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SOTERIOLOGICAL CAPACITY OF THE GODHEAD AND A PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUALS' DEPENDENCE AND RELEASE ACCORDING TO HINDU TANTRISM

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The issue of the spiritual liberation in Hindu Tantrism is closely linked with an idea of the primeval source of everything, or of that supreme, absolute Reality, God. Only such a free divine Being who has never known any bondages, can provide the release for the poor samsaric souls. The participation of the Godhead in life of suffering beings looks like a manifestation of a compassion. The divine grace is expressed in sending down of the blessed power (anugraha). Tantric deities paradoxically combine in themselves truly incompatible things, for example, knowledge and illusion. However, the duality of the tantric Deity is rather apparent than real. It is a consequence of the distorted focus of perception and of the unenlightened level of a person. The great soteriological gift bestowed by God, is rarely obtained by an adept without any effort or intent on his (adept's) part. The spiritual path unfolds as from below, i.e. from a position of the subject, and from above, i.e. from the ultimate Reality.

Key words: liberation, soteriology, Hindu Tantrism, Tantric Deity, individual's dependence and release.

The issue of the spiritual liberation in Hindu Tantrism is closely linked with an idea of the primeval source of everything, or of that supreme, absolute Reality, which is the scope of the ultimate freedom. This Reality is personified in the form of a Deity (first of all Śiva, but also Śakti, Viṣṇu, etc.). God is the absolutely free being who never was conditioned in any way. He establishes "rules of game", he forms cosmic laws, and the universe with all variety of living and non-living forms contained in it don't exist outside of this "game". The factor of the full and original independence of God from categories of causality, space and time holds the essential water parting line between it and the rest, empirical world. The power of spiritual blindness, sensual affections, that rules among finite beings, don't influences God. Tantric texts directly equate

freedom and the Highest Principle of the universe. Thus, “Kāmākhyā-tantra” (I. 10) speaks of the Goddess Kāmākhyā as following, “... it is called nirvāna, it is the union (sāyujya), sālōkya and saharūpa, Kāmākhyā is the high road!” (1). Only such a divine Being who has never known any bondages, can provide the release for the poor saṃsāric souls; but only if they wish to obtain it themselves.

Being absolutely unconditioned by anything, the Godhead acts freely without encountering the slightest hindrance. This liberty of his action is the power of his unobstructed self-spontaneity (svātantrya). In a striking contrast with it there are living beings which almost contemptuously are called as “livestock” (paśu) in Tantrism. This very name emphasizes that such beings are too attached to the world, they can’t break the attachment on their own without help from above. This participation of the Godhead in life of suffering beings looks like a manifestation of a compassion. One of many epithets of God that is “Ocean of the nectar of compassion” (karuṇāṃṛtavāridhi) alludes on it (2). According to the “Kiraṇāgama” (I. 23), “liberation is achieved with the help of pure Śiva”. “Saundaryalaharī”, 3 praises passionately the Great Goddess, describing her merciful qualities: “For those who submerged into a darkness of ignorance [you] are a city on the sunny island; for dullards you are a stream of nectar flowing from flowers of the [highest] Consciousness; for poor men you are the wish-fulfilling treasure; for those who plunged into the ocean of rebirths you are the Boar tusk, the enemy of Mura”.

This very kindness often has a special designation, identifying itself with a form of Śakti: for example, A. Avalon says of Vidyā Śakti. There are many kinds of such “Vidyas” (“knowledges”) “which, though appearing to be different as between themselves, yet have, as their common aim, the highest end of all human life, that is, Liberation” [17. Ch. 12]. In Kashmir Śaivism, a notion of “vidyeśvarāḥ” (lit., “lords of knowledge”) is used in a similar context. On this occasion, R. Torella tells as following: “The Vidyēśvaras are a group of eight deities headed by Ananta, whom Śiva invests with determinate functions; in particular, they are called to cooperate in the liberation of limited souls, acting as intermediaries in the revelation of the teachings of Śiva, etc. They employ another class of subjects as their instruments, the seventy million Mantras” [15. P. 201].

In Tantric movements compassion is usually personified by the female form of God. In particular, it is typical for the Pāñcarātra school: “It is Lakṣmī, mythologically God’s wife, and always intent on delivering, by her favour and compassion, the incarnated souls out of the misery of mundane existence” [20. P. 60]. Lakṣmī says of herself in a tantra of the same name in such a way: “Souls, which I, Śrī, threw my eye on, are exempted from their sufferings” (“Lakṣmī-tantra”, XIII. 8).

The divine grace is expressed in sending down of the blessed power (śaktipāta). This power has many varieties: for example, Kashmir thinker Abhinavagupta (X—XI cent.) in his treatise “Tantrāloka” (XIII ch.) lists nine of its patterns. It is called anugraha also; known by that name, the grace is one of five functions of God (pañcakṛtya), along with self-concealment (tirodhāna), creation (sṛṣṭi), conservation (sthiti) and destruction (saṃhāra) of the universe. Tantric adherents (as well as all

the Hindus) attach great importance to the soteriological support from the side of God. In fact, anugraha is a constant chance to get rid of sufferings [21. P. 227]. Anugraha don't impose itself on the man, and moreover, a person can spend a lifetime without noticing it; anugraha attracts only those who is ready to begin a spiritual life and to change themselves drastically. In the case of such a readiness anugraha manifests itself as a wide range of spiritual situations and practices, and each individual will perceive this spectrum in its own way.

The Godhead sends down the redemption, either alone or together with other important values, both temporal and spiritual. Often the enjoyment is referred to as a gift together with the redemption. Tantras considered the Godhead to be a giver of pleasure and liberation (bhuktimuktida) (3). Just as often, the redemption is granted as if in passing, among many other things, and its position as the highest value isn't too noticeable. In this case, it isn't for the author so much important to demonstrate concrete benefits conferred by the Deity, as to emphasize the nature of such a bestowing, which shows supernatural, miraculous capacities of the Godhead, his superiority over others, non-Tantric gods. "While some of gods are capable of granting Svargabhoga, and others Mokṣa alone, the Devī bestows on her votaries both the enjoyment of celestial pleasures and liberation" [12. P. 35—36]. Generously the adherents of Tantric Goddesses from Mahāvidyā group are heaped with favors, in particular, by Chinnamastā: "The usual rewards for her worship are cited: poetic speech, well-being and security, control over one's enemies, the ability to attract others (specifically women), the ability to influence kings, and liberation" [24. P. 163]. And there are similar words about Bagalāmukhī: "We find in Bagalamukhi's epithets reference to both her power to give worldly enjoyment and her power to grant wisdom, knowledge, and liberation" [24. P. 201]. Truly, there is no gift that could not be sent down by these powerful goddesses. However, Tantric Goddesses differ in their soteriological abilities: "All the aspects of goddess-transformations bring liberation, although some may bring the aspirant to the shores of knowledge, others to the summit" [23. P. 60].

A symbolic detail elaboration inherent for Tantras makes evident of itself in the case of the famous quartet of life values of Hinduism (caturvarga), among which there is mokṣa also. For example, in "Toḍala-tantra" (VI ch.) a bīja-mantra of the Goddess (krīm) is decomposed into individual components, and each letter represents a particular value. "... Oh Devi, K grants Dharma, P grants Kâma, I grants Artha and M grants Moksha. Oh beloved, the recital of these combined give Nirvâna Moksha"(quoted in [5. P. 31].

The soteriological action is performed by the highest power relatively easily, and it is to a large extent because this power that binds knots of existence. A. Avalon rhetorically asks: "This can only be by the grace of the Mother, for who otherwise can loosen the knot of *Maya* which She Herself has tied?" [17. Ch. 20]. Tantric deities paradoxically combine in themselves truly incompatible things. The cover of cosmic illusion organically interweaves here with the rejection of illusions, sensual affection — with a sincere acceptance of things as they are. "The Goddess is called Mahāmāyā, the great delusion when she is seen as responsible for the unsatisfactory and transient

nature of this life... But paradoxically the Goddess is also identified as supreme knowledge, *Vidyā*, which releases individuals from their bondage of desire and the consequent endless succession of lives and deaths. This is one of the many paradoxes that constitute the mystery of the Goddess's divine nature" [22. P. 468].

This amazing, incomprehensible for ordinary logic, duality of Tantric God is a paradoxical manifestation of his essentially non-dual nature. Before us is *coincidentia oppositorum*, the integrity of life, where "light" and "dark" sides of life close to each other. This is an inevitable repercussion of the manifold global transformation, whose elements completely are reduced to the divine abyss and drown in it; so God can't be *non-contradictory*. Tantric Deity isn't a mild benevolent angel; his freedom, among other things, implies independence from the ordinary contrast of good and evil. Kashmir philosopher Kṣemarāja (XI cent.) in his treatise "Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya" quotes from *Vimuktakas* by Bhaṭṭa Dāmodara: "Vāmeśa and others [goddesses] free [an individual] by the true knowledge, [or] enslave [him] by bonds of ignorance" [7. P. 30].

However, the duality of the tantric Deity is rather apparent than real. It is a consequence of the distorted focus of perception and of the unenlightened level of a person. This duality is perceived according to degree of a spiritual development of a man who refers to this power. For example, "Spanda-kārikā", 48, says: "Thus, this power of Śiva, the essence of which is the action, while staying at an enslaved soul is the source of enchainment, [and that she, being] known [by awakened one], stands in her intrinsic way, giving a success [in yoga]" (4). A criterion of such a perception is a phenomenon of desires: "...She who grants enjoyment or Liberation according as the Sādhaka is desire-ridden or free from desires", says Swāmī Vimalānanda [5. P. 30]. This is an echo of the ancient ascetic tradition, which is often manifested in the tantric texts (5); but on the other hand, sādḥaka (practitioner) may not to leave his desires because they can well be combined with his spiritual path: "Powerful to give Nirvāna Moksha and by Māyā to grant the desires of Sādhakas", says the same author [5. P. 32] (6). As a matter of fact, the soteriological activity of the Godhead is inseparable from other kinds of his activities, which, we repeat it, are also not unconditioned by anything (and in this sense, any action of the Godhead is soteriological). André Padoux writes about tantric universe as a "systeme total qui englobe tout, où tout se tient, où les niveaux se répondent d'un domaine à l'autre, où l'énergie est à la fois humaine et cosmique, et donc où manifestation des mondes et esclavage de l'homme, résorption cosmique et délivrance sont des processus rigoureusement homologables: quand on parcourt l'une, on parcourt l'autre, puisqu'il s'agit toujours d'un mouvement de la même énergie" [11. P. 45]. In truth the Deity, whose embodiment is the universe, is *everything* for Tantrists; in Tantras for a glorification of the personified highest Reality is often applied an "universal" style that associates the highest foundation with all forms of empirical reality: "Without Kāmātmikā no one is able to grant achievements and a good fortune. Kāmākhyā is the eternal dharma, Kāmākhyā is the benefit, Kāmākhyā is the abundance of pleasures, Kāmākhyā is the true liberation" ("Kāmākhyā-tantra", I. 8—9).

The reality is holistic and indivisible, but it has an impact from individual karmic peculiarities. "This continuum is what the enlightened adepts realize as nirvāna and

what unenlightened worldlings experience as *samsāra*... That essence merely appears different to different people because of their karmic predispositions... To ordinary worldlings, the One remains utterly hidden. To spiritual seekers, it seems a distant goal, perhaps realizable after many lifetimes... To the Self-realized sages, it is the only One that exists, for they have *become* the Whole” [19. P. 51].

In Hindu iconography, as in Buddhist one, Tantric Deities are often portrayed in a sinister appearance. This fact also has a soteriological significance. According to Madhu Khanna, who describes Mahāvidyās, “their gory associations are meant to horrify and shock. They strip reality bare in order that the seeker may confront the truth of transience” [23. P. 60]. This “shock therapy” is a necessary, but unavoidable measure oriented against the spiritual “thick skin” of an individual being, which cannot be “broken” any other way. Visual bloodiness and aggression of “demonic” images of Chinnamastā, Kālī, Bhairavī and other Tantric Goddesses churn a sleepy swamp of chaotic everyday existence, causes a person to do spiritual quest, think about dark sides of his soul, — sides, which he usually doesn’t notice, but under whose influence he nevertheless permanently resides. But as soon as an individual acquires the correct understanding, sinister, dark, depressive forms of tantric deities transform themselves into light areas of pure consciousness, and the fear gives way to the joy of enlightenment.

Tantrism is ambiguous in the question of whether creatures are introduced into the spiritual deception by the highest power, or they bear guilt for their problems themselves. According to L. Silburn, the Goddess doesn’t mess with beings’ heads intentionally: “La mère ne trompe ni ne se plaît à emprisonner les êtres dans les horreurs de la transmigration; elle ne donne naissance qu’ à un flot unique, celui des divines énergies. Mais l’ignorant qui court de désir en désir, de vague en vague, fait de ce flot puissant un douloureux devenir... Elle ne détruit donc pas la nature, elle la parfait et la mène à son accomplissement” [28. P. 101]. So, an alleged destruction actually is the transformation, the transition of a substance (or a living being) from one qualitative state to another. Thus, the highest power is not responsible for the fact that it isn’t understood correctly. We can agree with it, but the question arises: from where these very “ignorants” appear who “court de désir en désir” (“run from desire to desire”)? If they are not also the product of “un flot unique, celui des divines énergies” (a wave unique, i. e. as divine energies)? After all, the ultimate source of their condition that worsens itself because of karma, is the same Deity, and the very fact of their spiritual ignorance and of their stay in *samsāra* is an effect of the divine creative activity, which creates constraints and the relative level in general, because it can’t create the second absolute fundamental principle: only one monarch can reside on the metaphysical divine “throne”. In other words, the individual limitations are the “charges” of this divine creativity. Metaphorically speaking, two possibilities weigh on a supernatural scale: either a dynamic existence of the populous universe, but with the inevitable limitations and dependence in various forms, or a free existence of *all* beings, but with the elimination of the world as such. From the point of view of the divine Providence, a lesser “evil” is a creation of the universe with the provision to beings to be developed on the basis of opportunities granted to them. However, these opportunities are slim. Free will of an average person is woefully weak; predetermination dominates all his thoughts and actions. According to B.N. Pandit, “it is never in the hands of a person either to do or not to

do something that is worthy of being done. People are always bound to do what they are destined to do. We are urged to act a certain way according to own nature which is bestowed on us by the Lord" [26. P. 85]. Accordingly, the choice of perception of God is conditioned not by us, but to some extent also by this God. As "Kulārṇava-tantra" speaks (II. 93), "they don't know kula bewitched by your māyā" (7).

There is no doubt that the great soteriological gift bestowed by God, is rarely obtained by an adept without any effort or intent on his (adept's) part. The personal spiritual practice prepares the ground on which the fountain of divine grace will pour out later. This is quite logical, because an untrained person who is residing in captivity of sensual affections and who is quite satisfied with this condition, generally speaking, doesn't need the freedom, and therefore he hasn't a necessity to engage in a special psycho-practice. In accordance to one version, as reflected in Tantras, gaining of the freedom involves the abandonment from sensual desires: it is a reminiscence of ancient ascetic beliefs. Such pathos is laid in the words of Abhinavagupta (in his commentary "Arthasaṃgraha" to the "Bhagavadgītā", VII. 24) according to whom, "to one who gave up the desires and relies on one or the other image of a Deity, it (the image — SP) gives the state of purity and liberation. Otherwise, [the result will be] the opposite" (8). However, as mentioned above, a desire may not be in conflict with the movement along the path of liberation.

The deliberate refusal of anything interfering in the spiritual path is a negative, *passive* side of a Tantric practice. In addition to forming such a "platform" for the acquisition of divine mercy, the follower in some way tries to increase the chances of success in an attempt to influence the Godhead *actively*. In particular, this occurs through a ritual worship. As stated in the "Mahānirvāṇa-tantra" (III. 153), "Just as through instruction in Brahman one can free from all sins and go to union with Brahman, so [it is] owing to the worship you". Besides that (or in the context of the ritual worship), vehicles of devotional service, or *bhakti*. can become methods that accelerate the flow of divine grace. "Divine grace implies its human complement of devotion (*bhakti*)" [29. P. 174].

Acquisition of a mercy of the Deity, in some cases, implies an even more active, "heroic" conquest of the divine realm. Tantric *sādhaka* of the "hero" level (*vīra*) boldly challenges the reality's negative sides that are personified in the form of some aspects of the Deity. Taking possession of those parties, he turns them into an instrument for the salvation. It has already been said above about terrible elements of Tantric iconography of Deities. In contrast to ordinary people, the "hero" isn't running in fear from dark, gloomy faces of reality, but integrating them into his "world's picture". Here how D. Kinsley writes about it on the example of goddess Kālī: "The figure of Kālī conveys death, destruction, fear, the all-consuming aspect of reality. As such she is also a 'forbidden thing', or the forbidden par excellence, for she is death itself. The Tantric hero does not propitiate, fear, ignore, or avoid the forbidden. During the *pañcātattva* ritual, the *sādhaka* boldly confronts Kālī and thereby assimilates, overcomes, and transforms her into a vehicle of salvation" [25. P. 124].

Nevertheless the only personal efforts of a Tantric practitioner aren't enough to achieve the ultimate goal. It is believed that the supreme cult object must deliver a soteriological assistance at some stage of the adept's practice. According to the Tantric

alchemical work “Rasārṇava” (I. 25), “So long, however, as Śiva does not descend to block the impurity that impedes the soul’s liberation, and so long as one’s fetters to the world remain uncut, there is no way that true discrimination can arise through the use of calcinated mercury” (quoted in [29. P. 174]). In other words, individual psychotechnologies must necessarily combine with their legitimization from the side of Absolute; thus the spiritual path unfolds as from below, i. e. from a position of the subject, and from above, i. e. from the ultimate Reality. “God helps us in our endeavours”, teaches S. Radhakrishnan [27. P. 728]. Jan Gonda, exploring theology of the Pāñcarātra school, wrote the following: “... each vyūha (manifestations of the Godhead — *S.P.*) has two activities, a creative and preservative one and an ethical one, by which they lend assistance to those devotees who seek to attain the ultimate liberation” [20. P. 53].

A special case in our topic is represented by the notion of *non-being* (*abhāva*), or *emptiness*, which in the eyes of some Tantric followers is a perfect example of disconnectedness, unconditionality, absence of any backbone. Therefore, non-being is associated with the highest reality, God, and, consequently, with the release. The “Jñānātīlaka” says: “Non-being is the supreme God. Non-being is the supreme Śiva. Non-being is supreme knowledge. Non-being is the supreme path. All being is Non-being. Non-being is all the gods. Non-being is eternal and all-pervasive. [All things] merge into Non-being and from Non-being arise again... There is nothing higher than Non-being — liberation is in the hands of those who contemplate Non-being (*abhāvabhavīnām*). Those who have a support (*sālamba*) in phenomenal existence are never freed. Therefore one should contemplate that which is free from support, namely, the stainless plane of the Void... He whose mind is established even for a moment in the state of emptiness is freed of Dharma and Adharma and is liberated from the body” (quoted in [18. P. 62]).

It is necessary to summarize our small study. From the Tantric point of view, the freedom is an essential feature of the ultimate reality, personified in the image of a Deity. Various epithets, attributes and symbols of the Godhead, its functions, the myths swirling around it, show its free nature or hint at it. It works without any conditionality, and one of kinds of its activity is a deliverance of limited beings from the power of various constraints. The Godhead pours mercy on all those who aspires to spiritual heights. In a sense, any action of the Godhead in relation to the world in general and people in particular, is soteriological. The paradoxical nature of the Godhead consists in the fact that it is simultaneously a saving knowledge and an ignorance, tying living beings to various global processes; and therefore they can be freed from these attachments, in fact, only by the Godhead. But it performs this action not without effort on the part of Tantric teachings’ supporters, which in the course of their spiritual practice, create favorable conditions for the acquisition of the divine grace.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Some varieties of liberation are represented there. The highest level is *nirvāṇa* and *sāyujya* (unity), just below are located *sālokya* (stay in the world of the Deity), and *saharūpa* (more often *sārūpya*), that is the acquisition of the divine form.
- (2) “Kulārṇava-tantra” (I. 3), etc.

- (3) See, for example “Kulārṇava-tantra” (II. 113), “Kāmākhyā-tantra” (II. 49), etc.
- (4) Cf. also the judgment of the kuṇḍalinī in the “Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā” (III. 117): she “[gives] the release for yogis and enslavement for fools”.
- (5) Cf. “Death devours man who is torn by spines of desires, who is seduced by sensuous objects, who is burnt by fire of passion and hatred” (“Kulārṇava-tantra”, I. 44).
- (6) See also: “Devi herself is both desire and that light of knowledge which in the wise who have known enjoyment lays bare its futilities” [16]. But in general an ascetic discourse isn’t typical for the Tantric teachings favorably relating to the world as a manifestation of Śakti.
- (7) A little further (II. 96) Śiva professes: “Owing to me, Devi, paśus wander in a myriad of śāstras”, i.e. God deliberately misleads those who dislikes to him, and they are confused in the treatises containing false knowledge, not seeing the true path. Even lower (II. 97) it appears that all that false knowledge produced by the same Śiva.
- (8) Cp. also the words of the “Goraḥṣa-śataka” (verse 5): “The mind, which turned away from enjoyments, overcomes death and connects with the highest Ātman. This is a ladder to liberation”.

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СОТЕРИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ ВЫСШЕГО БОГА И ПРОБЛЕМА ЗАВИСИМОСТИ И ОСВОБОЖДЕНИЯ ИНДИВИДУАЛЬНЫХ СУЩЕСТВ В ИНДУИСТСКОМ ТАНТРИЗМЕ

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Вопрос о духовном освобождении в индуистском тантризме тесно связан с идеей первоисточника всего сущего, т.е. с высшей, абсолютной Реальностью, Божеством. Только такое свободное божественное Существо, которое никогда не знало никаких ограничений, может даровать освобождение для бедных сансарических душ. Участие Божества в жизни страдающих существ выглядит как проявление сострадания. Божественная милость выражается в ниспослании благословенной силы (шактипата, ануграха). Тантрические божества парадоксальным образом соединяют в себе поистине несовместимые вещи, например, знание и иллюзию. Впрочем, двойственность тантрического Божества скорее видимая, чем реальная. Она есть следствие искаженного восприятия и непросветленного уровня того или иного человека. Великий сотериологический дар, ниспосылаемый Божеством, редко обретается адептом без каких-то усилий с его (адепта) стороны. Духовный путь разворачивается как снизу, т.е. с позиции субъекта, так и свыше, т.е. со стороны высшей Реальности.

Ключевые слова: зависимость и освобождение индивида, сотериология, индуистский тантризм, тантрическое божество.