western Occultist and the Hindu Tantric do seem to have lived in similar worlds.<sup>26</sup> But the two terms, 'Occultism' and 'Esotericism', in their modern sense are said to have been first used by the French 'occultist' or magician Eliphas Levi (1810-1875); and 'Occultism' first employed in English in 1881 by Alfred Sinnett, Madame Blavatsky's English disciple who denoted by

it the philosophy he claimed was taught to him by Theosophy's Masters.<sup>27</sup> Theosophy was the most influential of the nineteenth century esoteric organisations which claimed to have inherited an older tradition that included gnosticism, alchemy, and Jewish and Christian Kabala. 'Eastern' traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism were absorbed into the synthesis by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, who founded the Theosophical Society in America in 1875 and first visited India in 1893. During the first decade of this century the Society grew into a strong international organisation and under Blavatsky's successor Annie Besant played an influential role in Indian nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Other esoteric movements of the time were the Order of the Golden Dawn, to which Yeats belonged; and the Order of Oriental Templars (OTO) headed by the "infamous" Alistair Crowley who borrowed from Tantra in his own systems of erotic magic.<sup>29</sup>

Woodroffe liked to quote from the Viśvasāra Tantra: 'What is here is elsewhere: what is not here is nowhere'.<sup>30</sup>

He compared it with the Hermetic maxim: 'as above so below'. The famous saying from the Hermetic corpus refers to the occultist's world of analogical correspondences between the divine and human levels, uniting human beings, divinities and nature in a hierarchical order.<sup>31</sup> Woodroffe wrote:

All occultism whether of East or West posits the principle that there is nothing in any one state or plane which is not in some other way, actual or potential, in another state or plane.[SS:276-7]

This applies to the doctrine of the tattvas, for these cosmic levels exist both without and within the individual, and each tattva contains those 'lower' levels which succeed it.<sup>32</sup>

The quotation from Viśvasāratāntra is also cited in the SP chapter on 'Embodied Consciousness' dealing with the physiology of the ṣaṭcakra. Here Avalon summarises the principles and purpose of Tantric yoga: to raise and utilise in the practitioner divine powers that already reside within him:

Man is a microcosm (Kṣudra-Brāhmāṇḍa). The world is the macrocosm (Brāhmāṇḍa). There are numberless worlds,

each of which is governed by its own Lords...In everything there is all that is in anything else. There is thus nothing in the universe which is not in the human body... In fact, the body is a vast magazine of Power (Sakti) ...The object of the Tāntrik rituals is to raise these various forms of power to their full expression. [SP:49-50]

This is consistent with the 'magical universe', where:

The universe is regarded as a human organism on a colossal scale and man as a copy of it in miniature. Man is also a miniature replica of God and so, by a process of mystically expanding himself, a man can become the sum<sup>33</sup> total of all things, and the wielder of supreme power.

This applies to Hindu Tantra as to Western 'magic'. The Tantric siddhis or supernormal powers are seen not merely as a by-product of spiritual development but its very essence, because they are a sign of the unveiling of the divine omnipotence which is inherent in the soul but obscured by ignorance.[See SS:465] Western Esotericism, Occultism or Magic, like Hindu Tantra, represented the continuation of ancient, pre-secular ways of thought which some considered more holistic.<sup>34</sup>

Occultism is presented 'scientifically' as the attempt to affect matter through thought. An essay on 'Mantra' which found its way in slightly differing form into SS, SP and GOL puts forward 'the power of Thought' as an explanation of the supernormal powers sought by Tantrics as well as various paranormal phenomena which were currently arousing interest in the West:

Thought-reading, thought-transference, hypnotic suggestion, magical projections...are becoming known and practised in the West...The occultist...will understand the Indian doctrine which regards thought like mind...as a Power or Sakti; something therefore, very real and creative by which man can accomplish things for himself and others.[SS:495]

In the same passage Avalon brackets together 'the Orientalist and Missionary' as people who misrepresent Indian teaching because they 'know nothing of occultism.'<sup>35</sup>

Woodroffe makes several references to an offshoot of American Christian Science called 'New Thought' which was first

expounded by Dr Heber Newton in a series of articles in the New York journal Mind, and aroused interest among followers of neo-Vedanta.<sup>36</sup> Woodroffe may have known the works of the pseudonymous 'Yogi Ramacharaka' who wrote on Hindu Yoga but seems to have been a Western practitioner of New Thought.<sup>37</sup> 'New Thought as it is called' Woodroffe wrote 'and kindred movements are a form of Mantravidyā.' [SS:79]<sup>38</sup> Directed mainly towards healing, the 'New Thought' taught that Universal Mind is immanent in everything in varying degrees and that the universe is its expression -- an idea which echoed Śākta doctrine as Woodroffe presented it 'scientifically' (see below). This Mind-power was present in Man who by the exercise of his 'will and imaging faculties' could transform not only his character but his environment and physical health.<sup>39</sup> The New Thought, however, did not have a supernatural dimension, and though Woodroffe seems to bracket it with Western occultism (SS:79) this was probably not strictly accurate.

Three chapters of SS are devoted specifically to ritual other than the pañcatattva [DP chapters 21, 23, 26] and a fourth to the philosophy of mantra [chapter 24], indicating the importance of the subject to Woodroffe. The chapter on 'The Psychology of Hindu Religious Ritual' [SS:463-482] originated in a lecture delivered in England in 1925. The 'psychology' is an occult one, set in a framework of Śiva-Śakti metaphysics, and ritual is an art: 'the Art both of Religion and Magic.' [SS:464]

The primacy of consciousness and the power of thought to affect matter are the underlying theme of the lecture. Thought itself is a force (cit-śakti) which can be shaped and directed by concentration on certain objects (outer and inward images - yantra and dhyāna - and mantras) with which the practitioner identifies himself. [SS:471-2] In this world-view, magic -- defined as the development of supernormal rather than supernatural power [SS:469] -- is inherently possible [SS:470: 'Mind-Rays, the Hindus would say... are more powerful than X-Rays']; but belongs to the

dualistic world which is to be transcended [SS:468]. The aim of sādhana<sup>is</sup> defined as specifically 'religious', however, <sup>and</sup> goes beyond this: it is to be 'raised from Limited to Perfect experience', and it also includes a moral dimension. It is defined as 'a spiritual effort to achieve a moral and spiritual aim, though it may also seek material blessings from the Divinity worshipped.' [SS:469]

The word 'Psychology' in the title attempts to present the subject in a scientific light. Of Tantric ritual Arthur Avalon had written:

The Tantra further claims not only to be practical... but also to be fundamentally rational...The virtue of its general method...is inherent in the mental states induced by dhyāna and other physical and mental processes ...chiefly explained by the fact that as at base all existence is of the nature of mind, the transformation of mind is the transformation of existence itself. [PT/1:80]

By presenting Tantric sādhana as a system founded on psychological principles (albeit of Hindu not Western psychology) it could be described as 'rational' -- a means by which Theosophists also justified their beliefs and practices -- in contrast to the reliance on faith of conventional Christianity.

#### Defence of Ritual - Woodroffe and Sivacandra

Woodroffe's ideas about ritual reflect the teaching of Sivacandra in his Tantratattva<sup>40</sup> in which he defended Tantra against the influence of the Brahmo Samaj and other modernizing critics of traditional Hinduism, among whom it was seen as 'idolatrous' because of its emphasis on ritual. [PT/1:13,17] Both Sivachandra and Woodroffe engaged in a vigorous attack on Liberal Protestant and Rationalist attitudes which led to a rejection of the outward forms of religion.[PT/1;24]. Sivacandra criticised religious outlooks which rejected the senses and insisted that it is not possible to worship a deity that has no form or attributes [PT/1:222]. He devotes much of his book to explaining the function of mantras and images in religious practice. He does so from a psychological stance in that his reference-

point is the working of the human mind, according to Hindu theories. Although this enabled Tantric ritual to be portrayed as rational, the term 'psychological' should not be taken to imply that Sivachandra believed that Tantric deities had no existence outside human consciousness. On the contrary, he devoted a large part of his discussion of images to counteracting just this idea among the Brahmos and other modernizers.<sup>41</sup> The argument turned on the interpretation of a verse from the Kulārnavatantra, a verse which he claimed was taken by his opponents to mean that 'forms have been imagined by Sādhakas in relation to Brahman', but which Sivachandra insisted meant the exact opposite: ie. that Brahman Himself builds forms (of Himself) for the benefit of Sādhakas.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the imagery through which deities are contemplated is not arbitrary or subjective, but given by the deity Himself, or Herself.<sup>43</sup> As Sivachandra puts it: 'Bhagavān Himself takes his own portraits in His own camera'. [PT/1:225] This leads to two consequences which are not 'rational' in the sense in which Western Rationalists would use the word. For it means that the images of deities are more not less real than the images perceived by the senses of objects in the 'real' world -- and moreover, more 'real' even than the individual, the Jiva's, own identity, for the latter belongs to the world of duality, which is ignorance (avidyā). The form of the deity, on the other hand, whether male or female, Īśvara or Īśvarī, belongs to an intermediary realm of 'true forms' created by māyā, which in Tantra, unlike Śaṅkara's advaita vedānta, is not regarded as illusion, but belongs to the intermediate tattvas between non-dual and dualistic perception. [ibid:246-7, 276-7, p.281] Thus the images of the divinities which are the objects of ritual worship as well as their dhyānas, the subjects of mental concentration, have not been produced by individual human minds: they are what in Jungian terms would be called 'archetypal images'. In Sivachandra's terms, they are supramental forms created by the essentially unknowable and unthinkable supreme Divinity. It has been seen how these ideas influenced Heinrich Zimmer (above p.128)

Interpretation of ritual as sādhana, or a means of attaining transcendent states of mind or powers, acted as a defence against accusations of 'idolatry'. At the same time it relativised all religious rituals by subordinating them to the goal of samādhi. Because deities -- although closer to reality than ordinary persons or objects -- still do not belong to the highest state of knowledge, it follows that: '...for him who realises that all things are Brahman, there is neither yoga nor puja' [ibid p.81].<sup>44</sup> But this applies emphatically only to those who have reached the goal: 'ordinary' people cannot transcend either rituals or the deities worshipped through them.

#### MĀYĀ-ŚAKTI: TANTRA AND WESTERN SCIENCE

By presenting Śaktivāda as a monistic doctrine that did not deny the reality of the phenomenal world or matter, Woodroffe and his friend Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay attempted to situate it among contemporary philosophies of science. This theme is developed in The World as Power [WaP] which Woodroffe published with Mukhopādhyāy a few years after Śakti and Śākta; but it is touched upon in the latter book, particularly in two chapters headed Cit-Śakti and Māyā-Śakti [DP chapter 14 ps.256-90 and chapter 15, ps.290-337], and the short talk 'Matter and Consciousness' [chapter 16 ps.337-347]. The first two were originally subtitled 'The Spirit aspect' and 'The Matter aspect' of the universe respectively:<sup>45</sup> titles that reflected current scientific-philosophical preoccupations with the relationship between these two categories. The three chapters all originated in lectures by Woodroffe: the first two were among those delivered to the Vivekananda Society around 1918, while "Matter and Consciousness" was an address to the Dacca Literary society in 1916 reprinted in The Theosophist in 1918.<sup>46</sup> Two of Mukhopadhyay's books are referred to: Patent Wonder and Approaches to Truth [SS:263], the latter being cited at the beginning of the chapter on "Māyā-Śakti" [SS:291]. A review of Approaches to Truth said that its author attempted to synthesize the principles of the radical empiricists with Vedanta.<sup>47</sup> This is also what Woodroffe



attempts in these chapters; but it was a form of Vedanta that held the dual principles of Śiva-Śakti in the place of the neutral Brahman as the absolute first principle. This Śākta monism<sup>48</sup> in a modernised world-affirming garb was shown to be corroborated by the 'scientific monism' of the West which was fashionable at the time.

This Western monism was placed opposite the 'dualism' of Christianity and other theistic systems: the aim was initially to subordinate 'God' or 'spirit' to 'matter';<sup>49</sup> Hindu 'monism' on the other hand seeks to subordinate all phenomena including 'matter' to Brahman. But the materialistic bias of mid-nineteenth century Western science was counterbalanced especially towards the century's end by thinkers who posited 'an inner life force manifest in man and also in physical nature'. Such 'pan-psychism' was part of the quest for 'a new spirituality which must be authorized by science and yet contain a religious value'.<sup>50</sup> Woodroffe presented a pan-psychism with Śakti as the underlying essence of everything; but he also hinted at a more theistic or devotional direction too, with an 'immanentist' bias: a seeing of 'the Mother' or 'God' in all things.[SS:334-6]

It has been suggested that the second half of the nineteenth century was the last period when a layman could sufficiently comprehend current ideas in all the sciences to form a coherent world view from them.<sup>51</sup> The picture of the unity of existence through the sciences of physics, chemistry and biology which Woodroffe presents was derived from the books by scientists which he had been reading, especially the physicist-philosopher Gustave Le Bon and L.Houlléviqgue, who wrote at the beginning of this century, and Ernst Haeckel, the most influential philosopher of science of the nineteenth.<sup>52</sup>

Three Hindu terms could be used to correspond to Western notions of 'matter'. Sakti represented the concept of energy, which increasingly was coming to be seen as more fundamental than matter itself [SS:306]; Māyā was suggested

by the insubstantiality of matter as revealed by new discoveries about the atom [SS:303], while Prakṛti, like Śakti, corresponded to philosophic concepts about a fundamental Substance which underlay spirit and matter [SS p.304]. Śakti in addition, as Prāṇa or 'Life', was correlated with ideas about the 'life' of Matter, which were current among Western philosophers of science, and opposed to notions of a separate 'spiritual' source of life, or Soul. [SS:313ff] Śakti being presented as the fundamental essence of everything within and beyond the phenomenal world, was an extremely fluid concept which could be used in any number of ways.

Cit corresponded to 'Spirit' but was called 'Consciousness' in later editions. It is the Cit-Sat-Ānanda that is Brahman of the Upanisads [SS:257-9]. As supreme unitary consciousness it is identified in Śākta theology with Śiva-Śakti in union. Rejecting Western theories that declared there could be no such thing as a consciousness without content, Woodroffe followed Mukhopadhyay in describing cit as Pure Consciousness, beyond the mind, absolutely quiescent and all-pervading, like the scientific 'Ether' (see below).[SS:268, 274]

### Spirit, Matter, Energy

During the first two decades of this century the mechanistic Newtonian science of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was being undermined by discoveries which led up to the splitting of the atom and the formulation of the theories of Quantum Mechanics in the 1920s.<sup>53</sup>

New mysterious non-material forces had become known: electricity had been discovered in the mid-nineteenth century by Faraday; Clerk Maxwell formed his theories about electromagnetic fields in 1873<sup>54</sup>, but X Rays and radioactivity, as new kinds of forces different from electricity, were only beginning to be discovered at the very end of the century. The discovery of radioactivity opened the door into the new world of the atom and showed that the

most fundamental constituent of matter was not after all so fundamental or so solid as was thought before.<sup>55</sup>

The revolution was becoming generally known a few years before Woodroffe delivered his lectures in 1916-18. The Theosophist regularly reported the new discoveries. In April 1913 its editorial noted that newspaper headlines were full of 'The Birth of the Atom' and commented:

Modern chemistry doubts whether there is any such thing as matter; it analyses the atom and finds it to be a transient manifestation of energy, which has a birth, a "life", and a death, but a death which leaves no corpse to bury, for the energy that was the atom is restored to the general energy of the universe.<sup>56</sup>

Such ideas carried exciting implications to those seeking a monistic philosophy that united 'matter' and 'spirit' -- from whichever side of the divide they placed their emphasis. Woodroffe asks: 'Where does it [matter] go according to Śākta doctrine, but to that Mother-Power from whose womb it came, who exists as all forms...'[SS:305] Energy -- non-material, invisible and slowly being revealed as more powerful and all-pervading than had been dreamt of before <sup>57</sup> -- could be assigned to the mysterious realm of 'spirit'. So could the related quasi-material concept of the Ether.

#### The "Luminiferous Ether"

Despite having heard of the theory of Relativity and perceiving its possibilities in WaP <sup>58</sup>, Woodroffe and Mukhopādhyāy still did not themselves yet live in a universe of 'empty' Space-Time. The Ether theory held sway in this period and was only beginning to be discarded by some scientists.<sup>59</sup> The Ether was conceived of as a special kind of very attenuated 'matter' which filled Space forming a continuum in which light waves and other forms of electromagnetic radiation were propagated, as well as accounting for action-at-a-distance (gravity). It was only gradually that the concept of Ether was replaced by that of outer space as a vacuum, in which electromagnetic fields could travel without any intervening medium.<sup>60</sup>

All theories concerning Electromagnetism were therefore at first closely bound up with the notion of the Ether. Material qualities such as inertia, density, elasticity were attributed to it, and even measured by some scientists. This was encouraged by the calculation of a definite uniform speed of light. As Oliver Lodge wrote: 'the possession of these properties makes the Ether very real'.<sup>61</sup>

Yet at the same time it was an ancient concept that retained its philosophical and spiritual qualities. It formed the key element in Oliver Lodge's own religious beliefs. A prominent psychical researcher as well as a physicist, he speculated that after the death of the physical body, a body composed of ether could still be a vehicle for the personality.<sup>62</sup>

'Ethereal' bodies and 'ethereal' vibrations were part of the stock-in-trade of Theosophy's terminology, as well as of Spiritualism -- both of them late nineteenth century movements. Ether, according to Oliver Lodge again '...is the primary instrument of mind, the vehicle of the soul, habitation of the Spirit. Truly it may be called the living garment of God'.<sup>63</sup>

If for Lodge the Ether could be the 'garment of God', for Hinduism it was the Cidākāśa or the 'Ether of Consciousness'. The parallel between the scientific Ether and the Indian Ākāśa seemed obvious, for Ākāśa was the first of the five elements (māhābhūta), which contained and transcended the other four.[SS:274]]<sup>64</sup> The mysterious nature of the scientific Ether, which 'differs profoundly' from ordinary matter 'in the physical sense, which alone is known by our senses'[SS:302], no doubt contributed to its mystical significance. Mukhopadhyay seems to have developed an elaborate theory of consciousness in terms of the 'Ether' and the 'Stress' (current terms of electromagnetism), and the notion of Ether as a continuum.[SS:268,274,293] Woodroffe, as with the subtle body notions (above p.233) sometimes accepts this identification and sometimes emphasises that it is analogy: 'I do not say that scientific "ether" is Ākāśa, which is a concept belonging to a different train of

thought...But it is important to note the agreement in this, that both in East and West, the various forms of gross matter derive from some single substance which is not "matter". Matter is dematerialized ...[SS:339-40- italics in the original] The prevailing theme of Tantric cosmogony, the emergence of the 'gross' from the 'subtle' (above p.234<sup>5</sup>) was echoed in the scientific view of matter 'condensing' out of the Ether and mysteriously fading back into it through radioactivity.<sup>65</sup>

Woodroffe opened his lecture entitled 'Māyā-Śakti' by declaring confidently:

Spirit and Matter are ultimately one, being the twin aspects of the Fundamental Substance or Brahman. [SS/1 p.77]<sup>66</sup>

Here he has borrowed a term from Haeckel's 'scientific monism'. Haeckel (1834-1919) was a German naturalist and Darwinian, and a philosopher of science whose books were extremely influential at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Writing mostly before the discoveries about radioactivity, his 'Substance' was an attempt to reconcile the older scientific theories about the duality of 'matter' and 'energy' as the two fundamental unchanging principles of nature.<sup>68</sup> The categories of 'God' and 'spirit' he placed within not beyond 'nature':

Monism...recognizes one sole substance in the universe, which is at once 'God and Nature'; body and spirit (or matter and energy) it holds inseparable'.<sup>69</sup>

His 'Substance' sounded 'spiritual' enough, however, being infinite, eternal (with 'neither genesis nor annihilation') and the source of all the changing phenomena of nature.<sup>70</sup> It was easy for Woodroffe to translate this into the terms of Śiva-Śakti philosophy. The concept of polarity, of two opposite aspects of one fundamental unity whose forms appeared and disappeared -- suggested both Prakṛti as well as the śiva-śakti polarity. Woodroffe in this chapter soon replaced 'Substance' as the fundamental reality of his version of monism with 'Consciousness', 'Life' -- and of course with Śakti itself, or Herself.<sup>71</sup>

Haeckel's monism was part of the 'Religion of Science' which swept Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Sometimes called 'scientific naturalism' it has been defined as 'an implicit faith that by the methods of physical science...alone could be solved all the problems arising out of the relation of man to man and man towards the universe'.<sup>72</sup> An earlier figure associated with it was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), whom Woodroffe also brings into his chapter, calling him 'the Philosopher of Modern Science'. He identified Spencer's 'Primal Energy' with Ādya Śakti, and both with Haeckel's 'Spirit-Matter Substance'. [SS:304]

With the discovery of radioactivity the 'Religion of Science' began to seem obsolete by the beginning of the twentieth century, when it seemed to be proved as a matter of empirical fact that matter was merely an aspect of energy.<sup>73</sup> Woodroffe paid little attention to the differences between the various Western scientific thinkers he cited, and the new theories fitted his own preferred world view even better:

'Matter' (in the scientific sense) disappears, and we and all that surround us are physically, according to these views, mere disturbed regions of the ether determined by moving electric charges - a logical if impressive conclusion, because it is by increasing their knowledge of 'matter' that physicists have been led to doubt its reality.[SS:303]<sup>74</sup>

#### The living and the non-living: Śakti as Prāṇa

Another passage from Haeckel was also quoted by Woodroffe at the beginning of 'Māyā-Śakti':

...in this universe immaterial Spirit is just as unthinkable as spiritless matter. The two are inseparately combined in every atom which, itself and its forces, possess the elements of vitality, growth and intelligence in all their developments. [SS:291]<sup>75</sup>

Another duality which Haeckel's monism sought to transcend was that between 'life' and 'matter'. He held that the most subtle qualities of organic life were present in some form in matter itself, and added a third term to his fundamental 'Substance': that of 'sensation'.<sup>76</sup> Haeckel even believed that the attraction and repulsion of molecules in chemical reactions were an illustration of sensation at the inorganic

level and amounted to a rudimentary form of "will".<sup>77</sup> His idea grew mainly out of studies of the cell as the simple foundation for more complex life.<sup>78</sup> For Haeckel this elementary form of sensation did not amount to consciousness, which was something that evolved out of sensation: what the concept did in his system was to enable him to discount the idea of 'soul' and 'body' as separate entities.<sup>79</sup>

Other scientific thinkers also sought to probe the boundaries of the living and the non-living at this time, especially the Indian physicist Jagdish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), whose experiments Woodroffe mentions in this chapter [SS:320] Bose was his contemporary in Calcutta, and a friend of Nivedita and of the Tagores.<sup>80</sup> So it is quite likely that Woodroffe would have met him, but by 1918 Bose's experiments would have been widely known anyway, and had begun to find acceptance. In that year he retired from his post as Professor of Physics at Calcutta's Presidency College and devoted his time to his research institute in the city.<sup>81</sup> His first book: Response in the Living and Non-Living had been published in 1902.

Bose worked on electro-magnetism and designed some early forms of radar equipment and radio receivers. He was among the first to discover the phenomenon of metal fatigue -- something which appeared to show a similarity in metals to the response to stimuli of living tissue.<sup>82</sup> He then extended his experiments to plants, devising complex equipment which could detect tiny electrical responses in plants that were similar to those of animal tissue in reaction to external stimulations such as shock. He believed he had shown that: 'Life's response is carried unbroken in the same form from metals to plants and then to animals.'<sup>83</sup> Although his experiments aroused some amusement and scepticism at first in the press and among some scientists, they were treated with respect by others and by 1919 he was received in Europe with acclaim.<sup>84</sup> When he lectured at the India Office in London summaries of his lectures were cabled to Europe and America. Neither did the implications for monistic philosophy go

unheeded. The Times reacted with a piece of 'positive Orientalism':

While we in Europe were still steeped in the rude empiricism of barbaric life, the subtle Eastern had swept the whole universe into a synthesis and had seen the One in all its changing manifestations.<sup>85</sup>

But such views were not confined to 'the East'. They were part of the quest for scientific 'monism' and considered 'modern', if controversial. Woodroffe mentions the physicists Ernst Mach [SS:321] and Le Bon, and quotes the latter:

This sensibility of matter, so contrary to what popular observation seems to indicate, is becoming more and more familiar to physicists. That is why such an expression as the 'life of matter', utterly meaningless twenty-five years ago has come into common use.[SS, p.316]<sup>86</sup>

Having shown how Śakti transcends the duality 'spirit'- 'matter', Woodroffe turns to that of living/inert, or organic/inorganic at SS:313. Again, Śakti is an underlying absolute or essence: this time it is 'Life ... beyond form...for in a sense it is Eternal Life whence all life in form proceeds.' [p.313-4] The significance is in the philosophical implication for the unity of being:

There are no absolute partitions or gulfs. All is continuous, even if we cannot at present establish in each case the connection. That there should be such gulfs is unthinkable to any one who has even in small degree grasped the notion of the unity of things.[SS:315]

The notion of Life as an Absolute derives from prāṇa the 'vital breath'. [SS:317] Since it is only present in living bodies this contradicts the ideas just expressed about there being no boundaries between living and non-living. But Śakti is here identified both with prāṇa and with Consciousness. It was something of a leap in logic to use the appearance of something akin to sentient responses in metals to argue for the presence of consciousness in them. Woodroffe gets around this by identifying prāṇa with the organization of matter, an idea borrowed from his friend Pandit J.C. Chatterji.[SS:317,319] Houllevigue had pointed out the



'extraordinary power of organization which resides' in matter.<sup>87</sup>

The Hindu concept of the three gunas of prakṛti thus are given 'scientific' corroboration. Śakti as Consciousness is sattva, the first and 'highest' of the gunas and it is veiled by 'matter' which is tamas, the lowest of them. [SS:321] This doctrine was considered to be proved by the experiments of Bose, whose responses in metal and plant tissue suggested the presence of Śakti veiled by tamas inherent throughout matter -- which is thence not jada (inert - above p.224). It was also seen as equivalent to Haeckel's "sensation" in inorganic and organic matter.

### 'Reality'

Woodroffe sets his chapter in the context of the ideas of his friend Mukhopādhyāy who elaborated on the world-affirming monism of the Śākta Tantra, placed opposite to the Advaita Vedānta of Śamkarāchārya. Mukhopadhyay was a follower of William James<sup>88</sup> who is frequently referred to in WaP. James, one of the first psychologists of religion who placed his emphasis upon experience and intuition, has been described as the first 'democrat of metaphysics'. An opponent of the European Idealists he affirmed 'the democratic consubstantiality of every entity and experience with every other'.<sup>89</sup>

Mukhopādhyāy set up a polarity between what he called 'the viewpoint of Siddhi' (that of gnosis or transcendental experience) and that of Sādhana, the view of those who are still on the path towards the final goal ('practical' as opposed to 'transcendental' experience). He placed the Śākta Tantra in the higher position, reconciling this opposition, accepting as real the twin poles of transcendent and empirical experience -- 'the whole of experience without any reservation whatever -- the whole concrete Fact of Being and Becoming' [SS:291].

It was a matter of definition. William James attacked Bradley's dismissal of time and change as mere 'appearances',<sup>90</sup> Woodroffe and Mukhopadhyay reject the same in Śāṅkarāchārya. For Śāṅkara, the Real is the state of sāmādhi, which is unmoving, and contrasted with the illusory universe which comes and goes -- namely the three states of ordinary consciousness: waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. [SS:292-3] Here Woodroffe specifically rejects 'changelessness' as categorizing ultimate Reality [SS:293] opening the way to more dynamic concepts which include the universe as constant flux -- ideas to which he returns in his concluding chapter of SS [SS:708-717]

Having thus established that the Śākta Tantra affirms the reality of the world and is 'scientific', Woodroffe asserts its value for modern times. The māyāvāda of Śāṅkarāchārya which denies the world can have a deleterious effect on those who do not have sufficient strength for world-renunciation. 'They become intellectual and moral derelicts who...have neither the strength to follow worldly life, nor to truly abandon it.' In the Śākta Tantra, by contrast it is not necessary to renounce because 'all is seen to be Her'. [SS:334] He sums up its value at the end of his chapter:

The Śākta doctrine is thus one which has not only grandeur but is greatly pragmatic and of excelling worth. ...Like all practical doctrines, it is also intensely positive. There are none of those negations which weaken and which annoy those who, as the vital Western mind does, feel themselves to be strong and living in an atmosphere of might and power. For Power is a glorious thing. What is wanted is only the sense that all Power is of God and is God... [SS:335].

He concludes the chapter by calling this 'the pearl which those who have churned the ocean of Tantra discover'. [SS:336]

So like Vivekananda's neo-Vedanta, this new Tantrism was called 'practical'. I discussed in chapter 5 the resonances which words like 'pragmatic', 'positive', 'vital' and 'power' carried in the contemporary scene. Lectures such as this one would have contributed to Woodroffe's appeal to his Western

educated science-loving admirers. The 'pearl' he presented to them was a world-affirming 'religion of Power', which could be defended rationally and in 'scientific' terms. Like Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta it presented a monist philosophy with an emphasis on experience of transcendent states but without denying the validity of ordinary worldly experience. But unlike Vivekananda's religion, this one did not place a value on celibacy but affirmed sexuality (though not sexual licence). The concept of Śakti was used to reconcile expressly or by implication a whole range of opposites: spirit/matter, religion/science, superconscious experience/ordinary experience, renunciation/sexuality, timelessness/change.

We have seen that the Avalon/Woodroffe books were those of an insider updating Śākta Tantra and integrating it within modern Hinduism. Its strength lay in its use of the knowledge and interpretations of many Indian people, both middle class bhadralok and more traditional pandits. The next chapter looks more closely at Woodroffe's work with his collaborators, especially his friend and teacher Atal Bihari Ghose, and attempts to reconstruct Woodroffe's relationship with the Sanskrit language and with the texts.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Above p.37. Woodroffe's name is on the list of Presidents at their Society headquarters in Calcutta.

2. 'Give up this filthy Vāmācāra that is killing your country'. (Collected Works vol 3 p.340). 'We must stem this tide of vāmācār which is contrary to the spirit of the Vedas' (vol 7 p.174). But he approved the 'real' purpose of the Tantras as 'the worship of women in a spirit of divinity'. (ibid p.215)

3. Halbfass 1988 chapter 21 ps.378-403

4. Halbfass op cit p.400

5. 1991 p.394 (and footnote), 395.

6. Bharati 1965 ps.15,31

7. *Vāc* p.53 (footnote 50). In fact Bharati does identify distinctive Tantric innovations in doctrine and sees the polar nature of divinity, or of Buddhahood, as one of them [ibid, p.18-19]

8.Farquhar 1920 p.199

9.1909 vol 1 p.481. Cited by Glasenapp 1936

10.In his Introduction to N.N. Basu: *Modern Buddhism and its Followers in Orissa*, 1911, p.10. Cited in Von Glasenapp op cit

11.Kripal 1995.

12.Sen 1982

13.It was a review in *The Nation* of New York. Cited at SS/3: p.xxi. In the background of these remarks was the American social philosopher F. Lester Ward's theories on the primacy of the female principle, from which Woodroffe here distances Sāktism.

14.He does this is at greater length in PT/1, ps.77-82 where he calls it 'Tantra'. Here he expands upon Tantric ritual as both rational and sacramental - a point discussed below p.248-9; 264-7).

15.PT/1 ps.14,30-1. In other places Woodroffe makes stronger criticisms of intolerance. See SS:287 where he quotes with approval: 'To dispute the religion of another is the mark of a lower mind. O Lord! O Great Magician! with whatever faith or feeling we call on Thee, Thou art pleased.'

16.Eg PT/2 p.3.'...the Indian mind rightly apprizes as of the highest value the world of ideas, deeming the question of their "historical" origins and development to be, as in fact it is, of much inferior importance. To the Western...Sanskritist the position is, in general, reversed.' This, he claimed, was because 'they believed Indian civilization had little intrinsic value.'

17.There follows a long list of names of the Goddess in many ancient cultures.

18.SS:137ff. Sellon 1865

19.From the *Sarvollāsa*, a Tantric compilation by Sarvanandanātha. SS:251 indicates that Woodroffe had just been introduced to this text in 1917 at the time he was writing this lecture.

20.The Tantric side, as opposed to the *Smārtas*, was 'represented by the general body of present-day Hinduism'. *ibid*

21.N.N.Bhattacharyya 1982; D.Chattopadhyay 1959, who favoured Tantra and Sāktism as evidence of a religion of 'the people' (the implication of Chattopadhyay's title *Lokayata*) over and against Brahmanical philosophy.

22. For example: 'A man with a taste for drink will only increase his thirst by animal satisfaction. But if when he drinks he can be made to regard the liquid as a divine manifestation and have thought of God, gradually such thoughts will overcome and oust his sensual desires.' [SS:602-3]

23. SS(DP) p.628, has 'spiritual advance' in place of 'attainment of liberation', thus making it a more this-worldly aim.

24. Sumit Sarkar 1992

25. The Sanskrit term adhikāra is used in Tantra to apply to personal spiritual - sometimes physical - qualities which made an individual suitable for a particular initiation. [KT: 13: 16-17, 20, cited at SS:575] However according to the rules of the Brahmanical Mīmāṃsā school, to have adhikāra for a ritual meant to be entitled to perform it by your caste and station in life, that is, within the system of varṇāśrama dharma. [Van Buitenen 1981 p.19] For Arthur Avalon the residual idea of qualification by caste is translated into qualification by race and culture.

26. See the description of the 12th century ars notoria summarized by A Faivre ('Occultism' in Eliade 1987 vol 11 p.37). There is even the same debate over whether to define Occultism in terms of a belief-system or merely as a ritual system (ibid p.36). [See also vol 5 ps.156-163 'Esotericism']

27. ibid vol 11 p.38, and vol 5 p.156

28. B. Campbell 1980, Nethercot 1963

29. See King 1977, and Regardie 1970

30. SS:277.

31. 'According to this principle, things that are similar exert an influence on one another by virtue of the correspondences that unite all visible things to one another and to invisible realities as well.' [Faivre in Eliade op cit vol 11 p.36]

32. Sen Sarma 1987

33. Encyclopedia of Magic, Introduction, p.12.

34. Faivre in Eliade vol 5 p.157 ('Esotericism')

35. See also SP:85 footnote 2.

36. Prabuddha Bhārata, vol 6 (1901) p.25ff. There were many articles and notes on the 'New Thought' in this periodical of the Vivekananda movement. See also vol 10 (1905) p.150-3.

37. See Atkinson 1911

38. See also SS:494: 'The creative power of thought is now receiving increasing acceptance in the West... Because they have discovered it anew, they call it "New Thought"; but its fundamental principle is as old as the upaniṣads...'

39. Atkinson op cit p.14

40. References from Śivacandra's book here are taken from the English translation by Jñānendralal Majumdar published as PT/1 and 2 by Arthur Avalon.

41. PT/1 chapters 4-7

42. PT/1 p.234ff and beginning of ch.5, p.237.

43. 'Herself' when the Goddess is seen as the primary divinity beyond the trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva.

44. This was not, however, Śivacandra's goal who, like Ramakrishna, wanted to preserve the condition of duality in relation to the Goddess in order to remain her son. [PT/1 ps.361, 462] For both these bhakta saints immersion in the supreme but impersonal Brahman was not regarded as the highest state. This is in contrast to Woodroffe.

45. In later editions these were re-phrased as 'Consciousness' and 'the psycho-physical' aspects. [SS:250, 290].

46. SS:337; TS/vol 40, p.31 (Oct 1918)

47. Modern Review vol 17/No.1 (January 1915) p.62.

48. At SS:414 he calls it a 'Duo-Monotheism'

49. F.M. Turner 1974 p.15.

50. *ibid* p.247, 249.

51. *ibid* p.12.

52. Le Bon 1907; Houllevigue 1909; Haeckel 1894 and 1913. For Haeckel see De Grood 1982.

53. Fritjof Capra 1976 p.62ff

54. S. Kern 1983, p.154.

55. Capra op cit ps.67-8

56. Daily Chronicle, Feb 11, 1913, quoted in TS Vol 34/2, p.1. Articles about the new discoveries from the popular press in 1906 are also noted by Kern op cit p.184.

57. Le Bon op cit p.10 'It [intra-atomic energy] is characterized by its colossal greatness...'

58. In his preface to the paper Power as Matter Woodroffe mentions a book by Professor Lewis Rongier which had just been drawn to his attention, in which the Ether theory was declared to be defunct. He welcomes the new theory claiming that it makes 'the notion of Māyā at least intelligible even to those who have hitherto derided it.' [WaP: p.173-4, and 188-90]

59. Kern op cit p.154.

60. *ibid*; Capra op cit p.62

61. 1925 p52

62. *ibid*, p.162

63. Quoted in G.F. Sander, The Riddle of the Ether, preface, p.xii

64. In Indian Sāṃkhya, gross matter is the last of the tattvas to emanate out of prakṛti; ākāśa or Space/ether is the first of these to evolve.

65. Le Bon op cit ps.11-12, 313.

66. In SS(DP):290 he has 'Spirit, Mind and Matter' thus disrupting the polarity of Haeckel's idea, although he too included the concept of 'sensation' as a third element (see below).

67. McCabe in Haeckel 1913, translator's preface, p.ix.

68. De Grood op cit p.44; Haeckel 1894 p.17-18.

69. Haeckel 1913 p.16

70. De Grood op cit ps.40-3.

71. Haeckel claimed to be a pantheist, his 'Substance' midway between 'matter' and 'spirit'. De Grood comments that 'the tables could be turned on Haeckel if the qualitative essence of force and energy were interpreted in terms of psychical activity... Then the outcome would be pan-psychism in which it would be as reasonable to reduce matter to God as God to matter.' [p.67] In effect this is what Woodroffe did to him.

72. Turner op cit p.12.

73. *ibid* p.26

74. He was quoting here de Houllevigue op cit, p.112-3.

75. 'An immaterial living spirit is just as unthinkable as a dead, spiritless material; the two are inseparably combined in every atom.' [Haeckel 1913 p.58.]

76. DeGrood op cit p.38.

- 77. *ibid* p.45; Haeckel 1913 p.183-4
- 78. *ibid* p.40
- 79. *ibid* ps.45-6; Haeckel 1913, p.73.
- 80. Mitra op cit ps.22-24.
- 81. B. Mitra 1982.
- 82. *ibid* p.27-30.
- 83. *ibid* ps.29-39
- 84. *ibid* p.57
- 85. Quoted in *ibid* p.57
- 86. Le Bon op cit, p.251.
- 87. Houllevigue op cit p.289.
- 88. Modern Review vol 17/no.1 (January 1915) p.62.
- 89. Kern op cit p.177
- 90. *ibid* p.204



## CHAPTER NINE

### COLLABORATORS, SANSKRIT AND THE SCHOLARSHIP OF ARTHUR AVALON

#### Atal Bihari Ghose

In the Bengali journal Baṣumati, where the obituaries of Woodroffe and Ghose appeared on the same page, Ghose was described as 'the famous founder of the Āgamānusandhana Samiti', and several volumes of the TT series were stated to be his work, including ST and PST but also several of the volumes which had other named editors. Ghose died on 12 January 1936, four days before Woodroffe.<sup>1</sup> The longer obituary of Woodroffe did not associate him either with the TT series or Āgamānusandhana Samiti; it simply called him a 'devoted Sādhak of the Tantras' and an exponent of Indian culture. In praising his writings it singled out only his reply to William Archer. But the paper said that Woodroffe and Ghose delved into the Tantras together and described them as guiding lights for India. Perhaps by the wish of the Goddess, it continued, 'they may again be born in this twin form in India to spread Śakti-tattva'.<sup>2</sup> Bhārat Varṣa, another Bengali magazine published from Calcutta, gives Woodroffe credit for a revival of Tantra which made it attractive to modern educated people, both in India and abroad. This and other obituary notices state that the two friends formed the Samiti together and were jointly responsible for publications resurrecting the Tantras from oblivion.<sup>3</sup>

Woodroffe's friend and chief collaborator was born in 1864 and lived in Calcutta. His family were traditionally Śakta, though not Tantrics, and the family was not sure what had led Atal Bihari to seek initiation. He received the typical English education of the Bengali middle class. He was a classmate of Narendranath Datta, the future Swami Vivekananda, at the Metropolitan Institute founded by Vidyasagar, and afterwards graduated at Ripon College in Philosophy and English. He then studied Law and practised as

a vakil (a traditional pleader) at the Alipore district court and at the Court of Small Causes in Calcutta. It is not recorded how he first met Woodroffe, but Ghose was also a disciple of Sivacandra Vidyārṇava.<sup>4</sup> However according to the family, he was closer to Jayakālī Devi, the Bhairavī who performed the siñcan ceremony for Woodroffe (above p.190), who had an ashram in Benares where Ghose sometimes stayed. I was told that Ghose is also thought to have practised in the crematoria of Birbhum and Bankura with one Mṛtyuñjaya Vidyāṅkara, a pandit from the Sanskrit college who eventually left his post to become a sannyāsi. Ghose's granddaughter thought this pandit acted as a spiritual guide to Ghose, Woodroffe and their circle but did not think Woodroffe was his disciple. Another mentor of Ghose in later years was Pandit Pañcānan Bhattacharya, editor of two volumes of TT published after the death of Arthur Avalon (above p.79), who was a famous expert on Tantra and author of many books in Bengali.

Ghose married twice: Sobhun Ghose and Mrs Sumita Guha were the children of his son by his second wife, Gauramma. She came from a South Indian family who had lived a long time in England, and so the language of the home was English. She was a friend of Josephine Macleod, whose photograph was in the house, and of other leading disciples of Vivekananda.

The suggestion in Baṣumati that the TT series was entirely the work of Ghose was not entirely accurate - he played no part for example in TT/7 edited by Dawasamdip. The correspondence to be discussed below gives some indication of the respective contributions of the two collaborators. A fund-raising pamphlet issued by the Āgamānusandhana Samiti (AAS) under the name of its President the Maharaja of Darbhanga significantly plays down Ghose's role. Although not directly claiming Woodroffe as the founder it declares the Society was formed 'to take over and continue the work begun by Sir John Woodroffe to collect, preserve and publish and also correctly to interpret the Philosophy of the Agamik Scriptures'. The pamphlet states that: 'Sir John Woodroffe

has practically single-handed laboured at this task for several years, and has published and translated some original texts.' As he approached his retirement 'he made over the work to this Samiti'<sup>5</sup> Atal Bihari Ghose is merely described as 'one of his collaborators...who is associated with him in this work from its very inception'. He was designated joint secretary of the Samiti, with Woodroffe. 'Arthur Avalon' is called its General Editor, but otherwise is not mentioned. This indicates the reduction of Woodroffe's influence after his departure from India, for the pseudonym was something he seems to have insisted on.

Ghose on the other hand seems to have wanted Woodroffe to claim direct responsibility for all the 'Arthur Avalon' works while he himself chose to stay in the shadows, even to the extent of using Woodroffe as a kind of persona. In one of two short articles which Ghose wrote for an American occultist magazine in 1930 he states:

Sir John Woodroffe in his book "Serpent Power" published under the assumed name of Arthur Avalon, has shown... in VV-44-49 of the scriptures translated therein...<sup>6</sup>

-- thus implying (if not exactly stating) that Woodroffe even translated the textual part of that book himself, something which I believe was not possible. An American friend of Ghose on sending him copies of the published articles, apologised that they had appeared under his name with a brief biographical introduction -- it seems Ghose had wanted to write anonymously. In one of his letters to Ghose, Woodroffe seems to have had to insist that the new Sanskrit edition of the MNT to be published as TT/13 should be ascribed to 'Arthur Avalon'. It is not easy to read from Woodroffe's handwriting what name Ghose had proposed to him, but it looks as if it could have been 'Woodroffe' -- it certainly is not 'Ghose'<sup>7</sup> -- and there is evidence that Ghose had at first wanted the MNT translation to go by Woodroffe's name (below p.305).

It is not clear how Ghose himself acquired the Sanskrit knowledge which made 'Arthur Avalon' a famous Orientalist,

since he had the normal English education of the middle class<sup>8</sup>. But that he did acquire it appears beyond doubt, even if we allow for his having himself received the help of pandits from the Sanskrit College, as his granddaughter acknowledged.<sup>9</sup> That Ghose translated several of the texts published or planned in the name of Arthur Avalon is proved by the fact that copies were found in his house and they were in his handwriting. These were drafts and final copies of the published translation of Kāma-kalā-vilāsa and fourteen chapters of an unpublished translation of Kulārṇava Tantra. There were also handwritten draft translations and notes on other texts which he was working on when he died.

#### Correspondence of Woodroffe and Ghose

The collection of letters in the Ghose family house consisted of twenty-one from Woodroffe to Atal Bihari Ghose, one from Ghose to Woodroffe (mentioned above in chapter 2), seven to Woodroffe from other people and ten to Ghose from other people.<sup>10</sup> Of those in the first section, only four were written before Woodroffe's retirement from India in 1922. After that date it seems that the two collaborators kept in regular contact, for in a letter written as late as 1933 Woodroffe explains why he has not written for several weeks. Only a small fraction of the correspondence therefore has been recovered: apparently a random selection. Letters were found haphazardly in drawers and in the pages of books, and among the manuscripts which Ghose had collected before his death.

As shown in chapter 6, some referred to Ghose as Woodroffe's guru. (above p. 179). But these letters show nothing of a Guru-disciple relationship between the two men; on the contrary Woodroffe is in the dominant role, reflecting his more powerful position in the colonial society, although the two men and their families are also clearly friends. Despite the fact that it is Ghose who has the knowledge on which Woodroffe needs to draw, Woodroffe is in authority and issues instructions. Their roles are therefore more like an 'orientalist' and his 'informant' than a disciple and a guru.

In Calcutta we see Woodroffe summon Ghose to study texts with him during a spare couple of hours (Letter 1A); in letter A2 (discussed in chapter 6 p.178) he gives instructions about the printing of SCN ('shatcakra': Letter 2A); he asks him to correct a proof for him (Letter A3); while letter A4, probably written from England while Woodroffe was on vacation in 1920, shows him sending back to Ghose a book and manuscript sent by a correspondent, and asking Ghose to look through it. Sentinath Iyer's letter discussed below reveals how because of Ghose's help, a correspondent could write to Woodroffe discussing texts without discovering that he was not a Sanskrit scholar.

After his departure from India in 1922, Woodroffe continued to issue instructions by letter to Ghose who had been left in sole charge of the TT publications. That he was alone is shown by a letter of 11th February 1931 which mentions possibly appointing some pandits to help him.<sup>11</sup> Some did help -- especially Pañcānan Bhattacharja - but of eight volumes of the series published between 1926 and 1936 seven were edited by 'Arthur Avalon' himself. These comprised five texts, among which MNT<sup>12</sup>, ST and PST are discussed in the correspondence. There was a lull in publications after 1922 -- by which time eleven volumes had already been produced -- with only the second part of TRT (edited by Sadasiva Misra) appearing in 1926. This indicates that it may have been Woodroffe's organizing capacity and probably also his money which had collected together the team of Indian pandits who edited the earlier volumes. In an undated letter that must have been written between 1923 and 1925<sup>13</sup> Woodroffe writes:

I was surprised to read in your letter that you have nothing to do except Mahanirvana. What has become of 2nd vol of Tantraraja? I have several times asked about this. When shall I see the Introduction? I sent it to you last summer and you were to add to it & to return it for me to revise. How does this stand? We must show M of D [the Maharaja of Darbhanga] something done. So far as I know nothing has appeared since I left. (Letter A6, appendix)

'Arthur Avalon' was not directly responsible for the Tantrarāja (TT/8 and 12) but the reference to their joint

work on the lengthy Introduction (which included a summary of the text) suggests this may have been the case with other volumes whose Introductions are signed with the pseudonym. Otherwise, before 1922 'Arthur Avalon' had only directly contributed two translations to the series: Kārpurādistotram and Kāmakalāvilāsa [TT/9 and 10]

Letter A6 reveals several sides of the Ghose-Woodroffe relationship: it begins with Woodroffe looking to Ghose for clarification over some details of Śiva-Śakti symbolism on behalf of another inquirer, and continues with Woodroffe giving his collaborator instructions over the practical aspects of publication, even to the use of paper. Ghose seems to have got into difficulties over money and sponsors and Woodroffe gives advice on how to handle the situation. Finally the letter turns to the only personal subject mentioned in this correspondence: the health of both the families, especially the Woodroffes. Their younger daughter, Barbara, was suffering from anorexia, from which she died in 1925.<sup>14</sup> Her father calls her illness neurasthenia and poignantly describes trying to stir her 'will'. Other letters mention frequent illnesses in the family, and the illness or death of their mutual friends: the Blounts, the Moellers, and Havell. As Woodroffe developed Parkinson's Disease, his handwriting grew more and more illegible until eventually he had to dictate his correspondence.

The letters however predominantly concern the TT series, with Woodroffe continuing to issue instructions on matters of publication and taking charge of the finances of the project up until the end. He gives advice to Ghose over his relations with their sponsor the Maharaja of Darbhanga, and potential sponsor the Maharaja of Patiala. We can see that Woodroffe considered he had the right to vet the final version of whatever was signed by the joint pseudonym even as late as 1935. This is evident from the only example in these letters of a disagreement between the two men, which occurred in the last letter in the collection dated March 1935, nine months before their deaths. Here we see that Ghose's

draft Introduction to his revised edition of PST has prompted a letter in which Woodroffe sounds unusually irritated. Objecting to what he considers the polemical tone of Ghose's draft, he comes close to claiming ownership of the identity of Arthur Avalon:

I have cut out in blue pencil the bulk of the proposed introduction as unsuitable and irrelevant...I am not concerned with orthodox polemics. These constant jibes at the modern Hindu become tiresome to the public. Moreover a polemic is more fittingly conducted in an article signed by the person who carries on such polemics. (Letter#21)<sup>14</sup>

Woodroffe also refused to countenance a compromise suggestion by Ghose that his introduction should go out under the initials A.S.<sup>15</sup> and insisted on his right to approve the final product.

The disagreement was over the authorship of the PST. Ghose vehemently supported the traditional ascription to Śankarācharya, but Western orientalist did not accept this. Woodroffe's instinct was to treat controversial questions with great care. In the end the original introduction to the earlier edition (TT/3) was preserved while the new introduction -- the one discussed in the letter -- was transformed into a Postscript to it. If we compare the two we see the difference clearly: the earlier introduction attempts to leave the question open; the later postscript decides firmly in Śankarā's favour, even if less polemically than might have been the case without Woodroffe's influence. [TT/18:1-4 and 67-73].

Looking at the earlier edition against this background, we can see a glimpse of how Woodroffe reacted to pressure from his collaborator. After presenting arguments for both sides of the dispute the earlier introduction leaves the matter thus:

I leave however others, who may think that the contents of the work itself notwithstanding its authoritative tone and general style tell against the tradition as to its authorship, the development of their thesis." [ibid, p.2]

This confusing sentence, which attempts to be "balanced" yet leaves us wondering just what is his own position, probably results from Woodroffe attempting to satisfy all sides. Chapter 8 has already shown how he dealt carefully with another matter he knew would be controversial (above ps.250-3); later in this chapter we shall see how he was anxious to please, not only his collaborators, but especially his Indian readership. At the end of his life, it seems Woodroffe was reacting against a strain of intolerance that was present in both Ghose and Sivadandra. The 'polemics' and 'jibes against the modern Hindu' which Woodroffe complains of in this late letter are fairly prominent in many passages of the Avalon/Woodroffe writings, especially in Principles of Tantra.

The letters during his last two years of life show Woodroffe beginning to tire of the Tantrik Texts. In a letter dated February 1934 he had said he wanted the AAS to be wound up after the PST edition was completed. This might have been because of his Parkinson's Disease, whose distressing symptoms were increasing;<sup>16</sup> or it might have had something to do with his return to the Catholic Church discussed in chapter 6. However, as it turned out, he continued to work and worry over the Tantrik Texts almost till the very end of his life.

Woodroffe usually addressed his correspondent 'My dear Ghose', occasionally 'My dear Atal' but only once by the more familiar 'Dear Atal'. Woodroffe's reserve is very apparent in these letters but it is accompanied by signs of genuine affection for his friend. His anxious concern over a break in the regular correspondence due to Ghose's illness shows that there was feeling in the relationship, and in another letter he worries over his friend's health, giving him advice on homeopathic medicines. Nevertheless there is a strong contrast between the Woodroffe correspondence and two letters in the collection which were written to Ghose by American friends in the 1930s. Their letters express a flood of personal feelings and reflections,



as well as showing how they looked up to Ghose as a teacher. Woodroffe on the other hand, although he constantly drew on Ghose's fund of scholarship, does not acknowledge it and passes it on as his own (albeit with Ghose's connivance). Perhaps it was because the later friends were American, or because they were younger, or because the date was into the third decade of the century -- but the pattern of relationship between these other Westerners seeking oriental knowledge and Ghose was quite different. The 'orientalist-and-collaborator' pattern with its overtones of colonial hegemony was replaced by one closer to that of Guru and disciple, or at least of teacher and pupil.<sup>17</sup>

By this time Ghose's contacts with Westerners had widened to include not only the United States but also Germany. A telegram of sympathy on Ghose's death was sent to his son by a German bookseller who paid a moving tribute to his father's scholarship:

We have learned of the death of the scholar Babu Atal Bihari Ghose through the German Consul General. It is my duty to convey to you the sympathy of German scholars for his death, as I know from my many contacts with them, how respected Mr Ghose was in Germany.<sup>18</sup>

#### Lama Kazi Dawasamdup

Woodroffe informs his readers that he first met the Lama Kazi Dawasamdup when the latter was translator to the Tibetan Plenipotentiary for the Government of India. Besides other posts as an official translator he was a headmaster at Gangtok, Sikkim.<sup>19</sup> Like Ghose in Calcutta, he passed on his knowledge to several Western scholars. He is best known for his collaboration with Evans-Wentz on a translation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead which went thereafter by Evans-Wentz's name, and to which Woodroffe wrote a Foreword.<sup>20</sup> Another book published by Evans-Wentz -- Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa -- was also based on a translation by Dawasamdup.

Space does not permit more than a few general remarks on Woodroffe's correspondence with the Lama. The collection of letters was thirty-two, written between 1916 and 1918, and concerned Woodroffe's commissioning Dawasamdup to edit and

translate one out of a collection of eight manuscripts of the Demchog Tantra, which Woodroffe had acquired in Nepal. In the event he only translated part of it, a sādhana based on the mandala of Demchog, who is the same as Vajradhāra the sixth and highest of the dhyāni Buddhas.<sup>21</sup> Although more of this correspondence has survived and the letters are also much longer than those to Ghose, they reveal a less subtle relationship between the two men. For Dawasamdub was simply employed by Woodroffe, who paid him to work on the manuscripts he had acquired.

This correspondence shows Woodroffe struggling hard to understand the Tibetan Vajrayāna and Māhāyāna concepts and to relate them to what he knew of Indian Śākta Tantra. He could only approach the subject through comparison with what he already knew and so he tried to interpret the Buddhist concepts through the medium of Hindu Vedānta. He asked for Sanskrit equivalents to all the Tibetan terms, and in one instance asked Dawasamdub to write the former in devanāgarī. (This is significant in light of the question as to whether Woodroffe could read this script, see below.) He plied his collaborator with questions in meticulous detail and most of the information he gleaned from the correspondence went into his Foreword to the volume and footnotes to the translation. They thus reveal Woodroffe at work with one of his collaborators and the thoroughness with which he attempted to grasp the subject. His lack of Tibetan did not prevent him taking an active role in directing Dawasamdub's translation, though he acknowledges the help of the Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College, who was also a Tibetan scholar.<sup>22</sup> Even more than with Ghose, Woodroffe is in control of this relationship; he often demands rather than elicits information from Dawasamdub, whom he rather arrogantly upbraids in one letter for not being sufficiently knowledgeable in his own tradition, ordering him not to resort to the works of orientalist scholars but to seek out senior Lamas to get the traditional interpretation of the text. One letter suggests he had made his collaborator feel inadequate over continuing his work.<sup>23</sup> Woodroffe was

impatient to have the volume finished. He said he wanted to complete the publication of the Tantrik Texts before leaving India, which he intended to do as soon as the European war would be over. Some letters mention his journey of 1916 to Kashmir and Ladakh where he visited the famous Hemis monastery.

Dawasamdup's role as a channel for knowledge about the Tibetan language and religion was significant. Besides Woodroffe and Evans Wentz, Alexandra David-Neel and two British Residents in Sikkim - Charles Bell and David Macdonald - studied and corresponded with him. Charles Bell who wrote books on Tibetan language and religion called him 'that tower of learning' and expressed his debt to the Lama's teaching.<sup>24</sup>

Evans-Wentz was also in touch with Ghose and corresponded with him. He acknowledges both his help and Woodroffe's in the preface to Tibetan Book of the Dead.<sup>25</sup> A letter from Evans-Wentz to Ghose in 1927 acknowledged help for Milarepa too, and mentioned his forthcoming book on Tibetan Yoga in which Ghose was taking a keen interest.<sup>26</sup>

Ghose and Dawasamdup belong to a class of people who have perhaps not been much noticed by historians: learned local scholars who played an important though often humble role in bridge building for Westerners interested in Hinduism and Buddhism. In more modern times their role has been replaced by the more commanding one of the Guru with his/her Western disciples.

The relationship between Woodroffe and these two collaborators seems to illustrate a distinct stage in the history of orientalism. When Sir William Jones studied Sanskrit with the help of pandits, all the distance had to be travelled by the European inquirer, who had by the nature of things to do the hermeneutical work himself, whatever the degree of his success in the task. Jones' pandits could not - and probably would not - of their own accord have presented

their knowledge to the West, and there was less knowledge of the English language or Western culture among them. In modern times, when the Guru with Western disciples has become such a fixture of Western culture itself, the role is reversed: it is the one who speaks for the tradition who also does the work of interpretation and representation, and places his religion into its Western context.<sup>27</sup> Dawasamdub was still in the older role of 'informant'. With Woodroffe and Ghose the position is somewhere in between. Ghose had excellent English and could have translated on his own without Woodroffe's help; and as we shall see, was quite good at presenting his knowledge. But I believe he would not have been able to give to modernised Tantra the very wide appeal that Arthur Avalon won for it without Woodroffe's mediation. This as I shall show was a joint work, although the hermeneutics tended towards that of the 'insider'.

#### The Samities, the Maharajas and Money

The Āgama<sup>28</sup> nusandhana Samiti (AAS) was a publishing company set up specially for the Tantric Texts, though it may have owned the copyright of some of the other books too.<sup>28</sup> Its publicity leaflet mentioned above reveals it to have had a distinctly 'missionary' or propaganda purpose, specifically aimed at the English educated Indian public. Its President was the Maharaja of Darbhanga who seems to have been the main financial sponsor after Woodroffe's departure. He and other sponsors may have commissioned particular volumes.<sup>29</sup> According to his correspondence with Dawasamdub, Woodroffe had already put a lot of his own money into the TT series: he paid Dawasamdub and therefore presumably paid the other Indian editors of the earlier volumes. The money was not recovered through sales, which seem to have remained poor.<sup>30</sup> On Rameshwar Singh's death in 1931, his son Kameshwar Singh took over as President and sponsor.[TT/20:p.ii]

The Maharaja of Darbhanga, Rameshwar Singh, was a fellow disciple of Sivacandra and a renowned Tantric practitioner. He was described by the Bengal Governor Lord Ronaldshay as a 'notorious' Śākta, patron of the temple to the Goddess at

Kāmākhyā where the 'erotic ritual' was performed.<sup>31</sup> Pal refers to him several times: as sponsor of a spectacular tantric puja performed by his Guru; as someone who practised sādhana in the crematoria of Bihar and Bengal along with Sivacandra; and as sponsor of many of the saint's publications.<sup>32</sup> He was a founder and General President of the Śrī Bhārat Dharma Mahāmandal, a neo-conservative Hindu organisation which nevertheless had a universalist attitude and sought to make the scriptures available to all castes and to women.<sup>33</sup> His sponsorship of the TT series might have reflected this aim. Rameshwar Singh was a colourful character who had a reputation among his subjects as a siddha Tantric: he was credited with having changed the course of a river through performing sādhana in its course and diverting a flood. He was called a rājārṣi, a King-rishi, indicating how his role as a tantric king fitted into a traditional pattern.<sup>34</sup> His image in British eyes was not just as a notorious Tantric - he was also described as an arch conservative politically; and he claimed that Rājbhakti was an element in the Hindu religion.<sup>35</sup> His 'kingdom' was really no more than a particularly large estate, but he was extremely wealthy.<sup>36</sup>

One other prince supported the AAS: the Maharaja of Cossim Bazaar, Mahindra Chandra Nandy, was named vice-President on its pamphlet. The Maharaja of Patiala, who reneged on his offer to contribute funds (see above p.199) although a Sikh, sponsored Hindu projects including Benares Hindu University.<sup>37</sup> He was perhaps approached for sponsorship after Woodroffe was told of his meeting in London with Ellen Woodroffe's sister-in-law, the American sculptress Malvina Hoffman. Hoffman describes the encounter in a book. Finding the Maharaja proud and cold at first she related how the atmosphere changed dramatically as soon as she mentioned the name of her brother-in-law: '...there were only two or three men left in the world,' the Maharaja had told her 'who have such authentic knowledge of our people and our religion'.<sup>38</sup>

We have seen that Pal who thought Woodroffe was introduced to Tantric scholars through the AAS, may have confused it with the Varendrānusandhana Samiti or Varendra Research Society (above p.187). The VRS was founded in 1910 to promote study of Bengali history, especially of the local Rajshahi area -- the medieval kingdom of Varendra which was rich in Tantric lore. Its Director A.K. Maitra, a lawyer by profession, was a swadeshi historian writing in English and Bengali but mainly in the latter. His aim was to reconstruct Bengali history and counter the influence of orientalist historians. He denied the existence of the 'black hole', and attempted to rehabilitate Siraj-ud-daula and other late Moghul rulers usually vilified by British historians. He also turned his attention to pre-Moghul Bengal with its Buddhist and Hindu Tantric legacy. He was a dynamic personality, well-known in his time, and for many years was close to Rabindranath.<sup>39</sup> Maitra believed, like Arthur Avalon, in restoring the image of Tantra as a 'mystic faith'. Maitra explained that the purpose of the society was to educate the opinions of scholars:

But it is chiefly as a centre of Tantrika activity that Varendra deserves to be specially explored, to discover the images and manuscripts which alone are capable of explaining the various stages in the development of that mystic faith, which are now only dimly seen, or more frequently, vaguely imagined, to suit the theories which the students of Indian history are so eager to advance.<sup>40</sup>

The Avalon/Woodroffe works are in this same spirit of re-evaluation of Tantra while emphasising its mystical element. Maitra wrote the introduction to volume 4 of the TT series and introduced its editor to Woodroffe.<sup>41</sup> He is mentioned several times as a source of information, [GOL:105; SP:xi] and the VRS as a source of manuscripts. The society had a museum and engaged in its own manuscript search. Its contacts among local people and 'traditional' scholars included descendants of Purnānanda, the sixteenth century author of sat-cakra-nirūpana. [SP:xi] Atal Bihari Ghose was a member of the VRS and wrote for its Bulletin (below footnote 88)

English writings

While it is easy to appreciate that Woodroffe used the knowledge of Ghose and other collaborators to publish the Tantrik Texts, what is not so easy to imagine is how he managed to produce even the English writings which are attributed to him without a knowledge of Sanskrit. Some parts of these are so technical and display so much apparent erudition with a wide range of references to texts and quotations that it is almost impossible to believe at first sight that they were not the work of an accomplished Sanskrit scholar. They comprise: Śakti and Śākta (SS), Garland of Letters (GOL) and World as Power (WaP), and the two long introductions to the translations of the MNT and SCN -- An Introduction to Tantra Śāstra (ITS) and the first part of The Serpent Power (SP) respectively. Along with Principles of Tantra, they have been published by Ganesh and Co in Madras for fifty years since the early 1920s. This was a family company founded by a Madras coffee merchant to whom Woodroffe was introduced by his Theosophist friend James Cousins. Mr Ranganadhan, the younger brother of the founder, was still faithfully turning out reprints of the books when I visited him in 1991. The work was seen by both brothers as an act of religious devotion, which never made a profit except from Śakti and Śākta and The Serpent Power, for which Dover Press acquired the American rights in the 1970's. Mr Ranganadhan had no doubt that Sir John Woodroffe wrote all the books of 'Arthur Avalon' and that he was an orientalist scholar. He did not believe that he had been a Tantric -- he told me that Woodroffe had emphasised to his brother the impartiality of his position. 'I do not propose, I do not oppose, I merely expose', he was quoted as saying. It was interesting to find that Mr Ranganadhan saw Woodroffe not at all as an expert on Tantra but simply as an exponent of Hindu religion and culture. Ganesh also published his 'nationalist' writings discussed in chapter 5.

It is necessary briefly to review the English publications again:

Śakti and Śākta (SS)

In addition to Woodroffe's lectures to the Vivekānanda Society of 1917-18, the first edition of SS contained four magazine articles which appeared during the same period.<sup>42</sup> The book was revised and expanded in the second edition which appeared only six months after the first -- they were published in April and October of 1918. The third edition appeared nine years later in 1927, and that represented its last revision. Careless editing in the second and third editions has made some of the chapters confusing, where long interpolations have been placed in the text without sensitivity to context, and the first edition reads much more clearly. Ganesh's fourth edition of 1951 was based on the 3rd edition. The only deliberate changes Ganesh have made are to omit the lectures which Woodroffe delivered in French<sup>43</sup> and to update his transliteration system.<sup>44</sup>

In the second edition, an introductory first chapter entitled 'Bhārata Dharma' was added plus three short chapters on the connection between Chinese and Indian Tantra (chapters 8,9,11 DP edition), for two of which the source was a book by a Jesuit missionary in China [SS:207,227], while the one on Cīnācāra is drawn from Sanskrit texts. An earlier article entitled 'The Origin of the Vajrayāna Devatās' was also included: this was first published in Modern Review in June 1916 under the name of Arthur Avalon. ['Matam Rutra', chapter 28, DP edition]. Here the pseudonym has been used to cover the help of Dawasamdup, for the chapter is a summary of a translation prepared by him for Woodroffe [SS:650] which is referred to in their correspondence. The third edition introduces both earlier and later material: three lectures delivered before or at the beginning of 1917 (chapters 16, 19 and 22); two delivered in 1925 and 1926 in London (chs 20 and 23); plus two articles in Indian magazines published in 1919 and 1920 (chs 12 and 13), and two articles of unknown date (chapters 18 and 21).



### Garland of Letters(GOL)

The preface states that most of this book was also composed of lectures and articles, except for the first ten chapters on the philosophy of Language, for nine of which the collaboration of P.N.Mukhopādhyay is acknowledged.[GOL p.xi] These were presumably written close to 1922 when the book was published. The central section -- chapters 10-21 plus chapter 24 -- were first published in Vedānta Keśari, one of the journals of the Rāmakrishna Mission. [GOL:xii] Chapter 24 (Varnamāla) is a general essay on Mantra, parts of which also occur in SS and SP. Chapters 10-21 we know appeared under the title Studies in the Mantra Śāstra (hereafter Studies) by Arthur Avalon in 1917-18 because most of the series were published in pamphlet form in those two years.<sup>45</sup> Many of these Studies focus on passages from texts.

The first part of GOL is on the whole much better written than the Studies section, which contain passages which are almost incomprehensible, being smothered by Sanskrit terminology and strained English. GOL thus highlights two aspects of the Avalon/Woodroffe style which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### The Serpent Power (SP)

In the first edition of SS and in the Studies, SP is referred to as a 'forthcoming publication', and it is closely linked thematically these earlier works. Although I believe the translations of the two Sanskrit texts with their detailed footnotes could not have been the work of Woodroffe, the seven introductory chapters most probably are. Ghose almost certainly helped him, but one reason for detecting Woodroffe rather than Ghose as the chief author of these chapters is that they rely even more heavily than any other of the Avalon/Woodroffe books on secondary sources in English (see below). The ascription to Arthur Avalon would have covered their collaboration, but mainly the fact that the Sanskrit text was translated by Ghose.

The World as Power(WaP) originated as a series of long pamphlets or short books published between 1921-3. Mukhopadhyay's help is acknowledged throughout, but he only wrote one chapter/pamphlet himself, the last one, which was published in 1929. [WaP: 3,8,297]. WaP like the other Avalon/Woodroffe books contains a vast number of references -- but here they are all to books in English or occasionally other European languages. There is much less Sanskrit. Mukhopadhyay was no doubt well-read in English. Nirad Chaudhury's autobiography, which covers this period, portrays the intellectual world of the Western educated Bengalis of the time and reveals how very extensive and eclectic their reading was.<sup>46</sup> But the future Swami Pratyagatmananda does not appear to have assisted Woodroffe with Sanskrit texts, and the pseudonym never refers to his help which is always acknowledged under his own name.

#### Use of the pseudonym

Among the English writings, we have seen that the pseudonym is used for SP, parts of GOL, and some of the original articles that made up SS. All of SS and <sup>most of</sup> GOL (apart from its first nine chapters) consist of articles and lectures; some were lectures first, then articles, then chapters. In nearly every case where a provenance is given for a particular chapter the pattern is the same: where it was first published as an article it was ascribed to Arthur Avalon; where it originated in a public lecture it was ascribed to Sir John Woodroffe. So it seems that at first Woodroffe only used his own name when he could not avoid it: he did not ascribe his public lectures to Arthur Avalon. SS went out under his own name probably because it contained his lectures, WaP because here the collaborator was Mukhopādhyāy and there was no need for the assistance of a Sanskrit scholar; GOL as a whole went by the name of Woodroffe, but the Studies were first published under the name of Arthur Avalon. It seems that the pseudonym refers to collaboration over texts -- but not necessarily only to the help of Ghose. We have seen it apply to Dawasamdūp (above p.299) and in Studies it may refer to the Kashmiri pandits who helped Woodroffe (see below).

### Order of writing

Apart from ITS and the preface and introduction to PT/1, nearly all of Avalon/Woodroffe's English writings on Tantra were published, firstly between 1915-1919, and then between 1921 and 1923 when Woodroffe's sections of WaP were first published, as well as (probably) the first nine chapters of GOL. However, from the summaries just given we can see that Studies, along with most of SS, and the first edition of SP were completed in a very short time in 1917-19. These books are closely linked, with some passages being repeated in them. Altogether the first publication of about thirty-four of the chapters of these three books can be firmly dated to the two years 1917 and 1918, with a little over half that number (about nineteen) which probably fall outside them.

The interval between 1919 and 1921 corresponds roughly with a period of furlough in England in late 1919-20, where Woodroffe would not have had the assistance of his collaborators. Very little was produced after 1923 following Woodroffe's retirement from India, apart from revisions for the third editions of SS and SP in 1927 and 1928 respectively. We have seen that the TT also diminished in momentum <sup>for a while</sup> after 1922, suggesting that it was the relationship between Woodroffe and his collaborators, especially Ghose and Mukhopādhyāy, which was so productive of both English and Sanskrit publications.

What about the period before 1915? We know that SP (1918) was five years in preparation,<sup>47</sup> which takes us back to 1913, the year that marks the beginning of all the publications. For stylistic and other reasons to be discussed later, we can probably assign ITS to Atal Bihari Ghose rather than to Woodroffe. Although we cannot be certain whether it was Woodroffe or Ghose who wrote the introduction and preface to PT/1 (1914), it is possible that, like the Introduction to TRT (above p.288) it was a joint production. Certainly, attacks on missionary and orientalist writers and their influence over the Western-educated public was a favourite theme of Ghose.<sup>48</sup>

### Sanskrit

We can now turn to the puzzling question of Woodroffe's relationship with Sanskrit. We know for certain that he tried to learn it: the Foreword to the third edition of Bhārata Shakti records a conversation with 'a distinguished European Sanskritist' who asked Woodroffe if he had learned the language: 'My reply', reported Woodroffe 'was that I had not learned Sanskrit, but that I had been and was still learning Sanskrit in this country.' To which the European scholar is quoted as replying: 'What a pity! They cannot teach Sanskrit in this country, they have no system.'<sup>49</sup> Woodroffe reported this conversation in 1921 but did not say when it took place. It suggests that his studies continued for some time and perhaps that he was taught in the traditional way. What is significant is that he was careful to claim not that he had learned Sanskrit, but only that he was learning it.

Let us now take a closer look at Ghose's note to Woodroffe and the letter it accompanied. [B1 and B2 in the appendix]. B2 was the first of three letters addressed to Woodroffe from a correspondent in South India, Mr Sentinath Iyer, who seems to have been a follower of the southern Śaivite sect of Śaiva Siddhānta. He made markings of his own on the pages<sup>50</sup>, but the writing of Atal Bihari Ghose can be seen clearly above the passages in devanagari script and alongside in the margins. It is the same handwriting as on his own note, 1B. I will return to the substance of these quotations later, but for the present we need only to note, first that the Sanskrit is very simple, and secondly that one of the passages consists<sup>almost</sup> solely of a list of sects:

Kāpāla, Lākula, Vāmā, Bhairava, Purvam, Pakṣitam  
Pāñcharātra, Pashupata and others of thousands.

This seems to suggest that Woodroffe needed help even with the devanagari script. Though Kāpāla and Lākula might have been unfamiliar names to him, Vāmā, Bhairava and Pāñcharatra he should have recognised because he used the words frequently in his writings.

Strange as this may seem, it is borne out by remarks made by someone who claimed to have taught Woodroffe Sanskrit. In chapter 6 we saw that according to Pal his teacher was Pandit Haridev Sastri, the High Court interpreter. But I was able to obtain a tape of an interview that took place in the 1960s on West Bengal Radio with Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji, by then a leading expert on Bengali Linguistics, who claimed that when still a student he was recruited by Atal Bihari Ghose to teach Sanskrit to Woodroffe and his wife Ellen. S.K. Chatterji was quite scathing and said emphatically: 'Woodroffe did not know Sanskrit'; and then he told an anecdote about how he had been asked the meaning of a word which did not exist because Woodroffe could not even read the script properly. So it would seem that Ghose really did feel it necessary to transcribe the list of sects -- although his note was written seven years later than the time Chatterji was talking about (see below). It is possible that Woodroffe had read Sanskrit in Bengali characters, as some Tantras had been published in that script, including MNT,KT and ST.<sup>51</sup> But if so it would seem a comparatively easy matter to learn devanagari too.

Chatterji recounts how Ghose had told him that Mrs Woodroffe was particularly interested in reading texts of Śankarāchārya, whereupon Chatterji had protested that he was merely a student who had just finished his BA, and this did not qualify him to teach Sanskrit philosophical texts. According to him, Ghose simply laughed and said: 'That doesn't matter, it will be quite enough for them!'<sup>52</sup>

The date of Chatterji's BA was 1911.<sup>53</sup> If his story is quite true it certainly follows that Woodroffe did not translate the MNT and publish it two years later in 1913. Neither did he and his wife translate the collection of Hymns to the Goddess which came out in the same year as GLb (see chapter 1 p.32). The Hymns was an anthology drawn from a variety of texts. What Chatterji says of Ellen Woodroffe agrees with what is written in the preface to the first edition: that she collaborated with the translations from texts ascribed to

Śankarāchārya, while Arthur Avalon alone was responsible for the rest;<sup>54</sup> and the fact that one of the first 'Avalon' publications came out jointly with his wife corroborates Chatterji's story about the couple studying together at the beginning. Chatterji also informs us that Atal Bihari Ghose initially wanted the MNT translation to be published under Woodroffe's name but that it was Woodroffe who refused and chose the name Arthur Avalon to indicate their collaboration.

To accept that Suniti Kumar Chatterji was Woodroffe's first teacher does not mean that he had no others afterwards; therefore it does not necessarily contradict Pal's account. What is problematical is that Pal states that Woodroffe met his Guru Sivacandra through Haridev Śāstri, 'his Sanskrit teacher', and that Woodroffe then introduced Havell to Sivacandra. If both statements are right then Woodroffe would have had to meet his Guru before 1906 when Havell left India. If he was already studying Sanskrit by then, it seems strange that he was still so ignorant in 1911.

In either case, whether Woodroffe began his Sanskrit studies in 1906 or in 1911, Ghose's letter<sup>(61)</sup> was written much later. It is dated 12th June 1918 when Arthur Avalon's books had been before the public for nearly six years. In fact it was written in the middle of what turns out to be Woodroffe's most productive period (see above). The first edition of SS had already been published and the first edition of SP was about to come out in September of that year. The Studies had already been serialised in a journal; and eight volumes of TT had been published.

#### 'Creation in the Tantra'

If Woodroffe began studying Sanskrit with Chatterji in or around 1911, he was four years into his studies when he gave his first public lecture on 'Creation in the Tantra' at the Dalhousie Institute in Calcutta (above, ps. 71-2; 224). It was first published as a pamphlet by the AAS in 1915, the year it was given, and there is little change from the text in the pamphlet and the chapter as it now stands in SS [DP ps. 379-

408].<sup>55</sup> It is full of Sanskrit philosophical terms which Woodroffe appears to use very fluently. A degree of familiarity with philosophical vocabulary however does not imply the ability to read an unseen passage of text. The second part of the lecture is based on the first chapter of Śāradātilaka [ST] with the commentary of Raghava Bhatta, which was to be edited later by Ghose as TT/16 and 17. The chapter follows the text and commentary closely: in fact passages of it are simply quotes in translation.[SS:396ff] It looks as if Woodroffe had studied the first chapter of ST with the help of Ghose and perhaps a roman transcription of the text, or a Bengali edition.

A comparison between the pamphlet and the more polished version in later editions of SS shows that some changes were made but the alterations are fairly minor.<sup>56</sup> The chapter is characteristic of one of the Avalon/Woodroffe styles: rather convoluted, technical and "heavy", and surely confusing to those in his audience without a knowledge of the subject. Woodroffe has another, far easier, style and this occurs when there is less use of Sanskrit quotations and when he is not attempting to discuss a particular text. A comparison of the 'Creation' lecture, with two lectures delivered later in London illustrates the difference. Although the London lectures might have demanded concentration from his audience, they are not so confusing to read. There are fewer textual references and most of the Sanskrit terms used are explained in parenthesis.<sup>57</sup>

Woodroffe could quote Sanskrit ślokas and mantras when he gave a public lecture.<sup>58</sup> That he would have learned to do this if taught in the traditional manner is very likely -- but that, too, does not imply an ability to read unseen texts. Taken together with his constant use of Sanskrit terminology, however, it would have helped to create the impression of Sanskrit erudition to the general public, and this was an important part of the image of Arthur Avalon as an English orientalist. If Woodroffe really was as ignorant of Sanskrit as appears from Ghose's letter and Suniti Kumar

Chatterji's story, one wonders how he would have managed to keep up such a performance in a public lecture. If anyone had stood up and quoted a śloka which he did not understand he would have been exposed. Moreover it also seems as if the author of most of SS, GOL and SP thinks about philosophical concepts through the medium of Sanskrit terminology.<sup>59</sup> Although even this can be achieved without necessarily needing to be proficient in grammar and translation, the mystery remains.

'Studies in the Mantra Śāstra'

The letter marked A3 in the appendix deepens it. This was a scribbled pencil note on High Court paper and though it is undated we can surmise it was written in 1917 or 1918:

¶Dear Mr Ghose, Please run through this proof and make what corrections are necessary specially noting the Sanskrit quotations marked in red pencil.

I shall be glad to have it back soon as it is the next article to appear in the Vedānta Kesari.

The articles in Vedānta Keśari as we have seen were the Studies in the Mantra Śāstra which later became chapters 10 - 21 of Garland of Letters (above p.39 ). Now, while the 'Creation' lecture could possibly have been written by someone without a reading knowledge of Sanskrit, it is harder to believe this of the Studies. They have the appearance of extremely scholarly productions, with short quotations from texts which are commented on in detail, and many references to other texts, as well as even greater profusion of Sanskrit terminology. The brief note reveals that Ghose assisted Woodroffe with the article concerned; but it was Woodroffe who seems to have been initially responsible for it, as the proofs were sent to him, not Ghose. Moreover, if Ghose had written the article himself, or even produced it jointly with his friend, he presumably would not have needed to be told that it was for Vedānta Keśari.

Moreover the author of the Studies informs us that they resulted from his visit to Kashmir which he had made in order to investigate what he called 'the northern Śaiva school' (ie



'Kashmir Śaivism'). He wanted to understand the relationship between the Śaivite doctrine of the thirty-six tattvas, and the parallel Śākta cosmogonic system concerning mantras and the śaktis associated with them, which as we have seen is the theme of GOL.[GOL:185] Although this does not rule out the possibility that Ghose contributed to the Studies, Woodroffe did visit Kashmir himself at this time. His correspondence with Dawasamdip reveals that he went there in the summer of 1916 (above p.294) This was just before the first of the Studies were published: from a reference in the second article to appear in the magazine, the first one seems to have appeared in the December 1916 issue of Vedānta Keśari.<sup>60</sup>

The chapters as they stand in GOL reproduce the offprints as published in 1917 and 18: there are only a few very minor differences between the pamphlet versions and the book. It is very hard to believe that Woodroffe could have written any of them the year before he needed Ghose to translate Sentinath Iyer's quotations for him in June 1918.

In the Studies Avalon added significant Kashmir Śaivite texts to his repertoire of quotations and references. He mentions the Kashmiri pandit Harabhatta Śāstri who provided him with a summary of the Śaiva doctrine of cosmic evolution extracted from two texts: the Netra Tantra, and the Tantrāloka -- but Avalon does not note that this is by the great Abhinavagupta. Several quotations from the pandits's summary are printed, accompanied by English translations.<sup>61</sup>

In the other articles, Avalon pursues his study through quotations of verses from Tattva Saṁdoha by Ksemaraja (again he does not note that this was Abhinavagupta's disciple) and Īśvara-pratyabhijñā, one of the core texts of Kashmir Śaivism, though again, he does not inform us of this fact. Indeed Avalon appears so unfamiliar with these texts that when citing the Tantrasāra -- another of Abhinavagupta's famous works -- he has to distinguish it from the nineteenth century Bengali text of the same name.[GOL 160-1]

Scholarship in English on Kashmir Śaivism was of course very much in its infancy at that time.

Yet the text which is quoted far more often than any of these is, once again, the first chapter of ST with Rāghava Bhatta's commentary, the text which we have seen featured prominently in Woodroffe's lecture of 1915, before his Kashmir visit. Woodroffe it seems was trying to penetrate more deeply the world of ideas which this text had introduced to him. In fact the doctrine of the thirty-six tattvas, with the cosmogonic role of Śakti and cosmic evolution through mantra became one of his 'pet themes'. It appears in the chapter entitled 'Cit Śakti' in SS [SS:256-289] where the diagram at SS:285 illustrates the scheme, and this chapter and Studies were written around the same time. Woodroffe returned to the theme again in 1926 in his London lecture on the worship of the Goddess, in which he describes the Śrī Yantra. [SS:409-434] In fact Studies, SS and SP are all closely linked thematically.

Apart from the texts named above, most of the other references in the Studies are very brief but what they lack in length they make up in quantity. The style, which is extremely technical with Sanskrit terms and phrases being frequently provided in parentheses, at times suggests that passages are translated directly from some Sanskrit commentary. The impression these studies give is of very extensive textual knowledge indeed.

Many examples could be given to illustrate this style. I will quote from just two passages: (The transliteration has been modernised in the 9th edition):

...it is said that ether is hollow or pitted (Suśiracīṇam), air is moving (Calanaparah), fire is digesting (Paripākavaṇ), water is tasteful (Rasavat) and earth is solid (Ghana). All the universe is composed of the four Bhūtas entering into one another (Parasparānupraviṣṭaiḥ māhābhūtaiś caturvidhaiḥ) pervaded by ether (Vyāptakāśaiḥ). " [GOL:189]<sup>62</sup>

And an example of his mingling of Sanskrit terminology in English sentences:

Above Bindu, the Śaktis...become more and more subtle until Niṣkala Unmanī is reached which, as the Yoginīhrdaya says, is uncreate motionless speech (Anutpannanispandāvāk), the twin aspects of which are Samvit or the Void (Śunya-Samvit) and Samvit as tendency to manifestation in a subtle state (Utpatsuh samvid utpattyavasthā sūkṣmā). Unmanī is beyond Kāranarūpā-Śakti; where there is no experience (Bhānam) or Kāla or Kalā nor of Devatā or Tattva, in the sense of category, as that which distinguishes one thing from another. It is Svanirvāṇam param padam, the Nirvikalpa-nirañjana-śiva śakti which is Guruvaktra. [GOL:120-1]

If Woodroffe wrote this, then even allowing for Ghose's revision of his Sanskrit quotations it seems <sup>superficially</sup> impressive. It is hard for the reader to follow, however, and one wonders in passages such as this last one whether the author himself understood it all. Nevertheless, for a reader who has a little knowledge of Sanskrit, this way of writing can make the language into a vehicle for understanding the philosophy. It is in effect reading a passage of text alongside a literal translation, and this may be a clue to what has happened. It looks as if Woodroffe is passing on the substance of his lessons, reproducing faithfully passages he has read with Ghose or other teachers, with the explanations he has been given by them.

If reading some of these chapters is like reading passages of text with the help of a teacher, it looks as if this is just what Woodroffe did with the 'traditional' scholars he met in Kashmir, especially Harabhatta Śāstri whom he named. This pandit was a member of the team working for the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies which had just started to be published from Srinagar. Its first volume appeared in 1911 edited by Jagdish Chandra Chatterji, who was Editor-in-chief of the whole series; he, too, acknowledges considerable help from Harabhatta Śāstri.<sup>63</sup> Woodroffe called Chatterji 'my friend' in 1917,<sup>64</sup> so possibly it was he who had introduced him to the Kashmiri pandit. J.C. Chatterji's Kashmir Śaivism (an introduction to the Kashmir series) had been published in 1913. It presents a detailed and rationalized account of the evolution of the tattvas and also contains in its first section an outline of the textual sources. Avalon does not

appear to have used it in his Studies, although he does draw on it in the chapter on 'Embodied Consciousness' in SP.[see SP:58-61]

That Woodroffe had little Sanskrit is also alleged by Agehananda Bharati -- formerly Leopold Fischer -- who wrote an autobiography entitled The Ochre Robe. He studied at Benares in the 1950s and would have met people still living there at the time who had known Woodroffe. Bharati stated that Woodroffe knew very little Sanskrit himself but relied closely on pandits and others who did.<sup>65</sup> Read in the light of this statement, Studies in the Mantra Śāstra suggest on closer examination that the author did indeed rely on others' translation and interpretation. Although he makes references to many texts, he seems only to have actually studied short portions of a very few selected ones. It is interesting to see that some of the ideas he focuses on seem to be connected to ritual or sādhana and inner experience. He also seems sometimes to be out of his depth. The Studies in the Mantra Śāstra, although Ghose may have contributed to them, do not need to have been written by an expert in Sanskrit, despite the very impressive knowledge their author appears to display.

If we have to concede this, then we must assume that others provided Woodroffe with most of his copious textual references which are such a feature of parts of his work. Some of them seem to be taken from the Sanskrit commentators he has mentioned.<sup>66</sup> Others could have been supplied by his pandit teachers, and of course by Ghose himself. But a further look at Sentinath Iyer's letter also suggests another source and shows us the process in operation.

#### Sentinath Iyer's Letter

Returning now to Sentinath Iyer's letter (B2 in the appendix), if we take note of all the ślokas which Ghose translated for Woodroffe, we can see that these have been incorporated into SS, in the chapter entitled 'The Tantras and Their Significance' [chapter 3, DP edition] <sup>67</sup>

The passages of interest begin at the top of SS(DP) p.56, where after an untranslated Sanskrit quotation from the Srimad Bhāgavata, the first edition had originally continued:

According to a quotation which has been given me from the Vāyu Samhita the latter speaks of a twofold Śaivagama namely one which is based on Śruti and another independent of it.[SS(1):2]

This was followed by the transliterated Sanskrit text from Vāyu Samhita 1.28 of which this sentence was a paraphrase.<sup>68</sup> Now the Sanskrit word for the 'independent' branch of Śaivāgama in the quotation was svatantra. This led Sentinath Iyer to complain that this term referred to some of the texts of Śaiva Siddhānta, and therefore the śloka appeared to state that these scriptures were not based on Śruti -- ie. that they were non-Vedic or heterodox. He suggested that Woodroffe replace the quotation from Vāyu Samhitā with one from Sanatkumāra Samhitā, which he wrote out in devanāgarī. In the second and subsequent editions of SS Woodroffe not only substituted a translation of this śloka, but he also inserted before it a paragraph incorporating Iyer's other quotations - from the Kurma Purāna - on the southern Śaivite sects. He followed Ghose's translations of them fairly closely, though not exactly. [SS(DP):56-7] It is interesting to see in the letter that Ghose translated even the śloka from the Vāyu Samhitā which Woodroffe had already used in his first edition. Woodroffe also took from another part of Iyer's letter a quotation from the Kāmika Āgama on the definition of Tantra, which appears on the previous page.[SS(DP):55, top]

The lengthy interpolations in the second edition have greatly expanded what began as a short article but they have also disturbed the flow of the original. The passage on the Śaivite sects reads as if Woodroffe has inserted it without much understanding. After it, he writes: 'Into this mass of sects I do not attempt here to enter, except in a general way.' [SS(DP):57, top] It seems that he found all this confusing; and he inserts his summary of Iyer's quotations

without much relevance to context. It is not really so important at this point to know the status of these different sects, some of them very ancient and obscure, such as the Lākula Paśupatas. The sentence: 'It is Śuddhādvaita because in it there is no Viśesana' [SS(DP):56, bottom] comes from another of Iyer's letters. There is no obvious need for it, apart from keeping Iyer happy.

The significance of this, is that it shows us how Woodroffe took care to satisfy his correspondent's objections and to get the matter exactly right in the eyes of his Indian readership. He did not exclude anything Iyer gave him, whether relevant or not. Many other interpolations in this and other chapters of the expanded second and third editions of SS may have originated in similar correspondence with readers, or from conversations with friends and contacts. Passages like this one give an impression of great meticulousness at the cost of clarity, but it begins to look as if this was done not so much out of pedantry -- as might at first appear -- as out of a desire to satisfy as many people as possible.

Woodroffe does not acknowledge Iyer as the source for these references. He has told us that the original quotation from the Vāyu Saṁhitā in the first edition, which prompted Iyer's letter, was also given to him by someone else (see above). In SS:509, he mentions a passage in the Rg Veda similar to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel and says a friend has told him of it but has forgotten to send the reference. The story is repeated in another chapter, still mentioning the friend and still without the reference. [p.521] We can assume that besides Ghose himself, there were many such friends and correspondents like Iyer who provided Woodroffe with references. On the whole he appears to be scrupulous about acknowledging his sources other than Ghose where he has drawn extensively from them, but to have done so for the great number of short quotes and references to texts which fill his work would have obviously been impossible.

Most of the numerous Sanskrit references in the books are very brief and many are repeated in several different places. It might seem obvious that referring to a text, even providing a short quotation, does not imply having direct access to it oneself, but the large number of such references in Arthur Avalon's writings tends to augment the impression of great Sanskrit learning which belongs to Woodroffe's image.

#### Use of Texts

In addition to Śārada Tilaka and others already noted, there are some other texts which Woodroffe mentions especially frequently, portions of which he seems to have studied in the original; in most cases he probably did so with Ghose. Most important among them are the two Tantras which were specially popular with the Bengali bhadralok: the Kulārṇava Tantra (TT/5) and the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra (MNT). MNT was a restrained Tantra as far as "immoral" practices were concerned (above p.61). Despite describing the pañcatattva and other sexual rituals in detail the KT can be presented as "puritanical" in its moral tone if quoted selectively and some passages were used to this effect by Woodroffe.<sup>69</sup> But it also contains passages which might have shocked, and this could perhaps be the reason why a promised translation never appeared. The Foreword to the Sanskrit edition (TT/5) stated that a translation on the same lines as that of the MNT would be published shortly and therefore no detailed summary of the contents was provided.<sup>70</sup> As already stated, an incomplete translation was found in Ghose's house. Woodroffe in SS takes more references from it than any other text, sometimes in detail.<sup>71</sup> A long quotation from its 'grand opening chapter' on the frailty of Man, in a lecture of January 1917, is a fairly close paraphrase of Ghose's translation.[SS:457]

The eighth chapter of KT however describes seven ullāsas - states of ecstasy approaching a condition where all constraints are dissolved and 'the command (of Shiva) is that which is willed (by the Sādhaka)'<sup>72</sup> These passages appear to describe a drunken orgy. They certainly suggest a cult of

ecstasy. Ghose in his notes interprets the ullāṣas as symbolic of states of mystical union.<sup>73</sup> Woodroffe makes a brief reference to this passage in his SS chapter on the pañcatattva, where he provides several explanations from which his readers may take their pick: that ullāṣas are stages of initiation; that a pandit has told him the passage is not authentic; that it is not meant to be taken seriously. [SS:616-7]<sup>74</sup> Other passages in the KT make fairly clear that sexual intercourse takes place within the ritual. Woodroffe is aware of this but gives it no more than a brief reference, which is immediately followed by citations of the text's moral injunctions.[SS:593]. In presenting the KT as a text preaching restraint of the senses, Woodroffe has told only half the truth. He appears unaware of the KT's cult of ecstasy.

The Six Centres (translation of the SCN) was also advertised on the list of early forthcoming publications, before finally taking shape as The Serpent Power about five years after the MNT translation was published. So these three texts, MNT, KT, and SCN seem to have been selected for translation very early on and to have formed the basis for Woodroffe's study of Tantra. He also studied the first chapter of ST with the interpretations of its commentator Rāghava Bhatta in very great detail, but he does not refer to any other chapter.

Two other texts referred to several time in SS, though far less frequently, are the unpublished Sammohana Tantra, of which there was only one manuscript,<sup>75</sup> and the tantric anthology called Sarvollāsa, whose author Sarvanandanātha was the subject of an article by Woodroffe in 1920 in which he states that he came across the manuscript 'three years ago'. There are three other references to Sarvollāsa in SS, all occurring in passages dating from 1917. [SS:146, 172, 349].<sup>76</sup>

Woodroffe acknowledges as a source for his article an Indian scholar, Dineśa Candra Bhattachāryya.[SS:251-255] Bhattachāryya had provided Woodroffe with his unpublished article on Sarvanandanātha because he wanted the latter's



place in the history of Bengal 'Tantricism' to be recognized. [SS:251]. This illustrates how the Indian public responded to Woodroffe's image.

All of the texts in the TT series are referred to in Avalon/Woodroffe's English writings, though some only once or twice. But the most frequently cited are four texts: MNT, KT, SCN, and ST. Of these four, two were edited by Ghose himself, and of the remaining two, he translated SCN for The Serpent Power, and KT he translated but never published. So this is strong evidence that Ghose was Woodroffe's most important, though not sole, source of textual knowledge. Woodroffe did not rely exclusively on him, but also sought out other scholars and pandits in many places.

For Śrī Vidyā, Woodroffe drew on two texts frequently quoted in SP: Ānandalahari (Wave of Bliss) with Lakṣmīdhara's commentary, and Bhāskararāya's eighteenth-century Sanskrit commentary on Śrī Lalitā Sahasranāma (the 'Thousand Names' of the Goddess), which is also quoted in GOL. These texts describe the worship of Tripurasundarī in her mandala. But although a translation of the former text was published by Arthur Avalon, his English writings know both of them only through the English translations of Pandit R. Anantakrishna Sastri, published by the Theosophical Society.<sup>77</sup> Another text of one branch of this school was the Tantrarājantra [TT/8 and 12]. Its detailed introduction signed Arthur Avalon provided material for Woodroffe's London lecture of 1926 on the 'Magna Mater' (see above). Kāmakalāvīlāsa whose translation by Ghose was published as TT/10, is referred to very rarely.

#### Use of Secondary sources

Besides texts he read with Ghose or others, and his wide contacts and correspondence, the third important element in Woodroffe's knowledge was his very wide reading in secondary

literature. His works are as full of English references as Sanskrit ones and occasionally French, German or Italian authors are also mentioned. Where other European orientologists are referred to, however, it is usually only in order to refute them, though scientific or philosophical writers are used to endorse Śākta ideas or to provide comparative material. One exception in the former category was Otto Schrader, the librarian at the Theosophical Society (see chapter 2 p.64), whose introduction to his edition of Ahīrbudhnyā Samhitā (a Vaisnava Pāñcarātra text) Woodroffe cites.[SS:59]. Louis de la Vallée Poussin gets several favourable references, as does Woodroffe's French contact Masson Oursel, though only because he agrees with Avalon.<sup>78</sup>

Secondary literature on Tantra and related subjects by contemporary Indian writers, on the other hand, whether in English or Bengali, is often drawn on and deferred to. As already mentioned, Pandit Anantakrishna Sastri,<sup>79</sup> J.C. Chatterji, and Brajendranath Seal (above chapter 7) are all extensively quoted or cited in SP. Besides Kashmir Śaivism, Chatterji's Hindu Realism<sup>80</sup>, is a prominent source in WAP. A notice in Modern Review describes Seal and Chatterji as leading modern reinterpreters of Indian philosophy. Chatterji combined the status of traditional 'pandit' with that of modern Western trained scholar.<sup>81</sup> Brajendranath Seal was Professor of Philosophy at the Calcutta University, and a member of the Sādhāran Brahmo Samāj, who later became a secular humanist.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from these major sources long extracts covering several pages are lifted directly from other Indian writers - for example, Saccidānanda Swami, whose 'modern' account of the grades of Kaula practice are paraphrased over several pages [SS:155-160]; and Jāḍaveśvara Tarkaratna's 'orthodox' views -- from his article on the history and antiquity of Tantra -- are quoted at length in the introduction to Principles of Tantra, and his textual references are used and acknowledged in SS [PT/1:48-66; SS:145]. An article on the origins of Tantra by an anonymous Indian writer in the journal Prabuddha

Bhārata, and Pañchkori Bāndyopādhyāy's lengthy review of Avalon's MNT translation were both reproduced in the introduction to the second volume of PT.[PT/2:11-16, and 16-22] The latter was a prominent journalist and writer on Tantra who was a fellow disciple of Sivacandra (see chapter 6 p.193). Finally, there are whole sections or chapters which are direct contributions from Indian scholars -- for example the long introductory chapter to PT volume 2 was written by Barada Kanta Majumdar, and a Note to a chapter in SS on precedents for tantric practices to be found in Vedic rituals, was contributed by Braja Lal Mukherji.[PT/2:25-153; SS:103-114]

Then there was of course Woodroffe's friend and second major collaborator, P.N. Mukhopadhyay, later to become an influential Guru in Calcutta. Apart from GOL and WaP to which he made major contributions, his pseudo-scientific theories about Kuṇḍalinī were worked out in correspondence with Woodroffe. This was summarized in the short chapter on Kuṇḍalinī in SS and at greater length in SP [SS:695-700; SP:297-313]; and his explanation of Pure Awareness found a place in the chapter on Consciousness [SS:267-8]. P.N. Mukherji was, as one reviewer put it, 'unnecessarily technical' and his books could 'scare away not only lay readers but also many philosophic students'.<sup>83</sup> But Woodroffe made a serious attempt to unpack his ideas and present them in accessible form.

Briefer references are made to many other Indian writers: for example: Nallaswami Pillai, author of a book on Śaiva Siddhānta and its Introduction by V.V. Ramana Śāstrin,[SS:59; PT/1 ps.42-3,45]; J.N. Mazumdar's paper to the Indian Research Society [SS:375]; Pandit Jayacandra Siddhāntabhūṣaṇa, who wrote an essay explaining the pañcatattva [SS:605]; Professor S.N. Dasgupta, soon to publish his standard history of Indian philosophy in 1920;<sup>84</sup> and Pandit Candrakānta Tarkālankāra's Bengali lectures on Hindu philosophy.[SS:308, 324]

Apart from long passages quoted from Anantakrishna Śāstrī and Brajendranath Seal, the whole of The Serpent Power draws heavily on secondary sources. A section on Rāja Yoga seems closely based on a pamphlet of Dayananda Saraswati published by the Ārya Samāj. This makes for some confusion as the writer of the pamphlet considered Rāja Yoga superior to Kundalinī Yoga, but Woodroffe places it as the culmination of his chapter on 'Practice'.<sup>85</sup> This might have reflected his later misgivings about Kundalinī Yoga. (See above p.232)

In SP, as in SS and GOL, some paragraphs are quotes from translated Sanskrit texts or their commentaries, along with the references cited by the commentator. For example, a phrase beginning: 'the Ācārya...' in the text of SP is confusing, until one perceives that one is actually reading the translation of a Sanskrit commentary by Bhāskararāya.<sup>86</sup> SP quotes so frequently in places that it becomes difficult to establish where one cited author or text ends and another begins, and the number of Sanskrit references in footnotes makes it encyclopedic in scope.

The introductory chapter in the first edition included two long quotations exemplifying 'modern criticism' of Kundalinī Yoga which were then answered by Woodroffe -- or possibly by Ghose. The first was a letter from the disciple of 'an English educated Guru' -- giving rise to an acerbic footnote to the effect that it was always necessary to note such a fact. [SP:273, footnote 2] Perhaps this indicates the influence of Ghose. The second extract was taken from a book by an unnamed Brahmo author. These two sections have been displaced in the later editions from the introductory chapter, where they were much better suited. Thus the first edition of SP began with an introduction along the lines of that to Principles of Tantra, addressing the negative images of its subject matter in the minds of the English educated Indian middle class. Displacing them to a later chapter may have been intended to give the criticisms more weight. (see chapter 7 p.232) Some of the other long quotations in Woodroffe's books are there for similar discursive reasons --

to present one side of an argument which is then discussed or criticised, as for example following Jādaveśvara Tarkaratna's contribution. [PT/1:66-7].

This list could be longer but these examples have been given to show how Woodroffe's books could be seen in the light of a compendium of contemporary Indian interpretation and scholarship around the subject of Tantra. Indian writers, except when they are considered to be influenced by Western orientalist prejudices, are usually treated with respect, and even when criticised are never condemned in the tones directed at foreigners. Thus Pandit Anantakrishna Shastri's negative attitude to the Kaula sects is gently and respectfully disputed [SP 250-1 footnotes].<sup>87</sup> If some Indian writers have ideas that seem extravagant or unconvincing, Woodroffe adds his own balanced commentary afterwards. Sometimes he uses their contributions as points for discussion; sometimes he answers their criticisms; but whenever he can, he accommodates them. Above all, they were a major source of his own knowledge.

It becomes clear then how Woodroffe made very extensive use of secondary sources, whether these were literature, personal contacts, or correspondence. He often gives his references, and although we cannot be sure that he always does so, this provides understanding of how his books were built up. He evidently read as much as his Sanskrit knowledge permitted him in the original texts, though presumably always with the help of written or oral translations. Even allowing for Atal Bihari Ghose's close assistance, it is still a very impressive performance. It shows us how far a skilful and dedicated use of 'informants' and secondary sources could take a scholar who had no direct access to Sanskrit at this period, when Bengali scholarship in English was abundant. It took Woodroffe further into the realm of the 'insider' than those among his European contemporaries who could rely on their own linguistic skills. It was a paradox: Arthur Avalon was meant to be a Western scholar -- but what he presented to his Indian readers was their own interpretation of their own

religious culture, to which he acted as a mirror and mediator.

#### Styles - Ghose or Woodroffe?

One solution to the problem of Woodroffe's apparent Sanskrit expertise might be available if there were an obvious difference between an 'Arthur Avalon' style and a Woodroffe one. Then one could attribute the former to Atal Bihari Ghose, as might seem to be implied by Woodroffe's disclaimer in his SS preface (see chapter 2 p.77 ). A thorough stylistic comparison of the different portions of the Avalon/Woodroffe works would probably not be of great interest, especially as we can assume that the two collaborators often worked closely together. The following are put forward as tentative suggestions that might indicate how the two contributions could be distinguished.

Some examples of Ghose's writing in English under his own name do bear resemblances in style and content to passages of SS and SP. Two short articles from the American Occult Digest mentioned above (see footnote 6 ) summarised Śākta Tantra as a integral part of 'Hinduism', which Ghose called 'Brahmanism' or Brāhmaṇya Dharma -- one of Avalon/Woodroffe's themes. They do so with a simplicity and economy unusual in the Avalon/Woodroffe books and with a minimum of Sanskrit terminology. The contents of one of these articles is close to the SS chapter entitled 'Alleged Conflict of Śāstras' [SS:235-250], describing the doctrines of adhikāra and bhūmikā: 'competency' and 'grades' of spiritual knowledge.

Other examples are: an article entitled Śiva and Śakti published in the VRS bulletin;<sup>88</sup> and 'The Spirit and Culture of the Tantras' in a collection of Studies on the Tantras<sup>89</sup> These contain more Sanskrit than the two short articles for the American periodical, but not to the extent that it overloads the English text. Apart from that, their content would be familiar to anyone who has read SS, except that Ghose, even more than Avalon/Woodroffe, stresses the symbolic over the literal sexual aspects of Śiva-Śakti ritual. These

articles are written in a simple style and do not tax the reader with complicated terminology. Yet Ghose keeps close to his Sanskrit texts; he cites them regularly but strictly in context. Moreover, in these examples to hand, he does not refer to one single secondary source in English (except in refutation). Nor does he occupy himself with much metaphysical discussion of the different forms of advaita, of the tattvas, and other matters, which so much fascinated Woodroffe.

Ghose's style is similar to that of the SS chapter on 'cĪnācāra' [SS:192-204], which we can almost certainly ascribe to him, since it summarises texts. 'Alleged Conflict of Śāstras' [SS:235-251], mentioned above, was an article for Indian Philosophical Review signed with the pseudonym. It contains much Sanskrit terminology, but considering its readership, that is not inappropriate. The writer cites many texts whose contents he expounds in a clear and fairly simple style. The theme -- that Indian schools of thought form a coherent whole which caters for all grades of spiritual development -- is pursued without any metaphysical discussion. This SS chapter too may be by Ghose.<sup>90</sup> Woodroffe himself could write reasonably clearly, but this was usually when he was not referring closely to texts. (above p.306)

Ghose's chapter in Studies on the Tantras covers its subject matter in short paragraphs under subsidiary headings. This is not at all like Woodroffe's writing which tends to be more discursive and rambling. It is however similar to the earliest of the Avalon publications, An Introduction to Tantra Śāstra (ITS). The writer of this book seems to experience less difficulty in explaining Tantric concepts with comparative economy than Woodroffe appears to have had later on, and passages from ITS have been reproduced in SS and SP, suggesting that Woodroffe could not find a better way of explaining some points. ITS has the familiar Avalon/Woodroffe style of using a lot of Sanskrit terminology, sometimes in parenthesis, sometimes in the text

and without always translating it. This happens to a much greater extent than in the articles by Ghose, but much less than in the Studies section of GOL. ITS, though difficult for a 'beginner' in Tantra, is much easier to follow than many passages in the later books. It is simple and factual, confining itself to imparting information and not embarking on philosophical discourses. Nor does it rely at all on secondary sources, but on the other hand quotes frequently from the relevant texts. ITS lives up to its name, for it is a compact introduction to the whole field of Tantra. Its author obviously has very wide knowledge and never gives the impression of being confused by his subject matter. For these reasons, and also because it was the earliest publication, we can probably consider Ghose to be at least the leading collaborator if not the sole author of this Introduction. That would make the whole MNT translation with its introduction in the first edition, in effect, the work of Ghose rather than Woodroffe, and it is significant to recall that it was this publication which first established the reputation of the pseudonymous Arthur Avalon among the Indian public and foreign orientalist.(Above, chapter 2).

The "heavy" style and confusing use of quotes and references that occurs in the other books might be the direct result of collaboration between the two authors. One gets the impression that Woodroffe was sometimes confused by Ghose and his other informants who had supplied him with more information and references than he could assimilate. It has been shown how he reacted to this problem in the case of Sentinath Iyer's letter.

On the other hand, Woodroffe displays more interest in metaphysical questions than Ghose, which he has a talent for presenting and interpreting. When he has distanced himself from the texts - and perhaps from his collaborators too - Woodroffe's writing can also be distinguished for being far more romantic, and more philosophical in the popular sense, than that of Ghose. Woodroffe's romanticism is revealed most clearly in passages of writing which are not about Tantra: in



his description of the landscape by the sea near Konarak [GOL:xiii]; in his writings on art appreciation -- for example a short article in the Madras magazine Shā'amā describing his impressions of Japanese temples <sup>91</sup> -- and Ganguly remarked that Woodroffe's early reviews of ISOA's art exhibitions 'created mild sensations'.<sup>92</sup> This romanticism also penetrates the Tantric writings in places and adds touches of beauty or spirituality. An example can be given from the lecture on the Goddess as Mother which Woodroffe delivered in London, long after his researches were complete. This lecture is a summary of what he had learned in India; its third and last section is specially fine. It concludes:

The Śākta unites himself with this joyous and liberating Mother, saying Sā'ham - "She I am". As he realizes this he is the fearless Hero or Vira...and fearlessness is also the mark of the Illuminate Knower...Such an one is not troubled for himself by the thought of Death...An imperishable instinct tells him that if he, like the leaves, is about to fall he is also the tree on which they will come out again, as also the Earth in which both grow, and yet again ...the Essence which as the Mother-Power sustains them all...Either man's consciousness expands into that Lordliness which sees all as Itself, or he and all lower beings are withdrawn into the Womb of Power in which they are conserved to reappear in that Sphurana or Blossoming which is the Springtide of some new World.[SS:433-4]

This is not like Ghose's style. Several articles which did not find their way into SS were published in Vedānta Keśari in 1924-5, after Woodroffe had left India. The shortest, entitled 'The Wise Childhood', was signed 'Sir John Woodroffe'; four others are on Tantric ritual and are by Arthur Avalon.<sup>93</sup> One of these four recalls Woodroffe's lecture on 'The Psychology of Hindu Religious Ritual' [SS:463-481] which was delivered in London shortly afterwards (in 1925) and of which a typed copy was found in Ghose's house. The other three present new material. They are closely based on texts, with some untranslated Sanskrit terms, some quotes in translation, and no references to secondary sources. The articles are straightforward, factual and economical. The only commentary is the occasional jibe at foreign orientalist or 'modern' Hindus. This sounds very much like Ghose. 'The Wise Childhood' is a striking

contrast. It is Woodroffe at his simplest and most beautiful: there is a quotation in Sanskrit from an Upaniṣad (but we find he has taken it from Farquhar's Crown of Hinduism), there are only a few Sanskrit terms which are explained. The article seems to have been inspired by 'Alleged Conflict of Śāstras' and refers to the main text on which that chapter was built," but unlike the SS chapter, it departs from the texts into meditation; it is philosophical and romantic in tone connecting the simplicity of childhood with the 'Beautiful ...vision of the sage-child in which naturalness is suffused and enriched by knowledge.' Perhaps in these later articles, we are able to distinguish the two distinct personalities which flowed together to create the figure of 'Arthur Avalon'.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Baṣumati, vol 14/2 (1342 = 1936) p.702.
2. ibid ps.700-701. Baṣumati, as we noted, was edited by Hemendraprasad Ghose, a disciple of Sivadandra who probably knew both Woodroffe and Ghose. (See above p.192)
3. Bharat Varsa, vol 23/2, ps.461-4; Indian Culture, Vol 2/nos.1-4 p.841; Saṁsad Bāṅgālī Caritābhidhān, Calcutta, 1988 (2nd ed) 'Atal Bihari Ghose'.
4. Family communication. The family did not believe Ghose had introduced Woodroffe to Tantra, but that it was Tantra that brought them together.
5. Copy in my possession.
6. Occult Digest, (Chicago?) April 1930, p.6 "The Teachings of the Tantra" by Babu Atal Bihari Ghosh. Copy in my possession.
7. Appendix: Letter A8 (undated). If any other editor had been responsible for this volume, his name would have appeared on it.
8. The grandchildren I met were born long after his death.
9. She described them sitting in a circle around him at his home, receiving dictation from him.
10. The three sections are designated A, B and C respectively. The reference numbers are my own.
11. 'I hope you will go very slowly yourself with the work until some other pundits are appointed to help you'.

12. That is, the Sanskrit text edited as TT/13.
13. Because it mentions his daughter's illness. See below.
14. Communication of James Woodroffe.
15. This seems already to have been done with the ST Introduction.
16. His letters had been typed from about 1930 onwards. A letter of March 1935 mentions the excess salivation due to his paralysis.
17. The two letters in question, from Helena Hopkins Zak and someone who signs himself Bernard, have not been included in the appendix as they are quite long. The letter mentioned above was a brief scribbled note, from Helena Hopkins Zak.
18. Translation mine.
19. TT/7 p.vii.
20. The Tibetan Book of the Dead was first published in 1927. Evans-Wentz wrote in his preface: 'I have been really little more than a compiler and editor...To the deceased translator' Evans-Wentz 1948 (2nd ed) p.xx. Lama Kazi Dawasamdub died in 1923 in Calcutta.
21. Śrī cakrasambhāratāntra in Sanskrit. TT/7 p.viii, xvii-xviii. The Lama's son did not know what became of the manuscripts.
22. Pandit Satiscandra Vidyabhusana. See TT/7, p.viii.
23. In his Foreword to The Tibetan Book of the Dead, however, he writes more respectfully of Dawasamdub's scholarship. Evans-Wentz op.cit. p.lxxxiv.
24. Charles Bell 1931 ps.200, 206-7. Bell also wrote a manual of colloquial Tibetan.
25. Evans-Wentz op cit p.xx.
26. Ghose collection C3, April 1927
27. This is not to deny that influential disciples also play their part in this process.
28. A letter from James Woodroffe after his father's death reveals that he was not certain about this.
29. Letter A6 suggests there was another sponsor of the ST.

30. I learned that large numbers of unsold copies of the series accumulated in Darbhanga. Sales mentioned in the letters do not seem to amount to much. It is not clear if Woodroffe also paid Ghose -- references in the letters to cash being sent to Ghose seem to have been remittances from sales to be paid into the account of the AAS, who owned the copyright.

31. OIOC Mss Eur D 609/1 Zetland Papers My Bengal Diary Vol 2 p.97 (July 14 1921): 'I asked [Emerson] if he thought the erotic ritual was much prevalent. He said he thought no, except at the temple of Kamākhyā near Gauhati in Assam....It stands on a summit of a hill and the Maharaja of Darbhanga, a notorious Shakta, is a great patron of it and has built a house on the hilltop.'

32. Pal op.cit. ps.53-5, 72-3, 78.

33. Farquhar 1919 ps.317-321.

34. Conversation in Darbhanga with Mr A.K. Mishra, former secretary to Rameshwar Singh's successor, Kameshwar Singh.

35. University of Cambridge Hardinge Papers vol 56 f.123. Letter from C.J. O'Donnell to Hardinge, 20.2.1913: 'He is a sunbaked Tory if ever there was one...'; Sumit Sarkar 1973 p.505 (referring to a speech to the Bhārat Dharma Mahāmandal in December 1906).

36. Stephen Henningham 1990. Henningham's history of Darbhanga chronicles the reign of Rameshwar Singh and his successor Kameshwar Singh but nowhere mentions that either of them was a Tantric.

37. Ramusack 1978 p.50

38. Hoffman 1936 ps.169-70.

39. K.C.Sarkar 1963. See also Journal of the Varendra Research Museum Vol.7 1981-2 (A.K. Maitra Number), University of Rajshahi

40. A.K.Maitra 1910 p.590

41. K.C.Sarkar op.cit. p.161.

42. SS(1) p.i (preface). Under 'Preface to the First Edition' in the Dover Press edition, this information has been omitted.

43. Two were delivered to Ellen Woodroffe's French Literary Society in Calcutta; and two were delivered in France, one being his address of 1921 in Paris. (above chapter 2 p. 66)

44. SS:vi (Preface to the Fifth Edition).

45. OIOC P/V 55-68.

46. Nirad Chaudhury 1976.

## Notes to Chapter 9

47.SP:xii (Preface to the first edition). The only earlier publications were two translations taken from Hymns to the Goddess which appeared in The Theosophist in 1912. The AAS pamphlet states that Woodroffe's début was his public lecture to the Dalhousie Institute - ie his 'Creation' lecture. If he had produced anything earlier, his admirers would almost certainly have retrieved and published it.

48.An anonymous writer in the Rationalist Review calling himself 'Vidura' had strong views on this matter. A draft article in Ghose's house shows that this was he.

49.Bhārata Shakti (3) p.xx, 'Postscript'

50.They are in red ink which is not apparent on the photocopy.

51.TT/1 p.1

52.For obtaining a copy of a tape of this interview I am grateful to Mr Gautam Sengupta of All India Radio Archives, Calcutta. I was told of its existence by the Ghose family.

53.See B.Mallick (ed) 1981, Preface.

54.Hymns to the Goddess (2nd ed 1952) p.viii-ix

55.Copies of the pamphlet were in the Ghoses' house and one is in my possession. The change of title reflects Avalon/Woodroffe's decision to avoid using the word 'Tantra' (above chapter 7)

56.For example, Woodroffe at first seems to have thought of prakṛti in more material terms than in later editions.

57.SS:409-434 and 463-481.

58.See for example 'Imitation and Independence' address to Friends Union Club BS(3) p.53. Also his address to the Rationalistic Society (see GOL:288).

59.See M.P. Pandit's remarks quoted in chapter 2 (above p.71 ) That Woodroffe could recognize concepts in Sanskrit terminology rather than English is actually stated in one of his letters to Dawasamdip.

60.See OICC P/V 63. The articles which became chapters 19 and 20 were the first to be published of the Studies series. This first offprint was published in July 1917 by the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras. It contained chapters 19, 20 and 10 -- in that order. In the second of these, the first is said to have been published 'last December'.

61.GOL:201ff. Woodroffe has heard of Abhinavagupta: at SS:396 he calls him 'the great Kashmirian Tantrik'.

62. The transliteration used by Woodroffe in GOL(1) had 'sh' for both dental 'ś' and palatal 'ṣ'. suśira instead of susira for 'hollow' is Ganesh's mistake. Woodroffe had sushirāchihnam. vyāptākāśaih should mean 'pervading ether' not 'pervaded by'. Ganesh do not distinguish visarga by 'h'.

63. See Chattopadhyay ed: Śiva Sutra, (Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies Vol 1), Srinagar 1911, preface p.ii. He says he has 'not allowed a single sentence' to go out without checking with the pandit, 'who has made a deeper study than any other pandits in the department'.

64. SS(1) p.3. He refers to 'my friend Jagadisha Chandra Chattopadhyaya Vidyāvaridhi'. In later editions the personal reference has been omitted. The SS chapter originated in an article published in Prabuddha Bhārata in Feb-March 1917.

65. Introduction to H.V. Guenther: Yuganaddha, the Tantric view of Life, 1964 p. (This Introduction is not included in other editions of the book)

66. Eg GOL:107. The quotes from Prayogasāra and Vāyaviya Samhitā occur in a passage taken from Raghava Bhatta's commentary on ST/1/7. A reference from PST paraphrased at GOL:125 and at SS:399-400 is also from the same.

67. This chapter, as we have seen originated in two short articles published in Prabuddha Bharata, a journal of the Ramakrishna Mission. (above p.211)

68. In the DP edition it has been referred to in parenthesis: 'See also Vāyu Samhitā...' [p.56]

69. Eg its 'grand opening chapter' quoted in two places, and the famous saying that man may rise by that through which he falls. [SS:592-3, 633]; in other places he refers to the moral qualities of a disciple [SS: 575 - KT:13:16-17,20] and of a guru [SS:593 - no reference] - and the injunction to do good to others (above footnote 77.) Most of the citations of KT illustrated its conformity with advaita. AM3

70. The Ocean of Kula is advertised as 'in preparation' on the fly-leaf of the first edition of GLb and in several early volumes of the TT series

71. There are about 30 references altogether to MNT and about the same number to KT (though these are rarely referred to in SP or GOL). By way of comparison, the next most frequently cited text in SS, Sammohana Tantra (see below), had 12.

72. KT:8:57 - Ghose's translation.

73. In a later chapter however he acknowledges that they could also be meant 'physically'.

74. In another place he suggests it was only intended to be read by the initiated. SS:586.

Notes to Chapter 9

75.SS:348. There are altogether 12 references to the Sammohana Tantra in SS, some of them quite detailed.

76.It was the Sarvollāsa which provided Woodroffe with his saying 'Women are life itself' in his speech to the Hindu girls' school in 1917. Above p.155.

77.Both translations were published by the Theosophical Society, Adyar. Śāstri's translation of Anandalahari (the first forty-one verses of Saundaryalahari - 'Wave of Beauty') with Laksmidhara's commentary was published in 1898, but Avalon appears to be using a second edition of the whole text published by Ganesh, for which I do not know the date. The translation of Lalitā Sahasranāma with Bhāskararāya's commentary was first published in 1899.

78.SS:347. For De la Vallée Poussin, see above chapter 1 p.50.

79.SP:144-147; 178-180; 246-254

80.Calcutta 1916.

81.Modern Review vol 19/no.5 (May 1916) p.559. A review of Chatterji's Hindu Realism.

82.David Kopf 1979 p.60ff Kopf calls him 'a very convincing advocate of the religion of humanity' ibid p.62.

83.Modern Review vol 17/no.1 (January 1915) p.63

84.SS:54. At SS:323 he cites one of his papers as a source.

85.SP:254-256 and footnotes to ps.255-6

86.SP:167, with footnote 3; 171, with footnote 2.

87.This pandit had previously worked for the Theosophical Society but his opinions on the Kaula sects reflected those of Lakṣmīdhara, whose work he translated.

88.Varendra Research Society Monograph No.6 (March 1935), Rajshahi, ps.12-16.

89.In Lokeśvarananda (ed) 1989. Ghose is described as 'One of the Founders of the Āgama Ānusandhāna Samitī'.

90.Another possible article by Ghose is the one on 'Mantra', chapter 24 of GOL which was first published in Vedānta Keśari but was not part of the Studies series. See above.

91.'White and Gold' in Shā'amā 1921 ps.237-9

92.JISOA, November 1961, p.99.

93.Avalon 1924.

Notes to Chapter 9

94. Bhāskararāya's commentary on Nityaśodaśikārnava. See SS:236.



### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the last edition of Is India Civilized? Woodroffe prophesied that the philosophical concepts of India would be appropriated by the West and added to its cultural wealth.<sup>1</sup> He probably could not have imagined the extent to which he would be proved correct, or have known the part he himself was playing in the beginnings of this process. From being seen as a primitive system of magic, 'Tantra' was transformed rapidly into a subtle philosophy that appealed to sophisticated minds in the West, thus greatly enhancing the prestige of Hindu thought.

For it was not only as a writer on Tantra that Arthur Avalon was influential, but just as much or even more as a channel for modern Hinduism, both in India and the West. M.P. Pandit's remarks, quoted in chapter 2, about the transparency of Avalon's writing to the 'original thought in Sanskrit' was an important ingredient of this capacity to mediate. This thesis has attempted to prove that it came about despite Woodroffe's own comparative ignorance of the language. Indeed, the very limitation to his knowledge was essential to it, by making Woodroffe more dependent than academic Sanskritists of the time to sources among modern 'insiders' to the tradition. He absorbed and reflected Indian thought without imposing his own structures upon it. Paradoxically, too, his very inability to translate into English for himself made him rely on the Sanskrit philosophical vocabulary which occurs so frequently in his work; he learned to think through it, and he passes this capacity on to his readers. This means that for foreign readers his books, though 'difficult' in places, are an education in Hinduism in which the English medium is constantly interlaced with the original Sanskrit philosophical concepts.

In India, the books represented an updating and modernizing of the Tantric tradition which was now seen as central to modern as it had been to 'medieval' Hinduism, and it was presented under the name of a 'foreign' orientalist. The

prestige of European scholarship was less than it had been a generation earlier, before the revival of confidence in Hindu identity at the beginning of the century. Orientalists who condemned Hinduism no longer carried the same weight as they had done once. But when they approved and eulogized, their prestige was still alive, and it was welcomed because it could be appropriated. This is what happened with 'Arthur Avalon'. But, in contrast to writers such as Max Muller of a previous generation, the interpretations that were found in his pages originated within India. However much European 'orientalist' romanticisation contributed to Woodroffe's attraction towards Hinduism, my contention is that the story that unfolds in this thesis is mainly one of Indian agency. The prestigious image of European orientalism was used and manipulated for the sake of an Indian agenda: the propagation of an updated refined Hindu Tantrism, and a reversal of Western valuations of it.

This brings us to Atal Behari Ghose, who perhaps has not had as prominent a place in this thesis as he could have had, and who should no doubt be the subject of another study himself. 'Arthur Avalon' appropriated much of his life's work. When Woodroffe called the Tantrik Texts 'his' publications, he was right insofar as his own money and organizing drive lay behind them, but without the scholarship of Atal Behari Ghose they could not have existed. Furthermore the translation and introduction to the Mahānirvāna Tantra which launched Arthur Avalon's reputation with such éclat as we saw in chapter 2, was probably entirely Ghose's work. Ghose was Woodroffe's teacher, and a channel of knowledge to several other Europeans. He could present ideas in a more easily accessible form than Woodroffe could, though without the latter's romantic appeal. However much or well he wrote, however, he could never at that time have carried the weight that 'Arthur Avalon' could carry. The desire to propagate his own religious beliefs, and to raise their status in modern opinion, was probably his strongest motive for actively promoting the deception that Woodroffe 'was' the real Arthur Avalon. It would not be true to say, however,

that the latter was 'really' Ghose either: he was both of them, a symbiosis. Woodroffe, whenever he felt himself sufficiently master of his material, could write in a style that won over the public through his religious and philosophical sensitivity, his tolerance, and his capacity to interpret Tantra in creative modern ways; and this too is an important feature of the books as well as their textual knowledge.

The 'Arthur Avalon' symbiosis however meant a certain loss of identity to both partners. Although on the one hand it could be looked on as an instance of a European, with greater power and social status in the colonial society, appropriating the knowledge of an Indian scholar, there was also a subtle current that ran in the opposite direction. Woodroffe's social identity was in part appropriated for the purposes of another. There are suggestions in his books that Woodroffe, too, lost out to 'Arthur Avalon'. We find him struggling not to have opinions expressed through 'his' name that he does not want to claim. His repeated insistence that he was an outside observer not a participator in Tantra, while it had the effect of enhancing the 'myth' of Arthur Avalon as the orientalist scholar studying the subject impartially, most probably represented his own attempt to distance himself. 'Arthur Avalon' was a kind of 'legal fiction' that resulted in works being attributed to Woodroffe that were not his, but the pseudonym also served as a barrier that Woodroffe placed between himself and Ghose, who seems to have wanted to make his own use of his British friend's identity. Ghose, it seems, had wanted the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra and other works to go by Woodroffe's own name: it was Woodroffe who initially invented the pseudonym and insisted on it.

Whatever the intricacies of the situation, and whatever the degree, or lack of it, of conscious deception, 'Arthur Avalon' was a legend that worked extremely well - and it worked for an Indian agenda, which drew prestige to Tantra from the status of the British partner in the symbiosis, and from the history of European orientalism. <sup>Arthur</sup> Avalon; ...

<sup>was</sup>  
a greater figure than either Woodroffe or Ghose alone could hope to be. In his own early foreword to the PST, Woodroffe had written:

It is common knowledge that in the history of all religions, works are attributed to great names to gain for them an authority which their real author could not perhaps have achieved. [TT/18:2.]

One wonders if Woodroffe ever perceived the connection with his own contribution to the modern tantric 'texts' he was helping to create.

This thesis has also been a study of a British supporter of Indian nationalism, if not exactly in the mould, yet in the same time and milieu as Annie Besant, Nivedita, C.F. Andrews. Here, instead of the orientalist projection upon the 'other', we have instances of identification with that 'other'. Woodroffe seemed ambivalent about his British identity, and escaped from it on occasion into a private Indian one; the former was public, the latter was personal and secret. His concern to defend the Indian 'Self' from the inroads of Westernization may have reflected his need to protect an aesthetic, religious identity of his own, perhaps identified as 'feminine' within the colonial context of rugged stereotypes of colonial 'super-masculinity'.<sup>2</sup>

Finally there is the attitude to sexuality implied but rarely explicitly stated throughout the Avalon/Woodroffe work. The revolution in sexual mores in Western society was still to come when Woodroffe was writing, and there is nothing in his work that even points towards it. Nevertheless 'Tantra' in modern popular consciousness is about the 'spiritualization' of sex, and Arthur Avalon is generally believed to be an early exponent of it. What is actually present in his work is something more subtle: an 'incarnational' philosophy linked to affirmation of the life of the senses, of 'this world', of matter, in opposition to the values of the renouncer and ascetic. It was also an appropriation of current scientific ideas, which attempted to unite the spiritual and 'magical' world-view of occultism with the

terminology of modern science - a project that was then, as it is now, a fashionable one for those seeking a more holistic interpretation of reality than that felt to proceed from modern scientific consciousness.

Last but not least there is the story of a remarkable friendship and collaboration that crossed the colonial divide, and lasted several decades until the death of both partners.

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ENDNOTES

1.IIC (3) p.354

2.Nandy op cit

## **APPENDIX**

LETTER B1: Ghose to Woodroffe

Dear Sir John,

I return the letter with the Sanskrit parts (except the quotation from the *Upasamāna*) translated. I do not translate this as you can get it from Max Müller.

I find that the quotation from *Murug Purāna* has been mutilated I think on purpose - or to put a charitable construction they have a different reading. But their reading seems not to fit. They have put *Skanta* for *Vanta*. *Skanta* does not so well but that is their reading. They have also dropped several words. My copy is that of the *Hindu Society* edited by a very competent man & who was no partisan.

What *Tantrik Dictionary* do you mean? As you mention the list of words I am collecting for the *Ullahabad* Manu

I am not finally  
W. B. Ghose

12<sup>th</sup> June 1918

You quote from the Vajrasamhitā the following  
 Aloka <sup>spec.</sup> <sup>num.</sup> <sup>recog.</sup> <sup>ble</sup>  
 Shringama <sup>as</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>new</sup> <sup>Shrute</sup> <sup>Althaus</sup>  
 वेवराजासि विविधः गात्रोऽज्ञानश्च ससृजतः ।

अनिसारमाः गौतम पुनावान्मागः  
 श्रुत्वा च श्रुतस्त्वामागं च श्रुत्वा च श्रुतः  
 स्वतन्त्र इतरमात्र स्वतन्त्रो दशमा परा।  
 स्वतन्त्रा च श्रुतः स्वतन्त्रा च श्रुतः  
 तन्मात्रा दशमा पञ्चासिदान्तान्मागः  
 च श्रुतः च श्रुतः च श्रुतः च श्रुतः  
 अनिसारमाः स्वतन्त्रा दशमा परा ॥

ΣΝ< <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup> <sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup> <sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup> <sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup> <sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup> <sup>68</sup> <sup>69</sup> <sup>70</sup> <sup>71</sup> <sup>72</sup> <sup>73</sup> <sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup> <sup>76</sup> <sup>77</sup> <sup>78</sup> <sup>79</sup> <sup>80</sup> <sup>81</sup> <sup>82</sup> <sup>83</sup> <sup>84</sup> <sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> <sup>87</sup> <sup>88</sup> <sup>89</sup> <sup>90</sup> <sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup> <sup>93</sup> <sup>94</sup> <sup>95</sup> <sup>96</sup> <sup>97</sup> <sup>98</sup> <sup>99</sup> <sup>100</sup> <sup>101</sup> <sup>102</sup> <sup>103</sup> <sup>104</sup> <sup>105</sup> <sup>106</sup> <sup>107</sup> <sup>108</sup> <sup>109</sup> <sup>110</sup> <sup>111</sup> <sup>112</sup> <sup>113</sup> <sup>114</sup> <sup>115</sup> <sup>116</sup> <sup>117</sup> <sup>118</sup> <sup>119</sup> <sup>120</sup> <sup>121</sup> <sup>122</sup> <sup>123</sup> <sup>124</sup> <sup>125</sup> <sup>126</sup> <sup>127</sup> <sup>128</sup> <sup>129</sup> <sup>130</sup> <sup>131</sup> <sup>132</sup> <sup>133</sup> <sup>134</sup> <sup>135</sup> <sup>136</sup> <sup>137</sup> <sup>138</sup> <sup>139</sup> <sup>140</sup> <sup>141</sup> <sup>142</sup> <sup>143</sup> <sup>144</sup> <sup>145</sup> <sup>146</sup> <sup>147</sup> <sup>148</sup> 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[illegible]

वेदाग्रसरतो विद्वान्ध्यामपेक्षुपातः । श्रद्धां ध्यायेत् ॥  
 एष पादुपरी योगः देवनीयो नृमृष्टमिः ॥ ध्यायेत् ॥  
 वेदवादनितोऽहो न भयैव कथितानि तु । ध्यायेत् ॥  
 नाम पादपतं शोभं तत्कुलभ्यैव भैरवम् ॥ ध्यायेत् ॥  
 ध्यायेत् ॥

The names of Awaithikagamas are found in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter 1-4<sup>th</sup> of Kuma-kazana as Kōshūka to

[illegible]

no Nautilites and also no Aviculites  
The Orthis, which we know



Sunday

Dear Mr Ghose -

As my wife is in town  
& cannot return before

11.30<sup>or 12</sup> and I have  
nothing to do between

10.00 when I finish my  
bath & 12 I want you  
to come home if you will

If you will come now  
the driver will bring you  
to the Sanatorium

Park Street near Inveralls,  
& then we will go together

to Mr Herich's house



Dear Mr. Ghose

Please run through  
this paper once when  
corrections are necessary.  
The only thing the Sanskrit  
translations marked on it  
please

Yours truly

Woodroffe

I shall find when it has  
been as it is the most  
authentic copy in the  
Veranda Room.

15 Jan 20

Dear Mr

I must have sent two  
copies of the manuscript  
and some as a sample  
work on the other. I hope  
it is all right. I  
will be glad to hear  
from you this  
week. I am from  
the Thompsons -  
Franklin & the  
others. You may  
know the work.

BETTER A2 From Woodroffe to Ghose (original handwritten) n

13(?15) Alexandra Court (written)  
3 Middleton Row (printed)

Dear Mr Ghose

I enclose a/c made up by Mr Moller & which I have been through showing our respective indebtedness to him on a/c of our trip to Konarak last Easter and the two railway tickets he took for you & Mrs Ghose. You owe him 96/2 of the 60/- I gave you. If as you said there is anything over (?) this should be divided in three parts you keeping one third & returning 2/3 for Mr Mueller & self.

Now if I remember rightly you paid for Mr Wurthle's carts which came (?) I suppose out of the 45/- we have credited you -- In that case please let me know what was paid for the carts for we are entitled (?) to get this back from Hoffmann's & when so obtained (?) it should be divided in three amongst us - When I hear what the amount (?) is I will write to Mr Hoffmann. Mr Wurthle only returned the day before yesterday.

As regards the printing of the Shatchakra you had better send a few lines to Bannerjee (?) to be printed to see the effect. If the margin is too small then we must increase the size of the page. Please do this at once as we cannot continue(?commence?) until the size of page for the .....(?lines? ?text?) is determined on.

Yours sincerely (?)  
John G Woodroffe

PS I shall be away at Puri next Sunday

LETTER A6 From Woodroffe to Ghose (original handwritten)

17 Bradmore Road  
Oxford  
[No date]

My dear Ghose

Thanks for your note about the 3 bindus. I know that Setu(?) Bindu = Shiva(?). What struck me as odd is that Shiva is Fire (Agni) and Shakti Moon. One would have thought it was the other way about because moon is white and fire is a reddish colour.

My Italian friend also wants a difficulty solved. He finds that on Hangsah it is stated sometimes that Hang = Shiva and Sa = Shakti and sometimes the reverse.

I have always understood and said that Hang, that is breath out, is Shiva and Sah, inspiration, is Shakti. Hang must be expiring and Sah inspiring for we breath out in saying Ha and indraw in saying Sa. But the question is whether Ha is Shiva or not.

As Prasara is "going forth" it might be that Ha = Shakti. The active going forth is hers but it is His will which sends her forth. You mentioned this point or rather I did before but I do not think you gave any explanation beyond saying that there are statements both ways.

The commentary to Ananda Lahari says Ha = Shiva (verse 1). In v.3 of Kāmakalāvilāsa Ha = Vimarśa.

This account is all confused to me at present and the only explanation I think of is that the Hindu is not exact in our sense .....primarily(?) according to circumstances. However let me know so that I can satisfy (?) P.....

I regret to find that in an article he(?) cites "Pandit" Chakrabarti of the Tantrik Order of America. I warned him not to do so and I have since written him that he will only dishonour himself and myself(?) by introducing(?) these men.

The Italian magazine "Netra" has now asked me for an article which I will send them on Sādhana.

I was surprised to read in your letter that you have nothing to do\* except Mahānirvāna. What has become of 2nd vol of Tantrarāja? I have several times asked about this. When shall I see the Introduction? I sent it to you last summer and you were to add to it & to return it for me to revise. How does this stand? We must show M of D something done. So far as I know nothing has appeared since I left. Do let me know when I may see the Introduction and what is the state of this book.

I am sorry about BC but as I told you and I hope it will never happen again, do not incur any expense before you receive the cash. If you do not care to say so yourself put the responsibility on me and say that I as your co-secretary insist on cash as matter of business.

You must also avail yourself of the opportunities you have of seeing M of D. He is a busy man. I do not see that any good will come of making it a State Department so long as he finances the series. But we on our hand must show something for the work done. If you can get him to take over(?) the paper then use it for some other book ["and if BC says anything" crossed out] after first telling BC and finally(?)asking for payment(?). Say point blank that you

LETTER A6 (continued)

cannot yourself find the money to finance Sharada and if he wants it done let him put down the whole cost in cash. Why should you worry yourself because of his failure? You have got the paper. You can't use it for Sharada Tilaka until paid for the paper & for the printing. If he does not produce the money then ask M of D whether he will take(?) over(?) the paper for some other book. Anyhow do not let yourself in again and never work except for cash. T....yourself now on Tantraraja & Mahanirvana and let M of D see some completed work.

My wife is getting better but is not yet fit again and has one or two slight relapses which shows she is still sensitive.

Doctors say that Barbara's illness is neurasthenia one of the symptoms of which is self-starving. They have..... diet (.....for her & she is manfully doing her best to take it. I have stirred her will & told her to keep the body as her servant but the difficulty in such cases is that the disease affects the mind. However she is doing her best at present and we are pleased at it. She is also being massaged(?).....flesh. I think she has let herself down with too much work & too little food. Keep this private except for your wife. Nancy is at home and this has done her good as she is now sleeping which she has not been doing well lately.

Best Xmas greetings again to you both.

Yours sincerely  
J G Woodroffe

\*"not really" scribbled in margin in a different hand.

LETTER A8 (Original handwritten)

29 Nov [NO YEAR]  
17 Bradmore Road, Oxford

My dear Atal

Do not as you propose have Mahanirvana text  
.....(illegible) name of any Editor. Put down (?) as Editor  
Arthur Avalon.

I was glad(?) to get(?) your photo. You look well though  
a bit(?) off colour(?)..... I would(?) not(?) have  
thought(?) that you had been through a severe illness. I am  
glad thus to have it & ..... proof of your state.

I am keeping well having gone to Boars Hill 500 ft up  
near Oxford a very healthy place. I can walk miles here(?)  
but live(?) in Oxford which is a relaxing pleasure. Moreover  
I have a peaceful time here.

My wife writes that she is not at all well and the  
Doctor there says she is very much run down. She has a bad  
cough and has been Xrayed & we await the doctor's report.

My daughter Nancy is better but far from well as she  
should be. The doctor says defective glandular action is  
interfering with her whole system. --- Anyhow it's my sister  
in law Amy (?) who had what.....was a cancer is making  
apparently a wonderful recovery. The tumour in the face  
...discharging into the mouth - a horrid business but  
apparently a liberating (?) one. As.....to be  
surrounded by sickness and death on all sides.

I feel personally better than I have been either in  
India or leaving it. I left your country just in time as far  
as health is concerned. I wish you as many years as you want  
& remain with all good wishes

Yours ever  
John Woodroffe

LETTER A17 From Woodroffe to Ghose  
(original handwritten by someone else)

16th February 1934  
Villa Aureglia, Beausoleil

My dear Ghose,

I think I have had now all the letters which you have sent to the bank. Every week I look forward to getting an announcement that the Prapanchasara is finished. I was glad to hear of your interview with D. I have written to him myself - thanking him for his interest, & regretting the loss which he has sustained in the great earthquake which you have had.

I should have preferred that the Samiti was wound up, on completion of the Prapanchasara and gloss. As regards P. the only rational explanation which presents itself to me is that his Guru has forbidden him to have any communication with me. You may ask why: and the answer would be that I have not been initiated. Otherwise his conduct is wholly inexplicable.

With many affectionate greetings

I remain

Yours ever

J Woodroffe

I shall be glad to have some chavyapracha, if it will travel. And if you can prepay the duty as otherwise it will be difficult for me to do so here. I must know what are the exact ingredients in any case.



LETTER A21 From Woodroffe to Ghose  
(original handwritten by someone else)

March 9th 1935  
Beausoleil

My dear Ghose

Yours of the 6th February to hand. I have now read and return your proposal for introduction to Prapanchasara.....note that the manuscript sent to me is incomplete. I have cut out in blue pencil the bulk of the proposed introduction as unsuitable and irrelevant. We are not concerned with the Ain Soph, the parentage of Jesus, the marriage of the Queen of Spain and so forth. I am not concerned with Orthodox polemics. These constant jibes at the modern Hindu become tiresome to the public. Moreover a polemic is more fittingly conducted in an article signed by the person who carries on such polemics. You suggest that if I do not approve the introduction might appear under the initials A.S. but to this I cannot consent. I only consent to the insertion of such matter as I have not blue pencilled. I also should like to see the remaining portion of the introduction not now sent to me.

I do not wish to sell the copyright of Isha Up to Mazumdar. If he tells me what he wishes to do in particular, how many copies he wishes to print, I may be able to license him to do so. I will write to Luzac to send him his account since the last settlement.

The proceeds of the last settlement were sent to you and were, I think, received by you. This is not an unfitting time for a further account, if I am correct as to the date on which the last settlement was made. As to Thacker Spink's account you might write or ....them and get their account sent on to me.

Yours ever with all good wishes,  
John Woodroffe (not signed)

P.S. I have not yet heard from Ganesh to whom I have written a number of times. I asked you, in one of my last letters to find out from him why I got no reply. Have you been able to do so?

**CY** TELEGRAM

FROM: Deutsch-Ausländischer  
Buchtausch  
Berlin  
TO: Herrn Babu Ajay K Ghose

DATE: 16.6.1936

Sehr geehrter Herr Ghose!

Von dem Tode des hervorragenden  
Gelehrten, Herrn Babu Atal Behari Ghose haben wir durch das  
Deutsche Generalkonsulat erfahren.

Es ist mir ein Bedürfnis, Ihnen das  
Beileid der deutschen Wissenschaft zu seinem Tode zum  
Ausdruck zu bringen, weiss ich doch aus meinen vielfältigen  
Beziehungen zu allen Gelehrten, wie angesehen Herr Ghose in  
Deutschland war.

In grösster Hochachtung!  
i.A.

Dr. Jürgens

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