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Āveśa and Deity Possession in the Tantric Traditions of South Asia: History, Evolution, &
Etiology

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Religious Studies

by

Vikas Malhotra

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September 2022

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August 2022

Āveśa and Deity Possession in the Tantric Traditions of South Asia: History, Evolution, &
Etiology

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Vikas Malhotra

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ABSTRACT

Āveśa and Deity Possession in the Tantric Traditions of South Asia: History, Evolution, &

Etiology

by

Vikas Malhotra

In South Asia divine power is believed to manifest in a variety of ways and through a variety of means. One of the most fascinating manifestations of this is deity possession, involving the incorporation of divine power into the human body. While deity possession remained historically on the margins within the classical literary tradition, in the Tantric literature of the medieval period, *āveśa*, meaning the "entrance" or "fusion" of oneself with the deity, becomes a central paradigm of religious praxis, used for both pragmatic (*bhoga*) and liberative (*mokṣa*) purposes.

The first part of my thesis explores pre-Tantric accounts of worldly, oracular, and divinatory practices and the various spirits beings and deities employed. Much of this data is found within South Asia's shared apotropaic and demonological (*bhūtavidyā*) traditions embedded in early Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, and Epic texts. I argue that certain groups of these shared deities described as *bhūtanāthas* ("Lord of Spirits"), often assimilated from local cults, gain growing importance in a variety of protective, exorcistic, and sorceristic rites during this period. I contend that it is these groups of deities and associated traditions which become central in the subsequent tantric traditions.

Part two examines the medicalization of possession in early Ayurvedic/*bhūtavidyā* literature, which provides emic interpretations of possession etiologies, symptomologies, and

mechanics. Many of these ideas, continue into tantric and yoga texts and influence the development of new possession conceptualizations and technologies, such as *parakāyapraveśavidyā*, “The Science of Entering Another’s Body.” Such practices were associated early on with the Śaiva Pāśupatas, and other renunciant traditions, who I argue began to model their behavior and practices on these earlier *bhūtanātha* deities and were key to the formation of later tantric groups and their institutionalization of deity possession rites.

Part three, which comprises the bulk of the dissertation, examines the various discourses surrounding the adaption of the term *āveśa* and its use in the Tantric Śaiva literature from the 5-11th centuries. Throughout this literature we see an evolution and reformulation of *āveśa* in terms of techniques (e.g., *nyāsa*, *mantra*, *mudrā*), interpretation (its congruence with *śaktipāta*) and mechanics (e.g., as a phenomena involving the subtle body). Thus, the semantic understanding of *āveśa* expands not only to refer to deity possession, but a host of high spiritual states, including liberation. I will argue this is one of the distinguishing features of Tantric Śaivism and Tantric Buddhism, manifested in practices associated with *samāveśa* and Deity Yoga, respectively. While possession remains marginal in Jain Tantra, tantric techniques of divinization were also used for liberative purposes by Jain ascetics, albeit minimally.

The concluding chapter includes data I collected from my fieldwork on various possession rites I witnessed in Kerala. I use Teyyam as a case study to trace how some of the concepts and techniques developed during the Tantric period were filtered back down to these low-caste groups, leading to the "Tantricization" of their particular practice. The final part of this chapter then takes insights gleaned from the data presented on Tantric deity possession in order to bring it into conversation with recent research from the larger field of

possession studies, including the social and medical sciences. I end with a series of questions regarding possession etiologies for future research.

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I. CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

O Mother, by your grace (*prasādena*), may these three worlds appropriate the nature of the Goddess that rests within the transcendental void, as I experienced it in the great cremation ground (*mahāśmaśāne*). Thus, this eulogy on one's own true nature (*svarupa*) has been expressed by me [Jñānānetra], who is Śiva, due to the power/will (*vaśena*) of the state of complete (*samyak*) possession (*samāveśa*). O Maṅgalā, may it be auspicious to the whole Universe, which is in fact my Self.¹

In South Asia, divine power is believed to manifest in a variety of ways and through a variety of means - in temple objects, sacred spaces, through ritual, devotional practices, and so on. One of the most fascinating manifestations of this is the incorporation of divine power into the human body, commonly known as deity or spirit possession, which in the Sanskrit literature was often denoted by the term *āveśa*. From an emic perspective once this divine presence is embodied, either spontaneously or intentionally through ritual, the human medium becomes empowered and endowed with supernatural powers, knowledge, and qualities, their thoughts, actions, and speech wholly attributed to the possessing entity.

Within academia, possession as an object of study has historically been relegated to the margins, often derided as "superstition" and "primitivism" - an academic legacy, according to Frederick Smith, arising "from the Protestant-dominated cultures of anthropology and the study of religion, which subtly yet pervasively establish hierarchies subordinating sorcery, witchcraft, and 'natural' religion to higher 'revealed religion.'"² In South Asia, possession was also generally treated with ambivalence and historically

¹ *yādṛṅ mahāśmaśāne dr̥ṣṭam devyāḥ svarūpaṃ akulastham | tādr̥g jagattrayam idaṃ bhavatu tavāmba prasādena || itthaṃ svarūpastutir abhyadhāyi samyak-samāveśadaśāvaśena | mayā śivenāstu śivāya samyaṅ mamaiva viśvasya tu maṅgalākhye | Kālikāstotra vv. 19-20: Sanskrit and translation from Sanderson, Alexis. (2007b: 272). "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir." In Mélanges tantriques à la mémoire d'Hélène Brunner, edited by Dominic Goodall and André Padoux, 231-442. Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie.*

² Smith, Frederick. *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 20. See for example Oesterreich, T. K. *Possession and Exorcism: Among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times*. (New York: Causeway Books, 1974).

marginalized in the scriptures of the great classical religions of India, despite its ubiquity throughout the sub-continent even today. Gombrich and Obeyesekere provide a partial reasoning for this view, detailed further in Smith's 2006 magnum opus on spirit possession in South Asia, *The Self Possessed*:

Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism - inculcated self-control and discipline... Possession is of course the very converse of self-control and is normally accompanied by the display of violent emotion. One could say that the Indian classical religions precisely censored out possession and opposed emotionalism.³

Despite this marginalization of possession, Erika Bourguignon's well known 1973 transcultural study on trance and possession revealed that out of 488 societies worldwide, 360 of them (74%) showed evidence of spirit possession belief and 251 (52%) of them had some type of institutionalized forms of possession and trance states.⁴ Bourguignon's data makes clear that possession is a worldwide and cross-cultural phenomenon - one that should be taken more seriously by academia. However, the stigma of possession continues to linger on.

Although anthropologists have long recognized that the term “possession” is overladen with cultural, philosophical, and ontological biases - a Western cultural concept attached to certain locally identified markers or symptoms - we nonetheless continue to discuss such phenomena across cultures under this heading, despite differences in emic explanatory models and discourses.⁵ Categorizing these varied phenomena simply as “spirit possession” often obscures differences in the range and meaning of these culturally specific concepts and potential differences in the markers used to diagnose them. As a complex

³ Gombrich and Obeyesekere. *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass: 1990), 457.

⁴ Bourguignon, Erika. *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973).

⁵ Halperin. D. "Trance and Possession: Are They the Same?" *Transcultural Psychiatry*. 33.1 (1996): 33-41.

cultural phenomenon, possession has often been equated with, or subsumed under, a variety of other anomalous experiences such as mediumship, trance, shamanism, channeling, automatic writing, glossolalia, etc. However, each of these terms have their own particular genealogies, associations, and features, some which overlap, though no single term seems adequate to classify the multivalent nature of *āveśa* (literally, "entering into") and its myriad expressions in meaning, form, and function in South Asia.⁶ Frederick Smith rightly states that,

as an indigenous category in ancient and classical India, possession is not a single, simple, reducible category that describes a single, simple, reducible experience or practice, but is distinguished by extreme multivocality, involving fundamental issues of emotion, aesthetics, language, and personal identity.⁷

South Asia is unique in the field of possession studies due to its extensive textual record on a variety of possession forms and practices that date back thousands of years. Again, this was most recently seen Smith's *The Self Possessed*, a comprehensive and exhaustive account on both negative and positive forms of possession in Sanskrit and vernacular texts from the Indian sub-continent. My own research supplements his own work, though my focus lies specifically within the blurry bounds of deity possession in medieval texts known as the Tantras.⁸ I have chosen this particular literature since it is within these traditions that possession moves from the margins to the center of religious praxis, providing not only worldly benefits (i.e., supernatural power and knowledge) but also the potential for exalted spiritual states, including liberation/enlightenment (*mokṣa*). The extensive historical

⁶ For example, the term "mediumship" derives from the specific context of nineteenth- to twentieth-century Spiritualism, involving primarily communication with the dead, while the term "shamanism", originally represented a host of traditions from Siberia.

⁷ Smith (2006: 34)

⁸ By "deity possession" I generally mean spiritually positive and oracular forms of possession. The term "deity possession" is itself problematic since not all forms of positive possession are affected by deities, or even necessarily a divine being - as we will see, even spiritually advanced humans can possess other humans and spirits in positive ways.

treatment of *āveśa* in the pre-tantric and tantric literature I examine provides a diachronic view of the phenomenon, allowing us to see how various groups conceptualization and interpretations of "possession" evolved over time. I believe much can be gleaned from these texts regarding the nature of possession in South Asia and, to some degree, the phenomena of possession in general.

Although I will be using culturally specific terms such as "possession" and "*āveśa*", I will be emphasizing much of the phenomenological data that I was able to cull from the texts I examined and my ethnographic fieldwork. This is intentional, as I believe using more generic phenomenological terms will be of value to other scholars when discussing, studying, and comparing similar cross-cultural experiences. Recently Aditya Malik has criticized the blanket use of biased terms such as "possession" to describe *āveśa*-rites in his own fieldwork on oracular tantric-influenced rites known as *jagar* ("awakening") in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand:

...*jagar* can be more fruitfully described as a ritual of embodiment rather than a ritual of possession or trance – since the category of possession itself carries within it a considerable amount of cultural bias and theoretical implications suggesting a duality of body and consciousness or spirit. In the language of possession, spirit or consciousness can exist separate to the body. In fact, possession suggests the taking possession of a body by spirit or consciousness. Embodiment on the other hand emphasises "...subjectivity as a self-world *relation* rather than as consciousness *apart* from the world... (in this context) the lived body *is* this relation ... that crosses subjectivity and objectivity" (Morley 2001: 75). The dancer, in the case of the *jagar*, by embodying God represents the "relation between subject and world that is prior to their categorical division." (Morley 2001: 74).⁹

The reasoning for Malik's criticism will become clearer as we begin to understand the tantric cosmology which undergirds these particular systems of knowledge. I agree with Malik and his call to create a shift in scholarly discourse away from Western categories such

⁹ Malik, Aditya. "Dancing the body of God: Rituals of Embodiment from the Himalayas". *Sites*. 6.1. (2009): 92.

as "spirit possession" to terminology which is more nuanced and generic. To this end, Malik proposes to describe "possession" or "*āveśa*" phenomena under the umbrella of "transformations in embodied consciousness", which is closer to emic understandings of *āveśa* and related terms (i.e., *samāveśa*, *graha*, *adhiṣṭāna*, etc.) in South Asia.¹⁰ Focusing on "embodied consciousness" not only provides a framework that is closer to the cultural categories within which such forms of worship and practice are situated, but also forces scholars to focus on the embodied - the socio-cultural *and* psycho-biological - dimensions involved in the experience, an approach often lacking in past studies.¹¹

Historically speaking, the study of spirit possession has been dominated by two seemingly polarized approaches. The first paradigm is the social or functional approach, championed by many scholars within the field of anthropology and sociology, and made popular by I.M. Lewis in his 1971 seminal work, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*.¹² This approach predominantly focuses on the social meaning of possession and its discursive function (or dysfunction) within that society. Generally speaking, this framework views possession as a social construct, for example, as a form of social protest or empowerment for oppressed or marginalized groups. Essentially, the possession phenomena itself is seen as imaginary or delusional - a way for marginalized groups to "act out" or express deeply seeded desires. The second paradigm can be called the psycho-medical approach, introduced by psychoanalysts and psychiatrists with the broad aim of reducing possession phenomena to some form of mental illness or pathology analyzed in terms of psychiatric categories developed within Western science (i.e., possession as

¹⁰ See Malik (2009)

¹¹ See Csordas, Thomas J. "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology". *Ethos* (Berkeley). 8 no. 1 (2003): 5-47.

¹² Lewis, I. M. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. (London: Routledge, 1971).

culturally shaped hysteria, Dissociative Identity Disorder [DID], schizophrenia, Multiple Personality Disorder [MPD], etc.). Because each approach works from its own specific preconceptions, each arrives at vastly different and contradictory conclusions regarding the nature of possession. Anthropologist Rebecca Seligman and psychologist Laurence Kirmayer elucidated the inherent problem in many of these earlier studies:

Understanding of dissociative phenomena like trance, possession, and certain healing practices has been derailed by polemical ‘either/or’ arguments: either dissociation is real, spontaneous and reflects basic neurobiological changes in brain state, or it is imaginary, socially constructed and entirely dictated by interpersonal expectations, power dynamics and cultural scripts that demand specific role performances. We have argued that this is a false dichotomy: every complex human experience emerges from an interaction of individual biology and psychology with social context.¹³

I situate this idea as the foundation of my own integrated approach for studying the phenomena of Tantric deity possession within South Asia. Broadly speaking, my work will explore two sets of questions - one set related to South Asian historical discourses surrounding *āveśa* in the Tantras and in specific contemporary traditions, and a second set related to investigating the various etiologies of *āveśa* specifically and possession more generally. My approach views possession as a complex and embodied phenomenon, which attempts to take into account both its socio-cultural and psycho-biological dimensions.

Thus, like Malik, my ultimate motivation is to begin moving away from complex culturally specific categories and try to analyze the experiences described from my sources more generically, for example, as shifts in subjectivity, agency, and objective bodily markers (or symptoms) associated with these transformations. Discussing it in these terms is also useful when deconstructing these experiences into their constituent components, or "building blocks" as Ann Taves describes them, allowing us to potentially compare these various levels

¹³ Seligman, Rebecca, and Laurence Kirmayer. "Dissociative Experience and Cultural Neuroscience: Narrative, Metaphor and Mechanism." *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. 32.1 (2008): 31.

of analysis (e.g., social/psychological /biological), with similar experiences in other cultural contexts, such as, New Age channeling or mediumship in the Candomblé traditions of Brazil or even dissociative disorders.¹⁴ In this way, we can begin the process of laying down a framework for the study of possession forms across cultures and disciplines.

However, such a shift has not taken place at this time, so I will continue to use the word "possession" for "*āveśa*" throughout this dissertation, keeping these caveats in mind. As far as a definition for "possession", I have opted to follow Janice Boddy's inclusive definition used in her own anthropological studies in Sudan, who states that possession is “a broad term referring to an integration of spirit and matter, force, or power and corporeal reality, in a cosmos where the boundaries between an individual and her environment are acknowledged to be permeable, flexibly drawn, or at least negotiable.”¹⁵ As we will see, her definition parallels much of what we will see with South Asian notions of *āveśa*.

OVERVIEW & QUESTIONS

Alongside Indologists such as Gavin Flood, J. R. Freeman, and Frederick Smith, I too generally maintain that possession is one of the central and fundamental paradigms of religious worship and practice in South Asia. Flood, for example, has stated, "It would be possible to read the history of religion in South Asia in terms of possession as the central paradigm of a person being entered by a deity which becomes reinterpreted at more 'refined'

¹⁴ For more on Taves concept of "building blocks", see Taves, Ann. *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and other Special Things*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011). Taves, Ann. *Building Blocks of Sacralities: A New Basis for Comparison across Cultures and Religions*. (eScholarship, University of California., 2013). Taves, Ann. 2015. "Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of "Religion". *Journal of Cognition and Culture*. 1-2. (eScholarship, University of California, 2015).

¹⁵ Boddy, Janice. "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 23. (1994): 407.

cultural levels".¹⁶ This is true to a degree, though I believe his argument fits most aptly within the history of demonology and Tantra, rather than South Asia as a whole. While various forms of possession (*āveśa*) become central in the Tantras as techniques for power and salvation, in the earlier literature possession is generally marginalized, treated with ambivalence, and primarily tied to more pragmatic goals associated with oracles and mediums, such as divining, prophecy, healing, etc. While possession-oriented cults surely existed in this early time, it was not necessarily reflected in the elite textual traditions which have been passed down to us. This is what becomes the focus of chapter two, which traces the earlier textual roots of many possession concepts and practices that become operative in the Tantras. Of course, *āveśa's* adoption in the Tantras did not arise in a vacuum, but rather came from these older traditions, some concepts going back to the time of the earliest Vedas. To this end, this chapter will explore earlier discourses and narratives surrounding possession/*āveśa* from Vedic, Buddhist, Jain and Epic/Purāṇic texts.

From chapter two, we will see that references to possession/*āveśa*, both negative and positive, have a long history in Sanskrit literature, including the earliest surviving scriptures of South Asia, the *R̥g Veda* (1500-1200 BCE). In these early texts references to possession were primarily negative, involving the hostile takeover of some demonic entity or angry divinity. However, there is also evidence of deity possession and positive forms of *āveśa* in these early texts (e.g., *r̥ṣis*, *vipras*, the *keśin*, etc.), which I will be discussing. However, one of the most important and foundational sources discussing possession in this early time was the Atharvaveda [AV] (1200–900 BCE). In these texts, one of the most significant deities to come to the foreground was the ambiguous outcaste god Rudra, who is described in this early

¹⁶ Flood, Gavin. *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006): 87.

time as a *bhūtanātha*, a “Lords of Spirits”, who has the power to control and expel harmful entities (often known as *gaṇas* -"troops") under his command, and to heal those possessed and afflicted by them. It is this particular aspect of Rudra as the *bhūtanātha* which, I argue, becomes the primary model for the Atharvavedic “medicine-men” known as *bhiṣajs*’, healers and specialists in *bhūtavidyā* (“The Science of Spirits”), first mentioned in the Upaniṣads, though rooted in the AV.

Bhūtavidyā-oriented literature drew not only from Vedic sources (e.g., AV, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Gṛhya Sūtras*, etc.) but also the larger demonological cultural substratum which included indigenous and non-Vedic local traditions, *śramaṇic*/ascetic religions (i.e., Jain, Buddhist, Upaniṣadic, Śaiva etc.), along with foreign demonologies that can be traced back to Persian, Greek, and Chinese sources.¹⁷ In many of these texts, we also find mention of various ritualists and sorcerers acting like *bhūtanāthas* - interacting and engaging with possessing spirits beings (*bhūtas/grahas*) for purposes of worship, magic (*abhicāra*), protection, divination, prognostication and oracular possession. I argue in subsequent chapters that much of the form and function of tantric rites, inducing deity possession, drew from this wide well of Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic traditions associated with magicians, sorcerers, diviners, and healers of various stripes, as witnessed in literature of this early period.

I will also briefly look at some possession accounts in the Epics, paying special attention to the narrative of Aśvatthāman's possession by Rudra-Śiva in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh). As we will see, many of the possession concepts and models detailed in this narrative

¹⁷ See White, David G. *Daemons are Forever: Contacts and Exchanges in the Eurasian Pandemonium*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021) for more on these "foreign" demonologies.

continue to be operative later in the tantric literature. The final section of chapter two ends with a closer look at various Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious narratives from the late Vedic to Epic period regarding the possessing entities themselves – a genealogy of sorts of *bhūtas* (“spirits”) and *grahas* (“seizers”), such as *rākṣasas* (demons), *piśacas* (goblins), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), *apsaras* (celestial nymphs), *nāgas* (serpent-beings), and *yakṣas* (dryads), etc., and their association with both negative and positive forms of possession. While negative forms of possession continue to dominate in this early period, there are also some fascinating accounts of positive and oracular forms of possession I discuss.

Out of this large group of supernatural beings, a number of powerful spirit beings began to become elevated in the Epic and Purāṇic literature to the status of *bhūtanāthas* (“Lords of Spirits”), again modeled upon or at least associated with the figure of Rudra-Śiva. In many cases, these fierce and ambiguous beings had their own independent regional cults which were eventually converted, domesticated, and adopted by Brahmins, Buddhists, Jains, and Śaivas in an attempt to not only access their powers as protectors, healers, holders of esoteric knowledge, and bestowers of supernatural powers (*siddhis*), but also to bring them and their respective cults into their religious fold. I examine some of these narratives and “conversion” strategies used to transform these ghouls into gods. As we will see, it is these ambiguous yet powerful beings from the demonological traditions who eventually come to populate the developing pantheons of the Śaiva, Buddhist and subsequent Jain Tantric traditions in the medieval period.

It is my contention that deity possession in South Asia has always been entwined with or drew from these earlier demonological systems and ritual paradigms, which primarily

dealt with sorcery, protective rites, healing, and exorcism. My argument stands in contrast to J.R. Freeman's conclusion in his studies of Teyyam possession rites in South India:

While this pathological complex of spirit seizure is certainly widespread in South Asia, it bears no necessary relation to auspicious, voluntary possession. It is in fact necessary to insist that this latter kind of controlled possession is most often a free-standing, independent religious institution, and this is no doubt why the two kinds of possession are everywhere terminologically distinct. Furthermore, it is clear in many regions that the deliberate forms of possession have more in common with *pūjā* than with demonic seizure.¹⁸

While I agree with Freeman's assessment that "auspicious" or "voluntary" possession is congruent with temple worship (*pūjā*), an argument I further in my own work, I disagree with his assertion that these two forms were completely divorced from each other. Though terminologically distinct (*graha* vs. *āveśa*), the two systems were closely intertwined historically, and it may be that "voluntary" possession ultimately emerged from these earlier demonological systems. This relation is particularly clear in Tantric possession rites I discuss in subsequent chapters, where yogis willfully become possessed by these same fierce "seizers" (*grahas*) designated as malignant afflictors in earlier *bhūtavidyā* traditions. In fact, as we will see, the tantric *yogi*, in many ways, becomes the "seizer" themselves.

Chapter three turns to accounts and interpretations of possession found in both the medical and yoga textual traditions which arose at the turn of the Common Era. From this data, I examine how spirit possession becomes interpreted using medical lenses prevalent in the Ayurvedic literature of this time, all of which contain sections dedicated to *bhūtavidyā*, and provide various etiologies, symptomologies, and explanatory models regarding the causes and mechanics of possession. As we will see, Ayurvedic physicians generally considered possession to be undesirable and pathological in nature at this time. Although

¹⁸ J.R. Freeman, "Formalised Possession among the Tantrics and Teyyams of Malabar," *South Asia Research* 18 (1998): 75-76.

some forms of possession resulted in ambiguous or mundane symptoms in their "victims", such as intoxication or madness (*unmāda*), or even potentially desirable qualities, such as supernatural strength or extra-ordinary knowledge, in these texts the supernatural beings were categorically designated as dangerous and in need of exorcism.¹⁹ This, of course, changes in later tantric traditions, when it was realized that these qualities from these spirit beings could be absorbed by tantric adepts when possessed and used towards their particular religious goals.

Following this, I continue to examine possession mechanics discussed in various yogic texts concerned with *parakāyapraveśavidyā*, "The Science of Entering Another's Body", exemplified by yogic possession narratives found in the Epics (e.g., Vīpula Bhārgava, and Vidura). I then turn to scriptures from the Pāśupatas, a proto-tantric Śaiva ascetic order, first mentioned within the Epics. As I will show, these Pāśupata *yogis* explicitly modeled their behavior and radical observances (*vratas*) upon their *bhūtanātha* Lord, Rudra-Śiva. The ultimate goal of Pāśupata yoga was *rudra-sāyujya* ("identification with Rudra"), resulting in the absorption of Rudra's qualities, including the ability to possess other beings and attaining the status of a *mahāgaṇapati*, a "Great Lord of (Rudra's) Troops". I will argue that this group is foundational to the formation of later Śaiva tantric groups (Atimārga II, III and the Mantramārga) and their eventual institutionalization of deity possession rites.

Thus, we see here already an expansion of *āveśa* as not simply being possession in this sense of an external deity entering into a human, but also humans possessing other beings, both human *and* supernatural. It is this confluence of shamanistic-like ritualists and

¹⁹ See Marcy Braverman, *Possession, Immersion, and the Intoxicated Madness of Devotion in Hindu Traditions*. (PhD Dissertation, UCSB, 2003).

ascetic soteriology that ultimately becomes synthesized in the tantric traditions.²⁰ This is evidenced in chapter four, the bulk of my dissertation, which focuses predominantly on the medieval tantric literature of the Śaivas, but also several Tantras from Buddhist and Jain sources. In this chapter, I trace the ever-evolving discourses surrounding *āveśa* and related terminology (e.g., *samāveśa*, *śaktipāta*; *adhiṣṭhana*, etc.), beginning with what some have called the earliest surviving Śaiva Tantra, the 4th-5th century *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā*, and ending with the 11th century Buddhist *Kālacakratantra*. My own work greatly expands upon Smith's, who devotes only one chapter to tantric possession in his book, *The Self Possessed*. I not only give a more comprehensive reading and analysis of several texts Smith briefly mentions (e.g., the *Niśvāsattattva-saṃhitā* [NTS], the *Jayadrathayāmala* [JYT], the *Tantrasadhbhāva* [TS], the *Tantrāloka* [TĀ], etc.), but also discuss texts that Smith does not mention or analyze at all, such as the *Svacchandatantra* [SVT], the *Brahmayāmala* [BYT], the *Yoginīsañcāraprakaraṇa* [YSP], the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* [SYM], the *Mālinīvijayottara*, the *Timirodghāṭana* [TU], the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* [KJÑ], the *Kubjikāmatatantra* [KMT], and *Manthānabhairava Tantra* [MBT], among others. Similarly, among the Buddhist Tantras I will discuss a variety of texts that discuss *āveśa*, such as the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* [STTS], the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālaśaṃvara* [SBDJ], the *Vajrakīlaya* [VT], and the *Catuṣpīṭha Tantra* [CPT], among others. Many of these sources were unpublished or

²⁰ White (2000: 18) writes, "...the body of doctrines and practices that are grouped under the heading of Tantra all draw, to varying degrees, upon two types of sources. These are the "shamanic" magical practices or ritual technologies of nonelite religious specialists and their clientele; and the speculative and scholasticist productions of often state-sponsored religious elites...The history of Tantra is the history of the interaction between these two strands of practice and practitioners, whose clientele, comprising commoners and political elites, have nearly always overlapped..." In White, David G. *Tantra in Practice*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

unavailable at the time Smith published his work, a limitation he acknowledged in his own preface.²¹

Ultimately, I argue throughout this chapter that various tantric groups begin to adopt and adapt possession concepts and practices from earlier demonological and ascetic traditions when it was realized that possession could be a useful tool not only for worldly needs (*bhoga*) and assimilating powers (*siddhis*) from supernatural beings, but also for exalted religious states, including liberation (*mokṣa*). Within these tantric texts we find, on one hand, practitioners identifying and assimilating the powers of these *bhūtanātha* deities, often through possession, in order to gain lordship over various spirit beings for there more worldly goals as diviners, healers, and exorcists. On the other hand, we also see possession not just as a method, but the final goal - understood as the most complete union one could achieve with the deity, akin to permanent state of possession and tantamount to liberation.

I begin by examining the Śaiva Atimārga ascetic traditions (II, and III), which lay much of the foundation for what was to come in the later tantric traditions. Like the PĀŚUPATAs orders these groups descended from, these tantric practitioners explicitly adopted *bhūtanātha* deities as their primary models in terms of behavior and practice. In many ways, as we will see, these practitioners were not so much trying to become possessed by spirit beings, but rather possess and embody the qualities of the spirit beings themselves. This novel mode of engagement and practice was a new development in the evolution of *āveśa* that was unique to the Tantras. Building upon these foundations, the Mantramārga and

²¹ Frederick Smith (2006: xv), who is not a specialist in Tantra, admitted himself in the preface of his book that much more would be revealed about possession by studying the Tantras in more depth: "I must also mention that our knowledge of Tantra from the mid-first millennium through the first few centuries of the second millennium C.E. is rapidly expanding, in great measure because of the efforts of Alexis Sanderson and his students at Oxford University. Doubtless, there will soon be much more to say about possession in tantric literature that will add considerably to what I have written in Chapter 10 and may force new paradigms on the notion of possession itself as it was configured historically in India."

Kulamārga branches of Śaivism began to reformulate possession in various ways with their own evolving perspectives and soteriologies.

In early Goddess-oriented Vidyāpīṭha texts of the Mantramārga, such as the BYT, YSP, SYM and the MVT, the language of possession is quite overt and explicit, while later tantras (e.g., the Kulamārga) began a process of internalization, domestication, sanitization, and refinement of possession concepts and rites, interpreted with newly developed philosophies and revelations that were emerging in the latter half of the medieval period. Not only were possession techniques refined as more powerful methods to their own religious goals, but it also began to be domesticated by more elite traditions, allowing them to be more readily available to a wider audience. For example, rather than performing extreme practices in cremation grounds or making offerings with polluting substances, as seen in earlier texts, the Kashmiri Brahmanical traditions (Trika-Kaula) began to shift towards more gnosis-oriented yogic practices, *āveśa* being induced through tantric technologies such as *mudrās* (ritual gestures), *nyāsa* (mantric divinization), visualization, and varied forms of meditation and observances (*vratas*). Furthermore, various Buddhist and Śaiva tantric scholars began to interpret the mechanics behind *āveśa* as being related to tantric physiology i.e., the subtle body and its systems of channels (*nāḍīs*), *cakras*, and the developing concept of *kuṇḍalinī* at this time.

Being a non-dualist school, the Trika-Kaula begin to use *samāveśa* ("co-possession") as the preferred term over *āveśa*. At this time possession had become reformulated, understood as a completely internal and non-dual phenomenon, where one is not possessed by an external deity, but rather "immersed" or "absorbed" by one's own higher nature or Self. As we will see, this transformation from *āveśa* to *samāveśa* was generally paralleled among

the Tantric Buddhists with the emergence of Deity Yoga, later considered the hallmark of Vajrayāna practice. Though the structure of these Śaiva and Buddhist's rites were similar, the Buddhists employed their own interpretations of the phenomenon which were more aligned with their own particular ontological and soteriological perspectives. The Jains also adopted some of the transformative and liberative divinization techniques, developed by the Śaivas and Buddhists, though they generally removed any transgressive elements and resemblances to *āveśa* as a form of deity possession.

Despite the domestication and non-dual exegesis by the Trika-Kaulas and others, the language and framework of *āveśa* as possession was clearly retained, even if conflated with other tantric concepts operative at this time, such as *śaktipāta* ("The Descent of Power"). This is particularly seen in discussions of the "proofs of possession", the objective markers of the *āveśa* experience, which remained relatively consistent from the time of the AV into the Tantras.²² A key component of my argument is that *āveśa* (and related terms) is a central and fundamental feature of Tantric philosophy and practice, one of the qualities that gives Tantra its specificity. For some tantric schools, this capacity for possession became a pre-requisite for all future tantric endeavors - if one was unable to become possessed, one could not continue on the tantric path.²³

The final chapter is broken up into two sections. The first portion discusses how many of these *āveśa* concepts and practices, adopted and refined by the Tantras from earlier popular, demonological, and ascetic traditions, were once again filtered down and re-

²² These included, for example, *udbhava* ('rising,' or leaping about), *kampa* ('trembling') *nidrā* (loss of consciousness), *ghūrṇi* ('moving to and fro) and *ānanda* ('joy'). See, for example, the *Mālinīvijayottara* and *Kubjikamata Tantras*. Of course, these signs overlap with a number of other pathological and non-pathological experiences as well, as evidenced in the Ayurvedic literature.

²³ This will be discussed in detail in chapter four. See Smith (2006) and Judit Törzsök, "Yoginī and Goddess Possession in Early Śaiva Tantras", in "*Yoginī*" in *South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. István Keul (London; New York, Routledge 2013): 179-197, for examples.

assimilated by non-elite folk traditions after the decline of state-sponsored Tantra. This the case in Kerala, South India, where possession is still firmly entrenched as a part of their everyday religiosity, and where I conducted fieldwork in both 1998 and 2016. I briefly trace how these ideas from the Tantras spread into Kerala in the medieval period through groups of itinerant householder ascetics, leading to a synthesis of tantric, Brahmanic, and folkpossession traditions, exemplified by rites that I will discuss such as Teyyam and the institution of the temple oracle (*veḷiccappāṭu*) found throughout the region.²⁵ Part of my fieldwork also involved documenting a number of other possession rites I witnessed during my time there and will also briefly discuss - including, an oracular possession rite by members of the Irula tribe; a *sarpam thuḷḷal* (Serpent Song) by the Pulluvan community, which involved making others ritually possessed by Nāga spirits; *Muṭiyēṭtu*, a high-caste temple performance, appropriated by the Brahmins though rooted in folk possession rites; and finally, a "muted" form of oracular possession involving the Sanskritized folk deity Shrī Viṣṇumāyā Kutṭicāttan. I mention all these rites in order to show the wide spectrum of possession forms in Kerala and how they differ depending on which influence predominates (Tantric, Brahmanic, or Folk). Besides brief descriptions and comparison of these rites, I also provide a number of emic perspectives and interpretations of these deity possession rites through interviews I conducted with both practitioners and devotees.

The second and final portion of this chapter brings together some of the data collected from my textual and ethnographic research into conversation with the larger field of possession studies, including perspectives from the humanities, social sciences, and psycho-medical sciences. Using these insights, I lay out some larger questions for future research,

²⁵ By "folk", in this context, I mean local traditions which are both indigenous and belong to the larger Dravidian culture of South India.

calling for consilience between these various disciplines (e.g., Anthropology, Psychology, Cognitive Science, Neuroscience, and Religious Studies) and using integrated approaches to discuss and analyze complex cultural phenomena such as possession. This chapter is broken into two broad, though interrelated, inquiries. The first section queries why certain social groups seem to have a predilection for possession. According to South Asia's textual and ethnographic record, and attested also across cultures, it appears that women, children, and other historically marginalized groups (low caste/class, homosexual/transvestites, etc.) have a higher capacity for the possession experience and are predisposed to both positive and negative forms. Often these are spontaneous experiences, induced ritually, or enshrined in lineage rights by communities who somehow pass this ability down to successive generations. However, in the tantric literature I explore it is primary males (including high-caste Brahmins) who are involved in possession rites, though these practitioners had to follow prescribed ritual procedures for extended periods of time, often involving transgressive and self-mortifying practices which, according to Olga Serbaeva-Saraogi, induce "artificial psychological trauma" and altered states in order to engender a state of *āveśa*.²⁶ Thus, a series of questions arise - What is it about marginalized men's, women's and children's bodies that make them more prone to possession? Can this psychosomatic capacity really be passed down through one's lineage? Why would non-marginalized men have to resort to extreme practices to achieve a similar state? What does "marginalization" actually mean here? That is, how do ideas, beliefs, and discourses shape and transform the states and dispositions of people's bodies?

²⁶ Serbaeva-Saraogi, Olga. "Can Encounters with Yoginīs in the Jayadrathayāmala Be Described as Possession?" in "*Yoginī*" in *South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. István Keul (London; New York, Routledge 2013): 200.

Rather than abstract explanations often characterized by the social sciences - i.e., that "social forces" have "social consequences" - I argue that we must examine marginalization as an embodied phenomenon, much in the same way possession is an embodied experience. What is key to understanding social marginalization as an etiological factor in possession is acknowledging the numerous cognitive and biological consequences of this marginalization and how these processes are involved in creating capacities for possession states. To this end, I review a growing body of anthropological and scientific literature (e.g., Cognitive Science, Psychology, Neuroscience, etc.) which shows how social relations, learned knowledge systems, and environmental stressors can have very physical, cognitive, and neurobiological effects on the body. I believe insights from this material may be useful in illuminating some of the questions I posed above. Ultimately, I hypothesize that there are three interrelated factors involved: (1) implicit and explicit belief systems regarding the permeability and porousness of self and other (2) a fluid sense of identity and self-body relationship, and finally, (3) past/current trauma or marginalization (including self-induced) in interaction with associated dissociative states, the primary consequence being ruptures in one's sense of self, identity, and agency.

The second primary question I address, again related to the first, goes beyond looking at capacities to try and understand how possession states may be engendered and learned through tantric ritual practice, in both the textual traditions and ethnographic examples I discuss. For this I examine recent research which I believe successfully used integrated approaches to address some of these questions - the first by Rebecca Seligman, who studies spirit mediums from the Afro-Brazilian tradition of Candomblé, and second by Tanya Luhrmann, who has been researching how Evangelical Christians learn to "hear" and "talk"

to God through their religious practices and systems of knowledge. I suggest that the possession practices described in the Tantras, and those I witnessed during my fieldwork, involve similar processes to what Seligman and Luhrmann describe in their respective research. In all three cases, practitioners purposely induce and cultivate non-pathological dissociative states and train what Luhrmann et al. identifies as a psychological capacity for absorption, in order to trigger, shape, and eventually master anomalous experiences, like possession.²⁷ Seligman describes how these transformations in identity among her subjects, from an individual to a deity, take place through processes of "identity diffusion" and the mediums subsequent "reconstitution".²⁸ After comparing their work with my own data, I end the chapter summarizing several key points and factors which emerge in conversation with these recent insights in order to lay a foundation for future cross-cultural work I hope to continue. Additionally, I believe the study of possession practices as a healing modality - for repairing selves and stabilizing self-body relationships - and the pathways individuals take to get there, is something worth studying and exploring - particularly for those in the psychological and psychiatric sciences. Traditional systems of knowledge, as seen in South Asia and Seligman's examples from Brazil, offer alternative frameworks to deal with experience such as possession, often allowing people to embrace their dissociative or anomalous experiences as potentially integrative and spiritually productive, rather than idioms of distress or pathology as seen in cultures where positive frameworks of possession do not exist.

²⁷ See Luhrmann, Tanya M. "The Art of Hearing God: Absorption, Dissociation, and Contemporary American Spirituality." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*. 5.2 (2006): 133-157 and Luhrmann, Tanya M, Howard Nussbaum, and Ronald Thisted. "The Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity." *American Anthropologist*. 112.1 (2010): 66-78.

²⁸ See Seligman, Rebecca. "From Affliction to Affirmation: Narrative Transformation and the Therapeutics of Candomblé Mediumship". *Transcultural Psychiatry*. 42 (2005): 272-294.

II. CHAPTER 2: THE TEXTUAL ROOTS OF TANTRIC DEITY POSSESSION IN SOUTH ASIA

A. INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In the previous chapter I discussed some of issues surrounding the academic study of “possession”, as well as the particular approach I will be employing in my own dissertation work on tantric possession or *āveśa*. Part of this approach involves exploring and contextualizing the many pre-tantric discourses on *āveśa* and, by extension, notions of the embodied self as seen in religious texts of South Asia. To this end, this chapter will explore earlier textual roots, discourses, and narratives surrounding possession, attested to most commonly in the Sanskrit literature as *āveśa*. Sources for this chapter will draw primarily from early Vedic, Buddhist, Jain and Epic/Purāṇic texts.

References to spirit possession, both negative and positive, have a long history in Sanskrit literature, going back to the earliest surviving scriptures of South Asia, the *R̥g Veda* (1500-1200 BCE). Since that time, a plethora of possession-related forms are evidenced within the literature, many still found throughout South Asia, despite its history of denigration by most classical Indian religions.²⁹ In the earliest Vedas, references to possession were primarily negative, involving the hostile takeover of some demonic entity or an angry divinity. However, positive forms of deity possession are also documented in this early time, usually associated with the ritual consumption of the *soma* plant or involving

²⁹ Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1990: 457) write: “The great classical religions of India - Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism...inculcated self-control and decorum... Possession is of course the very converse of self-control and is normally accompanied by the display of violent emotion. One could say that the Indian classical religions precisely censored out possession and opposed emotionalism. The scheme of values they set up was one of calm and dignified conduct, *civilized* behavior as opposed to rustic license.”

marginal figures such as the *Keśins*. The first part of this chapter will look briefly at some of these early Vedic accounts of possession found in these earliest texts.

This will be followed by a more in-depth examination of a possession narrative written about nearly a millennium later in the Epic period - the possession of Aśvatthāman by Rudra-Śiva in the famous episode of the *Sauptikaparvan* of the Mahābhārata. I examine this specific narrative because it is an early yet detailed depiction of possession that contains a number of relevant themes and patterns found in later Tantric deity possession practices and narratives. Rudra-Śiva's portrayal as a possessing deity in this time is relatively rare but significant given early depictions of Rudra in the Vedas, particularly the *Atharvaveda*, which I will examine next. In these early texts, Rudra is depicted with great ambiguity – on one hand he is a fierce and dangerous god prone to attacking humans, while, on the other, he is the *bhūtanātha*, a “Lord of Spirits”, who has the power to control and expel harmful entities under his command, and to heal those possessed and afflicted by them. It is this particular aspect of Rudra-Śiva as the *bhūtanātha* that I argue becomes the primary model first for the Atharvavedin “medicine-men” known as *bhīṣajs*, early specialists in *bhūtavidyā* (“The Science of Spirits”), and then later for tantric ritualists and practitioners of various stripes.

Bhūtavidyā, as seen in the early *Atharvaveda*, itself is a complex system with varied origins, drawing not only from Vedic sources, but also the larger demonological cultural substratum that included indigenous, and non-Vedic traditions, along with demonologies from foreign sources such as the Persians, Greeks, and Chinese. These varied sources left an indelible mark on the Atharva Veda and came to influence all subsequent Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain demonological traditions in South Asia. In these early Vedic *bhūtavidyā* texts, negative possession forms again dominate as they do in the RV - possessing spirits were

generally seen as malevolent beings in need of exorcism or destruction, a trend which continues to this day. At the same time, we also find some accounts in early Vedic, Buddhist and Jain texts of various ritualists and sorcerers interacting with these same spirit beings for purposes of magic (*abhicāra*), protection, divination, and prognostication. In some cases, this even involved possession by various spirits and deities into the body of a prescribed medium. I will argue that much of the form and function of tantric deity possession and magic drew from this wide well of Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic traditions associated with magicians, sorcerers, diviners, and healers of various stripes as witnessed in literature of this early period.

The final section of this chapter will take a closer look at the religious narratives and cosmologies surrounding the possessing entities themselves – the myriad of *bhūtas* (“spirits/ghosts”) and *grahas* (“seizers”), the two terms most commonly used to denote possessing spirits, which suffused the Vedic, Buddhist and Jain demonological literature in this early period. This includes beings such as the *rākṣasas* (demons), *piśacas* (goblins), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), *apsaras* (celestial nymphs), *nāgas* (serpent-beings), and *yakṣas* (dryads), among a multitude of others. A genealogy of sorts will be given for some of these categories, and sources will be drawn from multiple religious traditions from the Vedic to the Epic period. While negative forms of possession continue to dominate, there are also some fascinating accounts of positive and oracular forms of possession.

Out of this large group of supernatural beings, a number of powerful *bhūtas* began to emerge and become elevated in the literature to the status of *bhūtanātha*, a “Lord of Spirits”, often modeled upon or associated with the original *bhūtanātha*, Rudra-Śiva. In many cases, these fierce and ambiguous beings had their own independent regional cults or were

considered demonic beings by the orthodox traditions.³⁰ Many of these ancient deities were eventually converted, domesticated, and adopted by the Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains, in an attempt to access their powers as protectors, healers, holders of esoteric knowledge, and bestowers of supernatural powers (*siddhis*), but also to bring these deities and their respective cults into their religious fold. I will examine some of these narratives and the conversion strategies used to transform these ghouls to gods, including figures such as Hāritī, Kubera, Skanda-Kumāra, Gaṇapati, Bhairava, and Hanumān.

As we will see in later chapters, it is these ambiguous yet powerful beings from the demonological traditions who eventually come to populate the developing pantheons of the Śaiva and Buddhist Tantric traditions in the medieval period. Tantric practitioners often modelled themselves upon these *bhūtanāthas*, either by identifying themselves as the deity or, in some cases, by becoming possessed by them.

B. THE VEDAS: PERVADING GODS, SEERS, CHANNELERS, AND SHAKERS

The word *āveśa*, and its derivatives (from *ā√viś*), are first found in the Vedic literature in the ninth *maṇḍala* of the ṚV, a book dominated by hymns related to the divine elixir of the Vedic sages known as *soma*, which is said to induce, as Frederick Smith has argued, “a type of divine possession”.³¹ These *soma* drinkers were often known as *ṛṣis* (“seers”), visionary

³⁰ As Tarabout points out, "Demonic possession" in the Hindu context should be avoided, which I agree with, "... because the value judgment it presupposes leads to a misunderstanding of the pantheon: certainly, certain Powers are said to be dark forces, sometimes extremely violent and destructive, but all are capable of being incorporated into the turbulent troops which accompany the superior deities. Departed, vampires and other ghosts are not opposed to the gods but are subject to them, and thus proceed, despite their disturbances, from the divine order." Gilles Tarabout, "Corps Possédés et Signatures Territoriales au Kérala", in *La Possession en Asie du Sud. Parole, Corps, Territoire*, ed. J. Assayag and G. Tarabout, (Paris: EHESS, 1999): 315. As we will see continue to see throughout this chapter, the distinction between gods and ghouls is ambiguous at best.

³¹ See Smith (2006: xxii). See below for other references as well.

sages who were the first to “see” (from the roots $\sqrt{drś}$, $\sqrt{cakṣ}$, and \sqrt{ci}) and transmit the divine revelations of the Vedas. However, according to the RV, it was not simply the seers who were the creators of the Vedas, nor was it only the gods - rather, the two were considered *co-creators* of this sacred knowledge. Barbara Holdrege describes this process as a dynamic and synesthetic experience involving both "seeing" and "hearing" the ultimate nature of reality.

Holdrege writes,

...the gods are represented as the inspirers of the hymns, while, on the other hand, the *ṛṣis* themselves are said to generate the hymns... the process through which the hymns emerge is represented as a cyclical process in which the gods and *ṛṣis* both have a central role: the gods mediate the process of cognition through stimulating the visions and inspirations of the *ṛṣis*; these divinely inspired cognitions then take shape in the hearts of the *ṛṣis*, who give them vocalized expression in recited hymns, which in turn nourish and magnify the gods.³²

According to Holdrege, this experience bestowed divine knowledge regarding creation and the mechanics of the universe, giving the *ṛṣis* the power to manipulate both the cosmos and the gods. According to the RV, the hymns themselves originated from the “Imperishable” (*akṣara*) realm of the gods, which is “beyond space” (*vyoman*: [RV 1.164.39]).³³ From this realm, the gods impelled the hymns towards the *ṛṣis* who cognize and, in turn, recite them back to their original source, empowering both groups in the process. Thus, a cyclical co-creative relationship occurs where *ṛṣis* join together with the gods, who are said to be possessed (*āviveśa*) and pervaded (*viśvān*) by the divine Vedic meters (*jagati*) [RV 10.130.5c]. Through this shared revelatory knowledge experience, the text states, humans become divine sages (*ṛṣis*).³⁴ This may be one of the earliest explicit

³² Holdrege, Barbara A. *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1997): 233.

³³ "The *ṛcs* exist in the Imperishable (*akṣara*), beyond space (*vyoman*), where all the gods abide. He who does not know that [Imperishable], what can he accomplish with the hymn? Those alone who know it sit collected". [RV 1.164.39]." Translation by Holdrege (1997: 356).

³⁴ *viśvān devāñ jagaty ā viveśa tena cākṣpra ṛṣayo manuṣyāḥ* || RV 10.130.5c

depictions in Indian literature of the divinization of humans, involving both the commingling of humans and gods and the employment of *mantras*. This is a fundamental pattern that continues into the Epic and Purāṇic period and becomes standard in later tantric rites and literature, as we will soon see.³⁵

PERVADING GODS

Two of the most significant deities in the early *R̥g Veda* are Soma and Agni (Fire), and it is this same duo who are the primary deities involved in the cognition of the *ṛṣis* just described.³⁶ These two deities are often called *ṛṣis* or *kavis* (inspired poets) and, at times, *ṛṣi-kṛts* ("makers of ṛṣis"), implying that these two had the power to transform humans into divine *ṛṣis*. As Smith notes,

...the majority of occurrences of $\bar{a}\sqrt{vi}\acute{s}$ in the *R̥V* appear in the context of descriptions of relations between the processed and liquid soma, the deity Soma, various other deities, and the sages themselves. It is used for *soma* entering, permeating, psychologically or somatically influencing, and, perhaps, possessing a person or even a deity....³⁷

R̥V 1.91.11, for example, states, "O Soma, we, learned of speech, strengthen you with words. Gracious one, enter (*āviśa*) into us."³⁸ Note again the reciprocal relationship here – the *ṛṣis* first empower Soma with their sacred words and then ask the deified Soma to enter into their own bodies, which in turn, empowers them.

³⁵ We should also note the similarities between the *ṛṣis* cognition and the phenomena of channeling, which is evidenced in various traditions around the world, most recently in the form of New Age channeling. See Arthur Hastings, *With the Tongues of Men and Angels: A Study of Channeling*. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991), for more on this.

³⁶ Indra and Rudra are also notable in this regard. See Smith (2006: 177-197) and Holdrege (1997: 234).

³⁷ Smith (2006: 179) - See this section of his text for a variety of other examples

³⁸ *R̥V* 1.91.11: *soma gīrbhiṣ ṛvā vayan̄ varhayāmo vacovidah̄ | sum̄f̄l̄iko na āviśa* || Translation based on Smith (2006: 180)

This quality of pervasion and pervading into bodies, often marked with some derivative of $\bar{a}\sqrt{vis}$, is also a dominant feature of Agni, the God of Fire, who is said to pervade the world and all living beings in the form of heat.³⁹ He is also, most importantly, the sacrificial fire fundamental to all Vedic rites, acting as the messenger between the various realms of the cosmos. Not only does he purify and transport all fire offerings to the realm of the gods, but he also transports the souls of the cremated dead to the realm of Yama, the Lord of Death. Similarly, Soma is also regarded as a link between the human and divine realms, bringing divine knowledge and states of supernatural ecstasy to humans as the divine elixir. Often the two are coupled together in RV, and certain passages even identify these two pervading gods with each other.⁴⁰ Also of significance is their roles as divine healers and protector deities, the two often invoked together to drive away demons, disease, and illness. As we will see, all of these traits typify many deities who I categorize as *bhūtanāthas* "Lord of Spirits", a group of deities I will be discussing shortly.

Another important pervading deity, though referenced little in the earliest Vedas, is Vāc, the goddess of speech. Like Soma and Agni, she too is designated as a *ṛṣi-kṛt*, a *ṛṣi*-maker who "enters into *ṛṣis*" (*ṛṣiṣu praviṣṭām*; RV 10.71.3a)⁴¹ and bestows them her divine power: "Whom I love, I make powerful. I make him a *brahman*, a *ṛṣi*, a sage."⁴² Like Soma and Agni, Vāc is said to pervade (derivative of $\bar{a}\sqrt{vis}$) both heaven and earth (*dyāvāpṛthivī ā viveśa*, RV 10.125.6) and "possesses" or "enters into" (*āveśayantīm*) many forms.⁴³ She says

³⁹ See for example, RV 3.3.4 *pitā yajñānām asuro vipaścitām vimānam agnir vayunaṃ ca vāghatām | ā viveśa rodasī bhūrivarpasā purupriyo bhandate dhāmabhiḥ kavīḥ ||* and RV 5.25.4 *agnir deveṣu rājaty agnir marteṣv āviśan | agnir no havyavāhano 'gnim dhībhiḥ saparyata ||*

⁴⁰ Flood (2006: 46)

⁴¹ RV 10.71.3a *yajñena vācaḥ padaviyam āyan tām anv avindann ṛṣiṣu praviṣṭām |*

⁴² RV 10.125.5 *yaṃ kāmāye taṃ-taṃ ugraṃ kṛṇomi taṃ brahmāṇaṃ taṃ ṛṣiṃ taṃ sumedhām ||*

⁴³ RV 10.125.3 *tām mā devā vy adadhuh purutrā bhūristhātrām bhūry āveśayantīm ||*

in her own hymn, “The one who eats food, who sees, who breathes, who hears what is said, does so through me. Though they do not realize it, they dwell in me.”⁴⁴

As speech, Vāc is both immanent in the cosmos, yet transcends it – according to the ṚV, only one-fourth of her is what humans speak and comprehend, the remaining three quarters, “hidden in secret, do not issue forth.”⁴⁵ The one-quarter in the human world is compared by the texts to the wind (*vāta*), which also pervades and enters into all living beings (*ārabhamāṇā bhuvanāni viśvā*).⁴⁶ Furthermore, Vāc states that she not only “roams with the fierce hordes of *rudras*” (*rudrebhiḥ carāmi*),⁴⁷ and “carries” or “supports” (from *√bhṛ*) gods such as Soma and Agni, but also that it is ultimately she who gives the gods their power. She states, “I stretch the bow for Rudra so that his arrow will strike down those hostile to the sacred hymn.”⁴⁸ This connection with a powerful and pervading female deity and Rudra is also a continuing pattern that is seen throughout the Tantric literature with Śiva and Bhairava.

Although discussed little in the ṚV, there are hints of Vāc’s supreme and absolute nature, though this figures more prominently in later Vedic texts. In these texts, she begins to be explicitly identified with the supreme Brahman (*brahma vai vāc*) of the Upaniṣads, making her one of the earliest and most powerful goddesses in Indian literary traditions.⁴⁹ Texts such as the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (TB) exclaim that Vāc is the imperishable one (*akṣara*), the first-born of the cosmic order (*ṛta*), the navel of immortality (*amṛta*), and the

⁴⁴ RV10.25.4 *mayā so annam atti yo vipaśyati yaḥ prāṇiti ya īm śṛṇoty uktam | amantavo māṃ ta upa kṣiyanti śrudhi śruta śraddhivaṃ te vadāmi ||*

⁴⁵ RV 1.164.45 Translation by Holdrege (1997: 42)

⁴⁶ RV 10.125.8a *aham eva vāta iva pra vāmy ārabhamāṇā bhuvanāni viśvā*

⁴⁷ RV 10.125.1 *ahaṃ rudrebhir vasubhiḥ carāmy aham ādityair uta viśvadevaih | aham mitrāvaruṇobhā bibharmy aham indrāgnī aham aśvinobhā ||*

⁴⁸ RV 10.125.6a *ahaṃ rudrāya dhanur ā tanomi brahmadviṣe śarave hantavā u |*

⁴⁹ The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (12.4.21.1) and *Atharva Veda* (4.1) explicitly identifying *brahman* with the Word: “*brahma vai vāc*”

“Mother of the Vedas” (*vedanam mata*) [TB 2.8.8.5]. As speech, she also becomes associated with the power of the Vedic mantras, which are said to have flowed out from her during the time of cosmic creation and referred to as her “thousand-fold progeny.”⁵⁰

As Larson and others note, such references constitute some of the earliest notions of “female creative forces” which were gradually brought together to create one unifying conception of Vāc as “the personified female principle of energy”.⁵¹ Much of Vāc’s qualities and aspects also foreshadow what is to come later in the form of the Great Goddess of the *Devī Māhātmya* and the goddesses of the Tantric traditions (e.g. *Paravāc Brahman*), particularly around the notion of *śakti* (“power” or “energy”), representing both the feminine matrix and animating energies of the phenomenal universe. She can also be seen as a precursor for a number of speech-oriented “Alphabet Goddesses” in proto-tantric and tantric traditions.⁵²

What ultimately unites these early Vedic deities is their all-pervading nature and their representation as universal animating energies, which various Vedic texts state again and again, pervade the cosmos as well as humans and gods. As Smith notes, all these entities can be differentiated from other gods in that they all have forms (*rūpa*) whose “boundaries are amorphous, if not all-pervasive, while those of the [other] gods are seemingly more defined.”⁵³ To this list of early pervading Vedic deities, we can also add Vāyu, the god of Wind and Rudra, two deities we will discuss in more detail shortly. Vāyu not only represents

⁵⁰ SB V.5.5.12; SB IV.6.7.1-3

⁵¹ See Gerald James Larson, *The Sources for Śakti in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Saivism: A Linguistic and Aesthetic Category*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, (1974): 47, who references RV 10.125.

⁵² These include Śaiva/Śakta tantric Alphabet Goddess such as Māṭṛkā, Vageśvari, Parā, and Mālinī, some we will discuss in a later chapter. Māṭṛkā, for example, like Vāc is described as “the ultimate source (*yoni*) of all mantras, all *śāstras*, and speech.” See Judit Törzsök, “The Emergence of the Alphabet Goddess Māṭṛkā in Early Śaiva Tantras”, in *Tantric Studies-Fruits of a Franco-German Collaboration on Early Tantra*, eds., Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson. (IFP, EFEO, U. Hamburg, 2016): 135, for Sanskrit references.

⁵³ Smith (2006: 178)

ordinary wind, but more importantly, comes to be understood as the breath or vital wind (*prāna*) of humans and the cosmos (as *Puruṣa*).⁵⁴ As we will see, these ideas become primary features of many of the possessing entities we will be discussing in this and subsequent chapters.

VEDIC VIPRAS – “THE SHAKERS”

Besides *ṛṣi* or *kavi*, another common designation for Vedic seers was the term *vipra*, which etymologically means “quiverer,” and derives from the root *vip/vep*, which translates as “trembling, shaking, inspired, or ecstatic”.⁵⁵ Among its many Indo-European cognates is the Latin term *vibrare*, “to vibrate”. Holdrege writes,

The inspired thoughts of the *ṛṣis*, as the subtle reverberations of speech, are described as vibrating (root *vip*), and thus the seers themselves are deemed *vipras*... A *vipra* is thus a seer whose awareness is vibrant with the reverberations of divine speech, to which he gives vocalized expression.⁵⁶

Though *vipra* later becomes a synonym for a Brahmin, Jan Gonda’s analysis of the term throughout the early Vedas leads him to conclude that *vipra*:

...may originally have denoted a moved, inspired, ecstatic and “enthusiast” seer, as a bearer or pronouncer of the emotional and vibrating, metrical sacred words...the man who experiences the vibration, energy, rapture of religious and aesthetic inspiration.⁵⁷

Rather than simply a Brahmin priest, Gonda and others see the term as describing more of a shaman or a medicine-man who “trembles” when entering ecstatic states. Gonda backs this assertion with a quote from RV 10.97.6, which describes the *viprah* as a

⁵⁴ See for example, RV 10.90.13

⁵⁵ Monier-Williams (2007)

⁵⁶ Holdrege (1997: 230-232)

⁵⁷ Gonda, Jan. *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1963): 39.

“physician, a killer of demoniac powers, [and] one who drives away diseases”.⁵⁸ Frits Stall concurred with Gonda, stating that the term *vipra* described “the mystical intoxication of the Vedic poets, who have been inspired by the gods” and suggests, “that the Brahman is the trembling Vedic seer who is possessed by inspiring gods.”⁵⁹ Decades later, A.K. Ramanujan followed suit, countering notions of possession prevalent at that time: “One should not assume that ‘possession’ is the monopoly of the folk genres; the Vedas had their *vipras*, ‘the quivering ones’”⁶⁰. This is similar conceptually to those in the Christian Protestant traditions known as “Quakers” or “Shakers” - so called, due to the physical signs these charismatics display when “inspired” by the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ As we will soon see, the quality of *kampa*, “trembling”, becomes one of the primary markers and symptoms for possession states in both medical and tantric texts.

THE KEŚIN

A unique character found in a single hymn in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the Ṛg Veda [10.136] is the enigmatic *Keśin* (“The Long-Haired One”) who is emblematic, in many ways, of the *vipra*. Much ink has been spilled trying to understand just who and what this figure represented in early Vedic India. Some believe the *Keśin* was a proto-yogin, related to the unorthodox extra-Vedic group known as the *Vrātyas*, while others claim he is a remnant of an earlier shamanic culture of the pre-Vedic period or connected with the ascetic and

⁵⁸ *vipraḥ sa ucyate bhiṣag rakṣohāmīvacātanah* || RV 10.97.6

⁵⁹ J. F. Staal, “Sanskrit and Sanskritization.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 22 no. 3, (1963): 267.

⁶⁰ A. K. Ramanujan, “Two Realms of Kannada Folklore”, in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, ed. Stuart Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986): 71.

⁶¹ See Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

śramanic traditions of early Magadha.⁶² Whatever the *Keśin's* origins, it is apparent he stood somewhat outside of the Brahmanic social order - a renunciator (*muni*) who was clad in soiled rags, though praised as an exalted sage who is said to roam alongside the gods themselves.⁶³

Here is a translation of this hymn:

1. The long-haired one (*keśī*) bears Agni, the long-haired one bears the poison (*viṣam*), the long-haired one bears the heaven and earth. The long-haired one (bears) the sun for all to see. Indeed, the long-haired one is called this light.
2. The *munis*, having only the wind as a girdle, are clothed in tawny rags. They follow the swooping of the wind when the gods have entered (*devāso avikṣata*) them.
3. “Intoxicated (*unmaditā*) by our asceticism, we have mounted the winds. You mortals see only our bodies.”
4. He flies through the sky, gazing down on all forms. The ascetic has been established as the comrade of every god for good action.
5. The horse of the wind, the comrade of Vāyu - impelled by the gods (*deveṣito*), the ascetic presides over both seas, the eastern and the western.
6. Roaming in the course of the Apsaras', the Gandharvas, and forest beasts, the long-haired one is their sweet, most exhilarating comrade, who knows their will.
7. Vāyu churned it (the poison); Kunannamā prepared it for him. The long-haired one drank of the poison with his cup, together with Rudra.⁶⁴

It is unclear regarding the precise order of events, but we are told in the hymn that the ascetic's body had been "entered into" or "possessed" (*devāso avikṣata* – from the root *viś*) by the gods at some point. The *Keśin* is also said to have drunk a poisonous concoction (*viṣa*) with Rudra, prepared by the equally marginalized and mysterious female deity

⁶² See, for example, Flood (2006); J. C. Heesterman, “Vrātya and Sacrifice.” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 6 (1): (1962): 1–37; Max Deeg, “Shamanism in the Veda: The *Keśin*-Hymn (10.136), the Journey to Heaven of Vasiṣṭha (RV 7.88) and the Mahāvratā-Ritual.” (*Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism*, Saṃbhāṣā, 1993): 95–144; and D. Acharya “How to Behave like a Bull? New Insight into the Origin and Religious Practices of Pāsupatas.” *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 56.2. (2013): 101–31, for these various theories.

⁶³ *Muni* becomes an important appellation taken up by later *śramanic* traditions as well.

⁶⁴ Sanskrit: *keśyaghnīm keśī viṣam keśī bibharti rodasī | keśīviṣvaṃ svaḍrṣe keśidaṃ jyotirucyate || munayo vātaraśanāḥ piśaṅghā vasate malā | vātasyānudhrājīm yanti yad devāso avikṣata || unmaditā mauneyana vātānā tasthimā vayam | śarīredasmākaṃ yūyaṃ martāso abhi paśyatha || antarikṣeṇa patati viśvā rūpāvacākaśat | munirdevasya-devasya saukṛtyāya sakhā hitaḥ || vātasyāśvo vāyoḥ sakhātho deveṣito muniḥ | ubhausamudrāvā kṣeti yaśca pūrva utāparaḥ || apsarasām ghandharvānām mṛghānām carane caran | keśiketasya vidvān sakhā svādurmāntamaḥ || vāyurasmā upāmanthat pīnaṣṭi smā kunannamā | keśīviṣasya pātreṇa yad rudreṇāpibat saha ||* Translation based upon Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India. Vol. 1.* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014): 1621-1622, but modified.

Kunaṃnamā, named only once in all the Vedas.⁶⁵ The Keśin is further said to experience a state of ecstasy, madness, or intoxication (*unmaditā*), causing him to “mount” the winds and soar in the skies. Sailing through the air, the Keśin states, “Our bodies are all you mere mortals can see,” implying that he had somehow transcended his mortal frame. Light and solar imagery, usually associated with the gods, is used to describe the transformed *muni* in his state of possession/ecstasy. He also roams with the *apsaras* and *gandharvas* – celestial entities known even in the earliest Vedas to possess humans.⁶⁶

What or who precisely the *keśin* represents is difficult to surmise with the little evidence we have, but, as Flood notes, “the description of the Keśin is reminiscent of later ascetics who undergo extraordinary inner experiences”.⁶⁷ This is especially true of later tantric practitioners who were also known to use intoxicants, interacted with various female entities, divinization through ecstatic states of madness and possession by the gods, and the bestowal of supernatural powers such as flight. Although it is wise not to make a direct connection between the two, the resemblance is uncanny and many of these patterns continue in later possession practices of the tantrikas.

One potential connection hypothesized by various scholars is between the *keśins* and their association with the Vrātyas, an unorthodox and extra-Vedic brotherhood of itinerant ascetic-warriors who lived on the edges of Aryan society and attested to in book fifteen of the *Atharva Veda*.⁶⁸ Though on the margins, the Vrātyas were considered part of the Vedic-fold

⁶⁵ Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. (London: Penguin, 2005): 138, notes in her translation that Kunaṃnamā’s “...name may indicate a witch or a hunchback”, though she makes no mention why. David White (2003: 198) also believes there may be a connection between her and the “dread *yakkhiṇī* (female *yakṣa*) described in the fifth century C.E. Mahāvamsa, the Buddhist chronicle of Ceylon...the powerful *yakkhiṇī* Kuvannā”.

⁶⁶ In the later AV *gandharvas* and *apsaras* are said to cause disease [AV.4.37], but also known to cure madness [AV.6.111.4].

⁶⁷ Flood (2006: 79).

⁶⁸ See Heesterman (1962: 1–37).

once they had performed the *vrātyastoma* purification rites and sacrifice - however, evidence shows that they may still have been looked upon with disdain. Brian K. Smith translates verses from the Pañcaviṃśa *Brāhmaṇa* [17.1.2], for example, which states:

Those who lead the life of a *vrātya* are defective (*hīna*) and left behind. For they neither practice the study of the Veda nor do they plough or trade . . . Swallowers of poison are those [*vrātyas*] who eat foreign food as if it were the food of the Brahmin; who speak improperly as if it were proper; who strike the guiltless with a stick; and who, although not initiated, speak the speech of the initiated.⁶⁹

It appears the *Vrātyas* practiced their own customs and ceremonies, but the precise nature and structure of these rites is unclear. Based on textual evidence, Gavin Flood proposes:

...they were probably concerned with fertility and the magical renewal of life with the seasons. During the summer solstice ‘great vow’ (*mahāvratā*) ritual, the priest (*hotṛ*) muttered chants, which included reference to the three breaths animating the body. These breaths...suggest an early kind of breath control, which becomes developed as *prāṇāyāma* in later yogic traditions. This rite is accompanied by obscene dialogues and also involves ritual sexual intercourse between a ‘bard’, who may have otherwise remained celibate, and a ‘prostitute’; a rite which has echoes in later tantric ritual.⁷⁰

According to Flood and others, the *Vrātyas* soteriology was also markedly different from typical Vedic religious goals. For example, rather than simply appeasing or worshipping gods, the *Vrātya-Kāṇḍa* of the *Atharva Veda* states that the *Vrātya* “attained lordship of the gods, he became Īśāna (Rudra/Śiva).”⁷¹ Thus, this tradition seems to have had an early religious goal of unification or identification with the supreme God of the *Vrātyas*, Ekavrātya (identified with Rudra), leading them to emulate the dress and behaviors of the god. This is why they are described in the *Vrātya-Kāṇḍa* as being dressed in black with two ram skins over their shoulders and wearing a turban - all in imitation of their god.

⁶⁹Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998): 89.

⁷⁰ Flood (2006: 79)

⁷¹ *sá devāhām īśām páry ait sá īśāno ’bhavat* AVŚ 15.1.1-6

This early evidence, therefore, has led some scholars to believe that the Vrātyas may have been precursors to the Śaiva Pāśupata and Kāpālika traditions, groups which exerted considerable influence on the tantric traditions, as we will discuss later. Some, such as Günther Sontheimer, even suggest there may be a direct continuity between the Vrātyas and present-day possession cults, such as those associated with Khaṇḍoba.⁷² Sontheimer writes,

The imitation of the human leader who incorporated the divine and himself became Rudra, e.g., the Ekavratya in his cosmogonic ritual (AV XV), seems to have been a common feature before manifestations of the divine in *mūrtis* became popular... We need not view the later sects worshipping Siva or Bhairava with their peculiar rituals of *imitatio dei* as the antecedents of the Voggus, etc., but would rather suggest direct continuity between the ancient Vrātyas and the present day Voggus, etc. Parallels of such impersonations of the deity also include the devotee of the early Murukan, the velan dancing in a frenzy until he became Velan, that is Murukan himself. Similarly, the *devṛṣi* ("shaman") in the Khaṇḍoba cult is possessed by the god in the form of the wind and virtually becomes Khaṇḍoba.⁷³

Though direct evidence is sparse, I am inclined to agree with Sontheimer - as we will see, many of the practices involving both negative and positive forms of possession can be traced back to the Atharva Veda, and specialists belonging to these early cults did have some influence on later tantric and folk possession concepts. What is key here, however, is the confluence of identification with the deity they are imitating and the actual possession by the deity – according to Sontheimer the two can be seen as the same, conceptually. We must be cautious, however, given the little evidence we have of early Vrātya rites.⁷⁴ Regardless, this type of confluence doesn't really begin to be seen again until we come to the Pāśupatas and later tantric groups. We will return to the Pāśupatas again in following chapters.

⁷² Which, according to Sontheimer includes the Voggus of Andhra Pradesh, the Vaghyaas of Maharashtra, and the Vaggayyas of Karnataka. See Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, "Between Ghost and God: A Folk Deity of the Deccan" in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. A. Hildebeitel, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989): 302.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See Heesterman (1962) for more on these rites.

C. MODELS OF POSSESSION IN THE EPICS

We will continue examining the Vedic literature shortly, but before doing so I wanted to briefly mention a description and model of deity possession as presented in the *Mahābhārata* (MBH), written roughly a millennia later. I have chosen to discuss this now as it encapsulates many of the elements and themes we see not only in earlier literature, but also in later tantric literature associated with deity possession rites. The MBH is an enormously important text for scholars due to its magnitude and encyclopedic-like minutiae. Though it is a composite text, written and redacted over many centuries by numerous authors, it provides a fascinating window into one of the most consequential times in South Asian history (200BCE-400 CE).⁷⁵ Some believe it may have originally been an oral warrior's tale that belonged to the Kṣatriya traditions, though it was eventually taken over by Brahmins who altered the text to fit their own particular agendas.⁷⁶

The period of its composition overlaps globally within what some have designated as “The Axial Age” (800-300 BCE)⁷⁷, which in South Asia corresponds with what many have called a period of “Hindu” or “Brahmanical” synthesis – an era when Vedic traditions began to shift their orientation from orthodox ritual to what we consider now more mainstream

⁷⁵ According to some scholars, parts of the earliest material may reach back as far as the 8-9th centuries BCE, while most agree that the main period of its composition and redaction was from 400 BCE to the end of the Gupta period. Although called an “Epic” by Western scholars, the Hindu tradition classifies it as an *itihāsa* or historical text. See van Buitenen (1975) and Hopkins (1915) for more on this accepted dating. More recently, see Fitzgerald's (2004) introduction to volume 7 of the Chicago translation of the MBH for more on dating.

⁷⁶ See Goldman, Robert P., *Gods, Priests, and Warriors: The Bhṛguś of the Mahābhārata*. (New York: Columbia U.P., 1977) and Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), for various hypotheses of MBH as a warrior tale and Richard D Mann. *The Rise of Mahāsena: The Transformation of Skanda-Kārttikeya in North India from the Kuṣāṇa to Gupta Empires*. (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 16, on the Brahmanical agendas involved in the alterations of the text.

⁷⁷ Jaspers first introduced the term in his 1953 book *The Origin and Goal of History*. Since then, many have written on the concept: See Armstrong 2006's book *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions* for more general perspectives on it.

“Hindu” values, orthopraxy, and traditions.⁷⁸ This synthesis refers not only to the continued incorporation of non-Brahmanic groups and traditions (tribal/folk/regional cults), but also to emerging soteriologies and institutions of the renunciant (Upaniṣadic, Buddhist, Jain, Pāsupata Śaivism etc.) and *bhakti* traditions.⁷⁹ The importance of the MBh in defining what later becomes “Hindu” cannot be understated.

A number of possession forms are found throughout the Epics of the MBh and Rāmāyaṇa, some of which we will briefly discuss in this dissertation, though excellent work has already been done by the likes of Smith and others, so I will try not to repeat their efforts.⁸⁰ Smith adeptly relays, for example, the story of the virtuous King Nala’s possession (*āviśat* 3.56.3; *samāviśya* 3.56.4) in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* (3.50) by the jealous divinity Kali (“Discord”), after having committed a minor ritual lapse.⁸¹ Additionally, Smith and White have both finely recounted the episode of Vipula Bhārgava (MBh 13.40–43), who enters and possesses the body of his guru’s wife with his yogic powers (*yogenānupraviśya*, 13.40.50a) in order to protect her against the sexual advances of the lustful god Indra.⁸² This is similar in some ways to the story of the ascetic Vidura’s possession of King Yudhiṣṭhira as narrated in chapter fifteen of the MBh, the *Āśramavāsika* (Residence in the Hermitage). Both of these

⁷⁸ See, Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition. From the beginning to 1800*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988.), Hildebeitel (2001 and 2007) and most recently, Johannes Bronkhorst, *How the Brahmins Won: From Alexander to the Guptas*. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016).

⁷⁹ As we’ve seen with the Keśin and the Vrātyas, synthesis and incorporation of “extra-Vedic” traditions into the Brahmanic fold is nothing new, and found within the earliest Vedas.

⁸⁰ I refer the reader to chapter six in Smith’s (2006) work *The Self-Possessed*.

⁸¹ As we will soon see, ritual lapses and breaking of vows become two major causes of negative forms of possession throughout the Epic period and into the medical literature. Another point of note is that we are also told in this story that Kali’s brother Dvāpara, served as his assistant and “possessed” (*samāviśya*) the dice which ultimately lead to Nala’s demise, including the loss of his entire kingdom and possessions (MBh 3.55.13cd) – thus, objects can be possessed too.

⁸² See Smith (2006: 255-258) and David G. White, *Sinister Yogis*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 148-151.

episodes involve what comes to be known in yoga texts as *parakāyapraveśavidyā*, “The Science of Entering Another’s Body”, which I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

While these possession narratives are important, I wanted to focus on what I believe to be one of the most explicit and fascinating examples of early possession in the Epics, - found in the tenth book of the MBh and entitled the *Sauptikaparvan*, “The Massacre at Night”.⁸³ Smith briefly mention this episode in *The Self Possessed*, though it is not explored in any detail. This particular model of possession, I will argue, is closely aligned with tantric possession in a number of ways. I will first give a brief description of the episode, followed by some analysis of key elements and themes that we will continue to see throughout this dissertation.

THE POSSESSION OF AŚVATTHĀMAN

The *Sauptikaparvan* details the story of Aśvatthāman, the son of the great *brahmin* martial-arts guru Droṇa, and his frenzied slaughter of the sleeping enemy camp of the Pāṇḍavas and the Pañcālas. The chapter begins with Aśvatthāman and two other Kaurava warriors, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarman, who return to their camp only to realize that it had been completely over-run by their enemies. The trio becomes utterly disheartened upon learning that all their soldiers and relatives are dead after seventeen days of intense battle – they were the only ones to survive. Aśvatthāman’s depression quickly turned to anger when he learned from his dying commander, Duryodhana, about the deception and severe transgressions of

⁸³ This is W.J. Johnson’s more poetic translation, see W.J. Johnson, *The Saupthikaparvan of the Mahabharata: The Massacre at Night*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); while Kate Crosby (2009) is more literal, calling it the “Dead of Night”. See Crosby, Kate. *Mahābhārata. Book 10, Dead of Night and Book 11, The Women*. (New York; Chesham: New York University Press, 2009). Monier-Williams (1899) translates the term *sauptika* as related to sleep, but in reference to this story he translates it as “nocturnal combat”.

kṣatriya dharma (the warrior's code) by their enemy-cousins, leading directly to the death of his father and their defeat. Traumatized, Aśvatthāman becomes hell-bent on revenge.

Having taken refuge in the darkness of the forest, his two companions fell asleep, but Aśvatthāman was too distraught - his mind was reeling and full of one-pointed rage. In this state, he witnessed a ferocious owl (*ulūkam ghora* 10.1.36) swoop down and slaughter a flock of sleeping crows in a banyan tree. Seeing the owl's success, Aśvatthāman immediately takes this as a divine sign and resolves to massacre the sleeping enemy army surreptitiously in the dead of night. Aśvatthāman told his companions his plan, but they tried to talk him out of it due to its transgressions of warrior code. Kṛpa notes at various points in this section that Aśvatthāman appeared to be in a state of total bewilderment (*moha*, MBh 10.1.69, 10.2.30) and he advised him to first consult with his elders on the matter. On hearing Kṛpa's sound and moral advice, Aśvatthāman became "completely possessed" (*samanvitaḥ*) with misery (*duḥka*) and grief (*śoka*), his "mind inflamed with the burning fire of grief" (*dahyamānas tu śokena pradīptenāgninā*). His grief again quickly turned to rage (*krodha* MBh, 10.4.20) and he continued on with his cruel resolve (*krūraṃ manas*),⁸⁴ claiming that it was the Pāṇḍavas who first breached the rules of battle. Aśvatthāman argued they would only be acting as the "hand of fate and destiny" (10.1.52) by killing the immoral Pañcalas and Pāṇḍava. He likened this quest to a battle between the gods and demons, comparing himself to the demon-slayers Indra and Rudra, and also making references to Rudra's bow, Pināka, which was used in the famous story of the destruction (*pralaya*) of the universe - foreshadowing what is to come.⁸⁵ Aśvatthāman states:

⁸⁴ *dahyamānas tu śokena pradīptenāgninā yathā | krūraṃ manas tataḥ kṛtvā tāv ubhau pratyabhāṣata* MBh 10.3.02

⁸⁵ See Hildebeitel, Alf. "The Mahābhārata and Hindu Eschatology." *History of Religions* 12.2 (1972): 95-135, for more on this.

Tonight, I shall overpower them all, as the bounteous Indra did the Dānava demons, and slay them all together, I shall engulf them as I dispatch them, as a blazing fire to dry wood. Careening among the Pañcalas as I slaughter them in battle before the night is out, I shall be like the wrathful Rudra himself among the beasts, Pināka bow in hand.⁸⁶

With this resolve, Aśvatthāman and his two companions head out towards the Pāṇḍava camp, but before they can carry out their ghastly deed they are confronted by a fierce and terrifying guardian-spirit, a giant fanged being (*bhūtaṃ mahākāyam*) who looked like the fierce Rudra, though Aśvatthāman failed to recognize him despite himself being a devotee of the god. Undismayed, Aśvatthāman battles “the terrible-being” (*bhayānakam*) to the best of his ability but is defeated. Believing his defeat to be divine will, he cries out aloud seeking refuge in Śiva, not realizing, he was facing the great god himself. Aśvatthāman exclaims,

Aye, no matter how hard I think, I don’t recognize him at all, surely this is the terrifying result of my corrupt mind engaging on an unjust path, serving to obstruct it. My failure on the battlefield like this is ordained by divine will...for this reason I now seek sanctuary in the powerful Mahādeva... The god of gods, Uma’s matted-haired lord, who removes disease, the wrathful lord whose garland is a string of skulls (*kapāla-mālina*), the Destroyer...to him I go for sanctuary, focused in sublime meditation (*samādhina*). If I survive this terrifying disaster, this insurmountable ordeal, I shall make today a sacrifice to the pure one with the pure offering of all beings/all elements (*sarva-bhūta*).⁸⁷

The term *sarva-bhūta* here can be seen as a double-*entendre* – Aśvatthāman is at once sacrificing “all elements of his own being”, that is, his own body, as well as foretelling the upcoming onslaught of the sleeping Pāṇḍava-Pañcala army – a sacrifice of “all beings”. Upon stating this terrible vow, Aśvatthāman has a vision of a great sacrificial fire rising up surrounded by thousands of Śiva’s troops (*gaṇas*) - a dizzying array of terrifying *bhūtas*

⁸⁶ MBh 10.3.27-30. Translation based on Crosby (2009: 29).

⁸⁷ MBh 10.6.130-10.7.12. Translation based on Crosby (2009: 52-57).

(ghouls), goblins, and animal headed-beings of all sorts, clamoring together to get a good view of what is to ensue.

After uttering a *soma* mantra (*saumya-mantra*, 10.7.52a), Aśvatthāman, who is described as “blazing” (*pratāpavān*) and “possessed of great might” (*mahāmanyur*), offers to sacrifice his own self (*ātmānam upāharat*) to Rudra, called “The Lord of Fearsome Rites” (*rudraṃ raudrakarmāṇaṃ*), with his own “fearsome rite” (*raudraiḥ karmabhir*).⁸⁸ He exclaims:

Today I offer this, my own self, born in the family of the Āṅgiras seers, into the excellent fire as an oblation, bounteous Lord. Please accept me as an offering. Out of devotion to you, Great God, in supreme meditation (*parameṇa samādhinā*) I perform this rite before you, Self-of-All, in my current misfortune. All beings reside in you, and you in turn reside in all beings.⁸⁹

Aśvatthāman then mounted the great blazing fire-altar, which pleases Śiva-Rudra immediately, causing him to transform from his fierce form into a more familiar form. Śiva tells the warrior that up until this point he had been backing the Pāṇḍavas because of their association with Lord Kṛṣṇa, but due to Aśvatthāman’s supreme sacrifice, that time had come to an end. The text continues:

Having said this, the Self of the Lord entered (*āviveśa*) the high-souled body [of Aśvatthāman] and gave to him the supreme stainless sword. Having possessed (*āviṣṭah*) him, Aśvatthāman shone even greater with the splendor of the lord and filled with that splendor (*bhūyo jajvāla tejasā*) he became swift in battle.⁹⁰

The text goes on to describe how Aśvatthāman, now possessed by Śiva, enters the enemy camp, “like the Lord incarnate” (*sākṣad iva īśvaram*), along with Shiva’s hosts of fearsome spirits (*bhūtas*) and *rākṣasas* streaming around him. We should note also that an

⁸⁸ *taṃ rudraṃ raudrakarmāṇaṃ raudraiḥ karmabhir acyutam* MBh 10. 7.55

⁸⁹ MBh 10.7.54-56. Translation based on Crosby (2009: 65). Note Aśvatthāman's mention of being part of the Āṅgiras seers, a group that belongs primarily to the Atharva Vedic traditions. See more on this below.

⁹⁰ *evamuktivā mahātmānaṃ bhagavānātmanastanum | āviveśa dadau cāsmāi vimalaṃ khadgamuttamam | athāviṣṭo bhagavatā bhūyo jajvāla tejasā | vegavāmāścabhavad yuddhe devasṛṣṭenatejasā* || MBh 10. 7.64-65

explicit connection is made earlier in chapter one of the MBh between Aśvatthāman and Śiva, which states that Aśvatthāman is, in fact, a partial incarnation (*aṃśa*) of Śiva and is also made up of portions of Antaka (“The Ender”), Krodha (“Wrath”), and Kāma (“Desire”).⁹¹ Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman are also considered incarnations of Rudra’s fierce troops, respectively as the *rudras* and *maruts*.⁹² While he may have been considered simply a portion of the Great God in the beginning of the epic, through this sacrificial act and resulting possession, Aśvatthāman’s total identification with Rudra-Śiva becomes complete and his behavior, as we would presume, becomes wild and fierce like Rudra. Possessed, he violently slaughters his slumbering enemies, who are likened to sacrificial animals (*paśus*). The imagery throughout the rest of the story is thoroughly “Rudraic”, evoking much of the *pralaya* (“destruction”) imagery seen in the apocalyptic destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice.⁹³ Descriptions of the Pāṇḍava camp at the time of the night raid are also reminiscent of the fearsome cremation grounds frequented by Śiva, a favorite haunt of later tantrikas as well. Tantric imagery, in fact, abounds in this portion of the text. We are even told that Aśvatthāman has a vision at this point of the fierce goddess Kālṛātri, a goddess briefly mentioned in the Vedas, but also the prototype of the future Kālī, one of the most important and fierce goddesses within the tantric traditions.⁹⁴ Visionary meetings with wrathful goddess figures during cremation-ground rituals, often known as *melāpas* (or *melakas*), also become commonplace in many Tantras, some associated with possession rites as we will soon see. Crosby translates this particular section:

They saw standing there the black goddess Kālī with scarlet mouth and eyes, adorned in scarlet garlands, a matriarch clothed in scarlet apparel, noose in hand, all alone,

⁹¹ *mahādevāntakābhyāṃ ca kāmāt krodhāc ca ... ekatvam upapannānām jajne* | MBh 1.61.66-67

⁹² MBh 1.61.71-75

⁹³ For more on Dakṣa's sacrifice and this section, see Hildebeitel (1972).

⁹⁴ The name Kālī also shows up once more in praises to the Goddess Durga in book 4 of the MBh.

singing, the embodiment of the night of doom, looking to make her way among them, trapping men, horses, and elephants in her dreadful nooses, carrying off, trapped in her nooses, different kinds of departed spirits... [MBh. 10.8.68-72].⁹⁵

In the ensuing chaos, Aśvatthāman is described again and again using light and fire imagery while he is in a state of possession by Śiva, the text stating that he shone “like a thousand moons” (*sahasracandram vipulam*, MBH 10.8.49) and was full of *tejas*, “fiery energy” (*tejasvī*, 10.8.24). This makes sense since Rudra is strongly associated with Agni since the time of the Ṛg Veda.⁹⁶ We also saw this with the story of the Keśin in the ṚV, who was also illuminated when “possessed” by the gods.

Additionally, while possessed, Aśvatthāman is said to have acquired superhuman strength (*atimānuṣa vikramam* 10.8.23) and took on a frightful or inhuman form (*ghorarūpo* 8.46-8.47; *amānuṣa ivākāro* 10.8.44), his enemies’ continually mistaking him for some kind of ghoulish (*bhūtam*, 10.8.23) or demon (*rākṣasa/rakṣās* 10.8.30, 10.8.34, 10.8.43). As the slaughter continued, he becomes more and more frenzied and is described as having “gone mad with sacrifice” (*āhava durmadaḥ* MBh10.8.81).⁹⁷ It is unclear in the text if Aśvatthāman had any agency, or if he was unconscious during this period, but the end of his possession state is marked with the statement that “the fever had passed” (*gatajvaraḥ*, 10.8.138c).

This particular narrative is fascinating for a variety of reasons, primarily because it contains a number of relevant motifs and themes related to Aśvatthāman’s possession state, which we will continue to see again and again throughout this dissertation. These include:

- Characters in liminal states and liminal spaces, with liminal identities– (e.g., Rudra/Śiva and Aśvatthāman)

⁹⁵ Translation based on Crosby (2009: 79)

⁹⁶ We will return to this topic shortly, but generally both were said to have the same essential nature, and both were extolled for their generative and destructive powers. For example, ṚV 2.1.6.1 makes this identification clear: “O Agni, you are Rudra, the mighty Asura of heaven. You are the troops of Marut, the Lord of Food.” See also ṚV 1.27.10; 2.1.6; 3.2.5; 4.3.1; 8.61.3.

⁹⁷ See also MBh 10.8.129 for an early use of the term “*bhairava*” (“frightful”) as an adjective.

- Extreme psychological trauma and intense oscillating emotional states (wrath/grief/rage/shock) preceding the possession state
- Extreme changes in behavior and appearance while possessed (e.g., wild behavior, demonic appearance, and use of light imagery), as well as supernatural abilities and strength
- Ritualized possession involving a sacrifice of self (self-mortification) and the use of meditation and *mantras*
- The transformation of a fierce god (Rudra/Śiva) into a benevolent one through ritual sacrifice and worship
- Association of possession with disease, including insanity (*unmāda*) and fever (*jvara*)
- “Tantric” imagery – cremation-ground, inclusion of *bhūtas* and other known possessing entities, fierce goddesses (vision of Kali), and “fierce rites”

An important aspect preceding Aśvatthāman’s possession by Śiva is his psychological state. As described, we find Aśvatthāman going through great turmoil, tragedy, and experiencing a host of conflicting and intense emotions. In fact, we learn in the Epic, that his whole life has been marked by conflicting identities and roles – he is by birth a *brahmin*, yet he is a *kṣatriya* by training and livelihood. His liminal status as a *priest-warrior* means his duties are often at odds, and ultimately, he is unable to fulfill his *dharma* perfectly in either of his roles. That this was an issue foremost in his mind, is seen in his discussion with Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman:

I was born into the highest, greatly honored family, that of the priests, yet it was my ill-fated lot to follow the vocation of the warrior. Having known the warrior’s vocation, if now I were, by reverting to the brahmin way, to accomplish something, however great, I wouldn’t be respected for it. [MBH 10.3.20-23]⁹⁸

Learning of the deceit involved in his family’s death also leads Aśvatthāman to vacillate throughout this chapter between extreme emotions of utter despair, shame, and bewilderment on one hand and pure vengeful rage and wrath on the other. As we saw, his mind is said to be “ablaze” with grief and he literally becomes “possessed” (*samanvitaḥ*) by both grief and misery, which immediately transforms into focused rage and extreme wrath. It

⁹⁸ Translation based on Crosby (2009: 29)

is this wrath that leads him to commit to his heinous task and which connects him with parts of his essential nature, made up of Wrath, Death, Desire, and Rudra-Śiva himself. In this state of purified fury, he once again experiences defeat at the hands of the disguised Rudra-Śiva, and in a moment of total surrender he offers himself in an act of ritual suicide.

Although we cannot say that any event in this episode is “ritualistic” per se, the text does state that his mind was in a state of meditation (*samādhina*), perhaps caused by his focused emotional state of wrath. It is also notable, that prior to this act he used the *soma mantra* - it is unclear, however, if this is related to an actual *soma mantra* (as in the God/plant Soma) or if it was just a “*mantra* spoken softly”, another possible meaning of *saumya*, since no actual *mantra* is given.

As we will see, many of these same patterns and elements become commonplace in later tantric deity possession rites. The MBh’s description of Aśvatthāman’s acts as a “fierce rite” (*raudraiḥ karmabhir*, MBh 10. 7.55) is also significant in this regard, I believe. We can take “fierce rites” to refer to his own self-sacrifice or the ensuing human sacrifices to come, but either way, these both ultimately result in a sacrifice (*bali*) to the “Lord of Fierce Rites”. Let us briefly speculate a bit more on the potential meanings and significance of this term in this context.

FIERCE RITES

In the *Sauptikaparvan*, “fierce-rites” (*raudra-karman*) could simply be read as “terrible acts”, in the sense of the heinous crimes against *dharma* that Aśvatthāman had committed to. Elsewhere in the MBh, we find the term applied to Rudra when he is about to

destroy various demons,⁹⁹ or to the goddess Death when describing the “terrible deeds” she must commit to fulfill her appointed role.¹⁰⁰ The term is also used to describe child-possessing entities known as *kumāras* and *kumārīs*, who are said to “act ferociously” like Rudra when they seize small children – a section we will look at in detail shortly.¹⁰¹ However, since Rudra is also designated here as the “Lord of Fierce Rites” (*rudraṃ raudrakarmāṇam*), its usage in this passage may have more significance given the context of Aśvatthāman’s self-sacrifice and subsequent possession.

Self-sacrifice and human sacrifice were widely known in the Sanskrit literature as high, though terrible, acts of devotion – an act that Rudra himself was said to have done in chapter twelve of the MBh [12.8.36].¹⁰² The symbolism of self-sacrifice is ubiquitous in the South Asian literary tradition, one that hails back to the self-sacrifice of the Cosmic Man (*puruṣa*) in Rg Veda 10.90, the primordial sacrifice, which become identified as the archetype for the entire Vedic sacrificial tradition.¹⁰³ This primordial being was at the same time the sacrificer and the sacrificed, and from his dismemberment arose the creation of the cosmos and all phenomena. The early ideas found in this cosmogonic myth are ones that have remained at the core of sacrificial concepts in India over the millennia and are referenced throughout Indian art, myth, poetry, etc.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ MBH 12.160.50-51: *babhau pratibhayam rūpaṃ tadā rudrasya bhārata | tad rūpadhāriṇaṃ rudraṃ raudrakarma cikīrṣavaḥ* | Indeed, O Bharata, the form then assumed by Rudra was exceedingly terrible. Hearing that, Rudra had assumed that form for achieving fierce deeds.

¹⁰⁰ MBH 12.250.2

¹⁰¹ MBH 03.219.31: *tāsām eva kumārīṇāṃ patayas te prakīrtitāḥ | ajñāyamānā grhṇanti bālakān raudrakarmiṇaḥ* | “The *kumāras* are known as the husbands of the *kumārīs*, and these Rudra-acting (beings) sieze small children, while they remain unknown.”

¹⁰² MBH 12.8.36 *viśvarūpo mahādevaḥ sarvamedhe mahāmakhe | juhāva sarvabhūtāni tathaiṅvātmanā ātmanā* ||: “Once Rudra offered himself in a sacrifice, a universal sacrifice (*sarva-medha*) of his own. He poured into it all creatures, and then he offered himself.” This of course echoes the primordial sacrifice of the Cosmic Man in the Puruṣa Sūkta of the Rg Veda.

¹⁰³ Although it appears in the late 10th mandala.

¹⁰⁴ See Storm Mary Nancy. *The Heroic Image: Self-Sacrificial Decapitation in the Art of India*. Ph. D. Dissertation (University of California, Los Angeles, 1999): 3-4.

Though the symbolic offering of one's self is considered one of the most noble of religious acts, the actual practice was often viewed with ambivalence. Although there are clear injunctions against suicide all throughout the *Brāhmaṇa* and *Dharmaśāstra* literature, the *Kanthaśruti Upaniṣad* (*KU* - dated to the turn of the common era, though some portions are much earlier) made special allowance for ritual suicide for renunciants (*sannyāsin*), which included: starvation, drowning, self-immolation, dying in battle (known as “the path of heroes”), and “the great journey”, which involved walking northward without eating until one dies.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly enough, we find mention in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, one of the earliest Purāṇas roughly contemporaneous with portions of the MBh, that if one repeats a specific mantra over and over again in one's mind and then enters into a fire, they will go to the region of Rudra.¹⁰⁶

In earlier Buddhist Jātakas, stories of self-sacrifice abound as well, though their motivations for doing so were vastly different and usually served to demonstrate ideal models of unselfishness and heroic generosity. The *Maitrībala Jātaka*, for example, tells the story of King Maitrībala who appeases five bloodthirsty *yakṣa* spirits with offerings of his own flesh and blood. The five *yakṣa* demons were so awestruck with admiration by the King's selflessness and compassion, that any anger and malice they had previously harbored, vanished immediately and they all resolved to follow the Buddhist path. Seeing Maitrībala's infinite compassion, Śakra, the Lord of Gods, also rewarded the King by healing and fully restoring his body. This particular example also shows another common motif we will see

¹⁰⁵ See chapter three of Storm's (1999) thesis regarding the *Brāhmaṇa* and *Dharmaśāstra* literature as well as Patrick Olivelle, *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 134 who believes the *KU* is similar in sections to the more ancient Vedic text *Manava Śrauta Sūtra* and was likely a compilation of traditions that existed in the earlier centuries of the 1st millennium BCE.

¹⁰⁶ See Ganesh Vasudev Tagare, *The Vāyu Purāṇa. Part I*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987): 129.

again and again – the transformation and conversion of dangerous possessing entities (here, the *yakṣas*) into benevolent, boon-bestowing beings through rites of self-sacrifice, much as the ferocious form of Śiva turned into a benign one after Aśvatthāman’s terrible vow to sacrifice himself.

Though rarely mentioned in Vedic texts, ritual suicide does become important for the Pāśupata Śaivas, an early Śaiva school mentioned for the first time in the MBh. This practice becomes common in later Śaiva and Buddhist Tantric schools as well, often known as *utkrānti* (“upward advance”) and involved a ritual and forceful ejection of one’s vital energy from the top of one’s head, leading to bodily death.¹⁰⁷ As we will see in the following chapter, some of the same mechanics involved in this sort of ritual suicide are also found in tantric rites of possession.

Stories and rites of self-sacrifice become common tropes in later Hindu and Buddhist tantric texts and tantric-influenced medieval fantasy literature, such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara* “The Ocean of Rivers of Stories” among others. In many cases, these stories involve worshippers of Śiva-Bhairava, or some goddess figure, performing extreme acts of devotion in order to unite with or secure boons from the god or goddess. Often this was in the form of offering of oneself or bodily constituents as a sacrifice to attract various fierce entities (“becoming food for the *yoginīs*” as White puts it) which could result in attaining supernatural powers (*siddhis*), self-deification, or sovereignty over various spirits.¹⁰⁸

In South India, images involving self-sacrifice (often immolation or decapitation) go back even earlier to the 3rd century CE Pallava dynasty and continued with great fervor in the

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 3 of White (2009)

¹⁰⁸ David G. White *Kiss of the Yoginī: “Tantric Sex” in Its South Asian Contexts*. (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 195.

bhakti traditions of the Vaiṣṇava Alvar and Śaiva Nayanmar saints. Their biographies depict the saints performing various acts of extreme devotion, acting as idealized models of behavior for other devotees. Calling themselves “Slaves of the Lord”, the saints are described as being fully immersed, or even “possessed” by their fervent devotion and always complying with their Gods command, no matter how ghastly the request.¹⁰⁹ Some stories describe macabre acts, with the gods demanding sacrifice, either of their own limbs, their lives, or, in some cases, even their children. With the rise of left-handed Tantric sects in the South, transgressive tantric rites coupled with extreme devotion led to many graphic depictions in art and inscriptions of these gruesome rites from the 6th-8th centuries.¹¹⁰

These sorts of fierce rites of devotion continue today, though they are often derogatorily delegated as “folk” forms of worship. Examples can be found again in the cult of Khaṇḍobā mentioned earlier, originally a local “folk deity” who was later identified as a manifestation of Śiva-Bhairava.¹¹¹ Besides their oral traditions, a Sanskrit text on Khaṇḍobā, the *Mallāri Mahātmya*, was composed sometime in the 15th century.¹¹² The Sanskrit authors of this text disparagingly called these “folk forms” of devotion as *ugra bhakti* (fierce devotion), which generally meant acts involving various forms of self-torture and self-

¹⁰⁹ See David Shulman's, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980) and *The Hungry God: Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) for numerous examples.

¹¹⁰ These began to flourish due to royal patronage from the Pallavas and the Colas, which continued into the Vijayanagara Empire of the 14th century. Storm (1990: 180-181) states there is ample evidence from literary sources, such as the Tevaram and the Mattavilasa, that these sects flourished at sites such as Kanchipuram, Mayilapur, Kodumbalur and areas of Thanjavur. Mahabalipuram and Tiruchirappali from the Pallava/Paṇḍya period also contain sculptural evidence of these gruesome rites and many compositions and inscriptions are also found which depict self-sacrificial acts during the Cola period. After the fall of the Cola empire, these practices continue with Paṇḍyas, Hoysalas, Kakatlyas, Reddis, and the Yadavas and into the Vijayanagara empire of the 14th century. See Storm's (1990) for more.

¹¹¹ Sontheimer (1989) also identifies Khaṇḍobā with the deities Mallanna of Andhra Pradesh and Mailara of Karnataka.

¹¹² See Sontheimer “The Mallari/Khandoba Myth as Reflected in Folk Art and Ritual”, *Anthropos* 79, (1984): 1-3.

mortification. An example from the text is *chedapata*, "causing themselves to be cut", which Sontheimer believes is similar to the hook-swinging rites that devotees still perform today throughout South India. Other versions of the text call other cult practices, such as animal sacrifice, self-torture, and deity possession, forms of "rākṣasi" or "piśāci" *bhakti*, "demonic devotion".¹¹³ This comes as no surprise given the usual orthodox Brahmanic disdain for "folk" modes of practice.

Finally, we should note that the term "fierce rites" is one that also becomes used in reference to "black magic" in many magical Tantras and in the popular imagination.¹¹⁴ One of Monier-Williams definition for the term is "a terrible magic rite or one performed for some dreadful purpose" and its use generally refers to sorceristic rites (*abhicāra*) involving subjugation, death, exorcism, etc. – rites we will continue to refer to throughout this dissertation.

Regardless of the precise meaning of "fierce rites" in this particular passage of the MBh, I simply wanted to speculate on its various meanings, since all of them show up in some way in many deity possession rites of the Tantras - the use of transgressive rites, self-mortification and self-sacrifice, the conversion of fierce entities to auspicious ones, and magical acts of various sorts involving spirits become characteristic features of Tantric deity possession. For now, however, let us turn to a deeper examination of the central character in all this - "The Lord of Fierce Rites" himself, Rudra-Śiva.

¹¹³ According to Sontheimer (1989: 329-330) these texts include a Marathi translation by Siddhapal Kesari in 1535 and the 1821 *Mārtandā Vijaya* by Gangadhara.

¹¹⁴ Ullrey's dissertation (2016: 652) "Grim Grimoires: Pragmatic Ritual in the Magic Tantras", for example, discusses the *Uḍḍiśatantra* (1.25), which states: "During the inauspicious conjunctions, one should do inauspicious acts. The frightful acts (*raudrakarmāni*) [such as enmity bestowing and eradication] on *rikta* days (*riktārka*), [i.e., Sunday falling on the 4th, 9th, 14th]. On the death days (*mṛtyuyoga*) [the new moon sacred to the dead], the killing rites [are done]." See also the KSS for numerous examples.

THE ORIGINAL BHŪTANĀTHA: RUDRA

By the time the MBh was written, Rudra-Śiva had already gone through a complex process of adaptation and assimilation, leading to his rise from a marginal and dangerous intermediary entity in the Vedas, to one of the great gods of South Asia by the time of the Epics and Purāṇas. In MBh [13.171.41-43], he is not only a "God of Gods", but also a "God of Anti-gods" (*āsuras*).¹¹⁵ Many of the numerous Epic wars between the gods and demons within this period actually began due to this indiscriminate granting of boons to various demons who worship him.

In earlier Vedic texts, Rudra's strong association with these sorts of nefarious and demonic beings is explicit. Stella Kramrish poetically describes his demonic troop of *gaṇas* and *bhūtas* as having the same essential nature as the wrathful Rudra, stating these entities are,

...part of Rudra's being, tremors, resonances of his nature, byproducts of tensions that sustain his contradictory wholeness. They are scintillations of the Rudras, smithereens of the terrifying glory of Rudra-Śiva himself.¹¹⁶

The Epic Śiva's ambivalent depiction is clearly due to his Vedic roots as the archetypal "fierce" god Rudra (*raudra brahman*, ṚV 10.61.4), who is said to be born from the wrath of the gods in order to avenge the incestuous creator god, Prajāpati.¹¹⁷ Rudra's appearance in the earliest Vedic literature is marginal, claiming only three hymns addressed directly to him in the ṚV. By virtue of being in the Vedas, Rudra is, of course, a Vedic deity, though most believe his origins do not lie there. Rather, his inclusion in the early Vedic texts

¹¹⁵ *devāsuraṇīrṃmātā devāsuraṇīrāyaṇaḥ | devāsuraṇīrur devo devāsuraṇāmaskṛtaḥ | devāsuraṇīrāyātro devāsuraṇīrāyāḥ | devāsuraṇīrādhyakṣo devāsuraṇīrāyāḥ | devātidevo devaṇīr devāsuraṇīrāyāḥ | devāsuraṇīrāyāro devo devāsuraṇīrāyāḥ |* MBH 13.171.41-43

¹¹⁶ Kramrish, Stella. *The Presence of Śiva*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 298.

¹¹⁷ See Wendy Doniger, *Śiva, the Erotic Ascetic*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981): 114-118 and Kramrish (1992: 115) for more on this famous myth.

can be seen as early evidence that the assimilation of dangerous non-Vedic entities had already started – a process that continues with many of the deities we will be discussing throughout this chapter.¹¹⁸

In the ṚV, Rudra is described as a terrifying and destructive force, a “slayer of men” (*pūruṣaghnām*, ṚV 1.114.10) who attacks “like a ferocious wild beast” (ṚV 2.33.11).

Petitioners pray again and again to keep Rudra and his destructive aspects far away: “Do not slay or abandon us, O Rudra, when you become angry (*hīlitasya*) do not let your noose, seize us.”¹¹⁹ Gonda writes, “the essence of [Rudra] was, in the minds of Vedic men, the power of the uncultivated and unconquered, unreliable, unpredictable, hence much to be feared nature, experienced as a divinity”.¹²⁰ These characterizations continue in the Atharva Veda, where the earlier Vedic strategy to try to appease Rudra, lest he cause them disease or death, is adopted and magnified. AV.11.2, for example, likens Rudra to a disease-causing demon, who has both fever (*takman*) and cough (*kāsikā*) as his weapons and is implored by petitioners not to kill them.¹²¹

Rudra is often invoked also to keep his army of hosts (*gaṇas/sena*), the terrible *rudras* and the fierce storm gods (*maruts*) away in fear of attack.¹²² In some cases, the priests even ask Rudra to send his troops to attack their enemies - which can be seen as a very early form of hostile sorcery.¹²³ The earliest descriptions of the *rudras* essentially depict them as clones

¹¹⁸ White (2003: 28) states, “However, as Asko Parpola, Frits Staal, and, more recently, Bernard Sergent have emphatically demonstrated, the religion of the Vedas was already a composite of the Indo-Aryan and Harappan cultures and civilizations.”

¹¹⁹ ṚV 7.46.4 *mā no vadhī rudra mā parā dā mā te bhūma prasitau hīlitasya*. See also ṚV 1.114.10; 2.33.4; 11; 1.43.4; 7.35; 6.74 for numerous other examples.

¹²⁰ Jan Gonda, *Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism: A Comparison*. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996): 5.

¹²¹ AV 11.2.22-26

¹²² ṚV 1.64.2-12; 3.33.9; 3.99; 5.42.15; 7.35.6; 7.10.4; 8.35.3 and 10.52.6 for a variety of accounts.

¹²³ For example: *mṛḷā jaritre rudra stavāno 'nyam te asman ni vapantu senāḥ* || ṚV 2.33.11

of Rudra in appearance and qualities.¹²⁴ The *maruts*, on the other hand, are described as “ever-youthful”, yet ferocious warriors. Both groups, like Rudra himself, are also known as “howlers”¹²⁵ and both have equally inauspicious and auspicious qualities. These dual qualities of the *maruts* are also inherited from their “other” father, Vāyu, the God of Wind, bringer of both the life-giving rains and destructive winds and storms. These qualities, along with Vāyu’s inherent pervasiveness, is likely what caused his association, and identification, in some cases, with Rudra in the ṚV. Like Rudra, Vāyu is a “a god who leans more to the dark gods” and is classified among the “dread gods” whose ranks include Yama, Rudra, and Agni.¹²⁶ In certain passages, the *rudras* and *maruts* are also identified as being the same (ṚV 1.38.7; 1.39.4; 2.34), and like the *rudras*, the *maruts* are described as fierce (*ugrāḥ*, ṚV 1.166.6), violent (1.37.4), “terrible like wild beasts” (ṚV 2.34), terrifying to behold (*bhīmasamdrśaḥ*, ṚV 5.56.2), having dreadful phantom-forms (*ghoravarpasaḥ*, 1.64.2; 1.19)¹²⁷, and they are often beseeched by their devotees to keep their wrath at bay (ṚV 1.171.1-2, 7.56-58).

As J.C. Heesterman has pointed out, the Maruts were also intimately connected with the Vrātyas I discussed earlier, and he argues they may have served as their “mythical

¹²⁴ In RV 12:283:20, Dakṣa describes the *rudras* as all holding pikes and having matted hair. The number of the Rudras in the Brāhmaṇas (e.g., AB and SB) is usually eleven but is thirty-three in the TS. There is no standard list of the *rudras* names, however – various texts and sects often identify their own set of eleven *rudras*.

¹²⁵ The name Rudra has been translated as ‘roarer’, ‘howler’, ‘wild one’, ‘the fierce god’ and ‘terrible’. The alternate etymology derived from the root *rud* is related to his redness - ‘to be Red, Brilliant’, ‘to be ruddy’ or ‘to shine’. This may also be related to Rudra’s identification with the fire-god Agni. Most scholars believe the term Marut to have been formed from the root *mṛ*, which can either mean “to shine”, in relation to their lightning qualities, or “to crush, grind or pound”, related to their destructive activities as storm gods (ṚV 1.23.12, 1.28.8). Still others believe the term comes from *mṛ* as in “to die”, saying the Maruts were the “souls of the dead”, relating it more to their frightful and dreadful qualities (RV 1.64.3), though this seems unlikely. See Arthur Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology*, (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1963): 77-83 for these various theories.

¹²⁶ As seen in Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman’s Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007): 43, who quotes Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 40.

¹²⁷ According to Monier-Williams *varpasah* can also mean “phantom”

prototype”.¹²⁸ According to *Baudhayana Śrautasūtra* 18.26 (of the Black Yajurveda), the Maruts performed the *vrātyastoma* rite and in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* the *Vrātyas* are said to place their characteristic black-fringed garments on each other while reciting the mantra, "You are the Marut, you are the power of the Maruts" (*mārutam asi marutām oja*; TS 2.4.9).¹²⁹ Note the use of the term *oja(s)*, which represents the power and energy of the Maruts, and how the *Vrātyas* identify with it. As mentioned, this may be one of the hallmarks of *Vrātya* practice and could be seen as an early parallel to later tantric rites in which *sādhakas* become “possessed” (*āveśa*) by the *śakti*, the power or energy, of the gods (or goddesses) they are trying to unite with.

Though considered a “great god” by the time of the Epics and Purāṇas, some of Rudra-Śiva’s malevolent and “demonic” qualities continue on in the literature. In the MBh, for example, he is still known as a night-wanderer (*niśācara* - a term usually employed for demons), who roams around with other harmful spirits such as *pretas* (ghosts, of the recent dead) and *bhūtas*.¹³⁰ The roughly contemporaneous *Vāyu Purāṇa* [VP],¹³¹ also calls Rudra “the lord of the *rākṣasas*” (*rakṣodhipati*, VāP 24.109) who is greedy “like a jackal for embryo flesh” (*garbhamāṃsaśṛgālāya*, VāP 30.212). In essence, Rudra is being called a *bālagraha*, a class of harmful seizers (*grahas*), also found within the MBh, who possess and prey upon children and the unborn.¹³²

¹²⁸ See Heesterman (1962: 16-18)

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *niśācaraḥ pretacārī bhūtacārī maheśvaraḥ* | MBh 13.17.48c

¹³¹ *Vāyu Purāṇa* is one of the few *Purāṇas* that is explicitly mentioned in the MBh (3.194.15) and its supplement text, the *Harivaṃśa*. Whether this is the same *Purāṇa* that we now have a text for is uncertain, but scholars agree that most of it certainly pre-dates the 5th century CE, and some believe portions even pre-date the great Epic, giving the text a range of composition from the 5th BCE to 5th CE. See D.R. Patil, *Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa*, (Poona: S.M. Katre, 1946): 4, and Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1986) for the best data on dating the *Purāṇas*.

¹³² *garbhamāṃsaśṛgālāya tārakāya tarāya ca* | *namo yajñādhipataye drutāyopadrutāya ca* | VāP 30.212

Despite these malevolent and disease-causing qualities, Rudra is also praised in the early Vedas as the expeller and destroyer of demons and the primordial divine physician, alongside Agni and Soma (RV 6.74; AV 6.32.2).¹³³ His role as both the creator and destroyer of diseases is made explicit in the AV: “(The god) that has caused (the disease) shall perform the cure; he is himself the best physician.”¹³⁴ This concept continues in the Purāṇic literature - the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, for example, states, “You [Rudra] are the mental agonies and all physical diseases. In the same way you are the killer of diseases and the one who is in diseases.”¹³⁵

To early Vedic authors, he shared many of the same qualities as other Vedic gods - especially Agni - but also Soma, Vāyu, and Indra. In the RV and AV, he is often paired with other “pervading gods” such as Rudra-Soma or Rudra-Agni, particularly in the context of destroying or exorcising demons and disease.¹³⁶

To summarize, Rudra’s dual and ambivalent nature manifests in the early Vedas in a few different ways: 1.) He is propitiated either to keep himself or his dangerous *rudra-marut* hordes away, so that neither causes disease or death; 2.) He is invoked as the divine physician who empowers medicines and other healing treatments which drive away both diseases and demons; and finally, 3.) He is invoked to impose his control over and expel other demons, which may be causing illness or death, usually by possession. This concept is what eventually leads him to be known within the AV as a *bhūtanātha*, a “Lord of Spirits”, a point we will return to shortly.

¹³³ See RV 1.43.4; 1.114.5; 2.33.2-7; 5.42.11; 6.74; 7.35.6; 8.29.5; AV 2.27.6; 7.42.2; 6.57.1-2. The same can be said of his troops, the *maruts*, as well – at the same time they are also praised as divine physicians and bringers of divine medicines (RV 5.53.14; 2.33).

¹³⁴ *yás cakāra sá niṣ karat sá evá súbhiṣaktamaḥ* | AVŚ 2.9.5a

¹³⁵ *ādhayo vyādhayaścaiva vyādhīha vyādhigaśca ha* | VP 30.264

¹³⁶ RV 6.74.2, for example, states “Soma and Rudra, drive away, in all directions, the illness that has possessed (*āviveśa* - in the sense of 'inhabited') our dwelling.”

RUDRA IN THE ŚĀTARUDRIYA

Examples of Rudra-Śiva's ambivalent and complex nature as a wrathful yet benevolent deity is abundant in the Vedic, Epic, and Purāṇic literature. In order to give a cursory but concise synopsis of these qualities, I will briefly mention some of the epithets found within the mantras of the Śātarudriya of the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā which belongs to the White Yajurveda. In this text, both these malevolent and benevolent aspects of Rudra are praised in his totality, a sign, according to Jan Gonda, that he was "on the way to become an All-God."¹³⁷ This litany comprises a huge number of names and qualities that Rudra had acquired at this early time [8-6th centuries BCE?] and was recited during the Śātarudriya homa (fire sacrifice) as described in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (SB 1.7.3.1).¹³⁸ The text explicitly states that Rudra has two bodies, a "dread" (*ghora*) form, and an "auspicious" (*śiva*) one, and that both were appeased through its recitation and particular homa (fire) rite.¹³⁹ Recitation and contemplation of the various names of gods, generally known as *nāmastotras*, is a devotional practice still popularly practiced throughout S. Asia as a form of communication and communion with the gods in order to curry their protection, favor, and grace. The Śātarudriya, in particular, became very popular in later Śaiva traditions and its recitation is still practiced *en masse* today.

The litany begins with the author identifying Agni, the god of fire, with Rudra – a move not only bringing a more orthodox Vedic valence to the rite, but perhaps also a way to

¹³⁷ Jan Gonda, "The Śātarudriya," in *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Daniel H.H. Ingalls*, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979): 80.

¹³⁸ These verses are found in their entirety in the Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā of the White Yajurvedā, and in slightly modified recensions in the Black Yajurvedā (e.g., *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* and others), as well as in 14.29 of the Paippalāda recension of the AV. The use of Śātarudriya, however, only comes later. See Gonda (1979) for more on this.

¹³⁹ *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* 5.7.3.3

incorporate the more “non-Brahmanic” qualities of Rudra into the Brahmanic-fold. This identification is related to the preceding *agnicayana* sacrifice, which, upon completion, results in the transformation of Agni by the gods into the deity Rudra, said to be Agni’s highest and supreme form.¹⁴⁰ The text explains the origin and intention for the performance of this rite in a variant creation story for Rudra. In this version, Rudra is said to have emerged from the creator god Prajāpati’s wrath (*manyu*) and subsequent tears (*rudita*). Prajāpati’s torrential tears eventually pervaded (*anuprāviśan*) the whole universe and from that, thousands of *rudra* hordes also arose. The gods, afraid of the ferocious Rudra and his terrible troops, go to Prajāpati for help, who tells them to “pacify” (*śanta-devatyā*; 9.1.1.2) the dangerous divinities with sacrificial offerings. According to the text, priests therefore continue this rite indefinitely in order to appease and satisfy Rudra and his malevolent *rudras* so that they will not cause harm to them or their community.

Phyllis Granoff argues that this was a relatively new strategy at the time for dealing with destructive spirits, as the usual *modus operandi* of the ṚV and related literature was simply expulsion or destruction.¹⁴¹ She also notes, however, that the pacified agent, in this cases Rudra and his *rudras*, were not permanently converted or pacified - rather, the sacrifice had to be repeated regularly in order to continually keep their destructive forces at bay. As we will soon see below, full transformation and conversion of these destructive beings eventually does become a strategy, particularly with the Buddhists and Jains.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ *Śatapatha-Brahmaṇa* 9.1.1.1, "He then performs the *Śatarudriya* sacrifice. This whole Agni has here been completed; he now is the deity Rudra". Translation by Gonda (1979: 77). See also *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* 5.7

¹⁴¹ Phyllis Granoff, "Paradigms of Protection in Early Indian Religious Texts or an Essay on What to Do with Your Demons," in *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Piotr Balcerowicz (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003): 185.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* See also Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, (New York: Oxford University, 2004), for a number of Buddhist demon conversion stories, some of which are discussed below.

In this *Śatarudriya*, Rudra's wrath (*manyu*) is first addressed, followed by a plea that he and his fierce *rudras*, who hover around him by the thousands, neither slay nor harm the sacrificer or his livestock. Praise to Rudra's auspicious (*śiva*) form as the "primordial divine physician" (*prathamō daivyo bhiṣak*) is then made along with another plea to deflect attacks from enemy sorcerers (*yātudhānas*). He is addressed throughout this section as "The Leader of Troops" (*senānī*), "The Lord of Animals" (*pashūnām patih*), "The Lord of the Field Protector-Spirits" (*kṣetrāṇām pati*), "The Lord of Forests" (*āraṇyānām pati*), "The Lord of Spells" (*mantrin*), "The Lord of Merchants" (*vāṇija*), "The Lord of Hidden Places" (*kakṣāṇām pati*), and "The Lord of Herbs" (*auśadhīnām pati*). He's also hailed as the Lord of more undesirable groups, such as "The Lord of Robbers" (*taskarāṇām pati*), "The Lord of Thieves" (*stāyūnām pati*) and he is referred to as "The Deceiver" (*vañcate*) and "The Swindler" (*parivañcate*). These are likely references to non-Brahmanical communities, as the text also states thereafter that he lords over a number of lower-caste and tribal groups, such as carpenters, chariot-makers, potters, blacksmiths, *niṣādās* (MW calls them non-Aryan tribals/hunters/robbers), hunters, and even dog-keepers.

The verses which follow continue to describe his dual nature, first as "The Dread One" (*ugra*), "The Terrible One" (*bhīma*), and "The Slayer" (*hantr*), but then secondly as "The Beneficent One" (*śaṅkara*) and "The Auspicious One" (*śiva*). He is also extolled as the "Lord of Spirits" (*bhūtānām adhipati*, *i.e.*, *a bhūtanātha*), the "Scatterer of Diseases/Blood" (*vikirida vilohita*) and the "Lord of [protective] Amulets" (*pratisaryāya*). Homage is further made to his *gaṇas*, who are described as demonic night-wanders (*naktamcaras*) and deformed (*virūpa*), as well as a special class of *gaṇa* leaders known as the *gaṇapatīs* ("Lords of the Gaṇas"). Rudra is also called the leader of those *rudra*-beings "who afflict men in food

and in drinking vessels [e.g., disease]” (*ye ānneṣu vividhyanti pātreṣu pibato janān*), a common mode of entry for possessing entities, as we will see in later medical traditions.

A later *rudrajapa* rite in the *Manava-Śrautasutra* [11.7.1-3] provides some insight into how the *Śatarudriya* liturgy was used by some around the turn of the millennium. According to this text, after one has performed various purification rites, they are to recite the *Śatarudriya*¹⁴³ and the practitioner is directed to place (*nyāset*) the different aspects of the deity in the form of *mantras*, on the various parts of one's body.¹⁴⁴ For example, the syllables of the formula “*Oṃ Nāma Bhagavate Rudraya*” were placed on one's crown, nose etc. down to one's feet. Upon completion of the rite, we are told the performer would be delivered from any harm “that has gone into skin and bones” (i.e., disease), nor would there be any harm to his village, children, unborn children, etc. caused by demons, ghosts, robbers, and so on. Next the priest should meditate on himself in the form of the three-eyed, five-faced Rudra. Having recited the *Śatarudriya* chants, one invites the god and, meditates upon him, the purpose of the rite given as “the destruction of all evil”.¹⁴⁵

Again, several concurring themes and patterns can be elicited from this data. In particular:

- The use of mantras and sacrificial offerings in protective rites against diseases/demonic possession in order to pacify and appease destructive agents, especially the Lord(s) and controller of these malevolent spirits (“*bhūtānām adhipati*” or *gaṇapati*” i.e., *bhūtanāthas*).
- Rudra’s ambivalent and dual nature, associated with emotions such as “Wrath”
- Rudra’s strong association with non-Brahmanical communities

¹⁴³ Jan Gonda, *A History of Indian Literature, Vol. 1* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977): 483 calls this a “non-Vedic ritual” due to its use of non-Vedic mantras, and popularity among non-Brahmins.

¹⁴⁴ The inclusion of *nyāsa*, a standard Tantric practice, could place this portion of the text around the turn of the millennium according to Diwakar Acharya's recent work (2015) in *Early Tantric Vaiṣṇavism: Three Newly Discovered Works of the Pañcarātra - The Svāyambhuvapañcarātra, Devāmṛtapañcarātra and Aṣṭādaśavidhāna*. We will discuss this further in a subsequent chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Gonda (1979: 78-79)

- The ritual transformation of the performer into Rudra (just as Agni in the rite before it) through various tantric rites involving *nyāsa*, mantra recitation, and visualization

Let us now take a closer look at the *bhūtas* that serve under Rudra in his role as the *bhūtanātha* - a role that begins in the AV and is taken up by a host of other supernatural beings, gods, and goddesses in later Epic, medical, and tantric traditions.

D. Bhūtas, Bhūtavidyā, & Bhūtanāthas – The Science of Spirits and its Masters

An interesting feature of Aśvatthāman’s story in the *Sauptikaparvan* of the MBh mentioned earlier, is the description of Rudra’s attendants, which, as a collective, are generically termed *gaṇas* or *bhūtas*. These umbrella terms come to signify an infinite variety of ghoulish and nightmarish characters, which cluster around and accompany Rudra-Śiva wherever he goes. These varied beings are described in the *Sauptikaparvan* as having:

...a thousand eyes, with one hundred bellies, fleshless, with the faces of crows and of hawks...Some were even headless, or bear-mawed...their eyes and tongues gleaming and flame-colored. The hair of their heads was flame, chief of kings, and the hairs on their four arms ablaze. Some had the heads of sheep, others the faces of goats...some gleamed like conches, had conches for heads, or conch ears...That night furnished delight for the night-wanderers (*niśācarāṇām*), so dreadful and destructive was it for men, elephants, and horses alike. There appeared in that place ogres and goblins (*rakṣas and piśācas*), of every possible kind, gobbling the flesh of men, slurping at their blood. Deformed, discolored, craggy-toothed, streaked with dirt, fur matted, brows protruding, five-footed, swollen-bellied, with backwards pointing fingers, ragged, hideous, emitting frightful sounds, with nets of gongs hanging down, blue-throated, terrifying, accompanied by their mates and offspring, vicious, dreadful to see, merciless, these were the various features of the ogres’ appearance that could be seen there too. Gleefully quaffing blood, some danced forth in droves and commented, “This is excellent. This is fresh. This is tasty stuff.” The voracious feasters on entrails, the fat, the marrow, the bones and blood, the carrion-consumers that thrive on flesh, then tucked further into that flesh. Some of the many-mouthed, fierce carrion-consuming flesh-eaters, having gorged their fill of entrails, capered around with bloated bellies. There were tens of thousands, millions, nay tens of

millions of gargantuan, torturing *rākṣasas*, delighted and sated, and many were the ghouls gathered together at that great butchery, sovereign of the people.¹⁴⁶

This vivid hallucinatory-like illustration continues for many more verses, describing a variety of frightening supernatural agents found throughout the literature of this period. Some of these beings have earlier Vedic and Indo-Iranian roots, some likely belonged to regional non-Brahmanical cults - regardless, many were known possession entities by this time, shared by a variety of demonological traditions (Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Folk, etc.).¹⁴⁷ Much of this same imagery is found in earlier texts and continues well into the tantric traditions, as we will soon see.

Tradition holds that many of these fierce beings predominantly reside in cremation grounds, and this imagery, as we mentioned earlier, abounds in the *Sauptikaparvan* section of the MBh as well. We are told in an extended edition of the MBh, that their Lord Rudra also dwells in these cremation grounds, due to his deep love for his bizarre entourage. In this edition, Parvati asks Śiva why he stays in polluting and inauspicious places like cremation grounds, to which he replies:

I always wander over the whole earth in search of a sacred spot. I do not, however, see any spot that is more sacred than the cremation ground. Hence, of all abodes, the cremation ground pleases my heart most... O thou of sweet smiles, the multitudes of ghostly beings that are my companions love to reside in such spots. I do not like, O goddess, to reside anywhere without those ghostly creatures being by my side. Hence, the crematorium is a sacred abode to me. Indeed, O auspicious lady, it seems to me to be heaven.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ MBH 10.8.134-8.143. Translation by Crosby (2009: 91)

¹⁴⁷ Besides the characteristic flesh-eating cremation ground entities, this section also describes a host of other more abstract or less ghoulish supernatural agents in his entourage – for example, “Lords of Speech” (*vāgīśā*), “those who have attained the eight-fold superhuman powers” (*prāpy’asṭaguṇam aiśvaryaṃ*)” or those beings who are “perpetually immersed in sensual pleasures (*kāmakāraṅkāra nityaṃ*),^[11] yet free from passion (*vītamatsarāḥ*).

¹⁴⁸ MBH 13.141 from the *Anuśāsanaparva* or the “Book of Instructions” translated in Ganguli, Kisari M, and Chandra Roy, *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975): 290.

As we'll see, the cremation ground also becomes sacred ritual ground for later ascetics and tantrikas, who often modeled themselves after Rudra in hopes of encountering, interacting with, and even being possessed (or consumed!) by these same supernatural beings. It is many of these earlier *gaṇas* as *bhūtas* who can be seen as precursors to later tantric cremation-ground entities such as the *yoginīs* and *ḍākinīs* who are popularized within the tantric traditions. We will, of course, return to these accounts in a subsequent chapter.

As stated, since the time of the early Vedas, these sorts of supernatural agents have been generically categorized as either *bhūtas* (“spirits”), or *grahas* (“seizers”), and usually associated with a variety of human afflictions, including disease, mental illness, and death. These categories incorporated a wide variety of entities ranging from celestial planets (also known as *grahas*), to disgruntled gods and goddesses (*devas*), to more ambivalent beings like the *gandharvas*, *apsaras*, *yakṣas*, and *nāgas*, and finally to more demonic entities like the *rākṣasas*, and *piśācas*. It is these sorts of beings that make up the vast and massive landscape of the Indian “demonological” traditions we will be discussing - though it should be noted that much of the surviving literature represents only a small fragment of the religious reality that may have existed on the ground in this early period.¹⁴⁹

In some cases, these entities were categorically malevolent beings, classified as such among all the variant traditions. However, in other cases, these same malevolent beings were more ambivalent in nature, exhibiting auspicious and inauspicious attributes, and even considered “gods” by other groups - signifying local, non-Brahmanical cult deities who were included within the demonological fold of the orthodox Sanskrit traditions. As we will see, many of these entities designations often change and evolve between traditions over time.

¹⁴⁹ “Demonological” is a misnomer, of course, since not all these beings are classified as demons.

Historically the predominate mode of worship in South Asia did not necessarily involve the often-abstract deities of the Brahmanic pantheons, or the enlightened Buddha's or Jinas of the Buddhists and Jains, but rather a multitude of regional entities, often tied to the land and sacred spaces. The general population usually propitiated these kinds of beings for immediate worldly concerns – progeny, agricultural welfare, physical or mental healing, divination, protection against malignant spirits, sorcery, etc. David White nicely summarizes this point in his book, *Kiss of the Yoginī*:

In ancient times as in the present, village India has had its own local or regional deities that it has worshiped in its own ways and in its own contexts. These deities, which are multiple rather than singular, often form a part of the geographical as well as human landscapes of their various localities: trees, forests, mountains, bodies of water; but also the malevolent and heroic dead, male and female ancestors, and ghosts, ghouls, and rascally imps of every sort...these multiple (and often feminine) deities are, before all else, angry and hungry, and very often angry because hungry. Their cultus consists of feeding them in order that they be pacified...Brahmanic sources have qualified these as *laukika devatās* (popular deities), while Jain and Buddhist authors have termed them *vyantara devatās* (intermediate deities, as opposed to enlightened *jinas* and *tīrthaṃkaras*), and *devas* (unenlightened deities, as opposed to enlightened Buddhas and bodhisattvas), respectively. Yet when one looks at the devotional cults of the gods of so-called classical Hinduism, the gods of the Hindu elites, one finds remarkable connections—historical, iconographic, ritual, and regional—between these high gods and the deities of the preterite masses.¹⁵⁰

This last point is precisely the case with Rudra-Śiva and a host of other gods and goddesses we will be looking at throughout this and subsequent chapters. As we'll see, many of the entities incorporated into the tantric traditions, and those specifically involved in tantric deity possession, have roots that lay in local *yakṣa*, *graha*, and fertility cults of various sorts – cults in which possession was a common or even central feature, as is often the case today. Their inclusion and eventual incorporation from the common demonological substratum into earlier textual traditions was often a way to bring their respective cults and

¹⁵⁰ White (2003: 4)

followers, into the Brahmanic, Buddhist or Jain fold.¹⁵¹ They may have been deemed “demonic” beings by Sanskrit authors, or “*laukika devatās*” as mentioned by Pāṇini, but in the tantric traditions it is precisely these sorts of “lower” deities who eventually move from the margins of the Epic/Purāṇic period and rise to the top (or center to be more precise) of the tantric pantheons.

BHŪTAVIDYĀ IN THE EARLY VEDAS

It was the knowledge of these ambiguous beings that eventually comes to be known as *bhūtavidyā*, “The Science of Spirits”, first attested to in the 7th-4th century BCE *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (ChU 7.1.2). Here *bhūtavidyā* was considered one particular branch of knowledge (*vidyā*) alongside a host of others, including Vedic and Purāṇic knowledge, mathematics, and even a science of serpent-beings (*sarpadevajanavidyā*). Little description of what *bhūtavidyā* entailed at that time is given, but it is clear this is a genre of literature that goes back at least 2,500 years, and its inclusion in the infamous Sage Nārada’s list of *vidyās* implies its importance even at this early time.

Very early on the term *bhūta* may have had a wider semantic range, though in *bhūtavidyā*-related literature this term becomes most associated with trans-local possessing entities such as *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *nāgas*, *grahas*, *piśacas*, *yātudhānas*, *gandharvas*, *apsaras*, *pretas* (spirits of the dead), etc. along with a wide-ranging assortment of local spirits, depending on the region of the demonological tradition.¹⁵² While *bhūta* comes to mean most

¹⁵¹ See Ruegg, David Seyfort. *The Symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism/Hinduism in South Asia and of Buddhism with “Local Cults” in Tibet and the Himalayan Region*. (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008) on the concept of a shared cultural substratum among the Buddhists, Hindus and Jains.

¹⁵² Smith (2006: 474) writes, “It is probable that at this date the term *bhūta* indicated any type of being, animate or otherwise, visible or otherwise...including deities, heaven and earth, days and nights, the year and its

generically “a spirit”, a similar category known as *grahas*, “seizers”, was also commonly used in the Vedic period, though with a much more negative valence. The term comes from the root \sqrt{grh} meaning “to seize”, and its usage in relation to male *grahas* and female *grāhis* in early Vedic and later medical texts was almost always employed to describe dangerous disease-causing possession entities who “seized” their victims.

RV 10.161, as just one example of many, asks Indra and Agni to set free a human who has been “seized” or possessed by a *grāhi* (*grāhir jagrāha*), a female “seizer”. In the next verse (RV 10.162), Agni is called upon as the demon-slayer (*rakṣohā*) and is asked to drive away a fetus-attacking flesh-eating demon (*kravyādam garbham*) known as *Durñāman* (literally, “He with a Wicked Name”) who is said to strike women in their wombs. These two Rg Vedic hymns, in particular, anticipate two separate branches in later Ayurvedic and medical texts we will be discussing shortly – *bhūtavidyā*, which primarily focuses on exorcising possessing entities who cause mental and physical afflictions in adults, while the second, *kaumarabhrtya* (“child-rearing”), as it comes to be known, is focused on pediatrics, part of which involves driving off dangerous “child-seizers” known as *bālagrahas*. These two branches are separated in the early medical/Ayurvedic texts, though they are often found together in later texts due to their shared context dealing with possessing entities.

THE ATHARVAVEDA

divisions, lunar asterisms, the spatial midregion, the syllable *om*, numbers, oceans, rivers, mountains, trees, serpents, and birds. In addition...*apsaras*, *gandharva*, *nāga*, *siddha*, *sādhyā*, *vipra* (viz. brahmans), *yakṣa*, and *rakṣas*, as well as cows, ancestors, and teachers, both living and long deceased. Thus, by the mid-first millennium b.c.e. the word *bhūta* was applied to all manner of perceived ontological entities, including “spirits.” *Bhūta* may also have signified beings allied with an “element” (also indicated by the word *bhūta*), hence used to ‘personify the elemental fragments of creation, infinite in number.’”

Most of the *bhūtavidyā*-related texts we will look at trace their tradition back to the texts and lineages of the *Atharva Veda*.¹⁵³ In the case of later Ayurvedic medical texts, the stamp of the Atharva Veda is clearly there, though these were certainly not the only sources they drew from. Even the earliest Vedas included not only Vedic and local non-Brahmanic traditions, but also drew from the larger Indo-Iranian traditions of the Avesta and Zoroastrians. Evidence shows that later Buddhist and Hindu tantric demonological programs drew just as much from this shared substratum as they may have from early Vedic sources.¹⁵⁴ Grether argues, in fact, that:

many of the demonological conceptions associated with tantric *homa* rites should not be seen as a continuation of an unbroken Vedic tradition. Rather, they derive primarily from Indo-Iranian sources that originated in the regions of Gandhara and Kashmir during the early part of the first millennium.¹⁵⁵

The *Atharva Veda* itself was heavily influenced by these Zoroastrian systems and reflected, in many cases, ritual paradigms closer to Avestan sources than Vedic.¹⁵⁶ This may have been one of the reasons why it was sometimes excluded from the *traividya samhitas* (*Rg, Sama, and Yajur Vedas*) of the more orthodox schools. However, while Vedic texts such as the *Brāhmaṇas* generally treated the *Atharva Veda* as external to the accepted *traividya* divisions, later traditions often considered the AV the foremost of all the *Vedas*, and prior to the advent of Tantra, AV-trained *purohitas* (priests) were generally granted the highest status among royal priests.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ This, however, is a common practice even today with texts who simply sought Vedic authority, regardless of an actual connection or not.

¹⁵⁴ See Grether, Holly Jane. *Burning Demons and Sprinkling Mantras: A History of Fire Sacrifice in South and Central Asia*. (PhD Dissertation, UC Santa Barbara: 2011) on shared ritual programs of the Indo-Iranian traditions.

¹⁵⁵ Grether (2011: 128)

¹⁵⁶ Atharvaṇic priests, for example, primarily use a single fire, as they typically did in Zoroastrianism and later tantric rites, as distinguished from the Rgvedic rites performed in three fires. See Grether (2011).

¹⁵⁷ The 9th century Kashmiri author Jayantabhaṭṭa, for example, gives the AV this highest status [“*tat atharvaveda eva prathama*”] in chapter 4 of the *Nyāyamañjarī*. See Urmimala Bora, “Kingship and the

According to Clothey, The *Atharva Veda* reflected a “more ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ form of religion” and was concerned above all else with apotropaic spells and rituals with “magical intent.”¹⁵⁸ For Clothey, the focus on exorcism, healing, sorcery, and spells related to agricultural and economic prosperity, war, commerce, etc. were part of the “folk magic” of the AV. Other scholars, such as Modak, have echoed this as well, characterizing the R̥g Veda as the “Veda of the classes,” while the Atharva Veda represented the “Veda of the masses”.¹⁵⁹ While these “popular vs. elite” categorization are generally useful, it is also somewhat of a mischaracterization since the R̥g Veda has many similar qualities and objectives as the AV.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, much of the AV has close associations with the *gr̥hya* (domestic) and *śrauta* (sacrificial - often soma rites) *sutras*, - orthodox Vedic texts, which also included a vast array of non-Brahmanic rites that communities were practicing on the ground in this period. We should also note that despite these characterizations, the AV was not dedicated solely to “worldly” (*aihika*) rites, but also contain “otherworldly” (*āmuṣmika*) rites, referring to those sections of the AV which are more philosophically and spiritually oriented. For example, in the AV we can find early discussions regarding *prāna* as the enlivening principle of the Universe and the concept of *ātman* (e.g., AVP 11.4 and AVP 16.21-23). These sections may be the immediate predecessors to the oldest Upaniṣads and

Concept of Governance in the Atharvaveda,” (PhD diss., Gauhati University, 2012): 110. On the AV *purohitas* see Ronald Inden. “Changes in the Vedic Priesthood” in A. W van den Hoek et al., eds., *Ritual, State and History in South Asia*. (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Sanderson "Religion and the State: Śaiva Officials in the Territory of the Brahmanical Royal Chaplain." *Indo-Iranian Journal* no. 47 (2004): 229-300; and Marko Geslani, *Rites of the God-King: Śānti and Ritual Change in Early Hinduism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁵⁸ Clothey, Fred W. *Religion in India: A Historical Introduction*. (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006): 27.

¹⁵⁹ Modak, B. R. *The Ancillary Literature of the Atharva-Veda: A Study with Special Reference to the Pariśistas*. (New Delhi: Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, 1993): 1.

¹⁶⁰ Jan Gonda (1977: 277) believes the difference between “magical” acts in the AV versus the *traividya saṃhitas*, is more in its degree of prominence and applicability - there are many passages which are ritualistic without being 'magical', just as there are philosophical speculations interlaced throughout the text, without any apparent ritualistic purpose.

can be seen as the connecting threads between early Vedic and later Upaniṣadic worldviews, just as the more demonological elements can be seen as forerunners to later Tantric traditions. Taken as whole, the two sections are in accordance with the Atharvavedin view that their scripture helps “to attain enjoyment in, and liberation from, this world” – a well-known axiom in the tantric traditions, as we will soon see, as well.¹⁶¹

It is generally true, however, that the earlier Vedas' focus on complex, abstract, public and often expensive rituals, contrasted the rites of the AV which were relatively more simple, domestic, private, and focused primarily on the immediate and practical needs of the Atharvavedins and their clientele, which included not only the “common people”, but also royalty.¹⁶² Atharvan ritualists (*purohitas*), therefore, acted not only as domestic priests, but also as healers, exorcists, and “magicians”, often in service of the king as *rājapurohitas*. The oldest title of the AV is actually the *Atharvāṅgirasah*, a name that references two ancient families of *purohitas*, the Atharvans and ṅgirasas. The Atharvans, on one hand, are traditionally thought to have been responsible for the more auspicious practices found in the AV, such as healing (*bhaiṣaja*), appeasing (*śānta*) and promoting welfare (*pauṣṭika*), while the ṅgirasas', are believed to have authored the more “terrible” (*ghora*) practices of the corpus, what is often termed *abhicārika* or “hostile sorcery” practices.¹⁶³ Additionally, the ṅgirasas' were said to be closely associated with the “demon-slayer” god Agni (AV 6.35.3), and they were often invoked to avert evil or cause afflictions against their (or their client's)

¹⁶¹ See Gonda (1977: 292) for more on this.

¹⁶² See Sanderson's 2007 "Atharvavedins in Tantric Territory: The *Āṅgirasakalpa* Texts of the Oriya Paippalādins and Their Connection With The Trika And The Kālīkula: With Critical Editions of the *Parāṅgavidhi*, *Parāmantravidhi*, and the *Bhadrakālīmantravidhiprakaraṇa*," in *The Atharvaveda and its Paippalādaśākhā: Historical and Philological Papers on a Vedic Tradition*, ed. Griffiths, Arlo, and Annette Schmiedchen. (Aachen: Shaker, 2007).

¹⁶³ Gonda (1977: 267) mentions that the Gopatha-Brāhmaṇa (1.2.21; 5.10) also distinguishes between two Atharva Vedas - an "auspicious" one and a "terrible" one.

enemies (AV 2.12.5; 3.21.8). The AV's exclusion in other Vedic literature may have been partly due to these "terrible" (*ghora*) rites of the Aṅgirasas, which often involved the use of unorthodox or polluting practices and the manipulation of unsavory spirit beings.

According to the *Āṅgirasakalpa*, a later supplementary text to the *Paippalāda* recension of the *Atharva Veda*,¹⁶⁴ Atharvanic rites could be categorized into ten types: those that appease or avert evil (*śāntika*), those that promote welfare (*pauṣṭika*), subjugation by means of charms (*vaśa*), rites to hinder or paralyze others (*stambhana*), rites of bewilderment (*mohana*), those which bring about hatred (*dveṣaṇa*), eradication (*uccāṭana*), murder (*māraṇa*), seduction (*akarṣaṇa*), and rites to frighten adversaries (*vidrāvaṇa*).¹⁶⁵ As we will see, these types of magical rites continue well into the tantric traditions (e.g., *ṣaṭkarmam*), also involving the invocation and manipulation of questionable spirits.

THE BHIṢAJ: HEALER AND MASTER OF SPIRITS

The *Atharva Veda* contains much of what comes to be termed *bhūtavidyā*, though the work is relatively unsystematic in comparison to the Epic, medical, and *bhūtatantra* accounts we will soon examine. The AV's focus on various healing programs led the authors to call itself the *Bhaiṣajyaveda*, the "Veda of Medicines".¹⁶⁶ Priest-healers in the AV and subsequent Ayurvedic texts were often known as "*bhiṣajs*", an exclusive term not found in the other three Vedic *saṃhitas*. White describes the *bhiṣaj* as "Part physician, part shaman, part sorcerer", who was "viewed as both powerful and dangerous by Vedic society."¹⁶⁷ The

¹⁶⁴ There are today two recensions which have been passed down to us - the Śaunakīya recension and the older and larger Pippalādi recension.

¹⁶⁵ Gonda (1977: 267)

¹⁶⁶ AV 11.8.14

¹⁶⁷ White, David Gordon. *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 13.

term is cognate, in fact, with the Avestan *bishaz* (or *bishazyât*), which has the exact same meaning, evincing the ancient connection between these two particular traditions.¹⁶⁸ White succinctly summarizes the primary aspects of the AV, which are also foundational and characteristic of later healing systems in Ayurvedic and Tantric texts. These included:

...the apotropaic and therapeutic use of *mantras*, herbs, and amulets; various techniques of sorcery and countersorcery, including the creation and manipulation of “witches” (*krtyās*); the use of amulets and spells (*mantras*) for protection and aggression; and the notion that the demonic hordes populating the South Asian landscape could be controlled through offerings made to various leaders – who came to be called “lords of beings” (*bhuteśvaras*, *bhūtanāthas*) in later traditions – that straddled the line between the divine and the demonic.¹⁶⁹

We will discuss *bhūtanāthas* in greater detail shortly, but for now let us look at a few examples of the AV’s hundreds of charms, amulets, and spells used to combat and cure (*bheṣaja*, or *bhaiṣajyāni*) a variety of diseases and afflictions by dangerous possessing spirits, some of them known generically as *grahas* or *grāhis* (male or female seizers).¹⁷⁰ In many instances, the possessing entities and the associated diseases are indistinguishable, often identified as one and the same. For example, the “winged” disease-causing seizer known as *Jāyānya*, who attacks by “possessing” (*āviśati*) people’s bodies, has also been identified as the disease *scrofula*.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ See Grether (2011: 99) and chapter four of her dissertation entitled “Atharvanic Origins of Tantric Homa Rites”

¹⁶⁹ David G. White “Tantra” in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, and Angelika Malinar, (Leiden: Brill, 2012a): 575.

¹⁷⁰ For general examples, see AVŚ 1.22; 23.2; 2.25.4; 4.6.7; and 5.22.5. For *grahas* and *grāhis* see AVŚ 6.112.1; 2.9.1; 16.5.1; and 2.25. AVŚ 2.9, for example, involves a cure against demonic possession by using an amulet created out of ten different kinds of wood - “Oh amulet of ten kinds of wood, set free this man from the demon (*rakṣas*) and seizers (*grāhis*) who have seized (*jaḡrāha*) upon his joints!” (AVŚ 2.9.1a) *daśavr̥kṣa muñcemam rakṣaso grāhyā adhi yinaṃ jaḡrāha parvasu* | see also AVŚ 1.16, 2.4, 3.9 for other similar examples using protective amulets against diseases and demons

¹⁷¹ *pakṣī jāyānyaḥ patati s ā viśati pūruṣam* | AVŚ 7.76.4a

In book four, hymn thirty-six of the AVS, a powerful Atharvan priest is described who expels and kills various demons and enemies through his own divine power. The hymn reads:

Let the mighty Bull, Agni Vaiśvānara ("The Fire of All Men") endowed with true strength (*satyaujāh*), burn those who shall abuse and desire to harm us, and likewise those not favorable to us. He who, unharmed, would injure us, and he who, harmed, would do us harm - into the two tusks of Agni Vaiśvānara do I set him... the flesh-eating ones (*kravyāda*), seeking to harm others - all those I overcome with force. I overcome the *piśācas* (ghouls) with force; I take their power (*draviṇa*); I slay all the injurers; let my intention be successful... I am the tormentor (*tapana*) of the *piśācas*, like a tiger who torments cattle-owners or like dogs [tormented] on seeing a lion, they do not find a hiding-place (*nyañcana*). Only I am able to endure - not the *piśācas*, nor the thieves (*stena*) nor those wanderers of the forest (*vanargu*). The *piśācas* disappear from whatever village I enter (*āviśe*). Whatever village my fierce (*ugra*) power enters (*āviśata*), from there *piśācas* disappear and evil (*pāpa*) no longer exists.¹⁷²

This hymn is interesting because the primary agent who expels the demons is not just the invoked deity (Agni Vaiśvānara), as is typical in the other three Vedas, but rather the healer-priest himself. The deity, it seems, is only involved in the final act of destruction. As others have pointed out, the use of the first person is significant and commonly employed in the AV, a preference shared also by the Indo-Iranian *Avesta*. The Vedic *traividya* texts, in contrast, almost always use the third person to call upon deities who do the dispelling and destroying of the offending demons. Another distinguishing feature of the AV, again shared with the Zoroastrian traditions, is that it is usually a single priest who performs the rites and recites the corresponding mantras, rather than the multiple priests usually required in rites from the other three Vedas.¹⁷³

¹⁷² AVŚ 4.36.1-8a. Translation adapted from William Dwight Whitney, *Atharva-Veda Samhita*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1905), and Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*. (Benares: Lazarus, 1895).

¹⁷³ See Grether (2011: 109-110)

The power of the Atharvan priest-healer comes not only from his knowledge of medicines, oblations, and amulets, but, most importantly, from his knowledge and ability to wield *mantras*. As Zysk has written:

The *mantra*, or magico-religious utterance, was the key component of the healing rite. When properly executed at the designated auspicious time and place, the healer was able to unlock the door to the realm of the spirits and obtain the power necessary to ward off or destroy disease and to make medicines efficacious. Only the healer controlled the mantra, so that he alone governed the power to heal. Armed with his arsenal of mantras and other weapons of magic he set about his task of removing disease.¹⁷⁴

Zysk points here to the enormous importance of the power of the *mantras*, which allows its holder to interact with and manipulate the realm of spirits in order to exorcise spirit-afflictors and heal the spirit-afflicted. This is not a new idea, of course - as we saw in the Ṛg Veda the power of Vāc, “the mother of all *mantras*”, forms the basis of the powers of the *ṛṣis* and the gods.¹⁷⁵ However, this idea does become amplified in the AV, the primary difference being that the human *bhiṣaj* himself was now able to wield this enormous power of healing and destroying possessing demons, chiefly through *mantras* which controlled spirits or gods. Essentially, the *bhiṣaj* was modelling themselves after the primary divine healers and exorcists of the tradition (i.e., Agni, Rudra, etc.), though they were not elevated to any sort of divine status as earlier *ṛṣis* had.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Kenneth G. Zysk, "Mantra in Āyurveda: A Study of the Use of Magico-religious Speech in Ancient Indian Medicine," in *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Alper, Harvey P. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989):125.

¹⁷⁵ See RV 10.50.5 and references to Vāc in the RV I noted previously.

¹⁷⁶ White (1996: 13) writes, "At the center of this practice stood the healer (*bhiṣaj*) who was also a possessed 'shaker' (*vipra*) and an inspired master of incantation (*kavi*). Part physician, part shaman, part sorcerer, the atharvan priest was viewed as both powerful and dangerous by Vedic society. For this very reason, perhaps, his heir, the itinerant Ayurvedic physician (*caraṇa-vaidya*) was also regarded with suspicion by "good" brahmanic society."

EARLY SORCERERS AND MAGICIANS IN THE AV & BEYOND

Within the AV, we also find a number of imprecatory verses and rites directed against the enemies of the *bhiṣaj* (or their clients), which included not only demons and humans, but also other sorcerers. As mentioned earlier, it was these rites that generally fell under the *abhicārika* (hostile sorcery) class.¹⁷⁷ Some of these dangerous sorcerers are named - the most common ones being *yātudhānas* (“Holders of the *Yatu spirits*”) and *kimīdins* (another class of “evil spirits” according to Monier-Williams), while more benevolent ones were known as *kavis* (“mantic poets”). At times it is often difficult to distinguish whether these were human or non-human agents - the two often being conflated. In some cases, they are listed alongside a variety of disease-causing demons and child-seizers (*bhūtas/bālagrahas*) and described as having supernatural qualities, while in others they are clearly human sorcerers, both friend and foe.¹⁷⁸

We referred to the Ṛg Veda’s use of the term *kavi* earlier, where it generally had a positive connotation and referred to a mantic poet or inspired seer. *Kavis* are also found in early Iranian sources, referring to a specific royal lineage of poets who were said to have had the gift of prophecy. At the same time, various Gathas of the Avesta also depicted them more ambiguously, and Zoroaster was said to often demonized them, believing they were hostile towards him and his teachings.¹⁷⁹ The AV, in contrast, generally depicted *kavis* in a positive light as in the ṚV, a usage that continues within later Ayurvedic medical texts.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ E.g., AVŚ 1.9.2; 6.20.1; 7.116.2,

¹⁷⁸ See AVŚ 1.7; 1.8; 1.28; 4.20; 4.28; 8.3; 8.4.

¹⁷⁹ See Grether 2011: 130 who quotes Boyce 1975: 11-12

¹⁸⁰ Of course, the most famous Kavi in Hindu literature may be Kāvya Uṣana from the MBh, a Kavi, however, who was no longer an ally to the gods, but the priest and guru of the Āsuras, the “Anti-gods”. It is possible that this role-reversal was due to continued influence from the Avestan traditions, which the MBh also drew from. According to White, Dumézil has demonstrated that the epic mythology of Kāvya Uśanas and the Iranian myths of Kavi Usan “clearly arose from a common Indo-Iranian tradition.” See White (2009: 151) who references

The *yātudhānas*, on the other hand, were almost always seen in the AV as hostile shape-shifting sorcerers or as malignant spirits, known especially for their power of flight, and usually listed alongside other afflicting demons that needed to be retaliated against or destroyed.¹⁸¹ It was to these enemy *yātudhānas* that many of the terrible (*ghora*) *abhicāra* rites of the AV were directed at, often as a form of counter-sorcery. AVS 4.28.6, for example, describes the *yātus* as versed in the preparation of roots (*mūlakṛd*) and “witchcraft” (*kr̥tyākṛt*), and petitioners plead for the gods to smite them with their weapons (*vajra*).¹⁸² Their mention as worshippers of “root-gods” (*mūradevāḥ*) and as enemy sorcerers antagonistic to the Vedic Ṛṣis is found earlier within the ṚV as well.¹⁸³ Grether notes that Avestan sources similarly viewed *yātudhānas* as enemy human sorcerers.¹⁸⁴

AVS 1.28, dedicated to the demon-expeller Agni, is another example describing these sorcerer-cum-demons:

The god Agni, killer of demons (*rakṣohān*), and exorciser of tormenting demons/diseases (*amīvacātanaḥ*) has come forth burning away the deceitful ones, the *yātudhānas* and the *kimīdins*. O Lord, “He Who Has a Black Path” [Agni], burn up the *yātudhānas* and the *kimīdins*. Burn up the *yātudhānis* (sorceresses) that you meet. She who has cursed (us) with curses, who has conceived and is rooted in evil, she who has seized (*ārabh*) our child for the purpose of taking their sap (*rasa*/blood) - let her consume [her own] offspring. Let the *yātudhānis* eat [their own] son, sister, or daughter; moreover, let the wild-haired *yātudhānis* mutually destroy (*vi-han*) one another; let the hags (*arāyī*) be crushed.¹⁸⁵

Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée II: Types Épiques Indo-européens: Un Heros, un Sorcier, un-Roi*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986): 173–205 and 274–315.

¹⁸¹ They often are said to take on the shape of birds, dogs, or hooved creatures; see ṚV 10.87.6 and AVŚ 8.3.5c for references to flight

¹⁸² *yaḥ kr̥tyākṛṇ mūlakṛd yātudhāno ni tasmin dhattam vajram ugrau* AVS 4.28.6

¹⁸³ See ṚV 7.104.24; 10.87.2-14 and AVŚ 8.3.10, 8.4.24, 4.28.6. See also Sukumar Sen, “On Mūradeva Mūladeva and Śisnadeva”, in *Mélanges d’indianisme*, (Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1968): 677-683, who argues that these “root-gods” may have originally been non-Vedic gods that later became associated with Śiva and Skanda.

¹⁸⁴ Rather than *arāyīs* however they were usually paired with Avestan witches known as *pairikas*. See Grether (2011: 133).

¹⁸⁵ AVŚ 1.28

Here the *yātudhānas* and the *kimīdīns* are described as cursing the Atharvan priests, who in turn cast the demon-slayer Agni upon them, causing them to destroy one another and their offspring. Note the mention of the female *yātudhānis*, who are described here as “seizing” (*ārabh*) children in order to eat their vital fluids (“*rasa*”, their blood), and listed alongside another fierce group of demonic female entities known as the *ārayīs*, similarly recognized in the *RV* as killers of unborn children (*bhrūṇānyāruṣī RV 10.155.2.1*).¹⁸⁶ The *ārayīs* are mentioned in AV 2.25 also as “drinkers of blood” (*asṛkpāvan*) alongside another class of “fetus-eaters” (*garbhādaṃ*) known as the *kaṇvas*.

Hymn 8.6 in the AVŚ also has petitioners requesting Agni and Indra to destroy and drive away sorcerers and evil spirits who enter pregnant women via the womb in order to seize the embryo.¹⁸⁷ This hymn goes on to give a list of other child-seizing demons that could be dispelled with similar enchanted amulets and talismans. Many of the names are untranslatable and not seen elsewhere, suggesting they may have been part of the larger surrounding demonological traditions, which were only partially included here.¹⁸⁸ The translatable terms are usually descriptive in nature: some are called “bear-necked” (*rkṣagrīva*), another *asura* is described as black, hairy, and snouted (*tunḍika*), others are dressed in skins of goats or bleat like a goat (*bastavāśin*), while others are described as ill-smelling (*durgandhi*), and feeders of blood (*lohitāsyān*). Some are further described as having backwards feet (*paścāt prapadāni purah pārṣṇīḥ*), or pot-testicled (*kumbhamuṣkā*), or having multiple mouths, eyes, and limbs or even no limbs (*dvyāsyāc caturakṣāt pañcapadād*

¹⁸⁶ They are also known in this verse as *sadānvās*

¹⁸⁷ *mā sṃ vṛto mopa sṛpa ūrū māva sṛpo 'ntarā* | AVŚ 8.6.3a | *arāyān asyā muṣkābhyāṃ bhaṃsaso 'pa hanmasi* | AVŚ 8.6.5c

¹⁸⁸ AVŚ 2.24 for example lists eight types of *yātudhānas*, all related to destructive entities: *śerabhaka* (*serpent*), *śevṛdhaka* (*serpent*), *mroka* (*fire*), *sarpa* (*serpent*), *jūrṇi* (*fire*), *upabde* (*venomous animal*), *arjuni* (?), and *bharūji* (*jackal*).

anaṅgureḥ). These descriptions are very similar to Rudra-Śiva's fearsome hordes (*gaṇas*) as seen in the MBh's *Sauptikaparvan* account discussed earlier, and it is likely these earlier demonic beings of the AV who influenced the MBh's later portrayals, particularly the *bālagrahas* (child-seizers) found in Epic and medical texts. It is these groups who also come to populate the Tantric pantheon, a point we will return to soon.¹⁸⁹

Although earlier I translated the term *kṛtyākṛt* with the blanket term “witchcraft”, as many past scholars have, the Sanskrit meaning is actually much more specific. The term most literally means “making (*kṛt*) *kṛtyās*” - *kṛtyās* signifying both the female spirits conjured through sorcery and the sorcery itself used to create these conjured beings.¹⁹⁰ In many Vedic references, the conjured beings (e.g. the *yātus*) are conflated with the conjurer themselves (e.g., the *yātudhānas* as the holder of *yātus*) – this may help to explain why non-human qualities are sometimes ascribed to *yātudhānas* and other sorcerers, and why they are frequently listed alongside malignant and possessing entities who are clearly supernatural spirits.¹⁹¹ Regardless, Vedic texts (e.g., AV 10.1.4-5) do describe enemy sorcerers as conjuring up spirit beings and casting them out against Atharvan priests, who, in turn, counteracted the *kṛtyās* (or *yātus*) using their own magical techniques and devices, including medicinal offerings (*auśadhi*), root-magic (*mūlakaraṇa*) and amulets.¹⁹² The *kṛtyās* are described as being “covered in darkness” (*tamasāvṛtā*) by the magic of the evil conjurers, which they view as analogous to being ensnared in a net. Although it is vaguely described,

¹⁸⁹ See RV 7.104.23; 8.60.20; 10.87; AVŚ 4.20 and 5.29

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, the story of the *kṛtyā* named Yātudhānī in MBh 13.94.39 as summarized in White (2021: 141-142)

¹⁹¹ Since the time of the RV (see RV 10.87) *yātudhānas* are especially associated with *rakṣasas* – we could speculate that the *yātus* may have been a class of *rakṣasas* who the *yātudhānas* had control over.

¹⁹² See White (2012a) article on *kṛtyās* and counter-active devices, some of which also have Iranian origins.

the goal for the Atharvan priest is to counteract this sorcery by cutting these snares from the *krtyās* and sending them back in order to slay their own makers.¹⁹³

It is unclear in this particular passage (AV 10.1.4-5) how exactly these beings are conjured, though there is mention of their head, ears and nose being fashioned by the sorcerer's hands (*hastakṛtām*; AVŚ 10.1.1a). This likely refers to the creation of an effigy, since it states later in the hymn that the *krtyās* can be buried within a sacrificial altar (*barhis*), sacrificial fire, cemetery, or a field (AVŚ 10.1.18). The magical use of effigies and fetishes is found throughout the AV (e.g., AV 19.9), which is also commonly found in later magical-oriented Tantras.

Another vague reference to this “spirit-casting” practice is found in AVŚ 16.7.1, which mentions an Atharvan sorcerer who “pierces” an enemy with a "female seizer" (*grāhyainam vidhyāmi*). The text states “I summon against him (the enemy) with this cruel and terrible command (*praiṣa*) of the gods”, which indicates this was some sort of speech-act used to invoke and cast out a *grāhi* who “swallows up” (*gara*; AVŚ 16.7.4) the enemy.¹⁹⁴ In hymns 11.9 of the AVŚ, an invocation to destroy the army of one's enemies, we get a slightly clearer picture of the type of country-sorcery Atharvan priests may have been doing. Here we find the *purohita* invoking dangerous Atharvan deities such as Arbudi, Nyarbudi, and Triṣandhi with fire offerings and oblations (*ājye hute*; AVŚ 11.9.6) and then casting them out upon the enemy armies.¹⁹⁵ AVŚ 11.9.3 states that Arbudi and Nyarbudi, a duo of fierce serpent-like deities, trap (*ādāna*), bind (*saṃdāna*), seize (*grah*), and crush (*bhañj*) the enemy armies with their serpent-coils (*bhoga*). But that is not all – like Rudra, these frightful deities

¹⁹³ In this particular hymn, the enemy sorcerers are associated with *sūdras* (low castes), a king (who likely employs the enemy sorcerer), a woman, or even a *brāhmaṇa*. AVŚ 10.1.3.

¹⁹⁴ *devānām enaṃ ghoraiḥ krūraiḥ praiṣair abhipreṣyāmi* ||2|| AVŚ 16.7.2a

¹⁹⁵ *saptá jātān nyārbuda udārānām samikṣāyan | tébhiḥ tvám ājye huté sārvaír út tiṣṭha sēnayā* || AVŚ 11.9.6

also bring forth and manifest their own invisible spirit hordes (*udārā antarhitā* AVŚ 11.9.16c; *guptā* AVŚ 11.9.2) who aid in the destruction of the enemy army alongside a swarm of carrion-eating animals and birds which attack and eat the fallen corpses. Some categories of these hordes are given, many resembling Rudras own frightful *gaṇas*, including the *rakṣas*, *sarpas* (serpents), *itarajanas* (often translated as “dark spirits”, but most literally “other beings”), *gandharvas*, *apsaras*, *udāras* (invisible spirits)¹⁹⁶, *kṛtyās*, etc. Other spirits are again described by their attributes, such as the “four-tusked” ones (*cāturdaṃṣṭrām*), the “black-toothed” (*chyāvadataḥ*), “pot-testicled” (*kumbhamuṣkām*), and “bloody-mouthed” (*asṛṇmukhān*) (AVŚ 11.9.17a). These spirits, the text continues, go on to attack the enemy forces by possessing them, causing mental (specifically fear and bewilderment) and/or physical harm, ranging from dry mouth to death (e.g., loss of breath or heart attack) [AVŚ 11.9.21a]. As we will see, these sorts of descriptions parallel symptoms commonly given to those afflicted by possession in the medical traditions as well.

While we have no explicit descriptions of the precise methods of conjuring in these early Vedic texts, we do find them in later Hindu and Buddhist apotropaic texts and tantras, usually in relation to *yakṣiṇī*, *vetāla* and *yoginī-sadhanas*.¹⁹⁷ It is likely these ritual programs derived from earlier Vedic *kṛtyā* practices.¹⁹⁸ Mention of *yakṣiṇī-sādhanas* are found as early as the 4-5th century CE in Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra texts such as the *Jayākhyasamhitā* and early

¹⁹⁶ *khaḍūre 'dhicaṅkramāṃ kharvikāṃ kharvavāsīnīm | ya udārā antarhitā gandharvāpsarasas ca ye | sarpā itarajanā rakṣāṃsi || AVŚ 11.9.16*

¹⁹⁷ Ullrey (2016: 43) makes mentions of the *Pheṭkārīnī Tantra* which does explicitly describe the methods of conjuring and manipulating *kṛtyās* for their own magical purposes.

¹⁹⁸ The 11th century Kashmiri exegete Kṣemarāja, commenting on the *Netra Tantra* (7th-8th century), also glosses the term *kṛtyā* as *vetālī*, a malignant female spirit who is said to enter into (*pra-viś*) and animate a woman’s cadaver (*strīkalevara*). In this case, the conjured being (*kṛtyā*) is designated as a *vetālī* (zombie), who is then cast out (*prayukta*) by the sorcerer for destructive purposes - a mingling of older and newer sorceristic acts.

Śaiva/Buddhist Tantras such as the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*,¹⁹⁹ the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, the *Amoghapāśamahākalparāja*,²⁰⁰ and the later *Uḍḍāmareśvaratantra* corpus and *Kakṣaputa-tantra*, among others.²⁰¹ These rites invoke different *yakṣiṇīs* who perform various magical acts for the invoker or grants them various boons and *siddhis* (supernatural powers). These included worldly goods like money or food, but also youthfulness, long-life, resurrection of the dead, animating images (statue, painting, etc.), or even revealing knowledge about the past or future.²⁰² A typical *yakṣiṇī-sādhana* usually involves the creation of an image of the *yakṣiṇī*, either on cloth or as a *maṇḍala*, and making various offerings into a sacrificial fire. This is complemented by the use of various tantric technologies such as *japa* (mantra recitation), *nyāsa* (installation of *mantras* on the body) and *mudrās* (ritual gestures). Upon successfully completing the rite, the invoked *yakṣiṇī* is said to appear and asks the *sādhaka*, “What should I become - your mother, sister, or wife?” The practitioner then chooses one of these forms as her manifestation and she will then serve him according to that specified role. Although there is no possession *per se*, as we will soon see in subsequent chapters the rites do follow similar procedures to deity possession rites. We should note though that a very early *yakṣiṇī-vidhi* found in the *Guhyasūtra* (10.81–84) of the Śaiva *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*,

¹⁹⁹ This can be found within the *Guhyasūtra* of the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*. References are also made to achieving power over *bhūtīs*, *piśācinīs*, and *nāginīs*. See Shaman Hatley, “Śakti in Early Tantric Śaivism: Historical Observations on Goddesses, Cosmology, and Ritual in the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*”, in *Goddess Traditions in Tantric Hinduism: History, Practice and Doctrine*, ed. Bjarne Wernicke Olesen, (London; New York: Routledge, 2016): 14.

²⁰⁰ Chapter 52 is said to include a *yakṣiṇī-sādhana*. See Henrik H. Sørensen, “Esoteric Buddhism and Magic in China”, in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 202-204; and Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, trans. Bernard Faure, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 204-205, for more on this text and Maria Reis-Habito, “The Amoghapāśa Kalparāja Sūtra: A Historical and Analytical Study,” *Studies in Central & East Asian Religions 11* (1999): 39-67, for dating.

²⁰¹ See Ullrey (2016) on the *Uḍḍāmareśvaratantra*.

²⁰² See Yamano, Chieko. “The Yaksini-Sadhana in the Kaksaputa-Tantra: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Translation.” *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies Vol. XVII*, (2013: 102-117) for full translation of a typical *Yakṣiṇī-sadhana* as found in the 14th chapter of the 10th century *Kakṣaputa Tantra*, ascribed to the illustrious master of magical sciences, Siddha Nāgārjuna.

does mention that the constructed image of the *yakṣiṇī* actually comes to life – so, in a sense, the spirit does actually come to possess and animate a physical form, though not human.²⁰³

I make mention of all this because later tantric deity possession rites, as we will soon see, were closely allied with, and likely rooted in these sorts of early magical practices of the AV involving the manipulation of spirits. Ronald Davidson has recently argued that these types of practices were not exclusive to any one tradition but were part and parcel of a variety of sorceristic communities (Brahmanic, Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Folk etc.), who often pedaled their own magical traditions to the wider community. He believes that these groups, some which we will discuss later, may have provided the “raw material” for certain developments within Tantra. These groups, he writes, did not necessarily have “ideologies of liberation or transcendent divinity but were concerned with magical crafts of various kinds...which were appropriated by the tantric traditions on an as-need basis.”²⁰⁴ Many of these itinerant sorcerers were employed by royal courts in order to secure and protect their kingdoms against rival groups, and these sorts of dangerous rites, often employing ferocious yet powerful spirit-beings, were seen as efficacious to that end. For the King, it mattered not which communities these rites came from, as long as they achieved the desired results. These sorts of magical rites start to become more visible and prominent in tantric texts as their popularity among royal clients rose. At the same time, we also began to see early evidence in more orthodox traditions the denigration of such rites and their respective communities. This was likely because the *brahmins* role (and patronage) was being usurped by these various groups - first by Atharvan *rājapurohitas* and then by various Tantric ritual specialists who

²⁰³ See Hatley (2016: 14) for more details on this rite.

²⁰⁴ Ronald Davidson, “Magicians, Sorcerers and Witches: Considering Pre-tantric, Non-Sectarian Sources of Tantric Practices.” *Religions* 8 (9), (2017): 1.

had access to these more powerful technologies and spirit beings - rites that would have been off limits to orthodox Brahmins obsessed with pollution and purity.²⁰⁵

The *Manusmṛiti* (MS) law books²⁰⁶, for example, state that: “A two hundred [coin] fine shall be levied in all cases of sorcery (*abhicāreṣu*), root-magic (*mūlakarmaṇi*) and malicious conjuring rites (*kṛtyeṣu vividheṣu ca*) ...”²⁰⁷ Similarly, the *Bṛhatsamhitā* (BS) makes mention of magicians called “*maṇḍalakas*”, who are described as old with “rough and stiff hair” and “opportunists” in the entourage of “bandit kings”. Though denigrated, the BS still recognizes these *maṇḍalakas* as being skilled in sorcery (*abhicāra*), the destruction of enemies, and “spells relating to the rituals of the *kṛtyā*, *vetāla* and other spirits”.²⁰⁸ Groups of rival roaming-for-hire magicians are also mentioned despairingly in the Buddhist

Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra (4th century CE)²⁰⁹, as seen in the Gilgit manuscripts:

Moreover, Mañjuśrī, there... are beings with minds intent on mutual belligerence and perform unwholesome acts... They invoke a forest-god (*vanadevata*), or a tree-god (*vṛkṣadevata*) or mountain-god (*giridevata*), or invoke spirits (*bhūtān*) in individual cremation grounds. They deprive beings born into the womb of animals of their lives and offer *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas* food of flesh and blood. Having made an image of the body of an enemy, they accomplish terrible spells (*ghoravidyām*), or desire to damage beings or the destruction of [beings’] bodies by the practices of *kākhordas* and *vetālas*.²¹⁰

Though denigrated, we do get brief yet fascinating early depictions and characterizations of these sorts of magic rites, involving the invocation of various nature

²⁰⁵ See Sanderson (2007) on the Atharvan *rājapurohitas*.

²⁰⁶ Flood (1996: 56) dates these to be from the 2nd century BCE-3rd century CE.

²⁰⁷ *abhicāreṣu sarveṣu kartavyo dviśato damaḥ / mulakarmaṇi cānāptaiḥ kṛtyāsu vividhāsu ca* // MS 9.29. Translation based upon Ullrey (2016: 58).

²⁰⁸ BS 68.27cd *śūrah krūrah śreṣṭho mantrī caurasvāmī vyāyāmī ca* // BS. 68.37 *maṇḍalakakṣa-ṇamatorucakānucaro bhicāravitkuśalaḥ | kṛtyāvetālādīṣu karmasu vidyāsu cānurataḥ vṛddhākārah kharaparūṣamūrdhajaś ca śatrunāśane kuśalaḥ* | Translations based upon Davidson (2017: 12).

²⁰⁹ Richard D. McBride II, “Popular Esoteric Deities and The Spread of Their Cults,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia.*, ed. Orzech, et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011): 219.

²¹⁰ Gilgit Manuscripts I.13-14; and T.449.14.402c7-113 which was translated by Dharmagupta in 616 CE. See Sanskrit and its translation by Davidson (2017: 11). See also White (2012a) on practices involving *kākhordas*.

deities and spirits with flesh and blood offerings in cremation grounds. There is further mention of the employment of fetishes, “terrible spells” and fierce magical rites associated with *kākhordas* and *vetālas*. As stated, all of these come to characterize much of the tantric tradition as well.

VIDYĀDHARAS AND SIDDHAS

Among these amorphous groups of sorcerers-for-hire, we could also include the *Vidyādharas* (literally, “Holder of Spells”) and the *Siddhas* (“Perfect Beings”), two groups whose cult narratives and practices were shared by Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain groups since the early centuries of the first millennium and who become some of the most prominent and popular figures in the forthcoming tantric traditions. Before the medieval period, however, the two groups were similarly included in lists alongside other possessing *bhūtas* and *grahas*, depicting them either as human wizards or ambiguous demi-gods.²¹¹ Both groups come to be especially associated with esoteric knowledge, magical spells (*vidyās*), and various forms of sorcery and alchemy. It was understood in the popular imagination, that it was through these means that human *siddhas* or *vidyādharas* were able to transform themselves into their celestial and divine counterparts.²¹²

While *siddhas* as celestial beings are found throughout the Epic and Purāṇic literature, Ronald Davidson believes the earliest evidence of *siddhas* as “accomplished

²¹¹ According to White (2003: 161), the *Amarakośa*, a fifth-century lexicon, classes the Siddhas and Vidyādharas together with the *Yakṣas*, *Apsarasas*, *Rākṣasas*, etc., “as *devayonayah*, demigods ‘born from a divine womb’ and therefore not subject to death.” These groups were believed to either inhabit the regions between the earth and the heavens, and in some cases resided on, or even in, mountains. See David White’s article “Mountains of Wisdom: On the Interface between Siddha and Vidyādhara Cults and the Siddha Orders in Medieval India” in *Hindu Studies International Journal of Hindu Studies* (1997): 73–95, for more on this.

²¹² See White (1996 and 1997)

humans” is found in a Jain cave inscription from Orissa, dated to 2nd or 1st century BCE. Centuries later we also find the term in Kauṭilya’s political treatise the *Arthaśāstra* (2-3rd century CE), which refers to employing *siddhas*, understood as itinerant sorcerers for hire, as agents and spies of the royal state.²¹³ Around this same period, *siddhas* were also mentioned within the medical literature and recognized as supernatural and often dangerous possessing entities (e.g., Caraka-Saṃhitā 6.9.20–21).

In the Buddhist *Jātakamālā*, written by Aryasūra around the 4th century, reference is also made to groups of *siddhavidyās* who were said to be exorcists and healers that specialized in *bhūtavidyā*.²¹⁴ This emphasis on healers involving spells (*vidyās*) and the manipulation of spirits is also found in the coeval Buddhist *Mahāpratisara* (4-5th century) of the apotropaic *Pañcarakṣa* traditions, whose specialists were known as *vidyāvādika* (“Speaker of Spells”).²¹⁵ In the later Śaiva *Kumāratantra*, a text which contains its own sections on *bhūtavidyā*, physicians were similarly known as *vidyāpuruṣas* (“Spell-Men”).²¹⁶

Besides *siddhas*, all of these *vidyā*-oriented groups share much with the *vidyādharas*, a term, according to Davidson, first found within the Buddhist literature designating those who “manipulate incantations (*vidyā*) for the purposes of personal power and gratification”²¹⁷, giving the example of the great “outcaste” (*mātāṅgī*) sorceress

²¹³ See Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 174–175, and Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 233–234; 407–408.

²¹⁴ See White (1996: 58) who references Sharma’s, *Indian Medicine in the Classical Age* (1972: 99).

²¹⁵ See Michael Slouber, *Garuḍa Medicine: A History of Snakebite and Religious Healing in South Asia*, (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012): 80.

²¹⁶ See Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, “New Materials for the Study of the Kumāratantra of Rāvaṇa,” *Indian Culture* 7 (1941): 269–86.

²¹⁷ Davidson 2017: 194

(*mahāvidyādhari*) of the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* (1st-3rd century CE).²¹⁸ In a famous Jātaka verse, which simultaneously recognizes the *vidyādhara*'s power, but ultimately disparages them, states: “*Vidyādharas* study ferociously, so that they can move invisibly by means of medicines. Yet they cannot travel while invisible to the King of Death, so it occurs to me that I will travel with the Dharma.”²¹⁹ The term, however, was not always used derogatorily – by the second-century CE we find the poet Mātrceta praising the Buddha himself in the *Varṇārhavarnastotra* as the greatest of physicians and a *siddhavidyādhara* (a “perfected sorcerer” or alternately he is both “a *siddha* and *vidyādhara*”).²²⁰

In the Jain epic, the *Vasudevahiṇḍi* (“The Odysseys of Vasudeva”; 1st–5th centuries CE) we also find mention of *vidyādharīs* and *vidyādharas* as divinized humans with supernatural powers.²²¹ According to this story, the *vidyādharas* were founded by a royal family who received forty-eight thousand magical spells (*vidyās*) from Dharana, the lord of *nāgas* (serpents), the celestial *gandharvas* and the subterranean *paṇṇagas* (another race of serpents). Some examples of these *vidyās* (spells) included the power of flight, invisibility, the power to take on any form (*bahurūvā*), to create new bodies through magic (*māhāmaya*), and the power to stupefy enemies (*thambhiṇī*). They were also described as experts in medicine and treating serpent bites.²²² This knowledge of spells is ultimately what gave them their supernatural powers and semi-divine status, which were passed down through family lineages.

²¹⁸ *Mātāṅgī* also comes to be the name of an important Tantric goddess in the Mahāvidyā traditions of the Śaktas. See David R. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²¹⁹ *vijjādharaḥghoramadhīyamānādassanam osadhehivajanti na maccurājassa vajantadassanam tam me maṭṭhi hoti carāmi dhammam* || Jātaka 15.341 as quoted in Davidson (2017: 188).

²²⁰ In *Varṇārhavarnastotra* II.33, see Davidson (2002: 196) for full passage and translation

²²¹ Jaina argues this is a Jain version of the Brhatkathā. See Jagadīśacandra Jaina, *The Vasudevahiṇḍi: An Authentic Jain Version of the Brhatkathā*. (Ahmedabad: L.D. Inst. of Indology, 1997).

²²² See A. P. Jamkhedkar, *Vasudevahiṇḍi: A Cultural Study*. (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1984): 231.

The *Vasudevahiṇḍi* further states that it was a *vidyādhara* magician (Pkt. *indajāliya*) who initiated Vasudeva, the primary character of the story, and taught him the spell (*vidyā*) for flight (Pkt. *gogaṇagamṇajoggā vijjā*). Vasudeva was instructed to recite the *vidyā* for one full day and night and was warned that obstructing demons (Pkt. *vigghā*; Skt. *vighna*) would try to tempt and take him away in the form of beautiful women. After successfully completing the rite, a divine *vidyā*-goddess was said to have manifested in front of him and, with his assent, carried him off into the sky. Another *vidyādhara* teacher also gives him a spell (*vidyā*) for flying a *vimana* (aerial car). This teacher tells Vasudeva to go alone on the fourteenth night of the black fortnight (Pkt. *kālachanddasī*), to a lonely place on a mountain where he should make a tribute sacrifice (*bali*) to the gods and recite a sacred syllable (Pkt. *vijjā*) one thousand and eight times. The spells used were known as *Śumbhā* (used for taking off) and *Nīśumbhā* (used for landing). Interestingly enough, these names are also attested in the *Devī-Māhātmyam* (400-600CE) as evil demons (*asuras*) who were ultimately killed by Durga/Kālī.²²³ This is interesting because it may indicate that these spells for flight involved the manipulation and control of spirits in order to accomplish their magical feats. This is supported by one of the earliest Buddhist Tantras as well, the *Sarvatathāgatattvasamgraha* (STTS), “The Compendium of Principles of All Tathāgatas”, where we find Mahāvairocana using a magical spell (*dhāraṇī*) to invoke these same two spirits to go out and seize Śiva-Maheśvara in order to subjugate him.²²⁴

²²³ In the famous story in the *Devī-Māhātmyam* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (400-600CE). See Davidson (2017: 17)

²²⁴ This was known as Trailokyavijaya's (an incarnation of the yakṣa-bodhisattva Vajrapāni) secret *dhāraṇī* and is as follows: *Oṃ Śumbha, Nīśumbha hūṃ gr̥hna gr̥hna hūṃ gr̥hṇāpaya hūṃ ānaya ho bhagavan vajra hūṃ phaṭ* - Oṃ Śumbha! Nīśumbha! Hūṃ, Seize! Seize! Hūṃ. Go and seize! Make them come, O Lord Vajra! Hūṃ Phaṭ!. See Robert Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art*. (Boston; London: Shambhala, 1999): 182 for reference.

As we will continue to see in later chapters, much of the terminology, practices, and spells involving the manipulation of spirits in these pre-tantric texts persist in later tantric rites. Vasudeva, for example, must be initiated before gaining access to this sort of esoteric knowledge, which also becomes a cornerstone in all subsequent tantric traditions. Additionally, we should note how the term *vidyā*, and even *vidyādhara*s, involves a blurring and mingling of human practitioners, mantras, supernatural powers, and divinities. In tantric practice, *vidyās* become a primary term that denotes feminine mantras, but is also equivalent to the sonic form of the goddesses themselves. Thus, mastery over a *vidyā* is equivalent to mastery over the goddess the mantra represents, and it is she who bestows the knowledge and power to the aspirant. Once these goddesses are “mastered” and boons/knowledge acquired, the practitioner himself becomes perfected and transformed into a divinity.

These ideas of divinized humans (e.g., *siddhas*, *vidyādhara*s, etc.) who have mastery over various spirits and spells, much like the *bhūtanātha* figures (human or divine) discussed earlier, form the basis of both the Śaiva and Buddhist tantric traditions. As we will see, the Śaivas develop an entire division of texts known as the *Vidyāpīṭha*, “The Seat of Female Mantra-deities” that features just these sorts of spells, which is paralleled by the Buddhist’s who include within their own esoteric tantric canon the *Vidyādhāra-piṭakas* (Sorcerers’ Basket).²²⁵ While the term *vidyādhara* recedes somewhat in Śaiva texts, it continues to be used in Buddhist and Jain tantric traditions as well as popular fictional literature of the medieval period (e.g., The *Kathāsaritsāgara*).

²²⁵ These arise out of the protective (*rakṣa*) spells tradition (*dhāraṇi*), though follow Śaiva models once canonized.

THE BHŪTAS: EARLY POSSESSING AGENTS FROM THE VEDIC TO EPIC PERIOD

Let us now return to a brief survey of some of the categories of spirit beings who were commonly represented as possession-entities (often marked in texts by some derivative of *āveśa* or *graha*). Most of this survey draws from early Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit narratives of possession, reflecting the fact that these categories were shared by classical religions (i.e., Vedic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain) who often adopted and adapted supernatural beings from the vernacular traditions (and vice versa).²²⁶ As White has recently shown in his most recent 2021 book, *Daemons are Forever: Contacts and Exchanges in the Eurasian Pandemonium*, some of these entities may have even been adapted from a variety of other demonological systems outside of South Asia as well.²²⁷

Though each category of beings has its own specific set of characteristics, their identities are generally fluid, and certain entities gain multiple designations. Additionally, we will see that their incorporation into the classical religious traditions often follows a common pattern – first the fierce spirits are tamed and elevated either as guardian or protector deity, or they are somehow absorbed into one of the “Great Gods” of the traditions (e.g., Śiva or The Goddess). In some cases, originally fierce possessing-entities like Skanda and Hārīti become elevated as *bhūtanāthas*, transforming into Lords over their own hordes of beings. As we will see, it is many of these *bhūtanāthas* who eventually come to occupy the upper echelons of the developing Tantric pantheon in the medieval period.

²²⁶ See Primiano's “Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife” (Western Folklore. 54 (1): (1995): 37-56, concerning the blurred line between official and vernacular traditions.

²²⁷ See David G. White (2021) and his “Dākinī, Yoginī, Pairikā, Strix: Adventures in Comparative Demonology,” *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* Volume 35 (2013): 7-31, for a variety of examples of “Comparative Demonology”.

RĀKṢASAS AND PIŚĀCAS

In the early Vedas, the dangerous *rākṣasas* and flesh-eating *piśācas* are the most common “demons” depicted in the literature, considered some of the lowest entities on the hierarchical scale of beings. In many respects, it is their descriptions that most closely resemble Śiva’s *gaṇas* and *bhūtas* as depicted in the *Sauptikaparvan* of the MBh.

In the ṚV and AV the *rākṣasas*’ appearance is described as animal or bird-like, though they are also said to be shapeshifters and can even appear human-like.²²⁸ They are said to be “raw-flesh eaters”, “hooved” (*śaphā*; ṚV 10.87), sporting monstrous deformities (AV 8.6; 11.9.17), and often depicted as dancing about wildly, making tumultuous noises, and laughing out loud (AV 8.6.10-14). As we’ve seen, they are also known in the early Vedas to be disease-causing demons that infest human dwellings and villages (AV 4.36.8), attack born and unborn children (ṚV 10.162; AV 8.6), and cause madness and insanity (*unmatta*, *manohan*) by possessing their victims (AV 6.11-1; and 5.29.10).

These early ideas about *rākṣasas* continue well into the present day making these figure some of the most stable concepts in South Asia. I will give just one specific example of possession involving a *rākṣasa* here, which can be found in the first chapter of the MBh (1.166–68). This fascinating story involves the legendary King Kalmāśapāda (Speckled Foot) who was cursed by a sage to roam the earth and feed on human flesh, due to some transgression the King committed against him. The curse was also affected by another sage, the famous Viśvamitra, who summons a *rākṣasa* named Kimkara (“slave”) who “seizes”

²²⁸ ṚV 7.104.18-22; 10.87 and AV 4.37.11

(*grhītam*, 1.166.18a) and “possesses” (*rakṣasāviṣṭaḥ* 1.166.27a) the King.²²⁹ Although the account states that the *rākṣasa* had entered inside (*antargata*; 1.166.19c) the king’s body, no explicit signs of possession are given. The only symptom described by the text was that the King became distressed (*pīḍyamāna*), causing him to become aloof (*gatavyatha*; 1.166.27a). This aloofness causes him to disrespect another powerful sage, who then places a second curse upon the already cursed King. It is this second curse that solidifies the King’s possession, resulting in a “complete possession” (denoted by the term *samāviṣṭaḥ*) by the *rākṣasa* (*rakṣobalasangamāviṣṭaḥ*; 1.166.33c). In this state, it is said his senses had become completely “afflicted” by the *rākṣasa* (*rākṣasopahatendriyaḥ*; 1.166.34a), so that he no longer had any agency. As a result, he goes on a terrifying rampage in the forest, devouring and terrorizing humans for the next twelve years. This continues until the sage Vasiṣṭha returns one day and relieves him of his afflictive possession. This, the text states, was done through the utterance of the mantra “*hūm*” (1.168.3c) and by sprinkling him with water purified by sacred mantras (*mantrapūta*; 1.168.4a). As we’ll see, these sorts of practices are common in exorcistic rites throughout *bhūtavidyā*-related literature.²³⁰

Even lower than the *rākṣasas* are the frightful *piśācas* - demonic ghouls who devour (*ghas*) and drink the flesh and blood of their human victims, likened to *soma* stalks that are sapped of their vital fluids.²³¹ References to possession by *piśācas* are mentioned throughout Sanskrit literature, though not as common as many of the other *bhūtas*. The AV, for example, states that *piśācas* can enter the bodies of humans through raw, cooked, or ripened foods, as

²²⁹ Note the similarity of this depiction to *kṛtya*-like practices in which spirits are summoned and sent to attack the maker’s enemy.

²³⁰ Similarly, curses by sages are listed as one of the many causes of possession in the medical literature, an idea which is first found early in the RV, as we saw earlier.

²³¹ *somasyeva jātavedo aṁśūr ā pyāyatām ayām* | AVŚ 5.29.13a

well as milk, uncultivated grains and tainted drinking water (AV 5.29. 6-8) - much in the same way diseases enter into humans. Passages from the Vedic *Śrautasūtras* (*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 4.21-28) further give remedial measures if one becomes possessed by a *piśāca* (*bhūtopasprṣṭa*, literally “touched by the spirit”) during a *soma* sacrifice.²³² In the MBh and medical traditions, mention is made of child-seizing *piśācīs* (such as Śītapūtanā) who commonly possess children. Gonda also mentions sorceristic rites involving the conjuring of *piśāca* spirits in order to make them servants.²³³ Later stories from the *Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa* (2.3.51.53-69) and Kalhaṇa’s *Rājataranṅinī* (c. 1150 CE) 8.114.6 also feature stories involving *piśācāveśa* (“possession by *piśāca*”).

GANDHARVAS AND APSARAS

At the higher ends of the hierarchy of possession-beings, just below *devas*, *ṛṣis* and *pitṛs*, are the supernatural entities known as *gandharvas* and *apsaras*. As a collective, these two groups, along with the *yakṣas* (dryads) and *nāgas* (serpent-beings), are ubiquitous in South Asia, and they may be some of the most popular figures in Indian literature and art. Like Rudra, these figures are also by nature ambiguous, displaying both benevolent and malevolent qualities and deeds.

In general, stories involving *gandharvas* and *apsaras* frequently depict them as youthful and beautiful celestial beings and lovers, fond of games and sports, and masters of music and dancing. Many Vedic verses, in fact, shower praise and adoration upon them as if they were deities (*devas*), and they are said to reside in the “heavenly waters”.²³⁴ Besides

²³² As noted in Smith (2006: 475-476) see note 19 for full reference.

²³³ Gonda (1975: 315) finds mention of this rite in the *Sāmavidhānabrāhmaṇa* (3.7.3).

²³⁴ See for example, AV 2.2 and ŚB 11.6.1

their association with both the waters and the skies (RV 9.86.36; 10.10.4), they are also commonly associated with trees (AV 4.37.4, AV 11.9.24), like their terrestrial counterparts, the *yakṣas* and *nāgas*. Early Vedic references also associate them with the god Soma, as guardians and mediators of the ecstasy-inducing *soma* drink (RV 9.83.4), which they often transfer to the gods, *ṛṣis*, and humans. Also recall their association with the “shamanic” Keśin discussed previously, who is said to follow “the course of the *apsaras* and *gandharvas*” (*apsarasām gandharvāṇām... carāṇe*).²³⁵

One of the earliest speculative associations with *gandharvas* and possession is found in RV 10.85.21-22, where, according to Wendy Doniger, a *gandharva* known as Viśvāvasu “possesses” a girl before their marriage.²³⁶ Although the meaning in this very early reference is obscure and questionable, other references in the AV and *Brāhmaṇas* are more explicit, stating that *gandharvas* seize and possess women (*gandharvāḥ sacate strīyas* AV 4.37.11) and unmarried maidens (*kumārī gandharvagṛhita* (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 5.29; Kauṣītaki *Brāhmaṇa* 2.9) due to their dangerous lust for human females.²³⁷ Their association with erotic activities and marriage ceremonies has led some scholars to believe the *gandharvas* may have originally been fertility deities.²³⁸ The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (PB 19.3.2), for

²³⁵ See full passage earlier in this chapter.

²³⁶ See Doniger (2005: 273 n.21).

²³⁷ The *sūktas* refer to a marriage ritual in which brides are conceived to have been first married three times before marrying their human groom – first to Soma, then a *gandharva*, then to Agni and finally a human (RV 10.85.40-41). Although the meaning is obscure, it is clear from the verses that the *gandharva* must be exorcised from the bride before she can marry her human husband: “Rise up from here, Viśvāvasu: with reverence we worship thee. Seek thou another willing maid, with her husband, leave the bride.” *ud īrṣvāto viśvāvaso namaseḷā mahe tvā | anyām iccha prapharvyaṃ saṃ jāyām patyā sṛja* || RV 10.85.22

²³⁸ See, for example, Gail Hinich Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon: The Development of the Yakṣa in Hinduism and Buddhism*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991): 60 and Per-Johan Norelius, “Strīkāmā Vai Gandharvāḥ - Spirit-Possession, Women, and Initiation in Vedic India.” *Acta Orientalia*, 76, (2015): 13-89.

example, advises people who wish for offspring to make an offering to both the *gandharvas* and their *apsara* consorts.²³⁹

At the same time, these ambiguous "fertility deities" are also known as potential causers of miscarriage, and included in a list of "child-seizers" (*bālagrahas*) in AV 8.6, which states that women-enjoying (*strībhāgān*) *gandharvas* are causers of still-birth, prescribing the use amulets and talismans to drive them away.²⁴⁰ The PB also makes their dual nature explicit, stating that *gandharvas* "preside over man's offspring or childlessness" (*manuṣyasya prajāyā vāprajastāyā veśate* (PB 19.3.2), reminiscent of Rudra's dual-characterization as a disease causer and curer.

In certain passages, the AV lists these two groups alongside more demonic beings such as the *rākṣasas* and *piśacas*, all of which, the texts state, should be forcefully driven away (AVP 1, 29.43; AVŚ 8.6, AVŚ 4.37) through the use of herbs (*agasringī*) and "virile spells" (*brahmaṇā vīryāvata*). This verse also reiterates that *gandharvas* possess especially women (*gandharvaḥ sacate strīyas*) and adds that they are shape-shifters who take on various forms, mostly animal.²⁴¹ Additionally, both the *gandharvas* and the *apsaras* are feared in these texts because they can cause insanity (*unmādayiṣṇavaḥ*, AVP 1.29) and bewilderment (*manomuhan*, AV 2.2.5) when possessing their victims.²⁴² At the same time, they, alongside Agni, Indra, and Rudra, are petitioned to cure a possessed patient from

²³⁹ *gandharvāpsarasām stomach prajākāmo yajeta gandharvāpsaraso vai manuṣyasya prajāyā vāprajastāyā veśate teṣām atra somapīthas tān svena bhāgadheyena prīṇāti te 'smāi tṛptāḥ prītāḥ prajāṃ prayacchanti | PB 19.3.2*

²⁴⁰ *yé amnó jatān mārāyanti sūtikā anuśerate/ strī bhāgān piṅgó gandharvān vāto abhrām ivājatu//.*

²⁴¹ *śvevaikaḥ kapir ivaikaḥ kumāraḥ sarvakeśakaḥ/ priyo dṛṣa iva bhūtvā gandharvaḥ sacate strīyas/ tam ito nāśayāmasi brāhmaṇā vīryāvata || AVŚ 8.6.19*

²⁴² See also TS 3.4.8.4 and JB 2.269–72

insanity.²⁴³ Here we see pre-cursors to later medical and *bhūtavidyā* texts, which expand on this notion of possessing-entities causing mental illness.

Though they are “bewilders”, they also do the exact opposite, bestowing sacred, esoteric, and ritualistic knowledge in their role as intermediaries between the human and divine realms.²⁴⁴ In the ṚV, they are said to be associated with sacred Speech (Vāc; ṚV 10.177.2), have knowledge of the “immortal names” (ṚV 10.123.4; 139.6), and are petitioned to confer their secret knowledge of “the hidden order”.²⁴⁵ As “knowers of the deathless” (*amṛtasya vidvān*) they, along with their consorts, are invoked to “possess” their petitioners with wisdom: “The intelligence that is with the *apsaras*’, the mind that is with the *gandharvas* – that intelligence which is divine or human; may it enter/possess (*āviśatād*) me now!”²⁴⁶ Vedic texts This association with ritualistic and supernatural knowledge continues into Middle Vedic (900-600 BCE) texts, as detailed by Norelius.²⁴⁷

Various Vedic texts also mention that certain humans can actually transform themselves into *gandharvas*. For example, Purūravas from Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.5.1 states that he transformed himself into a *gandharva* through an esoteric rite, though little details of the procedure are given besides the recitation of some unknown mantra and the creation of a sacrificial fire using sticks from the sacred *aśvattha* (*Ficus Religiosa*) tree. This esoteric

²⁴³ See AVŚ 6.111

²⁴⁴ See Norelius (2015) for numerous examples.

²⁴⁵ *yad vā ghā satyam uta yan na vidma*; “that which is reality and which we do not know” (ṚV 10.139.5). See also AV 2.1.2 and ṚV 4.10.2 for other examples.

²⁴⁶ *yā medhā apsarassu gandharveṣu ca yan manaḥ | daivī yā mānuṣī medhā sā mām āviśatād iha* || RVKh 4.8.3. Referenced in Norelius (2015: 24).

²⁴⁷ Norelius (2015) references, for example, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (JB) 1.125-27 and *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* (BS) 18.46133. In one example from the JB, Indra is said to visit a three-headed (*triśīrṣan*) *gandharva* who was said to have knowledge of the future. Norelius further believes that the *gandharvas* and *apsaras*’ divine power of omniscience is due to their station in the highest realms of heaven - where “the heavenly *gandharvas* of the waters watch over mankind” (*nṛcākṣasa*; ṚV 9.86.36). Later Upaniṣads also locate them in an intermediate realm located between the ancestor-realm (*pitṛloka*) in the sky and the realm of the *devas* in the heavens (*svarga*) – see *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6.1

teaching, the text states, was given to him as a boon by the *gandharvas* themselves so that Purūravas could be with his *apsaras* lover.²⁴⁸

EARLY ORACULAR POSSESSION: GANDHARVAS AND YAKṢAS

It is in this literature of the Middle Vedic period where we also find some of the most interesting accounts of how this divine and hidden knowledge was sometimes revealed by the *gandharvas* – through the possession of female mediums who channeled this information to the human realm. These are some of the earliest and most recognizable accounts of “positive” forms of oracular possession amongst the predominantly negative forms of possession we usually see at this time. The most famous of these is in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BAU; 7th-6th century BCE), which chronicles a vigorous debate between the famous sage Yājñavalkya and a number of Vedic scholars on the nature of knowledge, death, liberation, reality, and the Self (*ātman*). In section three of this chapter (BAU 3.3.1), Bhuhyu, one of the protagonists, tells Yājñavalkya how he and other students had come upon the house of Patañcala Kāpya in the region of Madra. While there, Bhuhyu comes upon Patañcala’s young daughter who is said to be “possessed by a *gandharva*” (*gandharva-grhīta*). The students ask the *gandharva*, through the medium of the girl, who he was – to which the *gandharva* replied, “I am Sudhanvan, of the line of Āṅgiras.” Realizing this was a celestial being, the students eagerly interrogate the *gandharva* on various esoteric

²⁴⁸ See Norelius (2015: 32-34) for summary of full story. The later tantric influenced *Nada Bindu Upaniṣad* [NBU], dated to around the turn of the second millennium, does, however, give one method for becoming a *gandharva*. NBU 13 states that if one meditates upon the *vayuveginī* (“The Swift Wind) mantra at the time of death, one will become reborn as a *gandharva*. Mantras are also listed if one wants to be reborn as *yakṣas*, *vidyādhara*, etc., while a separate list of mantras are used to access the higher realms, which results in, according to the text, uniting (*sāyujyam*) with various gods (*devas*) such as Indra, Viṣṇu, or Rudra (NBU 15). As mentioned earlier, these early ideas of transforming oneself into a divinity through the use of mantra are foundational to tantric practice, especially in deity possession rites.

topics, which he reveals to them through the body of the young girl. With this supernatural knowledge, Bhuhyu had hoped to defeat the sage Yājñavalkya with a question he could not answer, but of course the wise Yājñavalkya, already privy to all sorts of divine knowledge, soundly defeats him.

Several sections later in the same chapter (BAU 3.7), Yājñavalkya is again questioned, this time by Uddālaka, who, as it turns out, also had stayed at the house of Patañcala Kāpya where he had been studying scriptures on sacrifice. Rather than Patañcala's daughter, however, it is his wife who was possessed, this time by a *gandharva* known as Kabandha, who claimed to be the son of Atharvan. In this story, it is the *gandharva* who does the questioning, testing Patañcala Kāpya and his students on various esoteric subjects regarding the ultimate nature of reality and the “inner controller” (*antaryāmin*) of all worlds and all beings. Not knowing the answers, the *gandharva* Kabandha imparts this divine knowledge to the *guru* and his students, through the body of the guru's wife. Like Bhuhyu in the previous story, Uddālaka tries to use this divine knowledge against Yājñavalkya in the debate, but also ultimately fails against the all-knowing Yājñavalkya.

The significance of the two possessed women channeling *gandharvas* who trace their lineage to the Atharvans and Āṅgirasas should not be lost – the AV is a text, as we've seen, where possession and acts of magic and sorcery abound.²⁴⁹ This account also proves that this sort of oracular possession was known and perhaps even commonplace, due to the students

²⁴⁹ There is, indeed, a sage Sudhanvan from the line of Rṣi Āṅgiras found in the RV and AV, though he is referenced solely in regard to his three sons, collectively known as the celestial Ribhus who were said to have attained their divine status through “good works”. On this Griffith (1895: 270n.3) writes, “Through their assiduous performance of good works they obtained divinity, and became entitled to receive praise and adoration, They are supposed to dwell in the solar sphere, and there is an indistinct identification of them with the rays of the sun: but, whether typical or not, they prove the admission, at an early date, of the doctrine, that men might become divinities.” Kabandha, on the other hand, was the son of Atharvan and the pupil of the illustrious sage Sumanta, who taught him the Atharva Veda. This knowledge was eventually passed on to his pupils, eventually leading to the two primary recensions of the AV we have today.

and Yājñavalkya’s stoic response and acceptance of this phenomenon as valid divine knowledge.

In three other *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Aitareya* (AB 5:29), *Kausītaki* (KB 2:9), and *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇas* (JB 2.126), we also find brief mention of *gandharvas* possessing maidens, though no specific names are given. In the first two, the AB and KB, the term *kumārī gandharvagr̥hītā* (“a *gandharva* seizing a maiden”) is employed, while in the JB the term *gandharviṇī* (literally, “having a *gandharva*”), is used to refer to the possessed woman. All three accounts are essentially variations of the same story, involving a young female medium possessed by a *gandharva*, who then provides divine knowledge regarding sacrificial rites.

In JB 2.126, the story begins with a *brahmin* named Udara Śāṅḍilya who wishes to secretly perform a dangerous one-day *soma* sacrifice. He does not tell anyone about his intentions, so he is greatly surprised when he receives a warning from his wife, who is “possessed by a *Gandharva*” (*gandharviṇī*), not to perform such a “dreadful” (*dāruṇa*) rite. The astonished Udara Śāṅḍilya asks her how she could have known this, and she replies that she had been possessed by a *gandharva* (*gandharva upanyeti*) who had relayed this message to her. Udara then tells his wife to ask the *gandharva* whether he will accomplish the sacrifice or not. She asks the *gandharva*, who explains to her the dangers of this particular sacrifice, which she then repeats back to her husband. Udara takes heed and ends up not performing the sacrifice.

What is interesting about this episode is that although the wife is “possessed” by the *gandharva*, there is no explicit change in her behavior, appearance, or identity. The possession is so subtle, apparently, that even the husband does not realize the *gandharva* is inhabiting her body until she reveals the divine knowledge. In comparison to other narratives

we've seen, and will continue see, she seems to be displaying a variant form of possession involving a *gandharva* who channels information through her but does not necessarily have control over her body or any effect on her individual consciousness. This may be similar in some ways to the *ṛṣis* who channeled the Vedas, as discussed previously, or akin to the modern phenomena of New Age channeling. Regardless, in other accounts, it is implied that the *gandharva* have completely taken over the consciousness of their hosts, since no mention of the women themselves is given. In this story, however, it appears the wife is fully conscious while possessed, and simply acts as the medium between her husband and the *gandharva*.

OTHER EARLY REFERENCES TO ORACULAR POSSESSION

Evidence of oracular possession is also seen in early Buddhist texts of the same period. Although spirit possession and allied “magical” practices were usually disparaged in most Buddhist (and Brahmin/Jain) texts of this time, their documentation in the texts still serves as important evidence of the existence of these practices during this early period. One of the earliest is the *Dīghanikāya*, "The Collection of Long Discourses", composed in the first centuries before the Common Era. Here, in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, we find mention of three types of divination (Pali: *pañha*; Sanskrit: *praśna*) in a long list of “wrong livelihoods” and “low arts” (Pali: *micchājīvena jīvika/tiracchānavijjāya*), which the texts states should *not* be practiced. For these early Buddhist authors, “diviners” (Pali: *nemittikā*; *Skt*: *naimitta*) and “exorcists” (Pali: *nippesikā*; *Skt*: *niṣpeṣa*), among others, were considered “tricksters”

(*kuhaka*).²⁵⁰ The list includes all manners of magical arts, including fortune-telling, prophesying, palmistry, dream interpretation, divining by means of omens and signs, blood-sacrifices to gods, the knowledge of charms to lay demons in a cemetery (*sivavijjā*), curing people possessed by ghosts (*bhūtavijjā*), curing snake bites, the use of venom and other poisons (*bhurivijjā* and *ahivijjā*), reciting spells to bind or paralyze, to make another lose control, to bring on deafness, etc.²⁵¹

Most relevant to our discussion, however, is the inclusion of the three divination forms - (1) “Divination with Mirrors” (*ādāsapañha*), which is glossed in its commentary as “Obtaining Oracular Answers By Means of a Magic Mirror”, (2) “Divination Using A Virgin” (*kumāripañha*), glossed as “Obtaining Oracular Answers Through A Possessed Girl” and finally, (3) “Divination with Gods” (*devapañha*) or “Obtaining Oracular Answers From a God”.²⁵² Though these acts were looked down upon, this early list attests to the sorts of practices performed by various groups of magicians and sorcerers current in that time. It is clear these types of magical practices have a long history in the sub-continent, some of which are still preserved in various *bhūtavidyā*-related and tantric texts, and some which are still practiced throughout South and East Asia, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

²⁵⁰ See *Dīghanikāya* 1.20 in T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Dighanikaya: Dialogues of the Buddha*. (Pali Text Society London: Luzac, 1956): 15. According to *The Purana Index* (1951) the term *kuhaka* also refer to a Nāga chieftan. Dyczkowski also notes that a Śakta Vāma (left-handed) Tantra known as the *Kuhaka Tantra* which is mentioned in the *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasamuccaya* - see Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1988): 34.

²⁵¹ See *Dīghanikāya* 1.9.1-11.22 for list, which is listed as DN 1.20-1.27 in Rhys-Davids, (1956: 16-24).

²⁵² *Dīrghāgama* 1.11: ... *micchājīvena jīvika kappenti seyyathīda ... ādāsapañha kumāripañha devapañha... iti.* DA I.97: *ādāsapañhanti ādāse devataṃ otāretvā pañhapucchanaṃ | kumārikapañhanti kumārikāya sarīre devataṃ otāretvā pañhapucchanaṃ | devapañhanti dāsiyā sarīre devataṃ otāretvā pañhapucchanaṃ.* Translation based on Rhys-Davids (1956)

Oracular possession and divination are also found in an early text of the Jainas as well, namely the *Paṇhāvāyaraṇa* (Skt. *Praśnavyākaraṇa*).²⁵³ Although an edition of this text is still forthcoming, Acharya has recently discovered a 12th century Prakrit manuscript of it in Nepal and has confirmed this to be the original form of the text, rather than the one found now in the Jain canon of the same name. As this text is believed to be one of the twelve *Aṅgas* that make up the earliest Jain canon, it is possible this text was composed around the beginning of the Common Era, concurrent with the Buddhist *Dīghanikāya*. The text deals with the following forms of divination: divination involving a deity's entrance into a linen cloth (*khoma-pasiṇāiṃ*) or some soft object (*komala-pasiṇāiṃ*), a mirror (*addāga-pasiṇāiṃ*), the surface of one's thumb (*aṃguṭṭha-pasiṇāiṃ*), or the surface of one's arm (*bāhu-pasiṇāiṃ*). The *Samavāyāṅgasūtra* (145), a later *sūtra* discussing the *Paṇhāvāyaraṇa*, also adds a sword, a jewel, and the sun as objects that can be used for this type of divination.²⁵⁴

Ronald Davidson has also pointed to the oracular use of *yakṣas*, a category of spirit beings we will discuss next, in early Jain and Buddhist texts by a class of diviners known as *ikṣaṇikās*, literally “seers” who “finds or sees objects or events distant in time and space”.²⁵⁵ They are mentioned in the *Arthaśāstra* (2nd century BCE-3rd century CE) alongside fortunetellers, interpreters of omens, astrologers, and other “magicians” of various types.²⁵⁶ In the Pali *Māṅgulitthisutta*, an *ikṣaṇikā* is depicted, though she seems to have become conflated with the *yakṣa* she is employing in a similar way to the *yātudhānas* and *yātus* in the early Vedas. The *ikṣaṇikā* here is described as flying through the sky, screaming, foul

²⁵³ See Diwakar Acharya, "The Original Paṇhāvāyaraṇa/Praśnavyākaraṇa Discovered", *International Journal of Jaina Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 6 1-10 (2007)."

²⁵⁴ See Acharya (2007: 2-3) for full reference

²⁵⁵ Davidson (2017: 188).

²⁵⁶ *Arthaśāstra* 13.1.7

smelling, and of jaundiced complexion.²⁵⁷ Another *Jātaka* text mentions *ikṣaṇikās* as being associated with magical and apotropaic rites involving corpses and cremation grounds, and employed by the royal family.²⁵⁸

Vasubandhu’s well-known commentary, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (4th or 5th century CE), also discusses an *ikṣaṇikā vidyā* (“spell”), which gives its wielder the ability to read another person’s mind (*paracittam jānāti*).²⁵⁹ He states that if one studies the *ikṣaṇikāśāstra*, one would be “capable of interpreting signs: his knowledge of the mind of another is produced through reflection; so too one can know the mind of another through mantras.”²⁶⁰ Ultimately, Vasubandhu says that these are inferior methods when compared to the technique of meditation (*dhyāna*). He also argues that most humans can only gain this ability through meditation or ritual action, it is not something innate. In contrast, he states gods and hell-beings (*nārakā*) do have this ability innately, which may help explain why ritualists may have been using these types of being in oracular and divination rituals of this sort.²⁶¹ No explanation is given why this ability is innate in these beings, however.

More descriptive accounts of *ikṣaṇikās* are found in later texts, which describe the female seer as using a bell to invoke a *yakṣa* who then whispers the desired answers into the ears of the seer.²⁶² A verse in the *Bṛhatkalpabhāṣya* (v. 1312), for example, describes the *ikṣaṇikā* in this way, as well as Kṣemakīrti’s 13th century commentary, which adds that the

²⁵⁷ In the *Maṅgaliṭṭhisutta* from *Saṅyuttanikāya* II.260 See Davidson (2017: 9) for full reference

²⁵⁸ *Asilakkhaṇajātaka* (no. 126) – see Davidson (2017: 11) for Sanskrit reference.

²⁵⁹ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press. 1988): VII.47, 424–5 - *asti hi ca gāndhārī nāma vidyā yayāphāśena gacchati ikṣaṇikā ca nāma vidyā yayā paracittam jānāti* | For some reason Davidson, (2002: 145) translates this as knowledge which “bring visions of the future”, though the Sanskrit clearly says otherwise.

²⁶⁰ Vasubandhu (1988: 1179)

²⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 1179-1180

²⁶² According to Davidson (2017: 7) this is mentioned in Jñānasāgara’s 1383 CE commentary, the *Āvaśyakaniryukty-avacūrṇi*.

yakṣa was clan deity (*kuladevatā*), and the seer (*ikṣāṇikā*) a member of the outcaste *ḍombī* community, perhaps giving some insight into the origins of this practice.²⁶³

However, besides these passing remarks, there is little descriptive or prescriptive evidence of these types of oracular and divination practices in these early texts until many centuries later in the Tantric literature. In the tantras we find mention of mirror divination and the practice of *svasthāveśa* ("healthy possession"), which generally involves possession of young girls and boys who act as mediums for possessing spirits. Smith, Strickmann, and others have traced how these, through various Hindu and Buddhist tantras, travelled throughout South, Southeast, and East Asia and beyond.²⁶⁴ Variants of this possession form can still be seen throughout these regions even today, especially in Nepal, Tibet, Kerala, and China.²⁶⁵ We will return to a more in-depth look at these phenomena in subsequent chapters.

YAKṢAS AND NĀGAS

We now return to the popular entities known as the *yakṣas*, who we just saw mentioned in relation to early oracular and divination practices. *Yakṣas* (along with *nāgas*) are some of the most commonly mentioned spirit-beings known to possess humans, and their presence in pan-Asian mythology is ubiquitous. They are generally considered lower in the hierarchy than the *gandharvas* and *apsaras* who are often described as "celestial" demi-gods, while *yakṣas* and *nāgas* are essentially their more terrestrial counterparts. They are often depicted in the Epic literature as nature spirits who inhabit trees, rivers, oceans, rock mounds,

²⁶³ *ibid.* p.7-8

²⁶⁴ See Smith (2006: 421-448) and Strickmann (2005)

²⁶⁵ Acharya (2007) reports that in Nepal, Newari Tantric priests still practice variant forms of these types of divination wherein they smear collyrium or similar substance on a mirror or a young boy or girl's thumb/palm and ask the boy or girl to see things on that blackened surface and report

and the numerous sacred sites that fill the cosmological landscape of South and East Asia.²⁶⁶ Much of the material on *nāga*-possession is found within the medical texts, especially Tibetan, so my focus for now will primarily be pre-Ayurvedic examples of *yakṣa*-possession. We will return to some examples of *nāga*-possession in later chapters.

The earliest references to the *yakṣas* are found in the Vedas, where they are also associated with the natural world, though in a much more abstract, cosmic, and metaphysical sense. One of the earliest references in the AV, for example, is the “The Great *Yakṣa*”, who is said to be “steeped in concentration on the surface of the water in the middle of the world - on him the various gods are fixed like branches around the trunk of a tree.”²⁶⁷ Conceptually, *yakṣa* refers here more to the idea of a Great Spirit, similar to early ideas of the supreme Brahman. This is a rare reference, however, as most other verses in the early Vedas use the term in the plural and list them alongside other groups like the *gandharvas*, *apsaras*, and *rudras*, as well as deities such as Agni, Rudra, and Soma. By the time of the *Upaniṣads*, references to *yakṣas* are almost always in the plural, unless addressing a specifically named *yakṣa*, and generally comes to take on the meaning of a lower level of “spirits”, similar in many ways to the generic term category of *bhūtas*.

The *yakṣas* in early Vedic texts seem to have a close affinity with the *gandharvas* and *apsaras*, especially due to their associations with water and trees, and their fondness for music, singing, dancing, and play (e.g., AV 4.34.7; TS 3.4.8.1). The three groups often become conflated in later Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic texts, and over time the more popular

²⁶⁶ See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1931); R. N. Misra, *Yaksha Cult and Iconography*. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981); and Sutherland (1991) for numerous references.

²⁶⁷ A very early reference in the RV (VII.61.5) has been referred to by De Caroli (2004: 25) as one of the first references to possession by a *yakṣa*, based upon a quote by VS Agarwala who reads into it that the “Yakṣa should not possess the body of the worshippers.” My own reading of the verse does not see such a reference, though their interpretation should not be outright excluded.

yakṣas and *yakṣīs* come to functionally replace and supersede the more Brahmanical *gandharvas* and *apsaras*.²⁶⁸ Conceptually the boundaries between them, as well as the *rākṣasa*, often disappear. This makes sense since most typologies place the *yakṣas* in intermediary regions between the celestial *gandharva/apsara* realm and the more terrestrial and demonic realms of the *rākṣasas*. This placement also helps to explain their dual natures, as it is clear in the literature that they take on benevolent and malevolent characteristics and qualities from both groups. In fact, inter-breeding among these varied groups was sometimes seen in the literature. Hopkins, for example, writes:

. . .the interrelation of different groups is so close that marriage connections constantly occur... so that the offspring are, in terms of social life, half-breeds. No group, again, is wholly evil or wholly good. All that can be said is that each is prevailingly good or bad.²⁶⁹

Many scholars have been frustrated by the apparent fluidity of the designation *yakṣa*, as it comes to be used interchangeably with a range of other beings within the literature - especially *rākṣasas* or *gandharvas*, as we mentioned, but also *āsuras*, *piśācas* (ghouls), and even *pretas* (departed spirits) among the Buddhists.²⁷⁰ Throughout the post-Vedic Brahmanic, Buddhist, and Jain literature, the use of the term *yakṣa* often served as a generic catch-all term for popular local deities, demi-gods (*devatās*), and spirits who were worshipped outside of their own traditions. In many cases, these were often "high gods" of South Asia India before official Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions demoted and demonized them. This included a wide array of nature spirits, fertility demi-gods, tutelary deities,

²⁶⁸ Coomaraswamy (1931: 34) writes, "Gandharvas and Apsarases appear to have been at first genii of vegetation and fertility, connected with Varuna and Soma, and when later they are reduced to the status of attendants on Indra, they are replaced, functionally, by the Yaksas and Yaksis. Yaksas and Yaksis are identical with Gandharvas and Apsarases as originally conceived..."

²⁶⁹ E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1915): 38.

²⁷⁰ DeCaroli (2004: 12) also mentions this confusing blurring of terminology, invoking stories where a *yakṣa* turns into *piśāca* or in Jātakas *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa* are used interchangeably. Similarly, the Lord of *yakṣas*, Kubera, is here referred to as the Lord of Vidyādharas.

guardian spirits, demonic obstructers, and ghosts. In the Vedic *Gr̥hya Sūtras*, *yakṣas* were depicted simply as popular demi-gods (*devatās*), invoked, and worshipped primarily for worldly favors and boons.²⁷¹

Coomaraswamy and others have also pointed out how the extensive and ancient archeological evidence of *yakṣa* sculptures and shrines represent some of the earliest examples of icon-worship in India. Many of these early *yakṣa* shrines were often marked simply by a stone slab placed in a forest grove, on a sacred mountain, or near a river, as is often the case for many local spirit shrines even today. *Yakṣas* also featured prominently in India's oldest surviving Buddhist shrines (*caityas*) at Bharhut and Sanchi.²⁷² In these early temples, *yakṣas* were usually depicted with animal or nature-oriented features, with names such as “Elephant-eared” (*gajakarṇa*), “Pig-eared” (*varāhakarṇa*), “Flower-faced” (*puṣpānana*), Tree-dwellers (*vṛkṣāvāsi*), etc.²⁷³ Misra believes many of these early images of *yakṣas* became later prototypes for sculptural and textual descriptions of Śiva's retinue of *gaṇas*.²⁷⁴ Their incorporation in early Buddhist shrines speaks, of course, to their great importance and widespread worship as *devas* or *devatās* among the general population.

Since at least the 2nd century BCE, *yakṣas* were known to “possess” (i.e., *bhavanti* or *āviṣṭa*) humans and are listed in the Hindu *Mānava Gr̥hya Sūtras* (MGS 2.14) alongside groups of other possessing-entities including *rākṣasas*, *jambhakas* (“crushers” or “devourers”), Buddhist *lokapālas* (world-guardians), and *vināyakas* (“removers”), among others.²⁷⁵ Interestingly enough, Mahāsenā (Skanda) and Mahādeva (Rudra/Śiva) are also

²⁷¹ Sutherland (1991: 93) mentions a number of *Gr̥hya Sūtra* references

²⁷² Coomaraswamy (1931: 48)

²⁷³ *ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Misra (1981: 125-126)

²⁷⁵ See Krishan, Y. “Vināyaka as Vighnakartā in the *Mānavagr̥hyasūtra* and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*: A Comparative Study,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 72-73, No. 1-4, Amrtamahotsava (1992): 363-367 for Sanskrit references.

included in this list, suggesting these groups of possessing entities have been closely associated with these two *yakṣas/devas* since at least this early time – an association, which continues into all subsequent South and East Asian traditions and literature. The mention of *vināyakas* is significant too, as this is one of the most common epithets of Śiva son and Skanda’s elephant-headed brother, Gaṇeśa, a figure we will return to shortly.

Mention of *yakṣas* and descriptions of *yakṣa*-cult activities, often characterized by their blood sacrifices, become more frequent throughout the Buddhist Jātaka, Dharmāśāstra, Epic, and Purāṇic literature.²⁷⁶ The MBh, for example, gives a long list of *yakṣa*-sacred centers (*yakṣa-tīrthas* or *yakṣa-sthānas*) that were visited for various worldly aims, such as obtaining offspring or curing disease.²⁷⁷ Similarly the 3rd-4th century CE proto-tantric *Mahāmāyūrī*, a Buddhist book of spells, lists almost a hundred different regional *yakṣas*, which included Hindu deities such as Śiva-Mahākāla and Skanda, who are described as presiding *yakṣas* of their particular locales at that time.²⁷⁸ Their mention supports the idea that, much like today, every town and village in ancient India had its own shrines to local tutelary-deities tied to region or land.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* also gives its own list of *yakṣas*, which included deities such as Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa), Nandī, Mahākāla, Maheśvara, Ghaṇṭākarna, and Harikeśa, among many others, as well as narratives describing how they were eventually brought into the Śaiva-fold,

²⁷⁶ See for example, Manusmṛti XI.96, which states that intoxicants, meat, and liquor, are the food-offerings (*balī*) for *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas* and *piśācas* (See Sanskrit in Olivelle 2005: 854), the Dummedha (no.50) Ayakūta (no.347) and Sutano (no. 398) Jātaka (see Cowell 1895), various references in MBh, and the Matsya Purāṇa 180.9–10. See Chandra, Moti. 1954. "Some Aspects of Yaksha Cult in Ancient India". *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*: (Mumbai, 1954): 53.

²⁷⁷ We find these throughout chapter three of the MBh, the *Āraṇyakaparvan*.

²⁷⁸ In this case Banaras and Rohitaka respectively, see Chandra (1954: 53). For the complete list of *yakṣas* in the *Mahāmāyūrī* see Sylvain Lévi, *Le Catalogue Géographique des Yakṣa dans la Mahāmāyūrī*, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1915): 19–139.

either as some aspect or manifestation of the great God Śiva, or as one of his *gaṇas*.²⁷⁹

Today all these beings are considered gods in their own right, or were absorbed into the larger figure of Rudra-Śiva. Many were also known as possession entities and associated with typical *bhūtanātha* activities (e.g., exorcism, healing, sorcery etc.), some which continues to this day. Even the relatively little known Harikeśa Yakṣa is still worshipped today near Varanasi as Harasū Baram, where his primary role is to exorcise ghosts and demons who afflict his devotees. He also has an oracular role and is said to possess men and women and use them as mediums to speak to their communities about the future and past.²⁸⁰

The *yakṣas*' connections with their *rākṣasa* counterparts become particularly strong in Epic period texts.²⁸¹ Based upon references in this literature, Hopkins states that the *rākṣasas* were regarded “as brothers or cousins of the Yakṣas, the former being prevailingly evil but sometimes good, the latter prevailingly good but sometimes evil.”²⁸² He bases this upon the Rāmāyaṇa, where we are told the leader of the *yakṣas* is Lord Kubera, the half-brother of the great *rākṣasa* king Rāvaṇa, who himself was the son of a *rākṣasa* King and *yakṣa* princess. As stated earlier, the blurring of these two categories is further seen in Buddhist contexts, where *rākṣasas* were often identified with and supplanted by the *yakṣas* and *guhnyakas* (“the secret ones”). Numerous tales are also found in the early *Jātakas* that describe monstrous and terrifying *yakṣas* who continuously torment both the monastic and larger lay community. In the *Sutano Jātaka*, for example, mention is made of a *yakkha* named Makhādeva who

²⁷⁹ MP 183.63-66 as seen in Chandra (1954: 53)

²⁸⁰ *ibid.* (1954: 54)

²⁸¹ As White (2003: 64) points out, an etymological association is even made between these two in one of their creation legends in the Rāmāyaṇa. According to this tale, after Prajāpati, the creator God, had created the *devas* (gods), demons (*asuras*), ancestors (*pitṛs*), and humans, he wanted to create beings who could protect the waters, but he also became hungry at the same time. As a result, some of the created beings that arose from this desire, said “*rakṣāmaḥ*” (“let us protect”) while others said “*yakṣāmaḥ*” (“let us gobble”)—and so the two were called Rākṣasas and Yakṣas, respectively.

²⁸² Hopkins (1913 :59)

terrorizes a kingdom, demanding a human sacrifice (with a bowl of rice!) every day.²⁸³ The *Valāhassa Jātaka*, noted by David White, also mentions fierce female *yakṣīs* who were versed in the art of magic and seduce their victims before consuming them.²⁸⁴

Additionally in the early Buddhist *Dīgha Nikāya*, *yakṣas* (Pali: *yakkhas*) were explicitly known as “seizers and possessors” (*ayaṃ yakkho gaṇhati ayaṃ yakkho āviśati*; *Dīgha Nikāya*, 3.204.17). Though most descriptions of *yakṣas* in this period depict them as cruel, monstrous beings that consume flesh/blood and haunt humans, they, much like the *gandharvas*, were also known to be holders of supernatural knowledge.²⁸⁵ Like *gandharva*-possession, possession by a *yakṣa* was not always a wholly negative affair. In the early *Mahāummagga Jātaka*, for example, a somewhat comical story is told of a character who secretly admits to his peers that he becomes possessed regularly by a *yakṣa* known as Naradeva (*naradevo nāma yakkho gāṇhati*), which causes him to “bark like a mad dog.”²⁸⁶

Another fascinating story is found in the 5th century Pali commentary *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* by Buddhaghosa, which tells of a female *yakṣa* who possesses her former child, Sānu, in order to set him on the Buddhist path. According to this narrative, Sānu’s current human mother took him as a child to become a novice monk, but upon reaching adulthood he became discontent and desired the life of a layman. He returned to his birth home, whereupon his human mother tries to dissuade him from breaking his vows, but she fails. Sānu’s former mother in a past life, had been reborn as a *yakṣa*, though she was still a follower of the Buddhist *dharma* and was apparently keeping tabs on her former son. After

²⁸³ See Jātaka 398 in E. B. Cowell, Francis, H.T. and Neil. R.A. *The Jatakas, Vol. III*, (London: Luzac & Company, 1897): 201-203.

²⁸⁴ White (2003: 189-190) and Misra (1981: 154).

²⁸⁵ See Candra (1954: 45). This is also conceptually the same as *yakṣa* depictions in the MBh, as in the famous scene between Yudishthira and the riddling *yakṣa* of the river in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* 297.

²⁸⁶ *Mahāummagga Jātaka* (no. 546) in E. B. Cowell, and Francis, H.T., *The Jatakas, Vol. V*, (London: Luzac & Company, 1905).

perceiving Sānu’s discontent, she decides to possess (*gahitabhāva*) his body in order to help try change his mind. According to Burlingame and Lanman’s translation, “the ogress went and took possession of the body of the novice, twisted his neck, and felled him to the ground. With rolling eyes and foaming mouth, he lay quivering on the earth.”²⁸⁷ In this state of possession, the *yakṣa*-mother warns Sānu not to leave the monastic order and then releases him. Sānu, now awake, though thoroughly confused, asked those who surrounded him, “A moment ago I was sitting in a chair...but now I am lying on the ground. What does this mean??”, implying that he had lost consciousness while possessed. His human mother then continued her discourse on the evil consequences of returning to layman life after being a monk, using his possession as an example. As a result, Sānu came to his senses, renounces the householder life, and takes full ordination into the Buddhist Order.²⁸⁸

We find many interesting stories of possessing *yakṣas* (Pkt. *jakkha*) among the Jains as well. In two examples from the *Bṛhatkalpabhāṣya*, the possessing agents of the story were said to have originally been humans who were somehow mistreated and then reborn as *yakṣas*, who then return to harass their former oppressors by possessing them.²⁸⁹ These involve an ill-treated servant who possesses his former cruel master and a slighted wife who possessed her husband’s second wife.²⁹⁰ From the *Antagaḍa-Dasāo* (1st-2nd century BCE) we also find a fascinating Jain conversion tale involving an iron-club wielding *yakṣa* named

²⁸⁷ Burlingame, Eugene Watson. *Buddhist Legends: Translated from the Original Pali Text of the Dhammapada Volume 30*. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1921): 208.

²⁸⁸ See Burlingame (1921: 207-211) for his translation of this section.

²⁸⁹ This idea also enters into Hindu conceptions in later texts such as the KSS and contemporary traditions even today. This is especially true in South India where Buddhist and Jain still have strong influence. Smith mentions that in Kerala “Yakṣis are ghosts,” women who have died by accident, beating, suicide, or miscarriage, and who prey on men to avenge themselves for male abuse from previous lives.” Smith 2006:261. This is corroborated in Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence, and Worship of the Goddess Kālī*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁹⁰ See Chandra (1954: 47) - the sources he gives are *Bṛhatkalpabhāṣya* 6260 and 6250

Moggarapāṇi, whose wooden image was said to reside in a shrine just outside the city of Rājagrha (modern day Rajgir, Bihar).²⁹¹ This also happens to be one of the earliest textual references to the use of wooden statues, giving credence to the idea that image-worship first began among *yakṣa*-related cults.²⁹² Moggarapāṇi's shrine was said to be visited daily by one of his devotees, a garland-maker named Ajjunae (Arjuna). One day, in front of Moggarapāṇi's statue, Ajjunae was horribly beaten and tied up by a mob of bandits, who then proceed to rape his wife. Naturally traumatized by these events, Ajjunae is about to curse Moggarapāṇi when the *yakṣa* himself stirs from the image and possesses the body of Ajjunae. Similar to Śiva's possession of Aśvatthāman in the MBh, Ajjunae is also endowed with the *yakṣas* supernatural powers while possessed and begins a murderous rampage of revenge against the bandits. In the confusion, he accidentally kills his wife, leading to a blood frenzy and tragic slaughter of the rest of the inhabitants of Rājagrha, killing six men and one woman every day. The *yakṣa*-possessed Ajjunae is eventually confronted by a Jain merchant who is able to thwart his attacks thanks to the powerful Jain vows (*mahavrata*s) he has taken and by evoking prayers to Mahāvīra. The power of these acts forces the *yakṣa* to leave the body of Ajjunae. Upon regaining consciousness, the confused and distressed Ajjunae realizes what he had done and immediately joins the merchant who was on his way to visit to a Jain ascetic. Upon hearing the ascetics teachings, Ajjunae converts to Jainism and, as retribution, vows to continually offer himself to abuse from the families of his dead victims. Keeping this vow, he eventually becomes liberated.

²⁹¹ See Barnett, L. D. *The Antagaḍa-dasāo and Aṇuttarovavāiyya-dasāo*. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1907): 85-93 for full translation of this tale.

²⁹² See Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956): 229.

CONVERTING THE YAKṢAS

On one hand, the Jain authors of this story recognize the real power of the more ancient and popular *yakṣas* which populated the South Asian landscape, while at the same time showing the very real dangers of invoking these sorts of ambiguous beings. The moral of the story, however, is that this danger is ultimately counteracted against and supplanted by the superior power of the Jain tradition, resulting ultimately in Ajjunae's conversion to Jainism. This sort of story follows the same basic format of Buddhist (and Hindu) conversion tales wherein popular non-Buddhist spirits and demons of various sorts are somehow defeated, transformed, and then converted to followers and protectors of the Buddha *dharma*. In this particular case, however, it is Ajjunae, after being possessed by the *yakṣa*, who converts to Jainism and not the *yakṣa* himself.

An example of a typical Buddhist conversion tale can be found in the *Mūlasarvastivāda Vinaya* (MV), written around the turn of the Common Era.²⁹³ The story begins just outside Mathurā with the townsfolk asking the Buddha to subdue a malignant *yakṣa* named Gardabha (literally "The Donkey"), stating, "The Lord has subdued many cruel *nāgas* and wicked *yakṣas*", implying that by this time subjugating spirits was a well-known activity of the Buddha. The townspeople accused the *yakṣa* of taking away their newborn children, indicating Gardabha was a garden-variety *bālagraha*, a "seizer of children".²⁹⁴ In the MV version, however, Gardabha's conversion rather than destruction becomes the preferred strategy for Buddhists when dealing with these sorts of dangerous entities. Here,

²⁹³ See summaries of this story in Granoff (2003: 189-190) and Decaroli (2004: 38-40). See Bagchi, *Mūlasarvastivādivinayavastu*, (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1967) for Pali.

²⁹⁴ P. S. Jaini, *Collected papers on Buddhist Studies*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2001): 358. Granoff (2003: 190) has pointed out how this same evil *yakṣa* is also mentioned in a coeval Vaiṣṇava text, the *Harivaṃsa* (Chapter 57), though here the demon-yakṣa is eventually killed by Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's brother

the Buddha admonishes and commands the evil *yakṣa* and his hordes to cease their destructive activities. The *yakṣa* Gardabha agrees to stop afflicting and killing the children of Mathurā, on the condition that the townspeople create a Buddhist shrine (*vihāra*) in his name. The people agree and create five hundred *vihāras* (shrines) for Gardabha and his retinue. In the same way, the story states twenty-five hundred more *vihāras* were eventually constructed, converting numerous other regional *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* into protectors of the Buddhist community.

This conversion and assimilation of dangerous spirit beings and local cult deities into protectors of the faith becomes a dominant pattern and paradigm in Buddhist accounts, especially as Buddhism began to spread throughout South Asia. On this, De Caroli writes:

The Buddhist desire to assist all beings, including spirit-deities, created a social function for the *saṃgha*. By turning spirit-deities to good purposes, the monks created a *de facto* role for themselves as mediators, capable of interceding between the public and potentially dangerous spirit-deities. Yet it also seems clear that this monastic role as spiritual intermediaries had its price. The *saṃgha* had obligations to these spirit-deities, and many members of the monastic community believed that they risked dire consequences if these responsibilities were ever ignored.²⁹⁵

Essentially, by adopting local non-Buddhist deities and spirits, the Buddhists also brought in their cult devotees into the Buddhist-fold, making the monastery and its officiates more functional for the needs of the larger community. As DeCaroli points out, the lay-community came to the Buddhist *saṃgha* for primarily two reasons: merit-making activities (e.g. donations, prayers etc.) or when they needed help in dealing with supernatural beings (healing, exorcism, propitiation, etc.).²⁹⁶ Over time, and with the rise of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, many of these same *yakṣas* and other spirit deities were often supplanted by or, in

²⁹⁵ DeCaroli (2004: 174)

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

some cases, even transformed into *bodhisattvas*, who began to gain more prominence and fulfilled similar functions.

THE RISE OF THE BHŪTANĀTHAS

HĀRĪTĪ: CONVERTING THE MOTHER OF DEMONS

In a Chinese Buddhist version of the *Mūlasarvastivāda Vinaya* (8th century CE), we find mention of another important child-seizing *yakṣa* named Hārītī (“Kidnapper”), also known as Bhūtamātā, “The Mother of Spirits”, whose conversion to Buddhism and transformation to a child-bestowing goddess, follows a similar pattern to the *yakṣa* Gardabha just described.²⁹⁷ Her first mention in China, however, is centuries earlier in the *Sutra of Miscellaneous Jewels*²⁹⁸ a Buddhist text translated around 472 C.E. In China, she was worshipped as *Guizi mu* (“Mother of the Demon-Children”), *Jiuzi Mu* (“Mother of the Nine Children”) and *Guanyin*, the “Giver of Children”.²⁹⁹ According to David White, Hārītī is also found in the sixth-century *Harṣacarita* (4.6–7) and can be identified with *Jātahāriṇī* (“Child-Snatcher”) of the *Kāśyapa Saṃhitā* (KS), where she is described as “one who feeds on flesh” (*piṣitāśanā*) and is an agent of miscarriage who feeds on unborn and newborn children.³⁰⁰ In both traditions, Hārītī originally starts out as a demonic disease-causing *bālagraha*, but is eventually transformed into a divine healer of disease and a bestower of children.

²⁹⁷ Her story is well developed in the Mahāvastu and the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the *Mūlasarvastivāda Vinaya*. For more on her literature see Noel Peri, “Hārītī la mère-de-démons,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 17 (1917): 1–102, Misra (1979: 73) and Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism, Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution through the Northern Buddhist Countries*, (Oxford, 1928).

²⁹⁸ *Za-Baozang-Jing* in Chinese or *Samyukta Ratnapitaka Sūtra* in Sanskrit. See Quan Yuan, “Praying for Heirs: The Diffusion and Transformation of Hārītī in East and Southeast Asia.” *The Journal of Chinese Historical Researches*, No. 74, (2011): 117-205.

²⁹⁹ Yves Bonnefoy, *Asian Mythologies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993: 126).

³⁰⁰ Besides the KS, long descriptions are also found in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* according to White (2003: 63).

Archaeological evidence places Hārītī's worship potentially as far back as the first century BCE, though her cult was most popular from the second to fourth century CE, particularly in the region of Gandhāra and Mathura (present-day Pakistan and North India). Early sculptural depictions often portray her surrounded by numerous babies and next to her consort, the Yakṣa-king Kubera-Pāñcika, another important *bhūtanātha* we will discuss shortly.³⁰¹ The continued spread of Buddhism along popular trade routes during this period also lead to her to be worshipped as a Goddess throughout much of Asia, and her cult is still found in Nepal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, China, and Japan.³⁰²

According to early Buddhist texts and oral traditions, the legend of the *yakṣa* Hārītī's origin begins in a previous lifetime as a human, where she had been made to dance against her will while pregnant, resulting in a tragic miscarriage. She was so angered and resentful that in her next life she was re-born as a *yakṣa* with five hundred *yakṣa*-children who she fed with children she snatched from the city of Rājāgrha. Upon hearing this, the Buddha, always looking for a teachable moment, decided to steal her youngest and most favored child, hiding the *yakṣa* infant under his begging bowl. Distressed at the loss of her child, Hārītī hears the Buddha is in the vicinity and runs to him for help. Upon hearing the distraught *yakṣī*'s woes, he turns to her and asks her how she could feel so badly about losing only one of her five-hundred children, when some mothers had lost their only child, to her? Showing her the suffering she had caused to others in this way, Hārītī immediately recognizes her offences, vows never to kill the town's children again, and becomes a follower of the Buddha. In

³⁰¹ See Decaroli (2004: 183-184) and Bellemare (2014)

³⁰² See Sree Padma, "Hariti: Village Origins, Buddhist Elaborations and Saivite Accommodations." *Asian and African Area Studies*, 11, 1, (2011): 1-17.

return, she is installed within the monastery as a protector of the community and given food and offerings to satiate her and her demonic-children's hunger.³⁰³

In this story, Hārītī is first given all types of traditional offerings, as found in the Atharva Veda and other early sources to try and avert her child-seizing activities. However, these offerings had no lasting effect, and it is only after the demon's full conversion and assimilation into the Buddhist-fold that the children of Rājāgrha are saved. While Hārītī's status is evidence that *yakṣas* were still considered powerful and of regional importance, enough to have her and her children enshrined within the monastic compound, she is still ultimately represented as subordinate to the more powerful Buddha. Granoff argues that this strategy of turning harmful demons into benevolent protectors was a new model for dealing with dangerous entities and forces at the time, a pattern that begins with the Buddhist *Jātakas*, but continues on into subsequent literary traditions of the Jains and Hindus.³⁰⁴

This perspective on the superiority of the Buddhist's conversion strategy is rooted in Buddhism's philosophy that even the most malignant beings and spirits could be transformed to beneficence. No being is inherently evil, hopeless, or eternally damned – rather, Buddhism holds all sentient beings are ensnared by the universal root affliction of ignorance and should be seen as being in a temporary state of extreme misfortune. In Buddhism's unifying vision, all sentient beings, including demons, ghosts etc., are further afflicted by the three poisons - hatred (*dveṣa*), lust (*lobha*), and delusion (*moha*), and all ultimately can attain enlightenment by realizing the truth of the Buddhist path. It is in this context that the Buddha (or some *bodhisattva* or *bhikku*) chose to use the logic and rationality of the *dharma* against these

³⁰³ Santi Rozario, and Geoffrey Samuel. *The Daughters of Hariti: Childbirth and Female Healers in South and Southeast Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 2002): 72-73.

³⁰⁴ Granoff (2003: 195)

dangerous spirits in the conversion literature. The conversion of the demons is often affected either by the Buddhist agent's embodiment of morality, selflessness, and virtue, as we also saw in the case of the *yakṣa* Moggarapāṇi and the Jain merchant previously or, as in this case, by means of pointing out the true cause of the *yakṣas* own suffering and low state of birth. This is in contrast to earlier Vedic strategies, which generally tried to expel or simply destroy such beings. As Sutherland succinctly writes, "The demons are put down and won over, but left intact, not, as in the Hindu myths, to rise again and rechallenge the gods, but to testify to the wisdom and compassion of the Buddhist *dhamma*."³⁰⁵ As we will soon see, this basic idea continues in Tantric Buddhism, and Tantra in general, but the means to affect this conversion changes greatly. Rather than the earlier Buddhist tales focus on righteousness and *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), in the Vajrayāna, forceful conversions using violence and even death were considered justified and expedient means when dealing with demonic entities.

Hārītī's worship is still popular today throughout Asia, primarily for protection and healing, but also as a fertility deity who bestows children. She is especially popular in Kathmandu, both as the Hindu smallpox-goddess Śītalā and the Buddhist/Newari Ajimā Hārītī ("Grandmother Hārītī").³⁰⁶ People of all backgrounds, including the Newars, Brahmans, Chetris, Tamangs, Gurungs and Tibetans, visit their shrines daily, primarily to counter various childhood-illnesses. Ajimā Hārītī is also considered the tutelary deity for groups of women-healers in Nepal known as the *dya māju* ("god-women"), who are known to regularly get possessed by the goddess. The *dya māju* are consulted by clients primarily for infant illnesses, but also to help aid with difficult pregnancies, miscarriage, and infertility or for healing bereaved parents over the loss of a child.

³⁰⁵ Sutherland (1991: 110)

³⁰⁶ See Rozario and Samuel (2002)

The Newaris view Ajimā Hārītī as an aspect of their ancestral-god couple known as Āju and Ajimā, “Grandfather” and “Grandmother” respectively, who they also identify with the tantric Bhairava and Kālī. Some *dya māju* cultivate Ajimā Hārītī as their tutelary goddess by receiving tantric initiation from a Vajrācāryā priest and training in *mantra* recitation, *mudrās*, visualization and other tantric ritual technologies. In this way these healer-women train to become human vessels and specialists in possession for direct consultation with the goddess. According to Linda Iltis’ recent ethnography, Ajimā Hārītī also allows access to possession and powers from virtually all the gods and goddesses of the Newari world, making the *dya māju* an extremely powerful healers with an array of tools and functions.³⁰⁷

Hārītī’s dual nature puts her in the same class of deities as Rudra and other ambivalent beings who not only have the power to take away, but also the power to give when they are transformed, converted, or appeased. This pattern of transformation continues with a host of other ambivalent and popular female entities associated with infectious illnesses and other misfortunes, such as Śītalā, Ṣaṣṭhī, and the serpent goddess Manasā, some at times being identified with Hārītī.³⁰⁸ An important and feature in all of these modern-day cults is the centrality of deity possession and healing. We also see that all of these respective, deity possession and its centrality within their respective cults. I would argue that this association between possession and ambivalent/intermediary divinities is not arbitrary but rather a marked feature – possession entities throughout Asia are almost always characterized by ambivalence, liminality, and fluid identities. As we will see this in subsequent chapters, these are also common qualities of those who also get possessed by such deities. We will

³⁰⁷ See Linda Iltis’s chapter, “Knowing All the Gods: Grandmothers, God Families and Women Healers in Nepal” in Rozario and Samuel (2002: 70-90)

³⁰⁸ For more on the goddess Manasā, see P.K. Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasa* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966).

discuss this in detail in the final chapter.

THE YAKṢA KING KUBERA

The Buddhist Hārītī's consort, the Yakṣa king Kubera (aka Vaiśravaṇa) was also a very popular figure found throughout Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain literature. After Rudra, and alongside Skanda, who we will discuss next, Kubera may, in fact, be one of the earliest and most important pan-Asian deities belonging to what I call the *bhūtanātha* category.

Unsurprisingly, his association with these two *bhūtanātha* deities is seen as early as Patañjali's 2nd-century BCE *Mahābhāṣya* [6.3.26], which describes images of Kubera used for worship alongside Śiva (as the *dvandva*, *śivavaiśravana*) and Skanda-Viśākha, who were classified Patañjali at this time as mundane or "worldly" (*laukika*) gods.³⁰⁹ Like many of the deities and *bhūtas* we've been discussing, Kubera's cult likely has non-Vedic origins, since even earlier in the AV he was characterized as belonging to the *itarajana*, the "other folk" (AV 8.10.28).³¹⁰ Other early references in the ŚB similarly allude to Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa's ambivalent and outcaste nature, calling him "The King of *Rākṣasas*" and "The Lord of Robbers and Evil-doers", echoing, as we've seen, the Vedic Rudra.³¹¹ However, he is also associated in this and other Vedic texts especially with "the science of demonology" (*devaganavidyā* in ŚB 13.4.2.10; *rakṣavidyā*, in the *Śāṅkhāyana Sūtras* 16.2; and *piśācasamyuktam niśāntam*, "tranquilizing possession by *piśācas*" in the *Āśvalāyana Śrauta*

³⁰⁹ Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* is a second century BCE commentary on Pāṇini's fifth century BCE grammar text; the commentary corresponds with Pāṇini (5.3.99)

³¹⁰ See Abdul Samad, *Emergence of Hinduism in Gandhāra - An Analysis of Material Culture*, (PhD Dissertation: Freie Universität Berlin, 2012): 10.

³¹¹ ŚB 13.4.3.10 in Julius Eggeling, *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa: According to the Text of the Mādhyandina School Part I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882): 367. Also see Misra (1981:60) who gives multiple references in the *Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra*. See also V.M. Bedekar, "Kubera in Sanskrit Literature with Special Reference to the Mahābhārata." *Journal of The Ganganatha Jha Research Institute*. Vol. XXV, Pts. 1-4 January-October (1969): 429.

Sūtra 10.7.6).³¹² According to Bedekar, the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* makes references to gods who had been previously human mortals, and Kubera is listed as one who attained his divine status through great penance, similar to various Siddhas and Vidyādhara discussed earlier.³¹³

By the time we reach early Buddhist and Hindu Epic texts, Kubera begins to take on his popular representation as a dwarfish (*vāmana*) pot-bellied fertility god, a trait shared with the emerging elephant headed Gaṇeśa and other protector deities and *yakṣas* of the time. Within these varied traditions, he begins to take on multiple roles as a "Lord of Wealth and Treasures" (often coupled with the "Goddess of Wealth", Lakṣmī)³¹⁴, a fierce *lokapāla* (world-guardian), and as the great and noble King of Yakṣas.³¹⁵ The Hindu Epics maintain he was a staunch devotee of Rudra-Śiva and legend claims it was Śiva himself who gave Kubera the boon of lordship over the *yakṣas*, due to his severe religious penances.³¹⁶ Other Epic and Purāṇic references expand his retinue beyond *yakṣas* as well, appointing him as the leader of a variety of *bhūtas*, including the *rākṣasas*, *gandharvas*, *apsaras*, *guhnyakas*, *kiṃnaras* (semi-divine spirits with equine or avian characteristics), and the *vidyādhara*s, earning him the title *Bhūteśa* ("Lord of Spirits") in the Rāmāyaṇa.³¹⁷ Additionally, like Rudra

³¹² Bedekar (1969: 426-428)

³¹³ Bedekar (1969: 427)

³¹⁴ References to Lakṣmī as a *yakṣī* (*yakhī*) are found on the stupa of Bharhut (second century BCE) where the names of both Kubera and Lakṣmī are mentioned - see Coomaraswamy (1971: 5).

³¹⁵ See Hopkins (1913) and Bedekar (1969) for multiple Sanskrit references

³¹⁶ See Misra (1981: 64-65). Like Rudra, Kubera is also closely associated with mountains, and both are said to ultimately reside at Mt. Kailash. Hopkins (1913: 69) writes - "Kubera, is in fact a pigmy Śiva, as Siva is a monstrous over-grown Kabairas."

³¹⁷ See Misra (1981: 5); and Ellen M. Raven, "The Secret Servants of Kubera" in *Studies in South and Southeast Asian Archaeology*, No. 2, eds. Hinzler, H. I. R, and R Soekmono., (Leiden: Koentji Press, 1988): 112; Also see *Devadhamma Jātaka* (1.23-27) for references to Kubera's lordship over the *vidhyādhara*s, mentioned in Decaroli (2004: 12). Also see Rāmāyaṇa (6.4.20) for Kubera's reference as a *bhūteśa*, "Lord of Spirits".

and Skanda, Kubera comes to have close association with fierce female entities known as the *mātr̥s*, "the Mothers", which we will discuss more shortly.³¹⁸

One interesting but controversial epithet often designated to Kubera is *Naravāhana*, which most literally means "He Who Has Men as his Vehicle", though some, such as Decaroli, have also translated it as "He Who Mounts Men", in an effort to see Kubera as a possession deity. Others argue that *nara* refers not to humans, but other classes of spirit beings, such as the horse-bodied spirits known as *kiṃnaras* or even the *guhnyakas*.³¹⁹ While it is possible that this refers to Kubera as a possessing entity, I have personally only come across one rare instance that attests to this in the medical literature.³²⁰ As we will see, Kubera, like Rudra-Śiva, is rarely represented as a possessing deity himself, but usually depicted as the controller over other spirits who do the actual possessing. The only other reference I am aware of that directly involves Kubera and possession, is in the MBh, which in a reversal, has Kubera being "possessed" by the sage Uśanas in order to steal his wealth!³²¹ At any rate, the appellation can still be related to possession in that he is lord over these possessing spirits, or if it is indeed "men" he is riding, then potentially it may refer to his control or possession over men through his spirit hordes.

Data from the Buddhists adds much to our picture of Kubera. In the early years of Buddhism, it is said that Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa (Pali: Vessavaṇa) was worshipped at treeshrines for progeny, much like *yakṣas* in early Vedic traditions.³²² As time goes on, however,

³¹⁸ A further association can be made between Kubera and Skanda - in the MBh's long list of fierce Mothers who attend upon Skanda, many bear names such as Vittada, Vasuda, and Piṅgākṣī, which are all feminized forms of epithets often associated with Kubera. Kubera's own consort, Harītī, is often classified as a Mātr̥ in various references as well. See also Hopkins (1915: 145) for more.

³¹⁹ See Raven (1988). David G. White (2003: 22) also relates this appellation to tantric corpse practices, which allowed practitioners to fly to heavens on a corpse as Kubera does on a man.

³²⁰ See AS 7.18, this will also be discussed in the next chapter on the medical texts.

³²¹ Found in MBH 12.278, see White (2009: 149-150) for summary.

³²² See, e.g., the story of Rājadatta Theragatha 5.1 in Rhys-Davids (1951: 189)

Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa becomes more associated with his knowledge of demonology, magic, and spells, as he does in various Epic traditions of the Hindus. An early example is found in the *Āṭavika Jātaka*, which follows a similar plot line to Hārītī's conversion story, but with a child-devouring *yakṣa* known as Āṭavika (or Āḷavika), "The Demon of the Forests".

Like Hārītī, the fierce Āṭavika is eventually converted into a follower of the Buddha and installed within the Buddhist community where annual offerings are made to him. Much of what is known about this deity and cult comes from early *dhāraṇī sutras* translated and preserved in China during the Liang Dynasty (502-557 CE), where he was known as A-t'o-p'o-chü or simply "The Supreme Marshal" (T'ai yüan-shuai), a protector deity who specialized in spells to destroy demons who spread epidemics.³²³ Though originally considered a subordinate of Vaiśravaṇa, the two deities were often conflated in later texts.³²⁴ *The Dhāraṇī Book of Āṭavaka, General of the Demons* (T. 1238), for example, contains many of these spells, along with exorcistic rites and the use of protective talismans in its section entitled "*The Great General's Rites of Exorcism for Driving Away Demons*" (T. 1238 21:183-184), which he is purported to have taught to the Buddha himself.³²⁵

The origins of this story can be located in the Indian *Āṭanāṭiya-suttanta* of the *Digha Nikaya* (DN 3.194-206). However, rather than Āṭavaka, it is actually Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa who teaches the Buddha the Āṭanāṭā protective verses. These were used in order to safeguard meditating monks in isolated places (e.g., caves, forests, etc.) from harassment by possessing and malevolent *bhūtas* who resided in these locations. As we will see, if these entities were

³²³ Katz (1995: 79-80) believes the Daoist deity Marshal Wen may have been heavily influenced by the Buddhist Āṭavika cult. See Katz, Paul R. *Demon Hordes and Burning Boats the Cult of Marshal Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

³²⁴ Several protective *dhāraṇīs* are attributed to Āṭavika, and it seems he was often conflated with Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa in the Chinese sources. In other sources Āṭavika is considered part of Vaiśravaṇa's retinue as one of eight generals of his armies. See Granoff (2003: 194).

³²⁵ See Strickmann (2005: 144) for description.

not pacified by the spell, the monks were instructed to call upon the army-generals (*senāpatis*) of their "demon-troops", who would then subdue the uncooperative demons under their command.³²⁶

The *Āṭanāṭiya-suttanta* begins with the Buddha on Vulture's Peak surrounded and guarded by the Four Great King of the quarters, along with their retinues of *bhūtas*. King Vaiśravaṇa, king of the *yakṣas*, speaks to the Buddha and tells him the protective benefits of the verses and then recites them to him. The verses begin with brief praises to the Five Buddhas, and then much longer and detailed praises respectively to Dhataratṭha (Lord of *Gandharvas*), Viruḥhaka (Lord of *Kumbhaṇḍa* spirits), Virūpakkha (Lord of *Nāgas*), and finally to Kubera himself, the Lord of *Yakṣas*. The text states that if one was approached by a malevolent *yakṣa*, one should shout out to their leaders, the twenty-eight *yakṣa-senāpatis*, saying, "This *yakkha* has seized me, has hurt me, harmed me, injured me, and will not let me go!"³²⁷ A list of all the *yakṣa-senāpati* are then given, which includes Brahmanic gods and sages such as Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, and Prajāpati, and a variety of Buddhist *yakṣas*.³²⁸ The list ends re-iterating that the *yakṣa-senāpatis* should be called upon in case of attack or possession by *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *kumbhaṇḍas*, or *nāgas*.

³²⁶ See Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012): 471-478 for full translation of the *Āṭanāṭiya-suttanta*

³²⁷ See Walshe (2012: 477)

³²⁸ This list includes the following: Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, the Rṣi Bhāradvāja, Pajāpati, Candana, Kāmasatṭha, Kinnughāṇḍu and Nighāṇḍu, Panāda, Opamañña, Devasūta, Mātali, Cittasena (the gandhabba), Naḷa, Rājā, Janesabha, Sātāgira, Hemavata, Puṇṇaka, Karātiya, Gula, Sivaka, the Nāga King Mucalinda, the Rṣi Vessāmitta, Yugandhara, Gopāla, Suppagedha, Hirī, Netti, Mandiya, Pañcalacaṇḍa, Āḷavaka (*yakṣa*), Pajunna, Sumana (serpent-demon), Sumukha ("Bright-faced", also a serpent-demon) Dadimukha ("Milk-Faced" -has a rich mythology in the Brahmanas and is also a serpent and Nāga in the SS and MBH, See Doniger, *Tales of Sex and Violence: Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), Maṇi, Mānicara, Dāgha, and Serissaka.

THE RAKṢĀ (PROTECTIVE) TEXTS

These *Āṭānāṭā* verses are some of the earliest examples in the Buddhist tradition of what becomes an important genre of pan-Buddhist “protective” (*parittā* or *rakṣā*) literature prevalent from the second century BCE to the third century CE.³²⁹ The *Āṭānāṭiya-suttanta* essentially served as a prototype for these *rakṣā* texts, whose purpose was to bestow magical powers and/or protection against a variety of misfortunes, including disease, snake-bite/poison, and harassment or possession by malevolent *bhūtas* and *grahas*. For Buddhist monks practicing in remote caves and forests, these threats were very real and immediate to their well-being. To counteract these dangerous forces, it was understood that these sorts of “worldly” protective (*rakṣā*) mantras were more effective compared to the liberative *mantras* employed for purposes of enlightenment. As in the Atharva Veda and later Ayurvedic traditions, these types of *mantras* were viewed as medicinal and known for their healing effects. As Rhys-Davids states,

The fervent utterances of the *parittā*, as synergy of thought sent forth by the utterers, are judged to be a possibly effective medicine no less than the muscular and material appliances of medical art. They are intended to range benign agencies on the side of the patient, and to keep far off those that may harm.³³⁰

The recitation of protection verses and *rakṣā mantras*, or *vidyās*, as they also began to be called, became widespread among Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna Buddhists and went on to

³²⁹ The Theravāda Buddhists subsume these texts under the label *parittā*, a Pali word based on Old Indian *pari-√trā* “to protect”. The synonymous term *rakṣā* (Pali *rakkhā*) is found both in Theravādin and non-Theravādin traditions and is, according to Skilling (1992: 125–9), preferable for the designation of this group of texts. See also Peter Skilling, “The Rakṣā literature of the Śrāvakayāna”, *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 16, (1992), 109–182. See also Ingo Strauch, “The Evolution of the Buddhist Rakṣā Genre in the Light of New Evidence from Gandhāra: The Manasvi-Nāgarāja-Sūtra from the Bajaur Collection of Kharoṣṭhī Manuscripts.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77 (1): (2014): 63–84.

³³⁰ See Rhys-Davids (1956: 187). As with *pratisaras*, *parittās* form follows function: both are tools/charms that “turn back” spells etc. cast by others. For more on *parittās* see Lily de Silva, *Paritta: A Historical and Religious Study of the Buddhist Ceremony for Peace and Prosperity in Sri Lanka*, (Colombo: National Museums of Sri Lanka, 1981).

influence *dhāraṇī* traditions such as the *Pañcarakṣā* corpus (“Five Protections”) and apotropaic texts like the *Mahā-Daṇḍadhāraṇī-Śītavaṭī*.³³¹ These in turn influenced the tantric literature throughout India, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Nepal, and into East and South-East Asia, where spells of this type become very common. Similar to Atharvavedic rites, these verses were often recited over threads or water, or written down on paper or cloth, and then tied on as protective amulets on parts of the body or deposited in *stūpas*.

Various recurrent features found throughout this literature, including the use of non-Buddhist mantras, the invocation of fierce female deities and *yakṣa-senāpatīs* (“Lords of the *Yakṣa* Armies), and the fact that it was the *yakṣa* King Vaiśravaṇa-Kubera who is said to be the source of these divine spells, is evidence that this literature was heavily influenced by non-Buddhist cults popular in this early period.³³² That the *rakṣā* verses came first from Vaiśravaṇa in the *Āṭanāṭiya-suttanta* and then passed on by the Buddha to his disciples may have simply been a device to introduce non-Buddhist texts and practices into their canon. At the same time, Buddhists may have been compelled to adopt and adapt these types of *rakṣā mantras* since they were commonplace at this time and dear to its converts, many who originally belonged to these same local cults.

Another very early and interesting protective manuscript, recently discovered in the Bajaur Collection, is the *Manasvi-nāgarāja-sūtra*, which was written in Gāndhārī and has recently been dated to the first two centuries of the Common Era.³³³ Rather than Vaiśravaṇa,

³³¹ The *Pañcarakṣā* corpus includes the *Mahāpratisarā*, *Mahāmāyūrī*, *Mahāsāhasrapramardanī*, *Mahāmantrānusāriṇī*, and *Mahāśītavaṭī*. See Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī. The Great Amulet, Great Queen of Spells. Introduction, Critical Editions and Annotated Translation (New Delhi: 2012)* See also Hidas, “*Mahā-Daṇḍadhāraṇī-Śītavaṭī: A Buddhist Apotropaic Scripture*,” in *Indic Manuscript Cultures through the Ages Material, Textual, and Historical Investigations*, ed. Vergiani et al. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017): 449–86.

³³² These included fierce goddesses found also found in Hindu traditions such as Gandhāri, Caṇḍālī, and Mātāṅgi. See Skilling (1992: 155).

³³³ See Strauch (2014) for more.

however, it is the Nāga king (*nāgarāja*) Manasvin who gives the Buddha the special protective *mantras*. Like other *rakṣā* texts, this *sūtra* similarly states that it grants protection against human enemies, non-human beings (*amaṇuṣa*), snakes (*dīrgha*), demons/sorcerers (*yātus*), *yakṣas*, etc. as well as protection from death by weapons, fire, water, or poison. These magical formulas are unique in that they were known as *vidyārājas* (*Pali: vijaraya*), “Lord/King of Spells”. In later tantric traditions *vidyās* were always feminine, so this usage likely reflects an earlier proto-tantric period before the feminine element became dominant.³³⁴

One of the most interesting and fascinating texts involving what I would consider a proto-tantric rite comes from a 5th century Chinese Buddhist text known as *The Consecration Sūtra* (*Kuan-ting ching*), which originates directly from earlier Buddhist *rakṣā* traditions, though heavily influenced by its own indigenous Daoist and popular Chinese traditions. This collection of twelve different manuscripts is in essence a spell book focused on various sorceristic rites, divination, exorcism, healing and protection against diseases, poisons, and demon possession. The twelfth chapter, for example, contains the earliest surviving Chinese version of the highly influential *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra*, mentioned previously, though replete with its own local Chinese demons.³³⁵ Despite its Sinicization, much of the Indian character remains, including its prescription for devotees to invoke the Buddha’s twelve great *yakṣa*-commanders if one needs protection against demonic attack - a passage we will return to in the next chapter.

³³⁴ Hidas (2012: 21 f.) adds that this masculine aspect was due to the fact “that the roots of this tradition go back to Brahmanism, to texts as early as the Atharvaveda”. See also Strauch (2014: 74-74).

³³⁵ The Chinese version, as expected, includes various Chinese demons in place of Indian demons. See Strickmann (2005: 132) and Strickmann, “The Consecration Sūtra: A Buddhist Book of Spells,” in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990): 75-118, for more on the indigenous Chinese elements in these texts.

It is in the seventh text, translated as "*The Devil-Subduing Seals and Great Spirit-Spells of Consecration, as Spoken by the Buddha*" where we find a rite to exorcise evil spirits, which, as the name implies, was taught by the Buddha himself. In it, the Buddha states that the healer-practitioner should visualize himself as the Buddha when performing the rite:

If among the four classes of the Buddha's disciples any malignant wraiths (*hsieh*) or evil demons should cause disturbance, fear, or horripilation, one should first visualize his own body as my image, with the thirty-two primary and eighty secondary marks, the color of purple gold. The body should be sixteen feet tall, with a solar radiance at the back of the neck. Having visualized my body, you are next to visualize the 1,250 disciples - next, the bodhisattva-monks. When you have completed these three visualizations, visualize the great spirits of the five directions.... If you succeed in realizing this without distractions but rather concentrating all your thoughts in singleness of purpose, those suffering from illness will be cured...malignant wraiths and evil demons will all be driven off.³³⁶

This fascinating rite may be one of the earliest involving the visualization of oneself as a Buddha – a practice which can be seen as a proto-type to “Deity Yoga”, considered the hallmark of Tantric Buddhism, but one that does not show up in Indian texts for at least another two centuries.³³⁷ We will return to these passages and Deity Yoga in detail in an upcoming chapter. What is of note here, however, is the confluence of Deity Yoga-like practices with these exorcist and apotropaic traditions.

KUBERA-SKANDA-VAJRAPĀṆĪ

³³⁶ Translation by Strickmann (2005: 132-135)

³³⁷ See 7th century *Mahāvairocana-bhisambodhi Sūtra* XVIII-XIX chapters on meditating on the letters of the alphabet which involves placing them around the body while visualising oneself as the Buddha. See Hodge's translation of these sections - Hodge, Stephen (trans) and Buddhaguhya. 2003. *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra*. New York: Routledge-Curzon.

Before leaving Kubera and examining Skanda, our next important *bhūtanātha*, I also wanted to briefly mention the very strong associations between these two particular deities who I believe, along with Rudra, go on to become the prototype for a wide array of deities foundational to the Tantric traditions. Their most important trait, of course, is their status and function as *bhūtanāthas*, as Lords and controllers of spirits, but the connections between these two goes much further than this in the textual and archaeological records. Both deities, as we will see, begin their careers as leaders of demonic entities, traces of which remain in the Epic and Purāṇic literature. Both, of course, are also intimately tied to Rudra-Śiva – Skanda as his child, and Kubera, as we saw, as his faithful chieftain and leader of his troops. They also share various epithets within this literature - the most obvious ones being *senāpati* (“Lord of The Spirit Armies”) or *Bhūteśa* (“Lord of Bhūtas), related to their *bhūtanātha* status, but also more specific ones like “Lord of the *Nairṛtas*”, an earlier Vedic class of child-seizing *rākṣasas*, which the epic villain Rāvaṇa himself is said to belong to,³³⁸ and the name *Guha*, “The Concealed or Secret One”. *Guha* is prominently used for Skanda, since his origin stories say he was born hidden (*guha*) in a bed of reeds, but it is also linked early on with Kubera due to his association and lordship over the child-seizing *guhyakas*.³³⁹ Finally, both Kubera and Skanda are also frequently depicted in early literature and sculpture holding either a spear, lance, or club, a common *yakṣa* accoutrement, which has historically caused

³³⁸ According to Hopkins (1915: 14) in the Epics most *Rākṣasas* are said to be the sons of Pulastya, making them also the brothers of the *Yakṣas*. Those called *Nairṛtas* are specifically the sons of Nirrti (Destruction), the wife of Adharma, and the mother of Fear, Terror, and Death. The sons of the wicked King in this epic are said to be incarnations of these *Rākṣasas*. See MBh 1.66.52 and 12.122.46). For reference to child-snatching see *Vāyu Purāṇa* 84.13-4: *nairṛtā nāmatah smṛtā grahās te rākṣasāḥ sarve bālānaṃ tu viśeṣataḥ*; see also MBh 9.47.31.

³³⁹ See e.g., Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, *Skanda-Kārttikeya - A Study in the Origin and Development*, (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1967): 48.

great confusion among scholars regarding the identity of early sculptures.³⁴⁰ Much the same connecting data regarding these two deities is found within the Buddhist traditions as well.³⁴¹

With the emergence of Tantric Buddhism, we also see the rise of another important *yakṣa*-figure who shares many of the same qualities as Kubera and Skanda. This is the figure of Vajrapāṇi, (“He who holds the Vajra in his hand”), whose earliest mention can be traced to Mahāyāna texts such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (“The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines”), the earliest *sūtra* in the *prajñāpāramitā* class which is believed to be have been written sometime in the first century BCE.³⁴² Though later texts identify him as a *bodhisattva*, in this early text he is still considered a lowly, albeit powerful, *yakṣa* who guards the Buddha as he travels through the northwest of the subcontinent. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, for example, states,

Vajrapāṇi, the great Yakṣa, constantly follows behind the irreversible Bodhisattva. Unassailable, the Bodhisattva cannot be defeated by either men or ghosts. All beings find it hard to conquer him, and his mind is not disturbed [by their attacks].³⁴³

Why the bodhisattva needs a guardian is not really discussed, but as we saw in the story of Kubera and the *Āṭanāṭiya-suttanta*, it is clear their inclusion is due to these *yakṣas* special knowledge of spells to protect against demons. Sculptures from the Gāndhāran period also depict Vajrapāṇi in this role, often flanking the Buddha as his protector and bodyguard and carrying his characteristic *vajra*, usually symbolized as a spear or club. The two most common representations at this time portray him either as a warrior figure or as a youth,

³⁴⁰ For examples of panels/sculptures see, R.C. Agrawala, “Gandhāra Skanda with Flames.” *East and West* 18 (1–2): (1968) 163–65. See also N. P. Joshi, *Mātrkās - Mothers in Kuṣāṇa Art*, (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1986): 6-7.

³⁴¹ P. Pal, "Dhanada-Kubera of the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and some Images from North-West India" in *Lalit Kali*, Vol. 18, (1977): 22.

³⁴² Linnart Mäll, *Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā and Other Essays*. (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2005): 96.

³⁴³ Edward Conze, *Astasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā* (Bibliotheca Indica, 284, 1958): 126.

depictions shared with Skanda, who Lamotte believes Vajrapāṇi was modeled upon and who the Chinese (as Weito) often identify as being one and the same.³⁴⁴ Like Kubera and Skanda, Vajrapāṇi is also known as the “Lord of the Yakṣas” (*yakṣasenadhipati*) and ‘The Lord of Guhyakas” (*guh yakadhipati*), epithets which follow him throughout his career.³⁴⁵ Yang notes also that in Chinese sources Ucchuṣma-Jambhala (i.e. Kubera) “is often paired, confused or identified with Guhyaka Vajrapāṇi”, while in Tibet and Japan it is the same with, interestingly enough, Vajrakumāra (the Buddhist Skanda).³⁴⁶ In the coeval *Lotus Sutra*, Vajrapāṇi is also listed as one of the bodily forms that the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara may adopt in order to convert beings to Buddhism, which includes an interesting array of beings such as Brahma, Indra, Maheśvara (Śiva), a *gandharva*, Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera), and an unnamed “*senāpati*” (a reference to Skanda?).³⁴⁷ These names likely describe associated divinities popular at this particular time.

By the time we reach the earliest Buddhist Tantras, such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and *Sarvatathāgatattvasamgraha* (“Symposium of Truth of All the Buddhas” STTS), Vajrapāṇi’s status is raised to one of the most powerful and high-ranking *bodhisattvas* (often called *vajrasattvas*), and recognized as a specialist in apotropaic rites and revealer of esoteric knowledge.³⁴⁸ In these and later tantric texts, Vajrapāṇi is often found as the presiding deity

³⁴⁴ See Lamotte, Étienne. “Vajrapani en Inde.” *Bibliothèque de l’Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoise* ; 20, (1966), who argues Skanda is likely the model for Vajrapāṇi. See Bonnefoy (1993: 125-134) regarding the Chinese Weituo’s (Skanda) identification with Vajrapāṇi.

³⁴⁵ See R. E. Emmerick, *The Sutra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarṇabhasottamasūtra*. (London: Luzac, 1970): 33; 37; and 66. See also Dinesh Chandra Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966): 336–337, who states the term most consistently employed for Vajrapāṇi is *guh yakadhipati*.

³⁴⁶ Yang, Zhaohua. *Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchusma in Tang China*. (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 2013): 21-24.

³⁴⁷ Translation from H. Kern, *The Saddharma-pundarīka or The Lotus of The True Law*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1884): 411.

³⁴⁸ Later texts and commentaries even attribute the compilation of the *Mahāyāna Sūtras* to Vajrapāṇi. See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism from the Origins to the Śaka Era*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988): 688.

of his own *maṇḍala*, flanked by four fierce goddesses, Vajrāṅkuśī (Vajra-Hook), Vajraśṛṅkhala (Vajra-Fetter), Subahu (Strong-Armed), and Vajrasenā (Vajra-Army) along with an entourage of “*vidyāgaṇas*” - the *vidyārājñās* and *vidyārājñīs* (“King/Queen of Spells”: MMK 2.53).³⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, it is in the STTS too where we find the famous story of Vajrapāṇi’s subjugation of Maheśvara (Śiva), a story considered by Alexis Sanderson to mark the beginning of the explicit assimilation of Śaiva rites and deities into the Buddhist-fold.³⁵⁰ We will return to this important story later, but suffice to say for now, a clear pattern is emerging of early *yakṣas* being subordinated and appropriated and then rising to divinities, particularly in Tantric traditions, though still retaining some degree of their original *yakṣa* identities. Buddhist deities such as Vajrapāṇi follow the same model as other *bhūtanāthas* like Rudra, Kubera, Skanda, and a variety of goddesses, all who command an army of fierce spirit beings and are known for their supernatural knowledge and powers, healing, and apotropaic qualities. These qualities become the model for a whole class of Tantric Buddhist deities, which Linrothe coins as “*krodha-vighnāntaka*”, based upon their fundamental expressive characteristic (*krodha*, “wrathfulness”) and primary identifying functions (*vighnāntaka*, “destroyer of obstacles”).³⁵¹ Members of this group share certain aspects with other Buddhist protectors like the *dvārapālas* (gate guardians), *lokapālas* (guardians of the directions) and the *dharmapālas* (*dharma*-protectors), among others. However, the *krodha-vighnāntaka* group, according to Linrothe, is far more powerful, and like other *bhūtanāthas*

³⁴⁹ See David Llewellyn Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors*. (London: Serindia, 1987):136. Also see Linrothe (1999: 47)

³⁵⁰ See Sanderson, "Vajrayana: Origin and Function," In *Buddhism into the Year 2000: International Conference Proceedings*, 87-102, (Los Angeles: Dhammakaya Foundation, 1994) and more recently Sanderson, “The Śaiva Age: The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period.” In *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, Ed. Shingo Einoo, (Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture, 2009): 132-141.

³⁵¹ Linrothe (1999: 12)

we examine, have the ability to bestow supernatural powers, liberating divine knowledge, and can destroy both inner (greed, anger, sloth, etc.) and outer obstacles (demons, disease, etc.). Linrothe further argues that early representations of these *krodha-vighnantakas* “drew directly on the earlier tradition of Yakṣas, Siva-Gaṇas and *ayudhapurusa* (the personification of deity’s weapons).”³⁵² As we will see in the following chapter, *krodha-vighnāntakas* and *bhūtanāthas* are essentially the same within Tantric Buddhism and become foundational in its development, especially in sorceristic and practices involving deity possession.

THE BHŪTANĀTHA SKANDA AND THE MĀTRṢ

We now come to arguably one of the most important *bhūtanātha*-type deities in South Asia associated with possession - Skanda, also known as Kārttikeya, Kumāra, or Muruga in various Hindu traditions. While we saw his inclusion as a “worldly” (*laukika*) deity in Patanjali’s second-century BCE *Mahābhāṣya*³⁵³ (alongside Śiva and Kubera) and a possession-entity in the MGS (2.14), some of the earliest and most detailed sources referencing his cultus can be found in Epic texts, when Skanda truly comes to the fore. It is also within Skanda's narrative in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* (“The Chapter of the Forest”) of the MBh (3.216–219), where we find one of the most developed and early lists of *bhūtas* and *grahas* as possessing entities, all which belong to Skanda's retinue.

Equally important as Skanda, is the mention of a special category of *bhūtas* known as the Mātrṣ (“The Mothers”), fierce feminine goddesses who were widely worshipped throughout the landscape of South Asia in this time. David Kinsley suggests that the Mātrṣ

³⁵² *ibid*

³⁵³ *Mahābhāṣya* (6.3.26) and *Mānava Gṛhya Sūtras* (2.14): see earlier reference above.

were likely non-Brahmanical, local village goddesses (*grāmadevatās*), who were assimilated into the Brahmanical fold.³⁵⁴ Historically the Mātṛs appear after the *yakṣiṇīs*, who they most closely resemble, but before the tantric *yoginīs and ḍākinīs*, the primary possessing agents in the tantric traditions. Like the *yakṣiṇīs*, the *mātṛs* were complex and ambiguous figures, defined by maternity and fertility, but also representing the powerful and dangerous forces of nature, including disease, illness, and death. The *Āraṅyakaparvan* viewed the *mātṛs* as *bālagrahas* (child-seizers) who possessed and killed children if not propitiated - however, if properly worshipped they had the power to bestow healing and progeny. Excellent work has already been written on the historical rise of the Mothers, and I refer the reader to these in my footnotes so as not to re-hash their efforts - rather, I will pull the relevant data for our present purposes.³⁵⁵

In the *Āraṅyakaparvan* of the MBh, the Mothers are depicted primarily as fierce attendants of their equally ferocious leader, Skanda. While this is their representation in the MBh, the archeological evidence gives a slightly different story. The earliest solid material evidence for a developed category of *mātṛs* comes from the Kuṣāṇa era (c. 1–3rd cent CE), which includes a diverse range of images from the Mathura region. Panels and statues of *mātṛs* and *yakṣīs* figure prominently alongside each other in this period, attesting to their close association. The *yakṣa* Hāritī, in fact, was often classified as a *mātṛ* in this period, again showing how much these two fluid categories shared. Like Hāritī, images of *mātṛs* often depicted them carrying infants, indicating their association with fertility and protection of

³⁵⁴ Kinsley (1986: 155) believes this due to their description in the MBh as “dark in colour”, speaking “foreign languages” and living in “peripheral areas” and their association with the “non-Brahmanical” god Skanda.

³⁵⁵ See especially White (2003), Mann (2012) and Hatley, “From Mātṛ to Yoginī. Continuity and Transformation in the South Asian Cults of the Mother Goddesses,” in *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, (New York: De Gruyter, 2012).

children. They were usually represented alongside one or two male guardian figures – sometimes the youthful, spear-bearing god Skanda of the MBH, but more commonly, the *yakṣa* king Kubera.³⁵⁶ Images of Kubera with the fierce *mātr̥s* turn out, in fact, to be the most numerous images found in the region, and this is significant given the data we’ve just discussed.³⁵⁷ Some have speculated that it is likely the Kubera-Mother association was the more archaic convention and pattern of worship and which may have been the precursor for Skanda’s own cult. Eventually, Kubera’s cult is eclipsed among the Hindus, though Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa remains an important translocal deity for the Buddhists.³⁵⁸ Why Skanda’s status among the Hindus surpasses Kubera is unclear, but what is clear is that Skanda, Kubera and the cult of the Mothers had a direct connection with each other and both were highly concerned with battling disease and possessing entities. Let us now examine the *Āraṇyakaparvan* account of Skanda and the Mothers in detail.

THE ĀRAṆYAKAPARVAN OF THE MBH

As stated earlier, the MBh is a complex, composite, and encyclopedic text written and redacted over many centuries by numerous authors. In its final form, however, it is clear its production was taken over by Brahmin authors, whose particular worldviews and agendas permeate the final text. Ultimately, this portion of the text was an attempt by the Epic’s compilers to systematize the demonological traditions of the time, which were generally non-

³⁵⁶ White (2003: 4) believes this a configuration that arose and was replicated from the Kushan-age “Vṛṣṇi triads” in the Mathura region, which originally consisted of Balarāma-Ekānaṁśā-Kṛṣṇa.

³⁵⁷ There are several panels from Mathura which depict a six-headed female divinity flanked by two male divinities. The two males have been identified as Skanda-Karttikeya and Visakha and the female as a “Graha”. There is archaeological evidence to suggest that the era Mathura cult of Skanda-Karttikeya and Visakha was focused on him as a Graha. See Joshi (1986: 14) and Mann (2012:140-148)

³⁵⁸ Hatley (2012: 101)

systematic. Due to its multi-authorship, the discerning eye can discover a variety of perspectives throughout the text and a shift in values over time. Richard Mann argues that this shift in values is particularly clear when examining the various accounts dealing with the deity Skanda. He contends that historically later portions of the MBh (e.g., the *Salyaparvan*) present an unambiguous view of Skanda as a benevolent high Hindu god, a leader of the *devas* armies (Mahāsena), and as a young and innocent child god (Kumāra), the son of Lord Śiva. Earlier portions such as the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, in contrast, depict Skanda as a much wilder and more ambiguous figure, who is closely associated with groups of malignant *grahas* who prey upon children. This is, of course, due to his roots in these earlier *graha/mātr̥s* cults - their inclusion in the Epic texts reflect the popularity these cult figures must have enjoyed during this period. Skanda’s transformation from malevolent *graha* to benevolent god, was precisely part of the Brahmanical agenda to domesticate the ambiguous being in order to bring him, and his cult, into the Brahmanical fold.³⁵⁹

Skanda’s mythical birth is a messy and complicated affair, involving three different birth narratives (MBh 3.213-221; 9.43-45; 13.83-86), which will not be expounded upon in detail here.³⁶⁰ Generally, however, his multiple birth narratives are full of inauspicious beginnings involving disorder, infidelity, uncontrolled lust, and deceit, and includes a host of “parents” - the six wives of the *r̥ṣis* (who later become the six celestial Kṛttikās), the lustful fire-god Agni, Garuḍa, the river goddess Ganga, and the goddess Svāhā.³⁶¹ But that is not all - we are also told that the true parents of Skanda was in fact Rudra and Umā since Agni was

³⁵⁹ See Mann (2012) and Bedekar (1975: 142)

³⁶⁰ Excellent summaries and analysis can be seen in the works of Mann and White, among others, that I would refer the reader to. See Mann, *The Early Cult of Skanda in North India: From Demon to Divine Son*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, McMaster University, 2004): 90-117 and White (2003: 37-44)

³⁶¹ i.e., the constellation Pleiades

actually “possessed” (*samāviśya*) by Rudra and Svāhā possessed by Umā (*āviśya*) when the two (or four!) united.³⁶² The use of possession language is significant I believe, and likely purposeful since it is within this very section that possession, and a huge variety of possessing entities, are discussed.

Adding to the absurdness of his multiple parentage, it is also said that Skanda was a fully formed child within only four days and he is described as having six heads with one neck and twelve eyes, ears, arms and feet. In one hand he was said to hold his characteristic spear, while in the other, a wild, red-combed cock. His birth is said to have taken place on top of a mountain, full of dangerous and malevolent supernatural beings - e.g., seven-headed “venom-eyed” snakes, *rakṣasas*, *piśacas*, and a variety of other treacherous ghouls, and fierce animals, and birds (MBH 3.214.11). As if absorbing their inauspicious qualities, Skanda immediately and indiscriminately begins various acts of violence upon the world around him following his birth. Like his fearsome father, Rudra, he too takes up a powerful bow and lets out a powerful roar (*rud*), which is said to terrify and stun all beings in the three worlds. Out of fear, all creatures, even the Earth herself, is said to flock to the child-god for refuge, which he immediately grants (MBH 3.214.30). Thus, while Skanda appears as an extremely potent force of chaos and disorder, a destructive power that seems to arise from his inauspicious beginnings and multiple parentage, his benevolent nature, when worshipped, is clearly seen as well.³⁶³

The gods, as they often do, became anxious and afraid of this new and powerful being, contending to each other that the Universe was unable to bear such a chaotic force and

³⁶² *rudreṇāgniṃ samāviśya svāhām āviśya comayā* | MBH 3.220.9a

³⁶³ As Handelman (1987: 139) puts it, “he is replete with potentially destructive power, for he cannot stabilize himself as a unitary being.” See Handelman, Don. 1987. “Myths of Murugan: Asymmetry and Hierarchy in a South Indian Puranic Cosmology.” *History of Religions* 27 (2): 133–70.

assuming that his arrival somehow meant their destruction. The gods run to their King, Indra, and demand he do something. Out of fear that his own position may be usurped by Skanda, Indra decides to dispatch the fierce "Mothers," (*mātrs*) against him, believing they would have the power to kill the odd-looking child god since they were *bālagrahas* (child-seizers), whose specialty was killing infants. However, upon seeing Skanda, the blood-thirsty (*lohitaḥhojanā*) Mothers immediately realize they would be unable to defeat such a powerful being, and instead become overpowered by love for the child. According to the text, their maternal instincts take over and milk instantaneously began to flow from their breasts. The Mothers then decide to adopt him as their own, transforming the fierce infant-slayers to fierce infant-protectors of Skanda (MBh 3.215.13-18).

Indra and the gods, however, now had to battle the mighty Skanda themselves. From the mouth of "the son of Agni" (Skanda), huge bolts of flames were said to have blazed forth and burned the armies of the gods until they too had to run for refuge. Indra, angered, unleashes his own mighty thunderbolt (*vajra*) at the child-god, which causes him no harm, but does split Skanda into two beings, resulting in the birth of the spear-bearing Viśākha ("The Forked One"). Seeing this miraculous sight, Indra surrenders and bows down in refuge to the mighty Skanda.

It was not only Viśākha who was born from this violent act, however, but also a host of beings known as Skanda's companions (*skandasyapārṣadān*), made up of the fierce *kumārakas* ("young boys") and the powerful *kanyās* ("young maidens") whom, the text states, "cruelly rob infants, both those born and those still in the womb" (MBH 3.217.1-2). An earlier mention of these demonic *kumāras* is found in the *Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra* (1.116.24), a late Vedic text dealing with domestic rites for a newborn son, including a

protective rite against attacks by a *kumāra* (*kumāra upadravet*).³⁶⁴ At any rate, the

Āranyakaparvan attempts to elucidate Skanda's connection with these newly born beings:

Those who are proclaimed as *Kumāras* and *Kumāris* and who were born from Skanda, they, O Kauravya, are all very great seizers who are eaters of fetuses. They (the *Kumāras*) are said to be the husbands of those *Kumāris* [and] perform terrible acts, seizing young children while remaining unknown (MBh 3.219.30-31).

I would argue that it is from these classes of fierce *bālagrahas* and Skanda's association with them that he receives the designation as "Kumāra", rather than just a reference to being a child-god as is predominantly understood. The text, however, seems a bit confused and tangled regarding this relationship as seen in the following lines of the text (see footnote).³⁶⁵ Eventually we are told the various beings that make up the six heads of Skanda, which includes Skanda, Viśākha, Bhadraśākha, Rudra, Agni, and lastly, the goat-headed Naigameṣa, an ancient *bālagraha* found in Vedic, Buddhist and Jain traditions.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ PGS 1.116.24. Various commentators at this time also considered the *kumāras* to be *bālagrahas*. See Mann (2004: 37).

³⁶⁵ *vajraprahārāt skandasya jajñus tatra kumārakāḥ | ye haranti śiśūñ jātān garbhasthāṃś caiva dāruṇāḥ | vajraprahārāt kanyās ca jajñire 'sya mahābalāḥ | kumārās ca viśākhaṃ taṃ pītṛtve samakalpayan | sa bhūtvā bhagavān samkhye rakṣaṃś chāgamukhas tadā | vṛtaḥ kanyāgaṇaiḥ sarvair ātmanīnaiś ca putrakaiḥ | mātṛṇāṃ prekṣatīnāṃ ca bhadraśākhas ca kauśalah | tataḥ kumārapitaram skandam āhur janā bhuvī | rudram agnim umāṃ svāhām pradeśeṣu mahābalām | yajanti putrakāmās ca putriṇas ca sadā janāḥ | MBh 03.217.1c – 03.217.5c*

Though born from Skanda, the text confusingly states that the *kumāras* take up Viśākha as their father, despite a few lines later Skanda being once again called "the father of the *kumāras*" (*kumārapitaram skandam*; MBh 3.217.4). It is also unclear who is referred to in the previous line as becoming "Goat-Faced" (*chāgamukhas*; MBh 3.217.3) and who is said to stand guard over the *kumāras*. The text simply states, "The Blessed One", though it is not completely apparent who this refers to. It seems to refer either to Viśākha, Skanda, or Bhadraśākha, though in a previous stanza it is Skanda's father, Agni, who is said to be in the form of a goat-headed deity known as Naigameya (*naigameyas chāgavaktro*; MBh 3.215.23). Too add to the confusion, the text goes on to state that the Mothers in turn make Skanda their son, who is also now described as being goat-faced!

³⁶⁶ *śaṣṭham chāgamayaṃ vaktraṃ skandasyaiveti viddhi tat | ṣaṭśiro 'bhyantaram rājan nityaṃ mātṛgaṇārcitam || MBh 3.217.12* "Know that the sixth face of Skanda from among the six heads is a goat's face which is always worshipped by the band of Mothers." As David White (2003: 282) has pointed out, the goat is traditionally Agni's sacred animal, and Agni as the goat-headed Naigameṣa here appears to be an "alloform" of an older child-bestowing Vedic deity known as Nejaṃeṣa, identical with Jaina deity Naigameṣa and the Buddhist Nemeso. White references Winternitz 1895 article "Nejamesha, Naigamesha, Nemeso". Deglurkar (1988: 57) claims that Naigameṣa was demon harmful to children that goes back to the time of the Atharva Veda, while the *Grhya Sūtras* mention the same dangerous being, though known as Nejaṃeṣa. The *Suśruta Saṃhitā* is also aware of a shape-shifting goat or ram-headed *bālagraha* known as Naigameṣa, who is noted as a protector of children if worshipped properly - SS6.36.11/ *ajānanaścalākṣibhrūḥ kāmārūpī mahāyaśāḥ | bālaṃ*

Archaeological evidence shows there was a cult of Naigameṣa in north-west India and the Ganges basin, which was widely popular throughout the Kuṣāṇa period - though it may be more proper to have called it a cult of Naigameṣī since more female versions of the goat-headed deity were found than male. Jayaswal provides evidence to show that this cult was especially associated with pregnancy and childbirth and worshipped by all segments of society.³⁶⁷

Directly after the goat-head reference, the next verse states, “The best among his six heads is called Bhadrāśakha, through which he created the divine Śakti.” As David White (2003: 39) notes, “these verses constitute the sole mention of Śakti as a goddess in the entire Epic”, which is significant given the association Skanda has with goddesses and the importance of Śakti in later tantric traditions.³⁶⁸

The confusion in these texts suggest that the authors were not completely familiar with demonological systems they were attempting to incorporate, or that these portions were incorrectly redacted from another source. The ambiguity may also have been purposeful – Mann argues that part of the Brahmanical agenda was to remove Skanda from his *graha* roots and domesticate his unorthodox and malevolent nature, allowing him to be appropriated into the Brahmanical fold.³⁶⁹

Collectively, the troop of Mother's Skanda interacts with are known as the *sapta-śiśumātara*, “The Seven Mothers of Infants”, and each member is enumerated, some of

bālapitā devo naigameṣo 'bhirakṣatu! “The goat-faced Lord Naigameṣa, father of the children, with trembling eyes and brows, he who assumes any form at will, whose splendour is great, protect the child!” By the 5th century CE, we find images of goat-headed figure carrying a spear – a clear merging of these two deities. See Deglurkar, G. B., “Naigameṣa Emerging as Kārtikeya: The Iconographic Record.” *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* Vol. 47–48: (1988): 57–59.

³⁶⁷ V. Jayaswal, *Kuṣāṇa Clay Art of Ganga Plains: A Case Study of Human Forms from Khairadih*, (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1991): 41-45.

³⁶⁸ White (2003: 39)

³⁶⁹ Mann (2004: 37)

which are known demonic entities in other sources.³⁷⁰ At one point, these groups of Mātr̥s go to Skanda, stating, “We want to eat the offspring of those (human) Mothers; give them to us.” (MBh 3.219.19). Skanda grants their request, stating they are allowed to “Injure the young children of people with your different forms until they are sixteen years old”, but he adds a stipulation - the Mātr̥s must save the offspring of those who properly worship them. Telling the Mothers this, Skanda becomes split once again – this time a golden fragment named Skandāpasmāra (Skanda’s *apasmāra* “forgetfulness” or “convulsion”), described as a “Rudra-like siezer” (*raudra-graha*), emits from his body and falls to the ground, trembling. As a way to distance this new being from Skanda, the narrator then states that it is this *raudra-graha*, not Skanda himself, who would aid the Mothers in the consumption (*bhuj*) of human children (MBh 3.219.22-25). As previously mentioned, Mann argues that these accounts of Skanda splitting from his *graha*-like behavior was a purposeful strategy used by the Brahmanical authors to distance, recast, domesticate, and ultimately assimilate Skanda's character into their more orthodox pantheon.³⁷¹

From Skandāpasmāra, eighteen more *skandagrahas* (“Skanda-Seizers”) arise and are listed (MBh 3.219.26-42). Each grasper is female, and each is named specifically, except for the collective group of *kumārīs* and *mātr̥s*. Only one of the *mātr̥s* is spoken of in more detail, but it is unclear if they are names or simply descriptors – for example, this mother is said to “feast on blood” (*lohitabhajanā*), was “born from fury” (*krodhasamudbhavā*) and was “the cruel daughter of the sea of blood” (MBh 3.215.22a *lohitasayodadheḥ kanyā krūrā*). All

³⁷⁰ The names are: Kākī (“She-Crow”), Halimā, Rudrā, Bṛhālī (“She Who Makes Strong”), Āryā, Palālā (“Sorghum Stalk”), and Mitrā (“Lady Friend”). Halimā could refer to either to screw pine plant (*Pandanus Odoratissimus*) or, as David White (2003: 39) notes, “Halīmaka (“Yellowness”) is a form of jaundice described in the Ayurvedic classic, the *Suśruta Saṃhitā* (SS).” The name Palālā (“Sorghum Stalk”), he states, is also the name of a male demon inimical to children in the *Atharva Veda*”.

³⁷¹ See Mann (2004)

other *grāhis* are similarly described as fierce in nature and “fond of flesh and liquor” (*māṃsamadhupriyāḥ* 3.219.35a). See van Buitenen’s full translation of this particular section enumerating the various seizers in the footnotes.³⁷² To add to this list of Mothers, David White notes another demonological list in the *Harivaṃśa*, an appendix (*khila*) to the MBh. The first of these includes a list of eighteen Divine Daughters (*devakanyās*) who are described as fierce female *grāhis* “resembling the tribal goddess Vindhyavāsini”³⁷³ who enjoy, “lymph, marrow, and are enamored of liquor and flesh, having the faces of cats and leopards, faces resembling those of elephants and lions, as well as faces identical to those of herons, crows, vultures, and cranes.”³⁷⁴ White further notes the connection and conflation of these *grahas* with diseases (e.g. *Skandāpasmāra*, *Jāyānya*, *Śītalā*) or feral domestic animals

³⁷² "Vinatā is said to be the horrible Bird-Grasper. They call Puṭana a Rākṣasī - one should know that she is the Puṭana-Grasper: she is an awful Stalker of the Night, evil in her ghastly shape. One horrifying Piśacī is called Sītapuṭana: this terrible-shaped specter aborts the fetus of women. They say that Aditi is Revatī: her Grasper is Raivata; this horrible and big Grasper afflicts small children. Diti, the mother of the Daityas, is said to be Mukhamaṇḍikā: this unapproachable demoness feasts gluttonously on children’s flesh. The Kumāras and Kumārīs that sprang from Skanda are also all foetus-eaters and very dangerous Graspers. Kauravya; the Kumāras are known as the husbands of the Kumārīs, and these Rudra-like acting demons snatch small children, while they remain unknown. The informed call Surabhi the mother of the cows; a bird perches on her and swallows’ children on earth, O King. The divine Saramā is the mother of the dogs, lord of the people - she too snatches the fetus of men at all times. The mother of the trees lives in the *karañja* tree: people who want sons therefore pay homage to her in the *karañja*. These eighteen Graspers, and others as well, like flesh and strong liquor; they always stay in the confinement chamber for ten nights. When Kadru in a subtle form enters a pregnant woman, she eats the foetus inside her and the mother gives birth to a snake. The mother of the Gandharvas takes away the fetus and goes; thus, that woman therefore is found on earth to be one whose fetus has vanished. The progenitrix of the Apsaras takes the fetus and sits, therefore the wise call that fetus a sitting one. The daughter of the blood sea is known as the nurse of Skanda: she is worshiped as Lohitāyani in the *kadamba* tree. Just as Rudra dwells in men, so does Arya dwell in women. Āryā, a mother of Skanda, is worshiped separately to obtain wishes. Here with I have proclaimed the great Graspers of the Kumaras who are malign for sixteen years, then turn benevolent. The enumerated bands of Mothers and the male Graspers are all always to be known by embodied creatures as the Skanda-Graspers." (MBh 3.219.26-42) as seen in J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahabharata. Volume 2: Book 2 The Book of the Assembly Hall; Book 3 The Book of the Forest*. (University of Chicago Press, 1975) 658. Minor emendations are mine.

³⁷³ Originally a tribal goddess from the mountains of Vindhya – that these beings resemble her may once again point to the tribal or at least non-Brahmanical origins of some of these beings. See Yokochi, “*The Rise of the Warrior Goddess in Ancient India A Study of the Myth Cycle of Kauśikā-Vindhyavāsini in the Skandapurāṇa*”, (PhD Dissertation, University of Groningen, 2004).

³⁷⁴ Translation by White (2003: 53) The second, a list of female Seizers, names Mukhamaṇḍī, Viḍālī (“Kitty”), Pūtanā, Gandhapūtanā (“Aromatic Stinky”), Śītavātā (“Cooling Breeze”), Uṣṇavetālī (“Hot Vampiress”), and Revatī, and ends with the plea “may the Mothers protect my son, like mothers, perpetually.”

(e.g. dogs) or birds - known agents of contagion.³⁷⁵ This characterization and association of invisible spirits with disease and animals as “agents of contagion” helps to explain their popularly imagined forms, which as we’ve seen, are often animal-headed or limbed. This motley crew of Mothers also recalls, of course, descriptions of Rudra-Śiva’s own animal-headed *gaṇas* and *bhūtas*, which likely follows the same logic.

Rather than Rudra-Śiva, however, all these fierce *grahas* are said to be subservient to Lord Skanda. The next few lines (MBH 3.219.43) state that one should propitiate these Mothers and seizers specifically through the “rites of Skanda” (*skandasyejyā*), which is briefly described as including worship (*pūjā*), pacifying rites (*praśamaṇaṁ kāryaṁ*), ablution, incense, collyrium, sacrificial offerings (*balikarma*), and other oblations. In return, the text claims, the *grahas* can be controlled and transformed from injurers, to bestowers of well-being, long life, and virility [MBH 3.219.44].³⁷⁶ These rites, of course, evoke the sorts of apotropaic practices we’ve seen in the Atharva Veda, which continue in coeval *bhūtavidyā* sections found in the medical texts, which we will turn to shortly.

As Mann has pointed out, this particular rite of Skanda (*skandasyejyā*) may be related to the *Skandayāga* rituals described in the *Dhūrtakalpa* of the *Atharvaveda Pariśiṣṭa*, a late Atharvavedic text written soon after the MBH.³⁷⁷ In this rite, Skanda is known as Dhūrta (literally “a rogue, thief, or cheat”), epithets which, as we’ve seen, echo names previously associated with Rudra and Kubera. Here, however, it is Skanda who is invoked into a

³⁷⁵ White (2003: 58)

³⁷⁶ *teṣāṁ praśamaṇaṁ kāryaṁ snānaṁ dhūpam athāñjanam | balikarmopahāraś ca skandasyejyā viśeṣataḥ || evam ete 'rcitāḥ sarve prayacchanti śubhaṁ nṛṇām | āyur vīryaṁ ca rājendra samyak pūjānamaskṛtāḥ ||* MBH 3.219.43-44

³⁷⁷ This chapter is found in book twenty of the *Atharvaveda Pariśiṣṭa*. According to Mann (2004: 41), dates for this could range from the beginning of the common era to the 6th century CE. Sections of the AVP also come to form parts of early Śaiva Tantric texts, see Peter Bisschop and Arlo Griffiths. “The Pāśupata Observance (*Atharvaedapariśiṣṭa* 40).” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 46 (4): (2003): 315-323.

maṇḍala, which is said to be made up of various ritual items, including garlands of tree leaves, bells, banners, mirrors, and a protective amulet. A variety of characteristic offerings are then made to the deity along with hymns of praise and the consecration of a sacrificial fire. The rite ends with the recitation of *mantras* and the tying of a protective amulet. The text states that this amulet protects against enemies, inauspiciousness and evils of all sorts, including demons, wicked humans, *gandharvas*, *piśācas*, *rākṣasas*, and malevolent spells from enemy sorcerers or witches. The completion of the rite is also said, interestingly enough, to grant wealth and progeny.³⁷⁸ As we've seen, these are all characteristic of protective ritual programs involving both Rudra-Śiva and Kubera, as well.

Following these lists in the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, another list of *grahas* who possess people older than sixteen years of age is given (MBH 3.219.45-55). None, however, are named specifically and the list represents generic categories, including *deva-grahas* ("god-graspers"), *pitṛ-grahas* ("ancestor spirit-graspers"), *siddha-grahas*, *rākṣasa-grahas*, *gandharvas*, *yakṣa-grahas*, and *piśācās*, among others. The text states that when someone becomes possessed (*praviśa* – literally “entered into”) by any one of these entities, the victims “quickly go mad” (*unmādyati sa tu kṣipraṃ*). A direct etiological association is thus being made between madness (*unmāda*) and possessing entities, though little detail is given besides a brief mention of corresponding symptoms and the mode of possession:

A man who sees (*paśyati*) gods, whether awake or asleep, quickly becomes insane (*unmādyati*) and is called “god-grasped” (*devagrahan*). One who sees one's deceased ancestors goes mad and is called “ancestor-grasped” (*pitṛgrahan*). One who hates perfected beings (*siddhas*) is cursed by them and becomes “*siddha*-grasped”

³⁷⁸ Mann (2004: 46) makes mention of the 7th-9th century text, the *Sanmukhakaḥkalpa*, “The practice of the Six-faced one” which is manual of sorcery and thievery using magical charms, powders, sleeping potions and other such spells for invisibility, breaking locks etc. Besides Rudra, the other primary and well-known deity associated with thieves in later traditions was the fierce goddess Kāli - see Dinesh Chandra Sircar, *Studies in the Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995): 102.

(*siddhagrahan*). One who smells (*upāghrāti*) scents and tastes flavors that are not accurate goes mad and is known as “demon-grasped” (*rākṣasagrahan*). One whom heavenly *gandharvas* touch (*sāṃspośanti*) is “*gandharva-grasped*” (*gandharvagrahan*) and becomes insane. *Yakṣas* may enter (*āviśanti*) a man who then slowly becomes insane and is known as “*yakṣa-grasped*” (*yakṣagrahan*). A “*pisāca-grasped*” man (*piśācagrahan*) becomes insane quickly, as does one whose humors (*doṣas*) are completely out of balance.³⁷⁹ Finally, we are told that these *grahas* are of three types: playful (*krībitukāman*), gluttonous (*bhoktukāman*), and lustful (*abhikāman*). Over the age of seventy, fever becomes the equal of a *graha*. But *grahas* never touch (*na sprśanti*) those who are pure, faithful, and devotees (*bhaktān*) of the god Maheśvara [MBH 3.219.46-58].³⁸⁰

In contrast to previous sections, note here that Maheśvara (Śiva) rather than Skanda, is, in fact, said to be the lord of all these beings. Shortly after, the text states that Rudra told Skanda that his “terrible flesh-eating companions” (*pāriṣadā ghorā piśitāzanāḥ*) were known by the wise (*manīṣibhiḥ*) to be none other than Śiva’s own *gaṇas*.³⁸¹ This makes sense given that Rudra is the more ancient *bhūtanātha* and Skanda’s father, but this may have also been likely a move to graft Rudra’s qualities onto Skanda in an effort to “domesticate” and strengthen the associations between the two deities.

This list of *bālagrahas* and *grahas* in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* of the MBH is fascinating for a number of reasons. First, it brings together in one section a huge swathe of supernatural beings explicitly classified as possession entities, many found in earlier Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain literature, in a relatively detailed and systematic manner. Like the Atharva Veda and the Ayurvedic treatises, the MBH also briefly gives some of the symptomology and prescribed rites and remedies to combat or propitiate these possessing entities. The mention of humors (*doṣas*), fever and madness in this passage also gives further credence to the idea that these

³⁷⁹ Also note the use of *ā+viś* when discussing *yakṣas* and also the equivalence made of the madness that arises from one who is *pisāca-grasped* being the same as one whose humors (*doṣas*) are out of balance. This becomes an important concept in the Ayurvedic texts, as we’ll see in the next chapter.

³⁸⁰ Translation based upon Smith (2006: 274-275)

³⁸¹ *ta ete vividhākārā gaṇā jñeyā manīṣibhiḥ | tava pāriṣadā ghorā ya ete piśitāzanāḥ* || MBH 3.220.12

sections may have been redacted from medical texts where, as we will see, all of this becomes much more detailed.

We are also given explicit characterizations of Skanda and Śiva's role as *bhūtanāthas* – we are told the *grahas* afflictive possession has been sanctioned by these deities and it is they who ultimately have control over them. If one directly appeases the *bhūtanāthas*, as in the case of the *skandayaga* rite, they have the power to make these destructive beings into beneficial spirits who bestow blessings, health, and wealth to his devotees - this idea, of course, forms the foundations of later tantric traditions. Since they are at the top of the command chain, it is implied that direct worship to his lower attendants might not even be necessary anymore. Again, this may have been part of the Brahmanical author's agenda - to direct cultic and worship activities away from the lower *grahas* and, instead, direct it to the higher, and now domesticated, *bhūtanāthas* like Skanda and Śiva. However, we should also note in MBh 3.219, that it is ultimately improper worship that causes possession by these afflictive beings, not the will of the *grahas* or their leaders. As Mann puts it “the text allows for a mechanism where the victim, or, in the more likely case of a child victim, the victim's parents ultimately receive the blame for not properly worshipping Skanda and Grahas.”³⁸² As we will soon see, this notion of moral transgressions as the cause for disease and possession continues and becomes magnified in the Ayurvedic medical traditions.

³⁸² See Mann, "The Splitting of Skanda: Distancing and Assimilation Narratives in the "Mahābhārata" and Ayurvedic Sources", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 127 (4): (2007): 461.

SKANDA IN THE MEDICAL TRADITIONS

Although hinted at, the MBh ultimately does not endorse the existence of a *graha* named Skanda. This was deliberate on the part of the authors, as Mann has shown, to separate Skanda from his *graha* roots and to re-characterize him as a force of control over *grahas*, as opposed to being a *graha* himself.³⁸³ In parallel medical and Purāṇic traditions, however, Skanda is often explicitly classified as a *graha*, usually alongside a host of other possessing-entities.

According to Meulenbeld and Zysk, the foundational medical texts of Ayurveda, the *Suśruta Saṃhitā* and *Caraka Saṃhitā*, were developed sometime between the second-century BCE and second-century CE, making them roughly contemporaneous with the MBh. Both further believe these medical texts were likely the source texts for this portion of the MBh.³⁸⁴ Smith follows suit, stating this section of the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, “was almost certainly adopted from them [the early ayurvedic texts] and mythologized in the MBh”, while Mann adds “if the two texts were not aware of each other, there can be little doubt they shared similar sources and held similar views on how Skanda and Grahas should be characterized.”³⁸⁵

In chapter thirty-seven of the *Uttara-Tantra* of the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, entitled *Grahotpatti-Adhyāya*, “The Chapter on the Origin of the Seizers, etc.”, we are told a slightly different story from the MBh’s account regarding the origin of the nine primary *bālagrahas*.

³⁸³ Mann (2007: 456)

³⁸⁴ See Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Volume 1A (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999): 342-43, and Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 13. We also find similar lists in Jain texts of the same period, such as the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*, aka the *Bhagavati Sūtra* (3.7.164), which mentions *yakṣa-grahas*, *indra-grahas*, *skanda-grahas*, *kumāra-grahas*, etc. again pointing to shared sources by these traditions

³⁸⁵ Smith (2006: 273) and Mann (2007: 454). In Jean Filliozat, *Étude de démonologie indienne. Le Kumāratantra de Rāvana et les textes parallèles indiens, tibétains, chinois, cambodgien et arabe*, (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1937): 11, he agrees that they likely shared the same source, though he believes the SS may have borrowed directly from the MBh.

In this account, the *bālagrahas* were created by the Kṛittika goddesses, the great Goddess Umā, Gangā, Agni and Śūlin (“The Bearer of the Spear”, an epithet for Śiva) in order to protect their newborn child Skanda, in contrast to the Mātṛs who were originally sent to destroy in the MBh. These child-seizers are described as having divine bodies (*divyavapuṣaḥ*), varied forms (*nānārūpā*), endowed with radiance (*śrīmantaḥ*), and composed of *rājasa* (passion) and *tāmasa* (darkness), qualities of the various Goddesses who they are said to be a portion (*bhāga*) of (SS6.37.3-5).³⁸⁶

There are also more details on some of the other *grahas* mentioned in the MBh’s *Āraṇyakaparvan*: the ram/goat-faced figure is explicitly identified as Naigameśa and said to have been created by Śiva’s wife, Parvati, as a friend (*sakhi*) and protector of the young child (*kumāradhārin*) Guha-Skanda, who here is stated to be a god (*deva*), rather than a *graha*. Skandāpasmara is also mentioned as a companion (*sakha*) of Skanda and is further identified as being the same as Viśākha, who is said to be born from Agni and described as “radiant as fire” (*agnisamadyutiḥ*) (SS6.37.7). Skanda, in contrast, is said to have been directly created by Lord Śiva.³⁸⁷ In this text then, it is clear that Viśākha and Skanda are two separate beings, while in the MBh account they are conflated by the authors.

In the few next lines, however, the text becomes a bit more ambiguous – SS6.37.8, for example, reads: “That *graha* also bears another name, known as Kumāra.”³⁸⁸ “That *graha*” implies they are talking about Skanda from the previous line, however, the following lines seem to want to make a distinction, stating:

³⁸⁶ *nava skandādayaḥ proktā bālānām ya ime grahāḥ | śrīmanto divyavapuṣo nārīpuruṣavigrahāḥ || ete guhasya rakṣārthaṁ kṛttikomāgniśūlibhiḥ | sṛṣṭāḥ śaravaṇasthasya rakṣitasyātmatejasā || strīvigrahā grahā ye tu nānārūpā mayeritāḥ | gaṅgomākṛttikānām te bhāgā rājasatāmasāḥ || SS 6.37.3-5*

³⁸⁷ *skandaḥ sṛṣṭo bhagavatā devena tripurāriṇā | SS 6.37.8ab*

³⁸⁸ *bibharti cāparāṁ saṁjñāṁ kumāra iti sa grahaḥ || SS 6.37.8cd*

That god (*deva*) born from Agni and Rudra, engages in play (*līla*) like a child - the Blessed/Divine One (*bhagavān*) never engages in improper conduct. In this matter, some illiterate ones equate Skanda and Kumāra. Those physicians, having no knowledge, say “He (Skanda) seizes”.³⁸⁹

This caveat may be an acknowledgement of the larger shift occurring in the tradition, as we had seen in the MBh, regarding the differences between the innocent child-god Skanda versus the fetus-eating Skanda-*graha*, who is more akin to the *kumāra* child-seizers of the *Āranyakaparvan*. This is all in contrast to the end of this section in which Skanda’s *graha* nature is indisputable: “Of all of those (*grahas*), *Skanda-graha* is known as the most horrible (*atyugratama*)”, whose severe afflictions, the text states, can cause disfigurement (*vaikalya*) and even death (*marana*).³⁹⁰

The SS continues, stating that once Skanda became the lord of the armies of the gods (*surasenāpati*), all the *grahas* came together and placed themselves before him, enquiring about their subsistence. Skanda decides to go to his father Śiva, who relays to him a short discourse on the principle of mutual or reciprocal benefit (*parasparopakāreṇa*), which is how, he argues, the world is preserved and maintained.³⁹¹ In order to provide for the *grahas*, Śiva allots to them the infants of those families who have committed various moral transgressions, including not worshipping or improperly attending to the gods, *pitṛs*, *brahmins*, or *gurus* etc., not following the rules of purity and virtue, not giving alms to beggars, etc. Note the continuation of this idea of possession being a result of moral or ritual transgressions, as discussed in the MBh 3.219 - an idea amplified in the medical literature, as we will continue to see. To expiate for their transgressions, the SS states that families should

³⁸⁹ | *bālalīlādharo yo+ayaṃ devo rudrāgnisaṃbhavaḥ | mithyācāreṣu bhagavān svayaṃ naiṣa pravartate|| kumāraḥ skandasāmānyādatra kecidapaṇḍitāḥ/grhṇātiityalpavijñānā bruvate dehacintakāḥ || SS 6.37.9-10*

³⁹⁰ SS 6.37.21-22

³⁹¹ Generally, the argument goes something like this: Just like the gods bring benefit to humans in the form of rain or wind or seasons, so to do humans benefit the gods through their devotional acts and sacrificial rites.

worship and make offerings to the *grahas*, thus securing the *grahas* subsistence and livelihood (SS 6.37-11-20). This, according to the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, is how the *bālagrahas* came into being and why they attack children – ultimately, they are re-cast as Śiva’s agents of justice, carrying out his orders against various transgressors.³⁹²

The text declares that possession by these entities occurs because of improper conduct (*apacāra*), loss of purity/cleanliness (*śauca-bhraṣṭa*) and the abandonment of auspicious religious rites (*maṅgalācāra-hīna*) by either the mother or wet-nurse. Possession can also take place if the child is somehow frightened (*trasta*), overly excited or astonished (*hr̥ṣṭa*), threatened (*tarjita*), or if beaten or abused in some manner (*tāḍita*). The chapter restates, that the *grahas* motive for harming (*hims*) children is simply to secure worship (*pūjā*) for themselves (SS 6.27.4).³⁹³ The following lines give further descriptions, stating that the *grahas* have supernatural (*aiśvarya*) powers, assume variegated forms (*viśvarūpā*), and enter/possess (*viśat*) the bodies of people invisibly.³⁹⁴ Following this is a very long list of medical symptoms characteristic of each of the nine *bālagrahas* (SS 6.27.8-27.16), followed by a general description of remedial and therapeutic procedures (SS 6.27.18-21). We will look at these in the following chapter.

As a general example of treatment for possession by these *grahas*, the text states the child should be kept in a purified room and their body anointed with medicated ghee. Mustard seeds should be strewn all over the floor, and a lamp of mustard oil should be kept

³⁹² In an earlier chapter entitled “Knowledge Concerning the Specific Features of the Nine Grahas” (Chapter 27, *Navagrahākṛtivistivijñānīyamadhya*), the full list of nine infant-seizers (*bālagrahas*) is enumerated, beginning again with the most dreadful *graha*, Skanda. Following him is Skandāpasmāra (identified as Viśakha in SS 6.29.9), Śakunī, Revatī, Pūtanā, Andha-Pūtanā, Śita-Pūtanā, Mukhamaṅḍikā, and Naigameśa, who is also called a *Pitr-Graha*. (SS 6.27.2-3)

³⁹³ David White (personal communication) notes that this portion may be a source for chapter nineteen of the Netra Tantra, which discusses the conditions under which people fall under the thrall of the evil eye, discussed in next chapter.

³⁹⁴ *aiśvaryasthāste na śakyā viśanto dehaṃ draṣṭuṃ mānuṣairviśvarūpāḥ* | SS6.27.7

perpetually burning therein. Offerings of perfumes, garlands, ghee, various herbs, medicines, and unguents are cast into a sacrificial fire, while reciting the following mantra:

Hail to Agni! Hail to the Krittikas! Obeisance to Lord (deva) Skanda, the Lord of the Grahas (*grahādhipati*)! With my head down saluting you respectfully, please accept my offerings! Swiftly make my child free from disease and well again!³⁹⁵

The mark of the Atharva Veda can be clearly seen here, as it can in all subsequent treatments described throughout this section. Although Agni is mentioned here, his role as the premiere demon-destroyer or exorcist in the AV, seems to have been superseded by Skanda who is now described as the *grahādhipati*, “The Lord of *Grahas*”.

SKANDA IN VARIANT TRADITIONS

Before leaving Skanda and diving further into the medical literature’s treatment of possession in the next chapter, I wish to offer an expanded view of Skanda by incorporating relevant data from variant traditions he is a part of and which he gets conflated with. Scholars focusing solely on the Northern Sanskrit traditions related to Skanda often overlook important aspects which add to the bigger picture of the Skanda. As we will see, while Skanda and his cult may have become more “domesticated” among Brahmanical circles in the North, in a variety of other traditions throughout South Asia and East Asia, Skanda’s *graha*-nature, his role as a *bhūtanātha*, and his association with possession continues on, particularly with the advent and eventual spread of the Hindu and Buddhist Tantric traditions.³⁹⁶ A primary feature of his cult in these variant traditions is not only its exorcistic and apotropaic dimensions, but also Skanda’s manifestation in his devotees in rites of deity

³⁹⁵ *agnye kṛttikābhyaśca svāhā svāheti saṃtatam|| namaḥ skandāya devāya grahādhipataye namaḥ| śirasā tvābhivande ahaṃ pratigrhṇīṣva me balim| nīrujo nirvikāraśca śīśurme jāyatām drutam||* SS6.27.20cd-21)

³⁹⁶ See Mann (2004) and (2012) regarding the various post-Kushan depictions of Skanda in the North.

possession. I will briefly give some examples from these traditions, which will add to our picture of what becomes the Pan-Asian Skanda.

Following this, I will additionally offer some relevant data regarding other *bhūtanāthas* related with Skanda and who become popular throughout Asia much in the same way. Like Skanda, all of these deities have strong associations with possession, either historically or currently – this includes Gaṇapati (“Lord of Gaṇas”) Mahākāla-Bhairava, who becomes the premiere *bhūtanātha* of the tantric traditions; and finally, Hanumān-Bālaḥ, the popular monkey-god.

MURUGAN-SUBRAHMAṆYA - THE SO-CALLED "SKANDA OF THE SOUTH"

Skanda’s counterpart in the South is a figure equally as complex as that of the North. As in the North, Skanda becomes conflated by Brahmanic systematizers with a variety of deities - a synthesis between the Sanskrit Skanda-Kumāra-Kārttikeya traditions of the North with the indigenous Tamil Cevvēḷ-Murugan traditions of the South.³⁹⁷ His following in the Southern regions of India (including Śri Lanka) is so widespread and popular that some consider it an independent tradition that should be “included in the “great” religions of Hinduism.”³⁹⁸

Murugan’s first appearance in South Indian texts is in the poems of the so-called Tamil Saṅgam literature, whose dates of composition are still quite a matter of contentious debate. Since its “re-discovery” at the end of the 19th century, its dating has been fraught with political agendas and motives, which has often skewed scholarship on this literature.

³⁹⁷ Clothey (2006: 233)

³⁹⁸ See Strickmann (2005: 224) and Filliozat (1937)

Originally, much of its composition was assigned sometime between the second-century BC to the fourth-century AD, however, many scholars, most recently Herman Tiekēn, have questioned this dating and have strongly argued for its composition to be closer to the eighth or ninth century CE.³⁹⁹ The various viewpoints on this will not be explicated here, but suffice to say, the Tamil Saṅgam's account of Murugan is quite different from Sanskritic accounts of Skanda, though some interesting and similar qualities are also found in both, as we will now see.

Like Skanda of the North, Murugan is strongly associated with mountains as *Malaikilavōṇ*, the "Lord of the Mountains" and is particularly linked with the hill tract regions (*kuṛiṅci*) and its tribal inhabitants. He is depicted as the hunter-warrior *par excellence*, much as Rudra is characterized in early Vedic texts and Skanda in the Sanskrit Epics. One difference, however, is that rather than Devasena, the consort of Skanda in the North, Murugan is said to be married to Vaḷḷi, a daughter of the chief of the hill tribe, implying Murugan's tribal association and potential origins as scholars have suggested.⁴⁰⁰ In the Sri Lankan tradition, his consort is known as Walliamme, who also belonged to tribal guardians of the Kataragama Temple complex known as the Veddās, where Murukan still resides as the primary deity of worship.⁴⁰¹

Like the Northern Skanda, Murugan is also especially associated with the color red, and is often known as Cēyōṇ, "The Red One". This association with red encompasses a

³⁹⁹ Herman Tiekēn, "A Propos Three Recent Publications on the Question of the Dating of Old Tamil Cankam Poetry." *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Asienkunde = Études Asiatiques: Revue de la Société Suisse d'études Asiatiques*. 62 (2): (2008): 575.

⁴⁰⁰ While there is mention in other poems of Devasenā being a second wife of Murugan, there is no mention of Vaḷḷi in the Sanskritic traditions of the North. However, according to Clothey (1978), Devasenā seems to be alluded to in the Tamil literature as Skanda's second wife. See Fred W. Clothey, *The Many Faces of Murukan: The History and Meaning of a South Indian God*. (The Hague; Paris; New York: Mouton, 1978).

⁴⁰¹ See Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1977. "Social Change and the Deities: Rise of the Kataragama Cult in Modern Sri Lanka." *Man*. 12: 377–96, for more on this complex.

number of qualities and motifs common in the Sanskrit and Tamil world, most generally symbolizing the god's primordial power, which is both generative and destructive. This is most clearly manifested in the potent symbols associated with the fierce Murugan in the Saṅgam literature – red lotuses, red garments, the red cock, the sacrificial fire (and subsequently the sun), and, of course, his association with blood sacrifices. These same associations with the color red are found with Rudra and various goddess and tantric traditions throughout South Asia.⁴⁰²

Skanda is also often depicted with his peacock vehicle though, in the South, there seems to be a stronger association with the red cock. To this day the cock is the favored animal commonly used in non-Brahmanical communities as a sacrifice to local gods and goddesses, particularly for apotropaic rites.⁴⁰³ Bhide notes that there is evidence in the Atharva Veda of cock sacrifices being associated with rites of sorcery and witchcraft, though in general the cock was not part of the orthodox Vedic sacrificial complex.⁴⁰⁴ We do, however, see mention of a cock sacrifice in Ayurvedic texts such as SS 6.28.8, as a method of healing against possession attacks by *Skanda-graha*. Murugan's association with the peacock also has apotropaic dimensions to it - as Strickmann has pointed out, Skanda in China also bears a spear in his hand and rides a peacock, both of which he states are,

⁴⁰² See Clothey (1978: 177-180) for more on Murugan's "redness"

⁴⁰³ Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India. Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged*, (Calcutta, 1921): 45 states "...to remove the bad effects of spells they invoke the principal deity of the particular village and offer cocks, goats, sheep etc., to that deity in the annual festivals...a number of cocks are offered to the village deities like Bahiroba, Mariai, Mhasoba. It is worth noting that the nature of these deities is altogether different from the Vedic deities". See also Wirz, Paul. *Exorcism and the Art of Healing in Ceylon*, (Leiden: Brill, 1954), for its use in exorcist rites and healing rites. I myself also witnessed the sacrifice of a cock in possession rituals related to Theyyam complex of Northern Kerala, which will be discussed later.

⁴⁰⁴ Atharvaveda (5.31.2). Whitney translates this verse as, "What (witchcraft) they have made for thee in a cock, or what in a *kuriṭa*-wearing goat, in an ewe what witchcraft they have made - I take that back again" (Whitney 1962: 279). Bhide also shows this association existed also in ancient Iranian Pahlavi texts - See Bhide, "Cock in Vedic Literature" in *Bhāratiya Vidyā*. Vol. 27, (1967): 1-5.

“standard instruments of exorcism” throughout Asia.⁴⁰⁵ Peacock feathers are reputed to have medicinal and healing properties and become an indispensable ingredient in demonological traditions for treating wounds, exorcism, and antidotes against snakebites. Even now peacock feathers are commonly waved over the sick or tied on as protective amulets to scare away demons and fight various diseases throughout India.⁴⁰⁶

Possession and exorcism are dominant features associated with Murugan in the Saṅgam poems. Murugan’s most important role in the literature is as a dispeller of *anaṅku*, which generally means “distress” or “fear”, but refers more specifically to suffering caused by disease, ghosts, demons, or sorcery. This *anaṅku* is often personified as his archenemy, the *cūr*, an afflictive malevolent spirit, usually female, who is said to roam the hills terrorizing and possessing its inhabitants.

Like Rudra, however, Murugan not only dispels *anaṅku*, but is also recognized as one who causes it. Although ultimately seen as a benevolent protector and a god of justice and virtue, Murugan dangerous side is also evidenced in these texts. For example, Murugan is feared for causing afflictive possession, especially in young women, much like the *gandharvas* we discussed earlier in the Vedic traditions. According to Purānānūru [299:6-7], women are instructed not to touch anything associated with Murugan, for fear they will be punished and possessed by the god. In various references he is even referred to as being *anaṅku* himself, implying that it is he who ultimately has control over this malevolent force –

⁴⁰⁵ Strickmann (2005: 224)

⁴⁰⁶ See P.T. Nair, “The Peacock Cult in Asia.” *Asian Folklore Studies* 33.2, (1974): 109; See also Smith (2006: 467 fn. 118) who also notes a contemporary *Hanumān-Upasānā* manual which discusses *yantras* used even today to ward off afflicting *bhūtas*. In these rites a peacock-feather fan is employed to “sweep away” spirits, especially from small children.

a feature familiar with most of the *bhūtanāthas* and *grahas* we have been discussing thus far.

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Despite this, what dominates most in Murugan's cult is his association with positive and divine forms of possession. A number of poems describe possession by Murugan as a joyous act of worship and communion, especially by women, who ecstatically dance his praise.⁴⁰⁸ In ritual contexts, other poems detail how he possesses the high priests and priestesses (*veḷan*) of the cult when invoked through rapturous and frenzied dance (*veriyātal*). He is also invoked in various divination rites in order to diagnose and prescribe treatments for disease and demonic possession. Frederick Clothey describes a poem on Murugan recorded in *Narriṇai* 288:

...a priestess (*kaṭṭuvicci*) is asked for a diagnosis of a maiden's languor. The diviner, be it priest or priestess, is believed to be possessed of the god and thus have access to the god's will... the site is spread with sand and decorated with red *kāntal* flowers...the dance is accompanied by musical instruments and songs. The priest elevates a puppet designed to take the illness from the maiden; a ram is sacrificed, and its blood offered to Murukan. The priestess...is given paddy, which she throws into the air. She perspires, shivers, smells her palms, and starts her rapturous singing in praise of Murukan. The paddy is counted by fours. If one, two or three paddy grains are left over, Murukan is believed to be the cause of the malaise; if the count is even, something else is that cause.⁴⁰⁹

Although this passage is poetry and neither highly descriptive nor prescriptive, these descriptions are remarkable for their continuity with past and contemporary possession and divination traditions, some which still exist throughout Asia today. Also note the use of possession as a way to diagnose, the creation of what appears to be a sand *maṇḍala*, and the use of a fetish, which they believe the disease is transferred to – as we will see these are all

⁴⁰⁷ See Clothey (1978: 29)

⁴⁰⁸ See Clothey (1978: 28)

⁴⁰⁹ See Clothey (1978: 28) who quotes from various Tamil sources (Tirumuru. 230 and Ciriyaṭirumardēl 20:22). Translation by Clothey.

important elements that are found in the Tantric texts and possession traditions even now. This is also the case in Sri Lanka, where Murugan regularly manifests himself by taking possession of his worshippers, particularly during festivals at Kataragama. Numerous ethnographies have been written over the years discussing the great Kataragama complex and the possession and exorcistic rites performed there.⁴¹⁰

Throughout the South, Murugan's devotees are also known to be involved in various "fierce rites" of devotion involving self-torture, mutilation, firewalking, hook-hanging and other painful ordeals imposed on his devotees in fulfillment of various vows. Referencing this aspect of Murugan-Skanda's worship, Strickmann writes, "His essential character seems to be that of a dark, violent god... a demonic and furious aspect remains at the core of the great patron deity, testifying to his ultimate demonic origins."⁴¹¹

Regardless of the precise dating of the Saṅgam literature, a process of Sanskritization and domestication had begun with the Southern Skanda from the 7th to 14th centuries, much as it did earlier with the *graha* Skanda from the North. During this period, sculptures, inscriptions, and literature gave dominance to Murugan-Skanda's more Brahmin-friendly manifestation as Subrahmaṇya. Leslie Orr argues that Murugan's disappearance from the archeological records during this period was due to his subsumption into the Śaiva and Brahmanic pantheons.⁴¹² Inscriptions from the 13th century give evidence of Subrahmaṇya-

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), Obeyesekere (1977); and Paul Younger, *Playing Host to Deity: Festival Religion in the South Indian Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴¹¹ Strickmann (2005: 224)

⁴¹² At this time, Subrahmaṇya was not considered a central figure in Śaiva or Śakta temple programs but was rather an adjunct protector deity installed alongside a number of other guardian deities (*dvārapālas*). Despite this effort to marginalize him, Subrahmaṇya's icons often became cult centers for his devotees, dwarfing even the presiding deities of the temple he was installed to protect. See Leslie C. Orr, "The Medieval Murugaṅ: The Place of a God among His Tamil Worshipers," in *Hindu Ritual at the Margins*, ed. Linda Penkower, (Columbia, S.C: The University of South Carolina Press, 2014): 21–41.

Skanda's rise in becoming a main focus of worship at such sites, and by the 14th century numerous temples were built solely dedicated to the deity. Not long after, Orr argues that a cultural revival of sorts takes place, which resulted in the re-incorporation of many of Murugan's earlier traits, and the re-establishment of Murugan temples throughout the South. Traces of Skanda-Murugan's cult are found throughout other parts of India as well, such as the Maharashtrian cult of Khaṇḍobā, where, as we've mentioned earlier, possession rites are common.⁴¹³

THE BUDDHIST SKANDA: KĀRTTIKEYA, MAÑJUŚRĪ, & VAJRAKUMĀRA

We've already mentioned Kubera-Vaiśravaṇa's and Vajrapāṇi's rise from their *yakṣa* roots to full-blown *Bodhisattvas* and *Buddhas* in early Buddhist traditions, popularized due to their ability to protect against demons and their bestowal of esoteric knowledge. Like other *krodha-vighnāntakas* who become seminal in the Tantric Buddhists traditions, the Buddhist Skanda plays a similar role and becomes identified with the protective *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī (“Gentle Glory”).⁴¹⁴ His descriptions are found in the one of the earliest Buddhist Tantras, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, where Mañjuśrī is often called Kārttikeya, Kumāra, and Kumārabhūta.⁴¹⁵ Here too Mañjuśrī carries his signature spear or *vajra*, has a peacock as his vehicle (*vāhana*) and is known as “The Lord of Bhūtas” alongside a list of fierce female

⁴¹³ See Sontheimer (1989)

⁴¹⁴ Also known as Mañjughoṣa (“Gentle Sound”).

⁴¹⁵ See Thomas Eugene Donaldson, *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa*, (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts: Abhinav Publ, 2001): 159-160 for iconography; See also T.N. Ganapati's volume 2 of *The Āryamanjuśrīmūlakalpa*, (1922: 253; 304; 315; 332; 44; 460)

possessing entities, such as the *pūtanās*, *bhaginīs*, *ḍākinīs*, *rūpiṇīs*, *yakṣiṇīs*, and *ākāśamātr̥s* (“Sky Mothers”, also identified as the *saptamātaraḥ*).”⁴¹⁶

In later Tibetan traditions, Skanda as Kumāra is paralleled in many ways also by Vajrakumāra, most commonly known as Vajrākīla, a deity invoked particularly for apotropaic, exorcistic, and *ābhicārika* rites. Robert Mayer has detailed many of the similarities between this figure and Skanda-Kumāra which includes: worship with six-segmented *rudrākṣa* bead *mālās* in the month of Kārtikka; association with mountains and worship in the form of a *yūpa* (sacrificial post); similar retinues and entourages – Skanda with an entourage of nine male heroes (*navavīra*) and a retinue of fierce female *mātr̥kās* and other child-disease goddesses such as Revatī, while Vajrakumāra has an entourage of 10 male Herukas (*daśakrodha*) and a host of fierce female *piśācīs* and other child-disease goddesses such as Revatī.⁴¹⁷ While direct connections are tentative between the two, the similarities seem to be too striking for mere coincidence.

Skanda appears in his more demonic *graha* form in earlier versions of the 3rd-4th centuries CE proto-Tantric *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī Sūtra* (MVS, “The Book of the Peacock Spells”). As mentioned earlier, this was an early Mahāyāna *rakṣā* (protection) text, and Skanda’s name appears here in a demonological list among other possession entities. His name is also included in such lists in two early Chinese translations of the text (T. 987, 988) as well a 5th century CE Sanskrit version of the *Peacock Spell* from the Bower Manuscript. In the 6th century Chinese translation, he appears both as an afflicting deity, and then later in the

⁴¹⁶ T.N. Ganapati, *The Āryamanjusrīmūlakalpa. Pt. 1.* (Trivandrum: Superintendent, Gov. Press, 1920): 20-21.

⁴¹⁷ Robert Mayer, "Observations on the Tibetan Phur-pa and the Indian Kīla", in *Buddhist Forum*, Volume II, ed. T. Skorupski, (London: School of Oriental & African Studies, 1991) :163-192.

text as a protector deity. The text states that Skanda, wielding his lance and the *Peacock Spell*, “will drive demonic venom into the earth.”⁴¹⁸

Skanda is also found in the Chinese Buddhist “*Book of Dhāraṇī for Protecting Children*” (*Hu chu t'ung-tzu t'o-lo-ni ching*, T. ro28A), a Sanskrit text translated into Chinese in the first half of the sixth century, wherein a group of fifteen powerful *bālagrahas* are described who devour human fetuses and attack young children. The Buddha lists them all, which includes mostly female demons with various animal forms, along with Kumāra (Skanda). Like early Indian medical texts, it also describes the characteristic symptoms and signs provoked by each of the fifteen demons - Skanda’s own particular signs being “trembling” or “rolling of the shoulders” according to Strickmann. Strickmann further notes that in China, Skanda’s “diagnosis and cure were affected through child-mediums, his incarnate representatives, whose wagging heads and shaking shoulders then betokened the god's presence.”⁴¹⁹ We will return to the use of child-mediums in a later chapter, but for now note the interesting relationship between a child-god (Skanda), who was originally a child-killing demon (Kumāra), who becomes employed as force for healing and oracular knowledge through the use of child-mediums. As we will see, this becomes a widespread pattern in oracular possession and divination rites throughout South Asia and East Asia.

From the seventh century onwards, Skanda becomes popularized in China as Wei-t'o, one of the chief guardian-gods found throughout China’s Buddhist monasteries.⁴²⁰

Strickmann believes the deity’s popularity was chiefly due to Skanda’s involvement in a

⁴¹⁸ In T.985,19:472C - see Strickmann (2005: 221).

⁴¹⁹ Strickmann (2005: 220). See also more recent work on these texts in Catherine Despeux, *Médecine, religion et société dans la Chine médiévale: étude de manuscrits chinois de Dunhuang et de Turfan*, (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 2010) particularly the chapter entitled “Infant diseases and Buddhist Demonology: Local and Exotic Knowledge in the Dunhuang Manuscripts”.

⁴²⁰ Strickmann (2005: 218) notes this is actually a mis-transliteration of his name, which should be Chien-t'o, rather than Wei-t'o.

series of visions and revelations by the distinguished monk Tao-hsuan beginning in 667 CE. According to tradition, at the ripe age of seventy-one the ailing monk went into retreat and begin having “visionary visits” from Skanda, who provided Tao-hsuan with divine knowledge. The monk was naturally excited and eagerly queried him about various divine topics, and Skanda’s responses were feverishly written down in a massive manuscript, of which only a small portion has been preserved.⁴²¹ The experience of the monk’s divine revelations has some similarities to the type of oracular possession we mentioned earlier involving *gandharvas* and *yakṣas* who communicated supernatural knowledge through various mediums (such as the *gandharva* possession of Udara, Śāṅḍilya wife), though, in this case, it was the monk himself who was the medium. Due to the monks’ divine revelations and his influence in the region at that time, Skanda begins to be installed as the guardian deity *par excellence* of Buddhist monasteries throughout China and employed in various possession and divination rites of the time. As Strickmann puts it, “That guardian-gods of temple gateways have been among the most active agents of possession in East Asia, may well owe much to Skanda and his cult.”⁴²²

Despite his early ascendancy to Bodhisattva-hood in other Buddhist traditions, Skanda is again seen as a *graha* in a 10th-century Chinese recension of the *Kumāra-Tantra*, which was translated as *The Book of Rāvaṇa's Explanations of How to Cure the Ailments of Children* (T. 1330; Skt. *Rāvaṇaprokṭabālacikitsā*). In this text, “Skandā” is listed as the twelfth *grāhi* alongside a group of eleven “Mother-seizers” (*gṛhamāṭṛkās*). Surprisingly the translator seems to consider Skanda a female too – this could either be a mistake on the part

⁴²¹ Preserved in the *Tao hsüan lü shih kan-t'ung lu* (T. 2107). Skanda’s role as transmitter of tantric revelations among various Śaiva Tantric schools is found as well in some of their earliest texts. See Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta. *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981): 5-6 for references.

⁴²² Strickmann (2005: 219)

of the translators or an attempt to differentiate this “seizing” Skanda to the Bodhisattva Skanda found in coeval traditions.⁴²³ In this account, the Mother-seizers are said to possess the child’s body, allowing them to consume the infant’s vital essence and breath, which leads to illness and potential death.⁴²⁴ This method of sucking the vital fluids is mentioned in the medical texts as we’ll soon see, but also becomes the *modus operandi* of the fierce *yoginīs* of the tantric traditions who possess and kill their victims. We will discuss this in more detail in the following chapter. As we will see in other Indian *bhūtavidyā* texts, it also states that the primary motivation for possessing and afflicting young children was to receive worship and extort offerings from their parents. Due to their fierce activities, the texts purported author, the famous *rākṣasa* demon-king Rāvaṇa of the Hindu epics, is said to have compassionately provided this apotropaic knowledge to combat and control these malevolent beings.

ŚIVA AND HIS GAṆAS: THE RISE OF THE BHŪTANĀTHAS

As we have seen so and far, and will continue to see throughout this dissertation, one of my primary focuses is on the figure of the *bhūtanātha*, the “Lord of Spirits”. It is these particular *bhūtanātha*-deities (e.g., Rudra, Kubera, Skanda, Hārītī, etc.) who were assimilated and appropriated by the classical religions in the Epic period and go on to become the central divinities during the emergence of the Tantric traditions. It is these *bhūtanāthas* who I argue

⁴²³ Similarly, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was feminized into Kuan-yin in the Chinese tradition. This deity was also involved in exorcistic and apotropaic rites which also used child-mediums as oracles in the 7-8th century Chinese translation of the *Amoghapāśa-sūtra* (T. 1097), see Strickmann (2005: 204).

⁴²⁴ This method of sucking the vital fluids is also the *modus operandi* of yoginis who possess and kill their victims is also found in the 8-9th century *Netra Tantra* which we will discuss shortly. See David G. White, “Netra Tantra at the Crossroads of the Demonological Cosmopolis.” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 5 (2): (2012b): 145–71.

become models for the tantric adepts, transacting with or emulating them to gain their powers and liberative knowledge, in some cases, through possession rites.

Before ending this chapter, I will give some more data on three other important *bhūtanāthas* - Gaṇapati, Bhairava, and Hanumān. Like Skanda and others we've mention, these three divinities also follow the same *graha*-to-god trajectory, and despite their changes in status over time, each continue to maintain some degree of their earlier *graha* and *bhūtanātha* qualities and their association with possession rites.

GAṆAPATI-VINĀYAKA

One of South Asia's most popular and beloved deities is the elephant headed god commonly known as the "Remover of Obstacles" and variously named Gaṇapati, Gaṇeśa, Vināyaka, and Vighnahartā). Images of Gaṇapati exist as early as the 2nd century CE, though his formal absorption into the Śaiva family, as Śiva's son and the brother of Skanda, doesn't occur until around the 6th century.⁴²⁵ However, as various studies have shown, the loveable Gaṇeśa, like most of the deities we've been discussing, is a composite deity with a complex history tied to darker origins. This is implied, of course, in his various name - Gaṇapati, "The Lord of Gaṇas", a name used earlier to refer to the fierce Rudra;⁴²⁶ Vināyaka, which originally referred to a class of demonic possessing entities; and finally, the related appellations Vighneśvara, the "Lord of Obstacles" and Vighnahartā, the "Remover of

⁴²⁵ M. K. Dhavalikar, "Ganesa: Myth and Reality." In *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*, ed. R. L. Brown, (Albany: State University of New York, 1991): 49–68, argues for 2nd century date, while A.K. Narain, in his chapter "Gaṇeśa: A Protohistory of the Idea and the Icon" (p. 19-48) in the same book, argues for a 4-5 century date.

⁴²⁶ *Taittirīya Saṃhitas* (4.1.2.2) and *Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitas* (2.7.2, 3.1.3). In earlier texts of the Ṛg Veda, Bṛhaspati/Brahmanaspati (RV 2.23.1) and Indra (RV 10.112.9) are also referred to as gaṇapatis, but strictly as an attribute and in reference to being a leader or lord. Most of the time *gaṇas* refers also specifically to the Maruts

Obstacles”, names which reflect the deity’s dual-role and qualities - at once malevolent, as the causer of obstacles, and benevolent, as the remover of these same obstacles. Gaṇapati’s iconography, as is the case with most animal-headed deities, also points to his roots in earlier *yakṣa/graha* cults.

This is borne out in the textual evidence as well. As we saw in the 2nd century BCE *Manava Gṛhya Sūtras* (2. 14), reference was made to a group of demonic child-killing *vināyakas* who possess humans, alongside Mahāsenā (Skanda) and Mahādeva (Rudra) – link’s which still continues to this day. In the MGS passage, four *vināyakas* are actually named specifically - Sālakaṭankāṭa, Kuṣmāṇḍarājaputra, Uṣmita, and Devayajana. No references, however, associate the *vināyakas* directly with the name Gaṇapati/Gaṇeśa or elephant features at this early time. According to the Rāmāyaṇa, Sālakaṭankāṭa refers to a type of *rākṣasa*, while the Pāriśiṣṭas of the AV include the name in a list of malevolent *grahas*, alongside Skanda.⁴²⁷ Kuṣmāṇḍarājaputra, on the other hand, is related to a category of Buddhist protector demi-gods (*lokapālas*), known as *kuṣmāṇḍas* or *kumbhāṇḍas* headed by the deformed, dwarfish, pot-bellied *yakṣa* Virūḍhaka, as found in Bharhut and Sanchi sculptures from the 2nd century BCE.⁴²⁸ Some early representations of these beings have them holding various animals (ram, birds etc.), while later Chinese depictions portray them as horse-headed.⁴²⁹ Later Purāṇas additionally classify this group as *piśācas*.⁴³⁰ The other two names are not referenced elsewhere and may have been local non-Vedic entities popular in the region where the MGS was compiled. In a related *Gṛhya Sūtra*, the *Bodhāyana*

⁴²⁷ See Rāmāyaṇa, Uttarakāṇḍa, 8.23 and AV Pāriśiṣṭas 20.4.2

⁴²⁸ See Anita Raina Thapan, “Ganapati: The Making of a Brahmanical Deity.” *Studies in History* 10.1 (1994): 4 and Strickmann (2002: 66–67)

⁴²⁹ See Sørensen (2006: 122, note 87) for references.

⁴³⁰ Vāyu Purāṇa II.8.198-199 and II.8.251-252.

Ghyraśeṣa Sūtra, we find also find the names Vighneśvara and Gaṇeśvara as synonyms of Vināyaka.⁴³¹

Like later medical texts, the MGS 2.14 gives symptoms of those who are possessed (*bhavanti or āviṣṭa*) by the *vināyakas* – possessed persons, the text states, may pound clods of dirt, tear up grass, write on their own limbs, have inauspicious dreams, feel as if they are moving through the air, or have paranoid feelings of being pursued. Furthermore, the *vināyakas* are said to act as various obstacles to humans - blocking princes from becoming kings, girls from attaining husbands, mothers from issuing children, teachers from reaching the position of a master (*ācārya*), students from studying, merchants from trading, and farmers from yielding crops.⁴³² The *Gṛhya Sūtras* lay down various propitiatory and expiatory rites in order to free oneself from possession by the *vināyakas*. These rites are similar to techniques found in the AV and involve quelling the spirits with offerings of raw and cooked meat, wine, and other foods (MGS 2.14.22). The priest is told to pour some of these offerings on to the heads of the possessed victims, while the remnants are given away at the crossroads (MGS 2.14.27), a favorite haunt of Rudra, the goddess, and their respective hordes of *bhūtas*.⁴³³

Although there are no references to Gaṇeśa in the critical edition of the MBh or the earliest Purāṇas,⁴³⁴ early portions of the MBh, like the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, do make references to *vināyakas* as maleficent spirits alongside other *bhūtas*, *rākṣasas* and *piśācas*.⁴³⁵ In one place

⁴³¹ In the Bodhāyana Ghyraśeṣa Sūtra (3.10.2.9), see Narain (1991: 42)

⁴³² See Rajendra C. Hazra, "Gaṇapati-Worship and the Upapurāṇas dealing with it," *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Research Institute*, Allahabad, Vol. V, pt. 4. (1948): 264.

⁴³³ See Shingo Eino, *From Material to Deity: Indian Rituals of Consecration*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005): 61.

⁴³⁴ Any associations with the elephant-headed god are later redactions

⁴³⁵ *na rākṣasā na piśācā na bhūtā na vināyakāḥ | vighnaṃ kuryur gr̥he tasya yatrāyaṃ paṭhyate stavaḥ || MBH 12.284.131*

they are also identified with Rudra's hoards as *gaṇeśvaras*, stating that these “*gaṇeśvara-vināyakas* control the whole world”.⁴³⁶ Similarly, in the *Harivaṃsa* the term *gaṇeśvaras* is used to describe a class of demons who cause disease.⁴³⁷

It was precisely around this period, according to Narain and other scholars, that the various strands that come to make up the current form of Gaṇeśa, begin to collide:

A process of syncretism led to a synthesis and incorporation of elements of popular-belief systems in the mainstream of Indian culture. As a part of this process, the malignancy of Vināyaka as a *vighnakartā* was removed, and from Vighneśvara he becomes a *vighnahartā*, Gaṇeśvara. First, Vināyaka was assigned a positive role and elevated as a *bhagavat* to whom offerings could be made by those desirous of *siddhi* (success), *ṛddhi* (prosperity), and *paśu* (wealth) (BGS 3.10.5). He was praised as a *bhūpati* and *bhuvanapati* as well as *bhūtānaṃ pati*. (BGS 3.10.6)⁴³⁸

Thus, beginning with the *Bodhāyana Ghyraśeṣa Sūtra* we see the *vināyakas* transformation from a “Causer of Obstacles” (*vighnakartā*) to a “Remover of Obstacles” (*vighnahartā*) if propitiated correctly, as well as an elevation in status as a “Lord of Spirits” (*bhūtānaṃ pati*). In the *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* (3-5th century CE), we no longer find mention of multiple *vināyakas*, but rather one *Vināyaka* who, the text states, was appointed by Brahma and Rudra as the leader of these same malignant spirits (*gaṇānām adhipati*).⁴³⁹

Although there is no mention of his elephantine attributes in these early texts, such qualities began to be seen epigraphic evidence and sculptural images from the 5th century onward.⁴⁴⁰ I will refer the reader to more comprehensive studies on the assimilation of

⁴³⁶ MBH 13.150.25 *isvaraḥ sarvalokānaṃ gaṇeśvaravināyakāḥ*

⁴³⁷ See Narain (1991: 22) for HV reference

⁴³⁸ Narain (1991: 30)

⁴³⁹ See Krishan (1992: 364) and Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems*, (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995): 147-148.

⁴⁴⁰ See Törzsök, “Three Chapters of Śaiva Material Added to the Earliest Known Recension of the *Skandapurāṇa*,” In *Origin and Growth of the Purāṇic Text Corpus: With Special Reference to the Skandapurāṇa*, ed. Hans Bakker et al., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004): 3 fn. 12, for reference to a 6th century image of Gaṇeśa with Śiva and Skanda.

Gaṇeśa's later elephantine form,⁴⁴¹ however, we should note that animal-headed *gaṇas* and *bhūtas* of these malevolent types were common and his portrayal as such should not come as any surprise.⁴⁴² There is, in fact, reference to an elephant-headed *yakṣa* in various versions of the Sabha Parvan (MBh10:35), Dantin “The Tusked One”, who is said to belong to the entourage of Kubera.

By the time we reach the earliest recension of the Skanda Purāṇa (eight-century), which contain the earliest birth stories of Gaṇapati-Vināyaka, most of the attributes we come to associate with Gaṇeśa are already in place. However, recently discovered portions of this manuscript also reveal some interesting data regarding his *graha* roots. In these portions Gaṇeśa tells his the Devī that he will fulfill the wishes of humans by bestowing wealth, health, progeny, and other worldly enjoyments to them. However, Śiva also mentions that Vināyaka consumes alcohol and meat, and should be worshipped accordingly. Additionally he is called “the leader (*nāyaka*) of all *gaṇas*” (*vināyakaḥ sarvagaṇeṣu nāyako*),⁴⁴³ and explicitly called a “*graha* who is hostile against other such demons” (*grahaṃ grahāṇām api kāryavairiṇam*).⁴⁴⁴ The text also warns that those who lead sinful lives or disrespect the deity will suffer the consequences and become possessed by him.⁴⁴⁵ Other sections also prescribe various *homas* in his honor specifically to combat possession by *grahas* and diseases (*graha-doṣa*).⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ See especially Brown (1991)

⁴⁴² See P.K. Agrawala (1978: 5-8) regarding Gaṇapati's association with the disease elephant-headed goddess Jyesthā.

⁴⁴³ 58a: *vināyakaḥ sarvagaṇeṣu nāyako ...* as seen in Torzsok (2004:3-4)

⁴⁴⁴ 59b: *grahaṃ grahāṇām api kāryavairiṇam* Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Other Purāṇas also associate Gaṇeśa with the *piśācas*, referring to him as Hastipiśācīśa (“The Elephant Lord of Ghouls”). See Thapan (1994: 21-22) for references.

In later tantric traditions, a Gāṇapatya cult does arise dedicated to Mahagaṇapati as the supreme deity, though possession does not seem to be a prominent factor. Some tantras describe the worship of groups of *gaṇapatis*, usually numbering sixteen, thirty-two and fifty-six, often with their consorts.⁴⁴⁷ In the *Prapañcasāra* (11th century), Gaṇapati presides over his own *maṇḍala* and is said to be surrounded by a group of nine *mātr̥s* who are worshipped not only for wealth, success, and removal of obstacles, but also for magical rites of subjugation against enemy kings, or for attracting a spouse, and even procuring elephants.⁴⁴⁸ In these rites, practitioners seem to revert back to his older role as an obstacle-creator, but for enemies. A much later Tantra the *Vidyārṇavatantra* (17th-18th century) is similarly focused on more of Gaṇapati's *abhicāra* (sorceristic) rites. Within this we can find mention of rites involving *homa* and *japa* of Gaṇapati's *mantra* resulting in the subjugation of women or enemy kings and their armies, murderous sorcery, obtaining treasure from *nāgas* or *yakṣiṇī* spirits, destroying evil possessing spirits, and a host of other *siddhis* (supernatural accomplishments).⁴⁴⁹ A brief *svasthāveśa* rite involving Gaṇapati is also mentioned which employs either a virgin boy or girl who is empowered by 108 repetitions of the prescribed mantra, and then said to be able to answer questions about the past, present, and future.⁴⁵⁰

In Tantric Buddhist traditions of China, similar rites are found associated with the Chinese Gaṇapati-Vināyaka. In various eighth-century Chinese texts (T. I268; T. 1270; T. 1271, T. 1272), a demonic Vināyaka is described as being dual-bodied, often depicted in a

⁴⁴⁷ See Bühnemann, Gudrun. 1987. "Tantric Worship of Gaṇeśa According to the Prapañcasāra." *Zeitdeutmorgese Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 137 (2): 357–82 and Bühnemann. 1989. *Tantric forms of Gaṇeśa according to the Vidyārṇavatantra*. Institut für Indologie, Eichtrach, Switzerland.

⁴⁴⁸ See Bühnemann (1987: 358)

⁴⁴⁹ Other *siddhis* include gaining magical sandals to fly, powers of invisibility and invincibility, protection from thieves, enemies and wild animals, attracting a spouse, rainmaking, and even liberation. See Bühnemann (1989: 64-69)

⁴⁵⁰ Bühnemann (1989: 66).

sensual embrace with his pig-headed consort, Senāyaka, identified by some as a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara aka Guanyin (T. 1270; T. I268).⁴⁵¹ These texts describe many of the same tantric *abhicāra* rites befitting ambivalent and dual-natured deities of this sort, including rites to cure people from madness caused by spirit possession. Another rite briefly mentions the use of two virgin girls, though it is unclear if it is a *svasthāveśa* rite as the text is severely corrupted.⁴⁵² There is, however, mention of a rite involving recitation of Gaṇapati's mantra before bed, resulting in the god manifesting himself in dreams and speaking on auspicious and inauspicious things. Other, more nefarious rites are also mentioned including subjugation and causing madness in others. In these rites an empowered image of Gaṇapati-Vināyaka is used as a charm or effigy, which causes the victim to become insane and act like an animal. When the effigy is removed, the insanity is also said to leave. Strickmann sees this is a form of possession - given the *graha* roots of Gaṇapati-Vināyaka, I would tend to agree with him.⁴⁵³

BHAIRAVA-MAHĀKĀLA-BATŪKA

Most of the *bhūtas* and *bhūtanāthas* we've described so far were at some point associated with Śiva-Rudra and his retinue of *gaṇas* and/or rooted in independent *yakṣa* and *graha* cults. This was clearly the case, for Skanda and Gaṇapati who were assimilated into the Śaiva pantheon as Śiva's sons, but this may also be the case for some of his other renowned *gaṇas*, such as Nandi (his bull vehicle), Virabhadra ("Hero-Friend"), Nīllohita

⁴⁵¹ This same representation went also to Japan where he is known as Kangiten or Shōten. His groups of *vināyakas* were assimilated to class of *kōjin* ("raging deities"). See Bernard Faure "The Impact of Tantrism on Japanese Religious Traditions," in *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond* ed. I. Keul (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012): 402-403.

⁴⁵² Strickmann (2005: 254)

⁴⁵³ See Strickmann (2005: 253-256) for all references.

"(The Blue-and-Red-One"), and Bhairava-Mahākāla ("The Terrible One/Great Death/Time [Lord]").

Scholars have long recognized that the Śiva himself is a composite deity, who owes different facets of his identity to various divine/demonic beings that were appropriated and assimilated into the Śaiva tradition, along with their respective cults and narratives, as the originally marginalized Rudra elevated to one of the "great gods" of Hinduism. Granoff argues that this synthesis of Rudra-Śiva primarily took place in the Gupta period, which represented, she writes, the "culmination of a development in which the *gaṇas*, originally totally independent figures, gradually became identified with Śiva and absorbed into his larger narrative."⁴⁵⁴ The early Purāṇas, various extra-Vedic, and even Jain and Buddhist texts often preserve the traces of this historic development. The early Skanda Purāṇa, for example, lists a number of *gaṇas* who were formerly *yakṣas* with their own regional cults.⁴⁵⁵

These developments can be traced within early medieval Hindu art as well. As Granoff has pointed out, Śiva was rarely ever depicted in early narrative scenes while his *gaṇas* were represented much more frequently.⁴⁵⁶ This was likely due to their popularity in their respective cults (e.g., Kubera/Skanda etc.), reflecting the central role these figures previously held when absorbed into the Śaiva fold. As seen in many early Purāṇic stories and sculptural representations, it is the *gaṇas* who were usually the primary agents carrying out Śiva's destructive acts. This is in contrast to earlier Vedic texts, where it was Rudra himself who performed most of these sorts of deeds. Granoff argues that this reflected a stage

⁴⁵⁴ See Granoff, "Śiva and His Gaṇas: Techniques of Distancing in Purāṇic Stories." *Voice of the Orient*. (2006): 80.

⁴⁵⁵ One *gaṇa* in SP 55.23, for example, is said to have been formerly a *yakṣa* who protected the territory of Pāñcāla, while other well-known *yakṣas*, such as Maṇibhadra, the Jain Pūrṇabhadra (early SP 23.21), and, of course, Kubera are also mentioned as becoming *gaṇas* of Śiva. See Granoff (2006: 96-97) for other sources.

⁴⁵⁶ Granoff (2006: 79)

of development of Śaivism in which the narratives of the individual *gaṇas* had not yet been completely assigned to Śiva. As the *bhūtanātha*, Granoff writes, “Śiva acts by proxy; he summons a being, usually identified as one of his *gaṇas*, who does what needs to be done”.⁴⁵⁷

As the *gaṇas* began to become assimilated into the Śaiva fold, so too does their respective cult narratives, often serving as the “raw material” to Śiva’s Purāṇic narratives. In some cases, this assimilation resulted in the *gaṇas* name simply becoming just another epithet of Śiva, while others were cast as manifestations or *avatāras* (incarnations), following the model of the Vaiṣṇavas.⁴⁵⁸ Granoff has given various examples of the former when comparing the “early” Skanda Purāṇa versus later Purāṇas, where Śiva’s mythology has been fully formed. Her analysis shows that many acts attributed to Śiva in later texts, such as the infamous slicing of Brahma’s fifth head, were actually performed by his *gaṇas* (or more precisely the *gaṇanāyakas*, “leaders of the *gaṇas*”).⁴⁵⁹ I will refer the reader to her articles for more detailed versions of these stories, but suffice to say there were a number of variant versions that existed in earlier texts when compared to later Purāṇas.⁴⁶⁰ Granoff believes these narrative “incoherencies” signal the amalgamation of several different stories that originally belonged to independent *gaṇas*, such as Nīlahiṭa, Bhairava and Mahākāla, which eventually absorbed into the great god Śiva’s own mythology.⁴⁶¹

Although there is little evidence of an actual cult for Nīlahiṭa (The Blue-and-Red One”), he may be one of earliest *gaṇas* associated with Rudra in Vedic texts. In the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. Part of the reason for this may have been due to the preference among more elite Śaiva schools at this time to worship the formless aspect Śiva who was beyond such worldly actions in non-anthropomorphic terms.

⁴⁵⁸ This is seen in the Śiva Purāṇa for example

⁴⁵⁹ See Granoff (2006: 95)

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Granoff (2003:104)

Taittirīyasamhitā, for example, Rudra’s hordes are said to be blue-necked (*nīlagriva*) and red (*vilohita*), while in AV 8.8.24 the name is actually used as an epithet for Rudra, who is invoked in counter-sorcery rites to ward off evil beings.⁴⁶² In earlier portions of the *MBh*, Nīllohita is considered one of the eleven *rudras*, however, later portions identify him and Śiva as the same being, suggesting his full absorption into Śiva had taken already taken place.⁴⁶³ Traces of Nīllohita demonic background are again seen in the late Ekāmra Purāṇa (9th-15th century CE), which explicitly identifies him as a demon (EP 30.22).

A variant version of the story in chapter five (the *Āvāntyakhaṇḍa*) of the late SP, identifies Mahākāla as the primary agent who beheads Brahma. However, his pilgrimage is not to Vārāṇasī, as in most versions, but instead to *Mahākālavana Tīrtha* in Ujjain, a known strong hold of Mahākāla’s cult. Mention of Mahākāla is found earlier as well, in Kauṇḍinya’s commentary (4th-6th centuries) to the *Pāśupata Sūtras*, where he is listed as an independent *gaṇa*.⁴⁶⁴

An interesting origin story of Mahākāla is found slightly earlier in the *Harivamśa*, which details Kṛṣṇa’s victory over the fierce demon (*āśura*) and infant killer, Bāṇa, who in other Epic sources is also listed as an attendant of Skanda’s and also the brother of the disease goddess Pūtaṇā.⁴⁶⁵ As he is about to kill Bāṇa, Kṛṣṇa is approached by Śiva who informs him that Bāṇa had received a boon from him and was his protector. Out of respect for Śiva, Kṛṣṇa agrees not to kill him. Bāṇa, however, is fearful of his life and is now afraid

⁴⁶² Blue and red also referred to the colors of the threads used in these exorcistic and apotropaic rites. See also *Taittirīya Samhitā* 4.5.1 and AVP 14.2.2.

⁴⁶³ See *Dronaparvan* MBh 7.57. In MBh 13.14.154 Nīllohita is said to be the foremost of the *rudras*. See Granoff (2003) for more references.

⁴⁶⁴ Similarly, in the *Agni Purāṇa* (AP 50.39), Mahākāla is named alongside Nandīśa as a door guardian (*dvārpālas*) of the temple, and in the *Brahma Purāṇa* 32.6, he is again listed as one of Śiva’s *gaṇas* alongside Kārttikeya, Gaṇeśa, and Nandīśvara.

⁴⁶⁵ See MBh 9.45.71. *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu* and *Padma Purāṇa* list Pūtaṇā as his sister.

that Śiva will kill him, to which Śiva’s chief *gaṇa*, Nandin, advises, “Bāṇa, Bāṇa, dance and everything will be fine!” (HV 112.114). To save his own life, the terrified Bāṇa begins a vigorous dance which pleases Śiva who, out of pity, offers him a boon. The relieved Bāṇa requests to become one of Śiva’s chief *gaṇas* and becomes known as Mahākāla (HV 112.124), who is also given the power to grant children to devotees who dance as he had just done (HV 112.120). Granoff believes this story is a reference to Mahākāla’s own cult, a cult associated with child protection and ritual dancing as a form of worship - features still found in many possession cults in South Asia⁴⁶⁶ In later Hindu and Buddhist Tantras, Mahākāla becomes a central figure and, as we will see in chapter four, plays an important role in a Śaiva tantric deity possession rite known as the *Mahākālahṛdaya*. The Buddhists also commonly invoke him as a *dharmapāla* or *dharmarāja*, a great protector deity who was particularly associated with sorceristic, prophylactic, and apotropaic rites.⁴⁶⁷

Rather than Nīllohita in the early Skanda Purāṇa, it is Bhairava in the late Skanda Purāṇa (9-13th century), who is said to have been born (*śaṃkarāṃśaja*) from and conjured up (*puruṣaṃ bhairavākṛtim*) by the *bhūtanātha* Śiva (SP 4.1.41),⁴⁶⁸ who decapitates Brahma and makes the pilgrimage to Kapālamocana Tīrtha (“Sacred Site of the Releasing of the Skull”) in Vārāṇasī, where Granoff believes Bhairava’s original cult may have been located.⁴⁶⁹ The earliest inscriptional mention of a cult to Bhairava is found in two brief 5th-century inscriptions of a Vākāṭaka king who described himself as devotee of the god, while in the 7th

⁴⁶⁶ See references in Granoff (2003:109). Śiva’s full identification with Mahākāla is also seen among certain populations around the same time, as evidenced in the court poetry of the 5th-century Kālidāsa. This indicates that in certain regions and times, Mahākāla’s identification and conflation with Śiva was not universally recognized.

⁴⁶⁷ As seen in the Mahākālatantra – see William Stablein, *The Mahākālatantra: A Theory of Ritual Blessings and Tantric Medicine*. (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1979).

⁴⁶⁸ However, slightly later it also states the two deities are one and the same (*svāṃ mūrtim aparām; SP 4.1.51*).

⁴⁶⁹ See Granoff (2003: 110). Davidson (2002: 211-217) also believes Bhairava began his career as a local ferocious deity.

century mention is made of the Buddhist Vajrabhairava in Nepal. Bhairava's earliest representations can be dated to roughly this period as well.⁴⁷⁰ Images of Bhairava parallel the wrathful iconography of Mahākāla, and the earliest images of both generally depict them as common *yakṣas*, with dwarfish (*vāmana*) body types, or as various protector deities such as the *kṣetrapālas* ("protectors of the field") and *dvārpālas* ("door-guardians"). As identification with the Tantric Śiva begins to take place during this period, Mahākāla-Bhairava begins to resemble Śiva's Aghora ("Unterrible") face - wrathful forms, black in color, with wide red eyes and fanged mouth. It is likely both also had strong associations with cremation-ground cults as both are almost always represented in the Tantric traditions with Kāpālīka accouterments, including the skull-bow and *khatvāṅga* (skull-topped staff) or club, a severed head, and a garland of skulls. David White writes that:

In all likelihood, the name Bhairava was an invention of early tantric actors, who applied it to the protector deities of the charnel grounds that were the favorite haunt of the skull bearers and *yogins*, whose goals of supernatural powers (*siddhis*) required that they undertake special mortuary, sexual, and magical rites. In the 7th–11th-century *Svacchandatantra*, Bhairava was the sole name employed for the god of these cremation ground rites. Some early descriptions of Bhairava went so far as to identify him with the charnel ground, which "wore" the bones and "drank" up the blood of the dead... Early tantric sources, both Hindu and Buddhist, often evoked troops of Bhairavas, locating them at peripheral *pīṭhas* where, paired with goddesses, they protected the boundaries of the universe. This is a tradition that continues down to the present...⁴⁷¹

Bhairava's importance in the early Tantric traditions is clearly seen with the classification of an entire stream of esoteric literature known as the *Bhairava Tantras*, superseding other figures such as Skanda and Kubera to become the premiere *bhūtanātha*

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. Granoff here cites Bakker 1997: 13, note 23. See also White 2012c. "Bhairava", in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. 484-489.

⁴⁷¹ White (2012c: 486).

and supreme deity.⁴⁷² In these sources, Bhairava is also explicitly called a *bhūtanātha* and a Vyādhbhakṣa, "Devourer of Diseases", who protects against possession by controlling his malignant disease-inducing spirits.⁴⁷³

As White points out, while a singular Bhairava is often the focus of the textual traditions, throngs of aniconic protector "*bhairavas*" become popular throughout villages and country sides of South Asia, usually alongside other protector deities and local gods/goddesses of the region. These aniconic images are usually simple unhewn stones smeared with orange vermilion powder or paste. Various scholars believe that the migration of Bhairava throughout Asia was primarily through the agency of various itinerant tantric groups in the medieval period who spread these forms of *bhairavas* far and wide to local traditions, who in turn further spread their worship to almost every corner of the subcontinent.⁴⁷⁴ Worship of Bhairava/bhairavas is also found throughout Tibet, Nepal, China, Mongolia, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and even Japan.

In the Tantras, multiple aggregates of *bhairavas* are also found, closely aligned with ferocious groups of *bhūtas*, *yoginīs* and *ḍākinīs*. One of the most common groupings are the *aṣṭabhairavas*, ("Eight *bhairavas*"), each Bhairava commanding seven other *bhairavas* (for a total of sixty-four) and, in many ways, paralleling the more ancient grouping of Skanda and

⁴⁷² See Mallmann, Marie-Thérèse de. *Les enseignements iconographiques de l'Agni-purana*, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963): 176, regarding Skanda and Kubera's displacement by Bhairava.

⁴⁷³ Sanderson, "Śaivism and the Tantric Tradition," in *The World's Religions*, eds Sutherland et al., (London, 1988): 670.

⁴⁷⁴ White (2008: 143) writes: "Along with the Dasnami Nāgas or the Gosains, the Kānphāṭa or Nāth Yogis have, since the fourteenth century at least, been most responsible for the spread of the cult of Bhairava in South Asia." See David White, "Filthy Amulets: 'Superstition,' True 'Religion,' and Pure 'Science' in Hindu Demonology," in *Divins Remèdes: Médecine et Religion en Asie du Sud (Puruśārtha 27)* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2008): 135-62. See also Sontheimer *Pastoral Deities in Western India*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989b): 198 and William Sax, *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 77-79, on how these cult spreads through marriage and migration

the eight *mātr̥s*.⁴⁷⁵ Various Bhairavas will be seen in subsequent chapters, but I wanted to single out one in particular, which Frederick Smith also noted as being particularly important in possession and divination rites throughout Asia.⁴⁷⁶ However, Smith gives little historical context or explanation why this specific form, known as Baṭuka (or Vaṭuka) Bhairava (“The Youthful Boy Bhairava”) came to be associated as such.⁴⁷⁷ In my view there are significant parallels between Bhairava as Baṭuka and Skanda as Kumāra, which I will show briefly below.

A Tamil lexicon, the *Piṅgala-Nighaṅṭu* (9-10th century), classifies “Vaṭuka” as an independent field-protector (*kṣetrapāla*), though functioning much in the same way the multiple *bhairava* shrines do throughout South Asia, as regional obstructers and protectors against enemies and demons. In this role, Baṭuka is often simply an attendant or protector deity to a more powerful god or goddess, usually housed in subsidiary or ancillary shrines.⁴⁷⁸ In Ceylon, a fascinating painting is found of a figure known as Siya-vaṭuka, at the ancient Buddhist site of Pallebadda.⁴⁷⁹ The painting is located within the oldest part of the current shrine, though no date is known of their production. Tradition holds Siya-vaṭuka was born

⁴⁷⁵ Although there is no single standard list, one of the earliest enumerations appears in the *Rudrayāmaḷa* and *Kubjikāmatantra*, which lists them as follows: Asitāṅga, Ruru, Caṇḍa, Krodha, Unmatta, Kapāla, Bhināda, and Saṃhāra See Dyczkowski (1988: 45) for this and other lists. See also Grieve, Gregory P., *Re-theorizing Religion in Nepal*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 81-82. Regarding the date of the *Rudrayāmaḷa*, David White personally communicated to me that “while its original core probably dates from before the 9th century, the version that has now come down to us contains data from as late as the 13th.” David White (2003: 322 fn. 88) further writes, “On the intimate links between the eight Mothers, the eight Bhairavas, and the eight cremation grounds in Nepali religious cosmography, see Toffin, *Le Palais et le temple*, p. 54.”

⁴⁷⁶ In Smith (2006: 434) he states that Hanumān, (especially in his five-faced form) and Bhairava (especially in his Baṭuka form) have emerged as some of the primary deities for possession in India.

⁴⁷⁷ The *Rudrayāmaḷa* lists Baṭukanātha as a general of other *bhūtas*, although he is under the command of Unmatta Bhairava (the “intoxicated” or “mad” bhairava), the fifth *bhairava* out of the primary eight. See Dyczkowski (1988: 45).

⁴⁷⁸ See, for example, Erndl ‘s (1993: 54-55) section on Nainā Devī who has a subsidiary shrine to Vaṭuka in Erndl, Kathleen M., *Victory to the Mother: the Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴⁷⁹ According to Mudiyanse (1976: 205) this site is traditionally associated with Phussadeva, one of the ten warriors of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Abhaya and believed to be as old as 161-137 B.C.E. See Nandasena Mudiyanse, 1976, “Antiquities and Paintings from Śaṅkhaṇḍa-Vihara (Ceylon),” *East and West* 26 (1–2): 205–12.

from *yakṣa* parents and was the protector god of Saman and his shrine.⁴⁸⁰ An unpublished *ola* (palm-leaf) manuscript preserved at the Colombo National Museum, describes this image in more detail:

The demons depart trembling when the ritual of Siya-vaṭuka is performed. He is three eyed and the mouth terrible to behold - his color is that of fire, very much demon-like; When biting his teeth, his tusks tremble and the roar is exceedingly great; He strikes with his sword, cuts the demons, and scatters them asunder; Master of the demons is this deity named Vaṭuka who is mighty and majestic.⁴⁸¹

Though it is unclear how old this material is, it is clear we are in the same demonological/*bhūtanātha* cult orbit as many of the beings we've been discussing - a *yakṣa* who eventually elevated as a Lord over, and protector against, these same demons. Most images of Baṭuka-Bhairava depict him either as a nude beggar (*Bhikṣāṭana*), a fierce dwarfish pot-bellied *yakṣa*, or, like Skanda-Kumāra, as a child-god. Despite these different forms, in the Tantras he is almost always donning bone accoutrements, signifying his cremation-ground cult roots. In the *Kulārṇava Tantra* (8.52) and *Kālikā Purāṇa* (67.6-13) one also finds *vaṭukas* (plural) as a class of beings worshipped in Kaula rites alongside *yoginis*, *kṣetrapālas*, *bhairavas*, *nāyakas*, *mātrkās*, *yakṣas*, etc. David White also makes mention of Baṭuka's role as a protector deity in various alchemical texts such as the *Rasārṇava* (11th century) and the later *Kākacaṇḍīśvara Kalpa Tantra*, both which invoke Baṭuka in order to pacify demons who may obstruct the alchemist's "work".⁴⁸²

Some interesting details regarding Vaṭuka's mythical origins are found in the 9-10th century tantric *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*. In chapter sixteen, Śiva-Bhairava tells the Devi: "O Viśālākṣi ("Large Eyed One")! You and I joined at Candradvīpa! The Six-Faced One,

⁴⁸⁰ Mudiyanse (1976: 207)

⁴⁸¹ Mudiyanse (1976: 209)

⁴⁸² See White (1996: 430 fn. 179)

Vaṭuka-Kṣetrapāla was born from our union.”⁴⁸³ Similar ideas are found within the *Kubjikā*

Tantras – e.g., in chapter forty-seven of the *Manthānabhairava-tantram*, the goddess

Kubjikā states:

The Lord Vaṭuka has six faces. Greatly powerful, he is my son. I have given (him) authority over all the Kula teaching... The great souled Lord accepts his part of the animal sacrifice (bali). It is not offered to the Kula scripture if it has not been (first) offered to Vaṭuka. (3cd-5ab).

These references to the “Six-faced one” are a clear identification, or at least association, with Vaṭuka and Skanda by the authors of these text. This would suggest either that these Kaula texts considered Vaṭuka and Skanda to be the sons of Śiva, rather than Skanda and Gaṇeśa, or that the authors simply considered Vaṭuka and Skanda to be the same.⁴⁸⁴ This is a possibility given some of the parallels between the two in textual and ritual contexts.

Beni Gupta writes that Baṭuka is also specifically worshipped to obtain various supernatural powers (*siddhis*) involving the traditional six magical acts (*ṣaṭkarmāṇi*) through the use of *yantras*, which Baṭuka “makes effective”.⁴⁸⁵ Although Gupta provides no specific textual sources, a Kaula rite in chapter eleven of the *Manthānabhairavatantram*, entitled “The Fashioning of the Maṇḍala and the Offering of Libation”, seems to fit this bill.

According to the text, after the *maṇḍala* is constructed:

One should purify the mirror... Install it with the goddesses’ divine Weapon and envelop it within Armor. [30-31ab]

⁴⁸³ *ahaṃ tvam ca viśālākṣi candradvīpasamāgatau | ṣaṭmukho vaṭuko jātāḥ kṣetrapālakulāgame ||* KJN 16.52.

This same chapter also states that Vaṭuka was the first to receive the Kula teachings from Śiva and the Goddess, which were then passed on to other *gaṇas* such as Vighneśa (Gaṇeśa), Nandin, and Mahākāla.

⁴⁸⁴ Also note the reference to Vaṭuka being a *kṣetrapāla* (field-protector) again, and the mention that he receives the first share of the *bali*, a role often held by Gaṇeśa.

⁴⁸⁵ See Beni Gupta, *Magical Beliefs and Superstitions*, (Delhi: Sundeep, 1979): 37. See also Basu, *Devata, by a Recluse of Vindhya-chala*, (New York: AMS Press, 1974): 182 who writes: “Like Vagālāmukhi, Vaṭukas are worshipped also for malevolent purposes...”.

After one has first made three meat offerings (*bali*) to the Lord of the Field, to Vaṭuka and to the Yoginīs, one should start the rite of adoration if one wishes unobstructed success. [33cd-34ab]

O great lord, place it [a purified jar filled with liquor] in front of the *maṇḍala* with the Weapon of Koṅkaṇa and, by enveloping (it with) the Armor and by means of the Self, the image (of the goddess) penetrates into it (*mūrtyāveśa*; 37).⁴⁸⁶

Here we clearly see that Vaṭuka is functioning, along with other kṣetrapālas and yoginīs, as a “remover of obstacles” in order to facilitate the goddesses’ entrance into and “possession” of the *maṇḍala*, thereby empowering it. Towards the end of the rite, we are told:

Then one should worship eight virgins (*kumārī*), six, three or one. The one who recites mantra will undoubtedly achieve success (*siddhi*) at the first auspicious time (*ādiparvan*)...without any doubt (one attains) success and, by practice (*sevana*), the (supreme) state (*gati*). (MBT 53-54)⁴⁸⁷

Similar to the MBT rite is the 12th-14th century *Kulārṇava Tantra*, which details the worship of Baṭuka before conducting a *śaktipūjā* involving what Goudriaan states is, “A special feature of the Kaula method...the worship of a human female as the incarnation of the universal Śakti” (*śaktipūjā*; KT 7.36-57).⁴⁸⁸ The mention of *kumārī*-worship in both these tantras is significant given Vaṭuka’s child-form and his association with *svasthāveśa* rites involving child-mediums, as seen in an undated Sanskrit manual entitled *Āveśabhairavam Śarabhakalpa* (“*The Chapter of Śarabha on Possession By Bhairava*”), mentioned by Smith.⁴⁸⁹ This type of possession involved ritual specialists (*māntrikas*) causing the deity to descend into the body of a young boy or girl who then acts as an oracle for the god. Smith gives a brief description of this *svasthāveśa* rite according to the manuscript:

After the *maṇḍala* is constructed, an eight-year-old boy with good qualities, who has bathed and is pure, is seated on it in lotus pose. Then the *māntrika* (officiant) recites a

⁴⁸⁶ See Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram: Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ: The Section Concerning the Goddess of the Tantra of the Churning Bhairava*, (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts: D.K. Printworld, 2009): Volume 11, p.71.

⁴⁸⁷ Dyczkowski (2009: 11.75)

⁴⁸⁸ Goudriaan and Gupta (1981: 95)

⁴⁸⁹ Śarabha is considered a celestial monster, a ferocious eight-legged griffin-like beast who is often depicted in temples as a guardian throughout South Asia. See Smith (2006: 422).

hundred times the long and intricate mantras designed to bring about possession. After this, cooled, powdered, and scented ash (*bhasma*, *vibhūti*) from a *havana* (ritual fire) is applied to the boy's forehead. The boy should then become possessed by Hanumān or Vaṭukabhairava as the *māntrika* calls out *āveśaya āveśaya* ("Let him become possessed! Let him become possessed!"), after which the boy gains the ability to communicate knowledge of the past, present, and future, including auspicious or inauspicious fruit that may be reaped by the client in a future birth.⁴⁹⁰

In this rite we find Vaṭuka (or Hanumān) as the possessing agent, who possesses a young boy (*kumāra*). This practice is still popular in various areas within India and Milan Ratna Shakya has reported that ritual possession of young boys by Baṭuka Bhairava occurs even today in Nepal. He writes, "Just as Kubjikādevi enters and embodies the virgin maiden, turning her into the living goddess Kumārī for her devotees, so too does Bhairava possess young virgin boys, who become a living Baṭuka Bhairava."⁴⁹¹ We will return to the topic of *svasthāveśa* in following chapters.

THE MONKEY-GOD HANUMĀN/BALAJI/MAHAVĪR

As seen in the *Āveśabhairavaṃ Śarabhakalpa*, Hanumān, the popular monkey-god of the Rāmāyaṇa, is also considered a possessing god. Though I am not aware of any early textual connections between Baṭuka and Hanumān, they do become linked in later traditions of the Nath Yogīs and related itinerant groups who were responsible for much of their imminent popularity and installation as protector deities in Śaiva and Goddess shrines

⁴⁹⁰ Smith (2006: 422-423)

⁴⁹¹ See Milan Ratna Shakya, *The Cult of Bhairava in Nepal* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008): 153-158 and 179-180. This association with oracular possession is also what must have led Visuvalingam (1989: 206) to state in her work that local *ojhas*, "spirit mediums" or sorcerers, often gather in Kashi to recharge their magical powers before the image of Baṭuka Bhairava" - see Visuvalingam, Elizabeth-Chalier, "Bhairava's Royal Brahmanicide: The Problem of the Mahabrahmana", in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. Hildebeitel, Alf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

throughout India. In many cases it was usually some form of Bhairava, often Vaṭuka, who gets paired with either Hanumān or Gaṇapati.⁴⁹²

Although commonly depicted as the greatest Vaiṣṇava *bhakta* (devotee) of Lord Rāma, Hanumān is, in fact, closely associated with Śiva and his *gaṇas* and popular in possession rites throughout South and East Asia.⁴⁹³ Like Skanda and Gaṇeśa, Hanumān is also a “second generation” deity propitiated primarily for worldly ends, especially healing, exorcistic, and apotropaic rites. Village and local shrines usually depict Hanumān in an alternative form to his iconic monkey-faced wrestler image associated with the Vaiṣṇava traditions. In these shrines, he is often depicted in an aniconic form, similar to village *bhairava* shrines, where he is represented simply as an upright stone slab smeared with orange *sindur* and set with a pair of silver eyes. In this form he is generally known as Bālājī (“The Child”) or Mahāvīr (“Great Hero”).⁴⁹⁴

As I argued earlier, Skanda-Kumāra (and Baṭuka) were likely worshipped in their child-forms due to their roots and association as leaders of *bālagrahas* (i.e., the demonic *kumāras/kumārīs*), and it is very possible that Hanumān as Bālājī (“The Child”) follows the same pattern. As Bālājī, Hanumān similarly takes on the *bhūtanātha* role in numerous healing and exorcistic temples throughout South Asia. The folklorist Komal Kothari differentiates this role as being part of Hanumān’s *vīr* (“hero” or “virile”) mode in contrast to

⁴⁹² For example, see Erndl (1993) account of the Vaiṣṇo Devī shrine in Himachal Pradesh. David White personally communicated the common pairing of Bhairava and Hanuman at *Vindhyavāsīnī* and several sites in Rajasthan as well.

⁴⁹³ Lutgendorf (2007: 11) writes, "His icons are as likely to be found in temples to Shiva or a local goddess as in those dedicated to Vishnu and his Rama incarnation. Hanumān’s devotees often point out, with a touch of both irony and satisfaction, that there are, in most regions of India, far more shrines to Hanumān than to his exalted master, and a modest number of temple surveys bear out this claim."

⁴⁹⁴ This is, of course, the name also for the great Jain *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra. While there is no relation to these figures, it is significant that Hanumān is considered a *vidyādhara* within the Jain tradition (Lutgendorf 2007: 323).

his *dās* (“servant”) mode, which represents his more devotional qualities as seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴⁹⁵ This term *vīr* is of interest and itself has dual connotations – in Tantra it generally refers to accomplished practitioners who embody a “heroic” ethos to practice the difficult path of Tantra. On the other hand, in popular traditions *vīr* also represents a class of spirits of the deified dead who had violent, untimely deaths. Within various tantric/folk syncretic traditions these often come together as groups of fifty-two *vīrs* (or *bīrs*), who are also identified as fifty-two *bhairavas*.⁴⁹⁶ These restless deified dead are often represented in village shrines as stones smeared with vermilion and silver paper and demand propitiation lest they attack humans with illness and possession, especially children. Hanumān as Mahāvīr, within these traditions, connotes his authority and control of these spirits. In this role he acts as a *bhūtanātha* who controls and protects against these dangerous *vīr* spirits, worshipped also for curing child-barrenness.⁴⁹⁷

Throughout Northern India, temples dedicated to Bālājī have become popular sites for ritual healings focused on exorcism. Although Bālājī treats a variety of diseases and afflictions, his specialty is said to be affliction by *bhūt-pret*s (“spirits” and “ghosts”). Lutgendorf gives the following ethnographic data at Mehandipur in Rajasthan, which is common to many healing temples of this sort:

Healing can occur in several ways. Sometimes the possessing spirit is induced to flee or is even “killed” by the deities, but this is an extreme measure against beings who are regarded as pitiable and themselves in need of treatment (Pakaslahti 1998:140). More commonly, the ghost is provoked to give a “deposition” (*bayān*) in which it

⁴⁹⁵ Lutgendorf (2007: 263-264)

⁴⁹⁶ See White (2003: 173) and chapters 5 and 8 in Hildebeitel (1989).

⁴⁹⁷ Human *vīrs*, usually ritual specialists and local priests believed to be endowed with *siddhis*, model themselves after Mahāvīr and perform apotropaic and exorcistic rites to keep the supernatural *vīrs* at bay. Kothari also mentions more dubious purposes as well – he states that human witches (often called *ḍākinīs*) are also known to propitiate Bālājī-Mahāvīr in order to obtain *vīr*-spirits from Balaji’s entourage as a personal spirit-slave. Kothari, writes, however, that these witches, “will have to keep it ‘satisfied’ (*tuṣṭi*) by feeding it the livers of children”, again pointing to the nefarious *bālagraha* roots of this tradition. See Lutgendorf (2007: 263) for quote.

reveals its identity and grievance. Often it proves to be the “unsatisfied” (*atrpt*) spirit of a relative who died an untimely death, or a ghost deployed through black magic by an enemy. Once the spirit identifies itself and declares what it wants, it can be placated and induced to leave its victim. It may be given a “home” (*ghar*) in the form of a tiny shrine of stones on Balaji’s hillside; this can receive *puja* on subsequent pilgrimages, to ensure that the spirit is happy and at rest. Such pacified ghosts may be revered as ancestral spirits (*pitara*), but they can also become “messengers” (*dūt*) of Balaji or one of his associates and be reassigned to their erstwhile victims as spiritual guardians.⁴⁹⁸

At these healing centers, Bālājī, along with other *bhūtanāthas* such as Bhairava-Mahākāla, are often known as “police captains” of their region, who exorcise and punish afflictive spirits under their control.⁴⁹⁹ In certain cases, it is these *bhūtanāthas* themselves who may possess the bodies of the healers (often known as *vīrs*), who then “battle” and expel the ghost/demon from the afflicted patient.⁵⁰⁰ In other cases, Lutgendorf notes ritual specialists become possessed by the “wind” (*havā*) of Bālājī, in order to diagnose patients and prognosticate for their clients.⁵⁰¹

There is little explicit textual basis for Hanumān’s role as a *bhūtanātha* in the Sanskrit literature, though some traces can be found. Much of Hanumān’s fierceness, for example, originates from his ascribed father, Vāyu, the god of Wind, and his *apsara* mother, Añjanā.⁵⁰² Another common designation for Hanumān is Māruti, “Born from Marut”, the terrible storm gods who were considered the children of both Vāyu and Rudra.⁵⁰³ Hanumān’s explicit connection with Śiva, however, comes only later in the Purāṇic period, either as

⁴⁹⁸ Lutgendorf (2007: 267)

⁴⁹⁹ Kāl Bhairav is also traditionally the *koṭwāl* (police constable) of Benares.

⁵⁰⁰ See Lutgendorf (2007), Sax (2009) and Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982)

⁵⁰¹ Lutgendorf (2007: 264)

⁵⁰² Two of Hanumān’s most common epithets are Vāyuputra or Pavanasuta, “son of the Wind” - it is clear that Hanumān’s immense power and ability to fly comes from Vāyu.

⁵⁰³ While Hanumān himself is not attested to in the early Vedas, there is mention of the monkey-deity Vṛṣākapi, who later Sanskrit authors try to connect with Hanumān, though a direct connection between the two is tenuous at best. The *Harivamsa*, a late appendage to the MBh, for example, connects Hanumān with Vṛṣākapi who is identified as one of the eleven *rudras*.

San̄kar-suvan (“Son of Śiva”) or in some cases as an incarnation (*avatar*) of Śiva.⁵⁰⁴ An interesting example of the former can be seen in a birth story of Hanumān found in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*. In this legend Kesari, considered Hanumān’s worldly father, resided on a mountain in South India and killed a troublesome demon that was harassing the sages of the forest. As a reward, the sages rewarded him with a boon. Being childless, he requests a son for himself and his queen, Añjanā. Granting this request, the sages teach him a powerful Śiva-*mantra*, which he is told to repeat over and over again. As a result of this penance, Śiva becomes pleased with Kesari and enters into his body in his “Rudra-form” along with the Wind-God, Vāyu. Possessed by both these entities, Kesari then unites with Añjanā, and after twelve years of lovemaking she becomes pregnant and begets the mighty Hanumān.⁵⁰⁵

As is the case with many animal-bodied deities, it is very possible that a proto-Hanumān figure related to an early *yakṣa* cult existed, though no surviving evidence has yet been presented.⁵⁰⁶ Indirect evidence does support this idea, however, since in later centuries Hanumān comes to serve both as a protector of fields (*kṣetrapāla*) and gatekeeper (*dvārapāla*) of towns, forts, and temples throughout India, roles often assigned to local *yakṣas* and other protector beings.⁵⁰⁷ Additionally, like other *yakṣas* such as Kubera, Mahākāla-Bhairava, Vajrapāni, etc., Hanumān also carries the iconographic “protectors” club.

One interesting birth story of Hanumān from the *Brahma Purāṇa* is relevant to our discussion here and alludes to Hanumān’s *bhūtanātha* role. In a chapter describing various

⁵⁰⁴ For example, the Śiva Purāṇa and the Dāṇḍi Rāmāyan (ca. 1500) - see Lutgendorf (2007: 53; 56; and 58).

⁵⁰⁵ Narula, Joginder, *Hanumān: God and Epic Hero*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1991): 115.

⁵⁰⁶ See e.g., Narula (1991: 20–24) and Coomaraswamy (1993:74). Lutgendorf (2007: 42-43) mentions some of the draw backs of these theories.

⁵⁰⁷ Lutgendorf (2007: 41).

pilgrimage places in South India, reference is made to a pair of related sacred *tīrthas* (bathing places) near the Godāvārī River in west-central India named *Paisāca-tīrtha* (“Ghoul-ford”) and *Hanumān-tīrtha*.⁵⁰⁸ In the story, the *apsara* Añjanā and her friend, Adrika, were both cursed by the god Indra for mocking him. As a result, they were born on earth among the monkeys – Añjanā, with a monkey-face and Adrikā, with a cat-face - and both were married to the monkey-king, Kesari.⁵⁰⁹ According to the legend, the infamous sage Āgastya happened to visit Kesari’s residence one day while the monkey-king was out, and both Añjanā and Adrikā accorded him great honor till Kesari returned. Pleased with their hospitality, the sage blessed them with the boon of begetting mighty and noble sons. Soon after, while playing in the woods, Añjanā was seen by the Wind god, Vāyu, and Adrikā by a *rākṣasa* known as Nirṛti (“Dissolution”) – these two supernatural beings instantly fell in love with them and “entered” into their bodies. As a result of this union, Añjanā gave birth to Hanumān, while Adrikā gave birth to a ghoulish being known as Adri or Ghora (“terrible”), who would eventually go on to become a *piśāca-rāja*, a “King of the Flesh-eating Ghouls”. The divine sons grew up quickly, and their supernatural fathers advised them to take their mothers on a pilgrimage to the Godavari River in order to release them from Indra’s curse. This is said to be the origin of the two related *tīrthas*. As Lutgendorf points out, by making Hanumān the half-brother of a *piśāca-rāja*, a ruler, or *bhūtanātha*, of the malevolent ghoulish spirits (*piśāca*), the story suggests “both Hanumān’s literal ‘kinship’ with these beings and his potential power over them.”⁵¹⁰ Indeed this is the story given at Hanumān’s most famous temple, the

⁵⁰⁸ Brahmapurāṇam 1976:84.471–72; these are also later alluded to in the (ca. fourteenth– fifteenth century) Sanskrit Ānanda Rāmāyana and in the (ca. fifteenth century) Bengali Rāmāyana of Krittibasa (Govindchandra 1976:160, 195)

⁵⁰⁹ In popular accounts Añjanā is also considered to be one of the sixteen *mātr̥s* (Mothers). See Lutgendorf (2007: 181).

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

Bālājī exorcist temple in Mehandipur, whose healing traditions for those afflicted by possession has been extensively studied.⁵¹¹

In Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇa, Hanumān is renowned as the archetypal ascetic-warrior, whose supernatural powers (*siddhis*) famously included not only his ability to fly, or become small or gigantic, but he also said to have attained the *siddhi* of resistance to all illness and disease through esoteric knowledge, which also allowed him to heal and cure others. Though this last aspect is not predominant in the Epic literature, it is touched upon in later *purāṇic*, tantric, and devotional literature. For example, the *Nārada Purāṇa* and the 12th century *Agastya Saṃhitā*, a Vaiṣṇava Pañcarātra text, both give *mantras* for invoking Hanumān in order to dispel ghosts and to cure maladies such as fever and epilepsy.⁵¹² Similarly, it is believed that chanting Tulsidasa's famous *Hanumān Chalisa* (16th-century) would invoke Hanumān's divine intervention to cure affliction by evil-spirits. In this extremely popular devotional hymn (*stotra*), still recited by millions of Hindus every day, one line explicitly states, "Evil spirits (*bhūta*) and flesh-eating ghouls (*pisācas*) do not come near those who chant the name of Mahāvīra."⁵¹³

Around the same time, and perhaps due to the powerful influence Tulsidasa had on the spread of *Hanumān* worship throughout India, Hindu tantric texts from the 16th century onwards also begin to invoke Hanumān in his fierce (*ugra*) five animal-headed (*pañcamukhī*)

⁵¹¹ See Kakar (1982) and G. Dwyer, 1999. "Healing and the Transformation of Self in Exorcism at a Hindu Shrine in Rajasthan: Social Analysis". *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 43, 2, 108-137 and *The Divine and the Demonic: Supernatural Affliction and its Treatment in North India*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

⁵¹² Lutgendorf (2007 55; 103-104).

⁵¹³ *bhūta pisācha nikata nahi āvai / mahāvīra jaba nāma sunāvai* || HC 24 Cf. John Cort (1997) has documented the identical role of the western Indian Jain Ghaṇṭakarṇ Mahāvīr, a Jain equivalent of Hanumān. See Cort, John. 1997. "Tantra in Jainism: The Cult of Ghantākarn Mahāvīr, the Great Hero Bell-Ears," in *Bulletin d'Etudes Indiennes* 15, 115–33.

manifestation, particularly for apotropaic rites.⁵¹⁴ To this end, many tantric protective “armor” (*kavaca*) rites can be found associated with this particular form of Hanumān.⁵¹⁵ Another rite of note, which Lutgendorf mentions, involves the invocation of Pañcamukhī Hanumān for the “activation of a peacock-feather fan to ‘sweep away’ ghosts, particularly from small children”.⁵¹⁶

Cults involving monkey-deities associated with possession rites are also found in China and other parts of East Asia, which still exists to this day. Much of this may have been indigenous, but various scholars have pointed out that there was likely some influence from the tantric Hanumān of India as well. This is particularly the case with the premiere monkey-god of China, the rambunctious Sun Wu-k'ung, “revered as a trickster, esoteric preceptor, healer (especially of children and horses), and as an exorcist”.⁵¹⁷ Lutgendorf argues that much of Sun Wu-k'ung’s story and character matches Hanumān from the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well. It is possible that both of these traditions drew from an even earlier cult of monkeys, though I have not been able to do further research on this yet. Strickmann notes the association with Sun Wu-k'ung and possession, stating that, “Chinese professional mediums

⁵¹⁴ The *Pratimā Koṣa* states "The heads are those of monkey (front or east), lion (south, Narasiṃha), eagle (west, Garuḍa), boar (north, Varāha), and horse (above the front head, Hayagrīva). The deities incorporated are for several benefits: Narasiṃha for elimination of fear (*bhayanāśana*), Garuḍa for magical skill, (*pātāla-siddhi*) and curing snakebites etc, (*viśa-bhātādi-kṛntanam*), Varāha for subduing all evil spirits and eliminating diseases (*sarva-bhūta-praśamanam tāpa-jvara-nivāraṇam*); and Hayagrīva for overcoming enemies (*dānāvana-karam*). In the ten hands are seen gesture of cow's face (*go-mudrikā*), sword, trident, goad, mountain (on the right side), skull-cup, *khaṭvāṅga*, noose, tree, and uplifted hand (about to administer a slap, *capeṭikā-mudrā*)." Translation by Saligrama Krishna Ramachandra Rao in *Pratima Kosha: Descriptive Glossary of Indian Iconography* 1. 1., (Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1988): 297-302. In later vernacular texts the number of heads also grow to seven or even eleven.

⁵¹⁵ These rites involved ritually constructing an invisible force field around the *tantrika* (or their clients) through the use of *mantras* and *yantras* and amulets, which was believed to protect against demon, illness and other dangers. Later post-17th century Sanskrit tantric manuals such as the *Pañcamukhī Hanumātkavaca* (“Shield of the Five-Headed Hanumān”) or *Hanumād Rahasyam* (*The Secret Teaching of Hanumān*) describe various mantras, *nyāsa* rites, and “visualization verses” (*dhyāna-sloka*) to Pañcamukhī Hanumān, often identified with Rudra. Most of these texts trace their root sources to either the *Brahmānda Purāna* or *Sudarśana Saṃhitā*. See Lutgendorf (2007: 381-383) and the next chapter for a look at some of these texts.

⁵¹⁶ See Lutgendorf (2007:108) - note the apotropaic use of peacock feathers once again.

⁵¹⁷ See Lutgendorf (2007: 357)

still regularly incarnate the formidable legendary monkey” at an annual festival held in Kowloon. The god does so by possessing a human-medium, who makes him acts like a monkey and who he speaks through.⁵¹⁸

ĀVEŚAVIDHI

Positive forms of deity-possession by Hanumān into the bodies of human mediums are also found within late tantric Sanskrit possession manuals discussed by Smith, such as the *Āveśabhairavam Śarabhakalpa*. More manuscripts addressed specifically to Hanumān also exist, including the *Āveśa Hanumāntam*, the *Āñjaneya-Āveśa-vidhiḥ*, (though listed as *Hanumadāveśavidhiḥ*) in the ORI Mysore catalog (C 548/5) and the *Āveśahanūmatkalpaḥ* (No. 7763; also known as *Āveśahanūmadvisaya* in No. 5586). I was able to procure the *Āñjaneya Āveśavidhiḥ* during my fieldwork in Mysore, which turns out to be a *svasthāveśa* rite involving a young boy (*vaṭuka*) who is possessed by Hanumān after being installed on a *yantra* made of multi-colored crushed powder. The colophon of this manuscript also claims these rites were taken from the *Sudarśana Saṃhitā*, placing it squarely within the same tradition of the tantric manuals Lutgendorf describes earlier.⁵¹⁹ However, the visualization in this manual is of a one-headed Hanumān (as Āñjaneya, “Son of Añjanā”), rather than the five-headed tantric figure. I will give a brief summary of this manuscript here based on my translation and analysis.

The *Āñjaneya-Āveśavidhiḥ* begins with the Goddess Parvati asking Śiva for an easy method for obtaining possession (*vidhānam sugamāveśaḥ*). Śiva begins by stating that “the yoga of possession, which is easily obtained” (*sulabhāveśayoga*), is difficult for people on

⁵¹⁸ Strickmann (2005: 333 note 48) also mentions a Malay “monkey-dance,” in which a monkey-spirit is made to enter a young girl who acts as a medium.

⁵¹⁹ *iti śri sudarśanasamhitāyām āñjaneyāveśavidhīrnāma dvitīyapaṭalāḥ* |

earth to access. However, out of his compassion, he provides the required *mantras*. He states that there are two types of possession mantras (*āveśam-maṅtram*) - one for possession by spirits (*bhūtāveśam*), which is easy to obtain (*sulabham*), and one for possession by gods (*daivatam*), which is hard to obtain (*durlabham*). Śiva issues a warning though – if one does not perfect the prescribed mantra before employing it, it could potentially kill the user.⁵²⁰ Additionally, he tells Parvati that one needs to keep both the *mantras* and associated *yantras* secret, or else the *siddhi* of possession will not arise (*gopayennabhavetsiddhi gopayennaprakāśayan*). He then relates the various parts of the mantra, which includes the “fettering seed-syllable” (*pāśābījāṃ*), the wind seed-syllable (*vāyubījāṃ*) and the “hook” (elephant-goad; *aṃkuśambījāṃ*) seed-syllable followed by praise of Hanumān and Lakṣmana, Rāma’s brother. After smearing sacred ash on the boy’s forehead and reciting the mantras one hundred times (*śatavāraṃ maṅtritāṃ*) the text states the boy will begin to tremble (*prasphura*) and then possession by Hanumān (known here as Jagatprāṇatanūbhava, “Son of the World-Breath” and Prāṇavāyusvarupāya, “He who’s form is Breath and Wind”), will take place. Śiva concludes this portion stating that,

O Devī, this “garland mantra” bestows the fruit of the *siddhi* called possession by Hanumān, immediately. For those who are chaste and refined, this mantra immediately yields possession for eight days, even in the Kali age.⁵²¹

The mantra itself is then provided along with the visualization (*dhyānam*), both which are said to have come from the famous Ṛṣi Nārada, and installed (*nyāsa*) upon the heart and the hand of the ritual specialist. Here is my partial translation from the manuscript:

Victory | *Ām Hrīm Glaum Dim Krom* | To the messenger of Rama, the protector of Lakṣmana, possess! Come near! Come near! Tremble! Tremble! Become tremulous! Victory to the Destroyer of the palace at Lanka, he who is the delight of Sri Rama and

⁵²⁰ *durlabham ca katāmartyaṃ maṅtrasiddhivinā priye ||*

⁵²¹ *āveśahanumaṅtākhyā kṣipraṃ siddhiphalapradam mālāmaṅtramidaṃ devī kṣiprāveśapradam kalau brahmacārī ca sabhyaśca aṣṭahayasamākrakam |*

Lakṣmana! Possess! Possess! (*āveśayā āveśayā*) Enter! Enter! (*praveśaya praveśaya*) Play! Play! (*kelaya kelaya*) | Cause to Speak! Cause to Speak! (*bhāṣaya bhāṣaya*) Victory to the lord whose own form is composed of breath and wind. Possess immediately! Possess! Hum Hum Phaṭ Svāha! Oh, one who is possessed, tell me of the past and future and present!⁵²²

After the rite has been completed, the possessing spirit Hanumān is dismissed with the following mantra:

Homage to the messenger of Rama, to the protector of the three worlds! Go! Go to your own place! Forgive! Forgive any offences! Be compassionate! Homage to the protector of the monkey-army! To the maker of compassion, Go! Go to your own place! *Svāha!*⁵²³

As we will see, the structure of these rites and mantras employed are commonplace in the Śaiva Tantras we will examine in chapter four. The *Āṅjaneya-Āveśavidhiḥ* itself is a small portion of a larger manuscript entitled *Āveśavidhiḥ*, "Rites of Possession", that I was able to retrieve from the ORI manuscript library in Mysore which the text states is explicitly about *devatāveśam*, "Possession by Demi-gods". It is composed in Sanskrit, though written in Telegu, and contains a number of *āveśa* rituals redacted from a variety of texts.⁵²⁴ In it we find the following sections - *Āṅjaneya-Āveśavidhi* ("Rite for Possession by Āṅjaneya"), *Bhairavāveśam* ("Possession by Bhairava"), *Āveśakālarātrīmantram* ("Mantra for Possession by Kālarātrī"), and finally, *Bhūtāveśakramam* ("Procedures for Possession by Spirits"). The text is quite corrupt, so any of my translations are tentative at best.

⁵²² *jayaṃ ām | hrīm glaum dim | kroṃ āṅjaneyāya | rāmadhūtāya lakṣmaṇarakṣakāya | āveśaya ehyohisphurasphura | prasphuraprasphura | laṅkāprāsādbhaiṅjanāya | śrīrāmalakṣmaṇanandakara | āveśayā āveśayā | rājñāpayati praveśaya | praveśaya | kelaya kelaya | bhāṣaya bhāṣaya | bhagavatprāṇavāyusvarūpāya | kṣipraveśaya | āveśayā | huṃ * huṃ | phaṭ svāha | ī yantramdāta | āyantrammdāta | kūrnuṃ nna brahmacārimīdanu | āveśa atīta anāgatavarthyā** || (11b)*

⁵²³ *om namorāmadhūtāya | trilokarakṣakāya | svasthānaṃ gachagacha | sarvaparādhaṃ kṣamkṣam | svakrpāṃ kurukuru | kapisainyaprākārāya | karuṇākārāya | svasthānaṃ gaccha gaccha | svāha |*

⁵²⁴ *Āveśavidhiḥ* palm-leaf manuscript- E 48069 – C. 548 (ORI Mysore): - see listing in Rajagopalachar, K. 1990. Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts. Volumes XVI–XVII: Tantra Mantra Sāstram. Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore. 1:50–53.

The compendium begins with various praises and a dialogue between Lord Śiva and the Devī, who is identified as Kālarātri, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahākālī and who desires to hear about the science of the "Signs of Possession by Demi-gods" (*devatāveśa-lakṣaṇam*) and their associated spells (*vidyā*).⁵²⁵ The Lord provides her with the proper mantras which promise possession by *devatās* (demi-gods) and *devas* (gods) such as Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara,⁵²⁶ and result in knowledge of the past and future, of one's previous and future lives, and those actions which produce good and evil results.⁵²⁷ Other powers include removing bareness from women, destroying sin and evil, and diagnosing diseases.⁵²⁸

The first portion of the rite involves placing a silver (*rajata*) or golden image (*svarṇamūrti*) of the deity Rudra/Śiva in copper pots (*tāmreṇakalaśair*) upon an elaborate *yantra* made of five powdered colors (*pañcavarnena cūrṇena*) drawn on cow dung. Various offerings are made, including rice and gemstones, and the deity is invoked into the image. By using the appropriate mantras, the manuscript states one can achieve possession, speak about the past and future, and perform various miracles.⁵²⁹ The section ends with a colophon stating it was redacted from the first chapter of the Śrī Āgamarahasya ("Glorious Secret Scripture"), which is a part of the unknown *Atharvaṇatantra*.⁵³⁰

A *nyāsa* rite is then given, involving the installation of seed (*bīja*) mantras on the body, followed by a visualization/meditation (*dhyānam*) where the adept identifies oneself as Bhairava, who is said to "possess all the gods" (*āveśaṃsarvadevānām*

⁵²⁵ *yadāsaṃśrotumicchāmi devatāveśalakṣaṇam | tadvidyātadvidānañca vada me karuṇānidhiḥ ||*

⁵²⁶ *brahmaviṣṇumaheśadi devatāveśa niścayam | ye svargasaṃsthitevāśca devīśānāntarottamā ||*

⁵²⁷ *atītānāgataṃ caiva janmāntara phalaṃ tathā | bhaviṣyajanma karmaṇca śubhāśubhphalaṃ tatha ||*

⁵²⁸ *putraprāptiphalaṃcaiva aputrāphalanirṇayam | duṣṭakṣimṇaṇcahemaścadoṣakṣiṇaphalaṃ tatha | rogaprāptiphalaṃcaiva atyāścaryaphlaṃtatha |*

⁵²⁹ *bhasmamañtreṇanikṣipet atītānāgataṃ caiva | vadatyāścaryakaṃtathā naśakyatesamāhātmyam || mayāvaktumaheśvari ||*

⁵³⁰ *|| itiśrīāgamarahasye atharvaṇatantrakāṇḍe umāmaheśvarasaṃvāde āveśamantra yantrapūjāvidhīrṇām prathamapaṭalaḥ ||*

bhairavañcintayāmyaham). Through these secret deity possession mantras (*rahasyadevatāveśamañtra*) and rites, the manuscript states one is able to instantly achieve possession (*kṣiprāveśa*) and a variety of supernatural powers (*siddhis*). It is here where we find the section on *Āñjaneya-Āveśavidhiḥ* discussed above.

Following this is the description of another *yantra* rite involving colored powders and the *mantra* for *Bhairavāveśam* ("Possession by Bhairava") said to be received from Śrī Agastya. This is a translation of the mantra:⁵³¹

Om ām hrīm krīm kṣām am glaum hum ḍim saḥ | Homage to Vaṭukabhairava, protector of the material world, granter of material wishes, the accomplished one. Obeisance to the one who causes immediate possession. Now possess possess!! *Om am hrīm kṣam krom* | Come near! come near! he with great courage and immeasurable power! The king commands you to possess! Speak, speak to me about the past, future and present! Cause to Possess! Cause to Possess!! Obeisance to Vaṭukabhairava, cause to possess! Parvati and the Supreme Lord command you! Now Possess! Possess! *Ām krīm kṣam glaum krom*. Enter this body, Oh Supreme Treasure of Compassion! Hum Phat! Hail!

Again, the manuscript states one can speak about the past and future, perform sorcery involving various spirits, and diagnose diseases.⁵³² It is not completely clear, but a brief rite mentioning the possession of a young boy and girl who have entered the *yantra* is given.⁵³³ Though little is stated about the details of this rite, we can imagine it was similar to the previous *Āñjaneya-Āveśavidhiḥ* rite.

Following this is the rite and mantra for possession by the Goddess Kālarātrī (*āveśakālarātrīmantram*), also known as possession by the yoginī Śrī Dakṣiṇakālī, and the

⁵³¹ *om ām hrīm krīm kṣām am glaum hum ḍim saḥ* | *sakalajagadrakṣakāya* | *vaṭukabhairavāya sakalavaraprada sādakāya kṣiprāveśakakārāya* | *atrāveśaya* | *āveśayā* || *om (12b) am hrīm kṣam krom* | *ehi ehi aparimitabalaparākramāya* | *rājñāpayati āveśaya* | *āveśaya atītānāgatavartamānam* | *me vadavada āveśaya āveśaya* | *āveśayavaṭukabhairavāya* | *pārvatīpārameśvarājñāpati* | *atrāveśaya āveśaya* | *ām krīm kṣam glaum krom* | *asya śarīra praveśya paramadayānidhe* | *hum phat svāha* |

⁵³² *atītānāgataṃ caiva vededbhairava ādarān* | *kṛtrimañceṭasaṃcaiva bhūtakṛtyatathainaca* || *nāḍīśalyaṃgataṃcaiva kṛtrimaṃ mantrajaṃ ta(13b)thā* | *rogakṛt kṛtrimaṃcaiva sarvavadati bhairavaḥ*

⁵³³ *vibhūtyābhimantrayan kumārodaḥ kanyakova yantraṃpari ca veśayan āveśanaṃtataḥkuryāt* |

dhyānam which is said to create possession in one's consciousness (*citāveśamayamkṛtau*). The rite also involves the use of a girl and boy in a *yantra*, though again little details or descriptions of their use are given. The mantra translates to, "Homage to the Goddess Kālarātrī, the Great Lordess of desire || Possess me! Possess now! Possess! Possess! Hum Phaṭ Svahā!"⁵³⁴

The manuscript ends with a portion entitled "Bhūtāveśakramam" - "Procedures for Possession by Spirits"). The text is severely corrupted but appears to be rites involving possession by the "Goddess Who Dwells in the Cremation Ground"⁵³⁵ and binding harmful spirits such as *bhūtas*, *pretas*, *piśācas* with mantras and enchanted strings.⁵³⁶ The colophon claims it was redacted from the fifth chapter entitled *bhūtāveśam* ("Possession by Spirits") from the unknown *Vetālatantra*.⁵³⁷

E. CONCLUSION

At this point, I have given a great amount of data regarding early possession narratives going back to the time of the Vedas, and a genealogy of many of the possession entities/*bhūtanātha* figures that eventually come to populate the pantheon of the Tantric traditions and become central in its deity possession rites. One of the reasons for relaying this information is to point out that the divinities involved in deity possession rites are not necessarily random.

⁵³⁴ *om namobhagavatī kālarātrikāmeśvarī | mayāveśo atrāveśaya āveśaya āveśaya hum phaṭ svahā ||*

⁵³⁵ *|| mañtram || om namobhagavatī smaśānavāsīnī bhūtapretapisāca parām āveśamukam | amalavarayām hāsakalavarayām kṣipramāveśayaṃ kurukuru |*

⁵³⁶ See a description of similar rite in White "Filthy Amulets: 'Superstition,' True 'Religion,' and Pure 'Science' in Hindu Demonology," in *Divins Remèdes: Médecine et Religion en Asie du Sud (Puruśārtha 27)* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2008): 135-62

⁵³⁷ *Colophon: iti bhetālatantra bhūtāveśam nāma pañcamapaṭalaḥ ||*

Generally speaking, the genealogies I have laid out show that all these possessing entities are closely intertwined in some way with the more ancient “demonological” (*bhūtavidyā*) and sorceristic substratum found throughout Asia (i.e., Atharvaveda/Ayurvedic, Buddhist *rakṣa-dhāraṇī* spell texts, folk traditions, etc.). Similarly, as we will see, possession rites in the medical texts, Tantras, and in contemporary possession traditions, often draw upon these earlier ritual paradigms. It is my contention that tantric possession and positive forms of possession in general, have always been entwined with the systems of negative possession. My argument stands in contrast to J.R. Freeman's conclusion in his studies of Teyyam possession rites in South India:

While this pathological complex of spirit seizure is certainly widespread in South Asia, it bears no necessary relation to auspicious, voluntary possession. It is in fact necessary to insist that this latter kind of controlled possession is most often a free-standing, independent religious institution, and this is no doubt why the two kinds of possession are everywhere terminologically distinct. Furthermore, it is clear in many regions that the deliberate forms of possession have more in common with puja than with demonic seizure.⁵⁴⁰

While I agree with Freeman's assessment that "voluntary" possession is congruent with temple worship (*pūjā*), an argument I also make in chapter four, I disagree with his assertion that these forms were completely divorced from the demonological/exorcistic traditions. Though terminologically distinct (*graha* vs. *āveśa*), the two are clearly historically related. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this becomes particularly clear in Tantric possession rites where fierce possessing entities are controlled and manipulated using tantric technologies which draw from these older traditions.

Another point that comes out of this data, is that not all gods in South Asia possess - in the same way that not all humans get possessed. As we will see, not only do all these

⁵⁴⁰ Freeman (1998: 75-76)

deities share similar features and qualities, but so too do the humans they possess. The possessors and possessed are more alike than we may think. Today, as in the past, the possessing entities of South Asia are by and large ambiguous beings from the lower echelons of the "spirit-divinity" hierarchy, rather than the "higher" or "classical" gods. Possession in South Asia is usually by goddesses and fierce spirits of various sorts (e.g., *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *yoginīs*, *mātrkās*, *bhūtas*, *pretas*, *piśācas*, etc.).⁵⁴¹ Of course, with the sorts of beings we have been discussing designations such as gods, spirits, and demons are fluid and shift over time by the humans classifying them. Similarly, according to textual and ethnographic data, those who experience deity possession are generally women, children, those who belong to marginalized communities, or those who ritually induce possession through extreme penances and self-mortifying acts.

⁵⁴¹ In South India, George Hart (1983: 118) believes that "there is evidence that the belief in possession through the spirits of the dead is older than the belief in possession by gods". See Hart, George L., "The Theory of Reincarnation among the Tamils" in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, ed. Wendy Doniger, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983).

III. CHAPTER 3: POSSESSION AND ITS MECHANICS IN EARLY AYURVEDA, YOGA, AND BHŪTAVIDYĀ

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus primarily on accounts and interpretations of possession as found in medical, yoga, and related texts. From this data we can gather information about how spirit possession was conceptualized in this early period, including its various etiologies, symptomologies, and mechanics. Following this will be an examination of possession mechanics as found in sources that discuss *parakāyapraveśavidyā*, “The Science of Entering Another’s Body”. This will include look at various yoga texts and then begin a brief survey of the Śaiva Pāsupatas who were known to be practitioners of this science and key in the evolution and formation of later tantric groups and their institutionalization of deity possession rites.

B. THE MEDICALIZATION OF POSSESSION: BHŪTAVIDYA, POSSESSION, AND MADNESS IN EARLY AYURVEDIC TEXTS

As we saw in the previous chapter, accounts of Skanda and his fearsome retinue of *grahas* in the Epic, Purāṇic and early medical treatises show that a relatively sophisticated “science of spirits” (*bhūtavidyā*) was being developed, systematized, and incorporated into this literature around the turn of the Common Era. While numerous independent medical and demonological systems existed throughout South Asia, the most authoritative came to be collectively known as “The Great Three” (*bṛhat trayī*), which included the *Carakasamhitā* and *Suśrutasamhitā*, considered the foundational texts of Ayurveda, along with Vāgbhaṭa’s *Aṣṭhāṅgahr̥dayasamhitā*, written many centuries later.

All three of these treatises trace their origins to the *Atharva Veda* and the various *ṛṣis* (sages) and gods who transmitted this divine knowledge to the human realm.⁵⁴² Of significance is the account of Agniveśa, one of the early *ṛṣis* of the *Carakasamhitā* lineage, who is described as having been “possessed” (*viviśur*, from the root *viś*) by multiple “Goddesses of Knowledge” (*jñānadevatāḥ*) when writing the teachings down for the first time, implying that the information did not come from himself, but was rather channeled from divine sources.⁵⁴³ Like the *Mahābhārata*, these Ayurvedic texts were composite collections produced by a variety of authors, drawing from various traditions, and revised and redacted numerous times over many centuries. Scholars have argued that these medical texts likely originated in a shared Brahmanic/non-Brahmanic and ascetic (*śramanic*) milieu, though its compilers and writers were primarily Brahmins.⁵⁴⁴

While the earlier *Atharva Veda* (and ancillary texts) viewed disease and disorders primarily in terms of demonic or magical etiology, Ayurvedic texts attempted to systematize disease using the lens of the “three humours” (*tri-doṣas*) - *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (bile), and *kapha* (phlegm). These three *doṣas* form the foundation of Ayurveda, considered the basic functional humours of the human body and mind, and responsible for all states of health and disease. Most simply, when the *doṣas* are in equilibrium, a human is stable - when

⁵⁴² The *Carakasamhitā* states that the medical treaties line of succession originated with the creator Brahma, which was then transmitted down the following line: first to Daśa Prajāpati, then the celestial Aśvin twins, then to Indra who passed on to Ṛṣi Bharadvāja who taught it other sages (*ṛṣis*), the foremost being Punarvasu (aka Ātreya). From him, his six disciples, Agniveśa, Bhela, Hārīta, Jatūkarna, Parāśara, and Kshārapāni received the teachings, put it into writing, and brought the knowledge to humans. See Filloziat (1964: 2-11).

⁵⁴³ *athāgniveśapramukhān viviśur jñānadevatāḥ | buddhiḥ siddhiḥ smṛtir medhā dhṛtiḥ kīrtiḥ kṣamādayaḥ ||* (CS 1.39.1-2): These include the goddesses of Discernment [*buddhi*], Accomplishments [*siddhi*], Memory [*smṛti*], Intelligence [*medhā*], Resolution [*dhṛti*], Speech [*kīrti*], Forbearance [*kṣamā*], etc. Since *pramukhān* is in the plural it may also imply that all of Ātreya’s chief disciples were possessed by these goddesses.

⁵⁴⁴ See D. Wujastyk, *The Roots of Āyurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998): 17 and Zysk’s book, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

unbalanced, sickness arises. Theoretically, Ayurveda is heavily indebted to early Sāṃkhyan philosophy, particularly in its formulation of the *tattva* (“constituent principles of the universe”) system, which provided the basis for the *tri-doṣa* system.⁵⁴⁵ Additionally, it adopted many early Sāṃkhyan classifications systems, particularly its hierarchy of supernatural beings, which pre-date or were contemporaneous with the earliest portions and layers of the medical texts.⁵⁴⁶ Though the medical texts draw from a number of other sources, Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic, Sāṃkhyan typologies left an indelible and lasting stamp on Ayurveda.⁵⁴⁷ Similarly, early yoga schools had a strong influence on much of Ayurveda’s philosophy, vocabulary, and concepts.⁵⁴⁸

Despite the adoption of the *tri-doṣa* lens and the inherent ambiguity with which it treated the phenomena of spirit possession, both the *Carakasamhitā* (1.30.28) and *Suśrutasamhitā* (1.17) identify *Bhūtavidyā* (“The Science of Spirits”) as one of the essential components of Āyurveda. Āyurveda has eight divisions, the two most salient to our own investigation being *Bhūtavidyā* and *Kaumarabhr̥tya* (pediatrics), both which focused specifically on possession in adults and children.⁵⁴⁹ The *Suśrutasamhitā* gives succinct definitions of both:

The [branch] known as *bhūtavidyā*, deals with possession [*upaśṛṣṭa*] of one’s mind/consciousness [*cetas*] by *grahas* (seizers) like gods, anti-gods, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *rakṣas*, *pitṛs*, *piśācas*, *nāgas*, *grahas*, etc. for the purpose of appeasing and

⁵⁴⁵ White (1996: 21) believes the medical doṣas may have been the inspiration behind the Sāṃkhyan *triguṇas* (literally “three strands”, though referring to the “qualities” of *sattvā-rajās-tamas*), which are first discussed in the Upaniṣads. The *tridoṣa* certainly predate the *triguṇa*, and they behave much in the same ways.

⁵⁴⁶ See *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* (SK, 53–54); The SK dates to 350-450 CE - Sāṃkhya concepts found in the SS and MBh represent earlier ideas than this compendium.

⁵⁴⁷ See Smith (2006: 86-487).

⁵⁴⁸ See Obeyesekere (1977) as well as Larson (1987) who also mentions various influences from Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems as well.

⁵⁴⁹ As we will see, an allied branch in later tantras also deals with the science of poisons/intoxicants (*Viśa-garavairodhika-prasamana*) – which also uses possession in various rites (see Slouber 2017).

removing the *grahas*, through pacification rites and sacrificial offerings [SS 1.1.8.5].⁵⁵⁰

The one known as *kaumārabhṛtyam* (“care of children” or pediatrics) is for the sake of destroying impurity of the bodily humours, wet-nurses, and nourishment of the child and for the purpose of appeasing the children’s diseases arising from *grahas* (seizers) or impure milk [SS 1.1.8.6].⁵⁵¹

The *Carakasamhitā* is believed by most scholars to be the oldest of the three, while the *Suśrutasamhitā* was composed slightly later. Both the text’s compositions were cumulative, dating primarily from the 2nd -3rd century BCE to the 4th-5th century of the Common Era, with some portions added even later.⁵⁵² These two early medical texts cover much of the same material, though the *Carakasamhitā* is considered more complete in regard to development and theory, while the *Suśrutasamhitā* is noted for its emphasis and specialty in early surgical techniques.

Today, however, the most widely employed Ayurvedic text is Vāgbhaṭa’s 6th century CE *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā* (AHS), or “Heart of Medicine”, which many consider “the greatest synthesis of Indian medicine ever produced.”⁵⁵³ It synthesized teachings from both the CS and SS, but also incorporated material from other local medical traditions and even early Tantras when they began to emerge. It has been translated into numerous languages early on, including Arabic and Tibetan, and is still practiced and memorized by students throughout South Asia today. Tradition also ascribes authorship of the *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*

⁵⁵⁰ *bhūtavidyā nāma devāsuraṅdharvayakṣarākṣahpitṛpiśācanāgagrahādy-upasṛṣṭacetasāṃ śāntikarmabalīharaṇādīgrahopāśamanārtham* / (SS 1.1.8.5)

⁵⁵¹ *kaumārabhṛtyam nāma kumārabharaṇadhātṛkṣīradoṣasamśodhanārtham duṣṭastanyagrahasamutthānām ca vyādhinām upāśamanārtham* / (SS 1.1.8.6)

⁵⁵² See Wujastyk (1998: 39–41). For a more precise dating of the core of the text to 50–150 C.E. and exhaustive evidence for this date, see Meulenbeld (1999 Vol. 1A):105– 115 and references. For SS see Meulenbeld (1999 Vol. 1A: 348-352) and references.

⁵⁵³ Wujastyk (1998: 236).

(AS), an expanded commentary of the AHS, to Vāgbhaṭa, though his authorship is debated.⁵⁵⁴

While the three texts share much in regard to *Bhūtavidyā*, there are some striking differences, reflecting not only the variety of sources the compilers were drawing from, but also the ambiguous status spirit possession had within the medical tradition. One difference, for example, is the absence in the *Carakasamhitā* of the long list of *bālagrahas* (child-seizers) as seen in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* of the MBH, but which is found in the later SS. In fact, while the CS clearly acknowledges the existence of various afflictions caused by possessing entities, and even recognizes that people believe in *bālagrahas*, the authors of the text seem to deny them. For example, a stanza found in chapter four of the *Śārīrasthāna*, “The Chapter on the Body”, describes a false pregnancy (pseudocyesis) caused by the *vāta doṣa* (wind humour), which results in the clotting of menstrual blood. The text states, that upon seeing the discharged blood, but no fetus, “stupid people” (*abudha*) will believe that the fetus was stolen away by evil spirits (*bhūtaḥṛtaṃ*). In these verses, the author asks rhetorically,

These night-wandering demons (*rajanīcara*), who are eaters of the vital essence (*ojas*), do they not desire people's bodies as well? If they steal away the fetus of the mother, why then do they not, having an opportunity, eat away her (the mother's) vital essence too? ⁵⁵⁵

Despite this, a few verses later the authors admit that there are diseases that afflict newborn children that originate either from wrathful gods or various possessing *grahas* (CS

⁵⁵⁴ Much debate surrounds the validity of the North Indian author Vagbhaṭa as the author of both the AHS and AS. See Meulenbeld (1999, Vol. IA: 597–656), for a detailed discussion of the identity and date of Vāgbhaṭa; See Wujastyk (1998: 238-239) regarding the relationship between AHS and AS.

⁵⁵⁵ *ojo'sanānām rajanīcarāṇām āhārahetorna śārīramiṣṭam | garbhaṃ hareyuryadi te na mātur labdhāvakāśā na hareyurojaḥ ||* (CS 4.2.8-10)

4.6.27).⁵⁵⁶ So while the author does not categorically deny the existence of *bālagrahas* and recognizes that *grahas* may be a possible cause of disease in children, their exclusion from the text and the author’s rhetorical question points to their ambiguous status. Another possibility is that the authors were simply unaware of the *bālagraha* traditions as reflected in the MBh and later SS.

The later AHS, clearly drawing from the CS, repeats this rhetorical question almost exactly in chapter two of its own *Śārīrasthāna*.⁵⁵⁷ Despite the same ambiguity, the AHS dedicates chapter three in its *Uttarasthāna* entirely to warding off dangerous possessing *bālagrahas*, aptly titled *Bālagrahapraṭiśedha* (“Warding off Child-Seizers”).⁵⁵⁸ The *Uttarasthāna* also has a separate chapter (chapter two) specifically on warding off childhood-diseases entitled *Bālāmayapraṭiśedha*, meaning the authors’ purposefully delineated disease and possession as two separate, though related, phenomena.

Another difference is found in chapter four of the AHS’s *Uttarasthāna*, dealing with “Knowledge Regarding Bhūta-Spirits” (*bhūtavijñānīya*) – rather than the eight categories of *grahas* listed in the CS and SS, AHS list eighteen different types. The SS collectively calls these eight categories *devagaṇo grahākhyah* (“Divine-troops known as Seizers,” which are said to manifest in various forms. In the CS, these divine seizers are enumerated as *devas* (gods), *ṛṣis* (seers/sages), *gandharvas*, *piśācas*, *yakṣas*, *rakṣas*, *brahmarakṣasas* (brahmin-

⁵⁵⁶ *āptopadeśād adbhutarūpadarśanāt samutthānalingacikitsitaviśeṣāc cādoṣaprapakopānurūpā devādīprakopanimittā vikārāḥ samupalabhyante* | (CS 4.6.27)

⁵⁵⁷ *garbhaṃ jaḍā bhūtaḥṭaṃ vadanti mūrter na dṛṣṭaṃ haraṇaṃ yatas taiḥ | ojo’śanatvād athavāvyavasthair bhūtair upekṣyeta na garbhamātā* || (AHS 2.2.62)

⁵⁵⁸ The *Bālagrahapraṭiśedha* of the AHS strays ever so slightly from accounts found in the SS or MBh – it states that it was Śūlapāṇi (“the holder of the spear”, Rudra-Śiva) who created the *grahas* in order to protect the newborn child-god, Guha (Skanda). Also, in this system, twelve *bālagrahas* were created – five males (Skanda, Viśākha, Meṣa, Śvagraha (Dog-seizer) and Pitrgraha; AHS 6.3.2.1), and seven females (Śakuni, Pūtanā, Śītapūtanā, Adṛṣṭipūtanā, Mukhamaṇḍitikā, Revatī, Śuṣkarevatī; AHS 6.3.2.2-3.1), the same exact seven are found in previous texts we mentioned.

demons), and *pitṛs* (deceased ancestors). In the SS, the number of eight remains, but *śatrugaṇas* (the troops of enemies of gods, elsewhere called *āsuras*), and *bhujaṅgas* (serpent beings) are added, while *ṛṣi-grahas* and *brahmarakṣasas* are removed [SS 6.60.7].

These categories, it seemed, were fluid and changed depending on their associated regional traditions and contexts, and they were, as noted in the AHS, open to expansion. Vāgbhāta includes all the beings listed in the CS, and adds ten more – *daityas* (demons aka *āsuras*), *uragas* (“beings that go on their bellies” - a type of *nāga*), *pretas* (ghosts), *kūṣmāṇḍas*, *niṣāḍas* (tribal-beings), *aukiraṇas*⁵⁵⁹, *vetālas* (zombies), *guru-grahas* (*guru-seizers*), *vrddha-grahas* (elder-seizers), *ṛṣi-grahas* (*ṛṣi-seizers*), and *siddha-grahas* (often these last four are grouped with *pitṛ-grahas*) - for a total of eighteen. The AS’s corresponding *bhūtavidyā* section, (chapter seven, also entitled *bhūtavijñānīya*), is consistent with the AHS but lists eighteen “Lord of Bhūtas” (*aṣṭādaśa bhūtādhipatayah*), whose attendants, the texts states, are innumerable (*prthak koṭiparivārāḥ*) (AS 7.2). These generally match earlier descriptions, re-iterating that all the *bhūtas* are frightful (*bhayānakā*) night-wanderers (*niṣārdhavicāriṇ*), who desire eating flesh, blood, and fat (*māṃsāsṛgvasāśinaḥ*) (AS 7.3).

One other item of note in the AS, not found in the CS, SS or AHS, is the specific mention of Ísvara (Śiva), Indra, Kubera (Dhanada) and Varuṇa (Lord of the Sea) as possessing entities (AS 7.18).⁵⁶⁰ The mention is brief, but it is unique since these deities are usually understood as *bhūtanāthas*, Lords *over* various possessing beings, rather than

⁵⁵⁹ *Kiraṇas* appear in the Buddhist *Mahāmāyurīvidyārājñī* as well as the *Mahāpratisarāmahāvidyārājñī* (David White, personal communication).

⁵⁶⁰ *tatrāpi govṛṣamiva nadantaṃ dīptamukhanayanamādīptena svareṇa sarvamābhāsamānamīsvareṇa | medhastanīvidyudvṛṣṭīrvācā viśṛjantamindreṇa | dhanāni vācā prayacchantamācchindantaṃ ca dhanadena | surāsavasamagandhaṃ kṣāṣṭhatṛnarajvādi sarvaṃ pāsāmbhimanyamānaṃ varuṇena || AS. Utt. 7.18*

possessing agents themselves. This passage states that people who become possessed by Śiva make a “roaring sounds like a bull” (*govṛṣamiva nadam*), while ones possessed by Indra emit sounds like thunder and lightning (*medhastanitavidyudvṛṣṭīr-vācā visṛjantamindreṇa*). People possessed by Kubera (this is the sole mention I know of Kubera directly possessing), are said to “ramble incessantly” and “continually give or withhold gifts”. Finally, if one is possessed by Varuṇa, the victims are said to engage in self-flagellation either with chains, ropes, and sticks, etc. and they smell like liquor (*surāsavasamagandham kāṣṭhatṛṇarajjvādi sarvaṃ pāśamabhimanyamānaṃ*). A number of other entities are also mentioned, though they are not found in any other Ayurvedic texts I’ve seen so far - further evidence of the openness to incorporate alternative/local demonological systems within texts like these.⁵⁶¹

Despite all this data on the various *bhūtas* and *grahas*, there is still some considerable ambiguity in the medical texts in regard to their nature, paralleling in many ways the ambiguity of *Skandagraha* as we saw in the MBh. In SS 6.60.2-21, for example, we find the following statements:

Extreme penances, generosity, religious vows, righteousness, piety, truthfulness, as well as the eight qualities (*guṇas*) are either wholly or partially innate (*nityā*) in them [the *grahas*] depending on their [respective] power (*prabhāvam*) (SS6.60.20). *Grahas* do not cohabit/have intercourse (*saṃviśanti*) with humans, nor do they possess (*āviśanti*) people. Those who say ‘they possess’ (*āviśanti*)” do so due to their ignorance in the domain of *bhūtavidyā* - they should be disregarded. [SS 6.60.21]⁵⁶²

The statement that these *grahas* themselves do not possess people comes somewhat as a surprise, given what is written throughout the rest of this chapter. However, the author

⁵⁶¹ Mention is also made of specific Yakṣas like Maṇivara and Vikāṭa (AS 7.23), and a host of other specifically named but unclassified beings such as Yajñasena (AS 7.24), Saṅgama, Vidyumālin, and classes of beings known as Kaśmala, Kuśa and Nistejas. (AS 7.26)

⁵⁶² *tapāṃsi tiivrāṇi tathaiva dānaṃ vratāni dharmo niyamāśca satyam| guṇāstathāṣṭāvapi teṣu nityā vyastāḥ samastāśca yathāprabhāvam|| SS6.60.20 || na te manuṣyaiḥ saha saṃviśanti na vā manuṣyān kvacidāviśanti | ye tvāviśantiiti vadanti mohātte bhūtavidyāviśayādapohyāḥ || [SS 6.60.21] As Smith (2006: 564) points out, one of the commentators of the SS, Ḍalhāṇa, takes *saṃviśanti* to mean sexual intercourse between spirits and humans, a trope commonly found throughout the Epics and Purāṇas and a matter, obviously of debate.*

does clarify in the following line [SS6.60.23] that it is not the *grahas* themselves who possess (*āviśanti*), rather, it is the innumerable attendants (*paricāraka*) of the *grahas*, described as “fierce-looking nightwalkers who are fond of flesh, marrow, and blood”.⁵⁶³ Again we seem to have a distinction trying to be made here between the lords of these spirits, the *bhūtanāthas* or *grahādhipatis* like Skanda, and the possessing entities, the *grahas* and *bhūtas*, which they control. It also appears the authors are saying these *grahas* are divine in nature as evidenced by the qualities listed. This divinity is ultimately attributed to their Lords (*svāmins*) whose command they follow and essence they partake of:

On the subject of those night-stalkers (*niśācara*) that are the servants of the multitude of deities (*devagaṇa*) [the following is the case]: because of their commixture (*samsargād*) with the essence (*sattva*) [of the deities], they are to be known as *añjanas* ("Anointed Ones") [SS 6.60.23].⁵⁶⁴

Now then, those who are known as “deity-seizers” (*devagrahā*) are impure (*aśuci*). However, they are like deities (*deva-vat*) and invoked and revered as if they were deities (*deva-vat*). [SS 6.60.24]⁵⁶⁵

The [*graha*’s] behaviors, actions, and customs are those of their Lords (*svāmin*). This is [also] the rule among the gods etc. [There are] those among them who are the daughters of *Nirṛti* (Chaos). He [*Nirṛti*] is [thus] known as “procreation.” [SS 6.60.25]⁵⁶⁶

When they have been perverted from truthfulness, their behavior is determined by the multitudes [of *grahas*]. There are some [among these] who, abiding in the *bhāv* of these deities (*devabhāvam*) [i.e., *grahas*,] take pleasure in violence (*himsāvihārā*).” [SS 6.60.26]⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ *teṣāṃ grahāṇāṃ paricārakā ye koṭīśahasrāyutapadmasaṃkhyāḥ | asrgvasāmāṃsabhujaḥ subhīmā niśāvihārāśca tamāviśanti ||* (SS 6.60.22.2)

⁵⁶⁴ *niśācarāṇāṃ teṣāṃ hi ye devagaṇamāśritāḥ | te tu tatsattvasaṃsargādvijñeyāstu tadañjanāḥ ||* SS6.60.23.

Thanks to David White for his assistance with these translations. On this verse, White writes (personal communication): “Why they are so called [añjanas] here is a mystery to me. It perhaps has something to do with the fact that collyrium is an invisibility salve, and that these night-stalkers render their divine masters invisible when they strike in the dark of night. In all these verses, *devagaṇa* seems to be referring to the *grahas*.”

⁵⁶⁵ *devagrahā iti punaḥ procayante aśucayaśca ye | devavacca namasyante pratyarthante ca devavat ||* SS 6.60.24

⁵⁶⁶ *svāmiśīlakriyācārāḥ krama eṣa surādiṣu | nirṛteryā duhitarastāsāṃ sa prasavaḥ smṛtaḥ ||* SS6.60.25.

⁵⁶⁷ *satyatvādapavṛtteṣu vṛttisteṣāṃ gaṇaiḥ kṛtā | himsāvihārā ye kecid devabhāvam upāśritāḥ ||* SS6.60.26

Bhūtas are called grahas, for which reason, with respect to this knowledge, the physician considers it [the knowledge of the grahas to be] demonological. Therefore, it is named *bhūtavidyā*. [SS 6.60.27-28.1]⁵⁶⁸

From this exposition quite a few things can be noted. First, it is clear that what makes these physicians experts, is their great knowledge about the variety of possessing spirits – which spirits “possess” and how and why they do. This section also clarifies, as we mentioned, that the innumerable attendants of the various Lords are the ones who do the possessing, not the Lords (*svāmins*) themselves. The conduct and intentions of these *grahas* seem to be based upon their specific nature, which we are told is associated with their respective Lords.⁵⁶⁹ As a reminder, the authors also tell us that these *grahas* were originally born from the daughter of Nirṛti, Chaos or Destruction personified, implying that there should be no surprise regarding their harmful natures.

It is a bit unclear, but there also seems to be a delineation being made in SS6.60.24 between *devagrahas* and *devas* – the *devagrahas* are “like *devas*”, though the text states they have turned away from truth and are impure.⁵⁷⁰ A similar idea is also seen within AS 7.4, which states: “Due to their comingling and dwelling with the gods and demons, their [the bhūtas? or victims?] actions, behaviors, and customs have been commonly perceived as having the same name (or being the same as).”⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ *bhūtānīti kṛtā saṃjñā teṣāṃ saṃjñāpravakṛṭṛbhiḥ (SS6.60.27.1) | grahasaṃjñāni bhūtāni yasmādvetyanayā bhīṣak || (SS6.60.26-27) vidyayā bhūtavidyātvamata eva nirucyate | (SS6.60.28.1)*

⁵⁶⁹ Which are categorized, as we’ve seen, as those who delight in killing, lust, or for worship.

⁵⁷⁰ David White (personal communication) - “I believe that *deva-gaṇa* is being used synonymously with *grahas* here. This is not so unusual, given that in both Buddhist and Hindu texts from the period, all non-Vedic, non-“classical” deities were often called deva(ta)s, including all of the sub-classes of *grahas*: *yakṣa-grahas*, etc.”

⁵⁷¹ *satyatvādapavṛtteṣu vṛttisteṣāṃ gaṇaiḥ kṛtā surāsurādisaṃvāsasaṃsargāttacchīlācārakarmatayā ca tatsaṃjñām labhante (AS. 7.4)* I originally assumed “their” refers to the *bhūtas* comingling with the higher gods and demons, though White personally communicated to me that “their” may refer to humans who are possessed by these *grahas*.

DISEASE & POSSESSION IN THE MEDICAL TEXTS

As discussed earlier, possession and mental/physical disease in South Asia have gone hand-in-hand conceptually since the time of the earliest Vedas. This was understood either as spirits as the causers of disease through possession, or the diseases themselves being anthropomorphized into possessing agents. For example, in the *Carakasamhitā* we find the mythological origins of fever (*jvara*), considered “The Lord/King of All Diseases” (*sarvarogādhipatiḥ*; CS 2.1.35.2; *sarvarogāgrajaḥ* CS 6.3.4) due to it being the “oldest disease” (*pradhāno rogāṇām*, CS 6.3.4). According to the CS, fever was born from the wrath of Lord Śiva (*maheśvarakopaprabhavaḥ*) during the destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice (CS 2.1.6.3). From Rudra’s fury (*raudra*) a young boy was emitted, “blazing with the fire of wrath” (*bālaṃ krodhāgnisantaptamaṣṛjat*) and described as having three heads (*triśirā*), nine eyes (*navalocanaḥ*), staunch and pot-bellied (*hrasvajāṅghodaraḥ*), and of terrible (*raudra*) countenance (CS 3.21-25). It was this young boy who destroyed the sacrifice and was then given the role as Fever by Lord Śiva.⁵⁷²

This same origin story of Fever is expanded upon in certain recessions of the MBh. In MBh 12.274, for example, we again find Śiva's anger causing him to emit a drop of sweat, which falls to earth and turns into a raging fire. According to the narrative, from this fire a short hairy gruesome man with red eyes and a tawny beard, said to resemble a hawk or an owl, was born. He had a gaping mouth with monstrous teeth, was hideous, dark-complexioned, and wore red garments. Immediately after his birth, Fever goes on a rampage and begins to destroy the world around him, a clear echo of the fierce child-god Skanda’s

⁵⁷² This being is identified as Virabhadra in the MBh - see Flood (1996: 150) for summary of this story from the MBh.

own origin story. Brahma runs to Śiva and begs him to divide Fever into many pieces, claiming the Universe was unable to bear the full weight of his powerful energy. After Śiva was assured his share of the sacrifice, he consents and divides Fever into many parts, resulting in a multitude of diseases which were distributed among men, animals, birds, and plants, saying “This awful energy of the great god is called Fever, and the lord is to be bowed to and honored by all creatures that breathe”.⁵⁷³

In an earlier story in the MBh, Fever, again created by Śiva’s energy, was used to defeat the demon Vṛtra. This fever is described as having possessed (*jvarāviṣṭa*) Vṛtra’s body, and, in medical fashion, his symptoms are listed:

Now I will tell you, O King, the symptoms that appeared in the body of Vṛtra when the Fever had possessed (*āviṣṭa*) him. His hideous mouth began to blaze with fire, and he became extremely pale. His limbs trembled (*gātrakampa*) greatly and he began to breathe hard and fast. His hair stood on end (*romaharṣa*) and he emitted sharp sighs. A dreadful jackal (*śivā*) of inauspicious appearance came out of his mouth, O Bhārata - this was his memory.⁵⁷⁴

With the demon’s body in a weakened state, the Gods were able to kill Vṛtra, but from his bodily remains arose an even more dreadful being – Brahmahatyā, the anthropomorphized personification of Brahminicide, the worst of all sins.⁵⁷⁵ According to the text, this was due to Vṛtra’s dual parentage as the son of the *brahmin*-god Tvaṣṭṛ and a *āsura* mother, who is described as a fierce black demoness who wore a garland of skulls (*kapālamālinī*).⁵⁷⁶ Although this section is not considered part of the critical edition of the

⁵⁷³ MBH 12.274.2–58. Cf. the expanded interpolation given as appendix I, no. 28, 212 lines, and appendix II, no. 1, 46 lines; translation of final line by Doniger from *Hindu Myths* (1987: 283-286)

⁵⁷⁴ MBH 12.273.1-3; translation based on Doniger (1987: 87)

⁵⁷⁵ The earliest attestation of this myth is Taittiriya Samhita 2.5.1, discussed in Smith, "Indra's Curse, Varuṇa's Noose, and the Suppression of the Woman in the Vedic Śrauta Ritual" in *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, ed. Julia Leslie, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992): 23.

⁵⁷⁶ She was terrifying (*mahāghorā*), and fierce (*raudrā*), striking fear to the world (*lokabhayāvahā*). She had a terrible gaping mouth with sharp teeth (*karāladaśanā*) was frightfully deformed (*bhīmā vikṛtā*) and dark and tawny (*kṛṣṇapiṅgalā*); her hair was disheveled (*prakīrṇamūrdhajā*), and she had frightening eyes (*ghoranetrā*).

MBH and was likely added later, we can see from this, and various other examples, how disease, sin, and emotions like anger and fury were often personified into demons and possessing entities. These are common tropes in much of the literature up to this point, which becomes amplified in the later tantric period, as we will soon see.

In an important philological study by Minoru Hara, Hara lists all of the different ways the verbal forms of *ā-viś* were employed throughout the MBh in hopes of better understanding the terms semantic range and usage in this period. From his pain-staking research he arrived at eight different categories, concluding that,

...the nominal concepts standing as the subject of *ā-viś*- are more or less characterized by overpowering impulse, psychological and physiological as well, which originate either from outside or inside the human being. These impulses overtake human beings especially when they are off-guard, who, once overtaken, can hardly resist. Those who are suddenly seized by violent emotion (anger, fear, grief, desire, etc.); those who are possessed by demoniacal beings (*bhūta*); those who are in the grip of disease (seizure, swoon, etc.); cities which fall unexpectedly into natural calamities (flood, epidemics, famine etc.) – all those under the impact of *force majeure* are termed *āviṣṭa*.⁵⁷⁷

Hara continues, stating that in “its infinite form *āviṣṭa* is almost synonymous with *ākrānta* (seized), *grasta* (stricken), *grhīta* (overtaken), *abhibhūta* (overpowered) and *ārūḍha* (ridden)”.⁵⁷⁸ He then gives the following eight categories, which cover the term’s semantic range in the MBh:

1. Words expressive of violent emotion: anger (*krodha*, *kopa*, *rouṣa*, *manyu*), agony (*ārti*), manly valor (*pauruṣa*), joy (*harṣa*), grief (*śoka*), fear (*bhī*, *bhaya*), agitation (*sambhrama*)
2. Words expressive of selfishness/vice (*adharma*, *pāpman*), self-conceit (*ahaṃkāra*), arrogance (*darpa*), haughtiness (*māna*), contempt (*avamāna*), malice (*mātsarya*), greed (*lobha*)

She wore a garland of skulls (*kapālamālinī*), and she was emaciated (*krśā*), drenched with blood (*rudhirārdrā*), and clothed in rag garments (*cīrastraṇivāsini*). [MBH 12.273.10-13]

⁵⁷⁷ See Minoru Hara, “Śraddhāviveśa,” *Indologica Taurinensia* 7: (1979): 261–273. This study was done in order to get a better understanding of the term *śraddhāviveśa* (“possessed by faith”) as found in the in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (1.2). *Grasta* can also mean “swallowed” here.

⁵⁷⁸ Hara (1979: 271).

3. Words expressive of affection in general and sexual desire in particular (*kāma*, *rāga*, *manmatha*, *madana*)
4. Words expressive of suffering and disease such as pain (*duḥkha*, *asukha*), delusion (*moha*), seizure (*vepathu*), fever (*jvara*), consumption (*yakṣman*)
5. Words expressive of demoniacal beings (*bhūta*), who assail humans by the act of possession: *yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*, *dānava*, *āsurā*, *kali*
6. Words expressive of physiological impulse: hunger (*kṣudh*), thirst (*pipāsā*, *trṣṇā*), drowsiness (*nidrā*), fatigue (*śrama*), waking up (*prajagāra*), and intoxication (*mada*)
7. Words expressive of mental impulse and excitement: anguish (*cintā*), curiosity (*kautūhala*), astonishment (*vismaya*); compassion (*kṛpā*, *ghṛnā*), and bashfulness (*lajjā*)
8. Words expressive of calamity (*alakṣmī*, *anartha*) such as drought (*avr̥ṣṭi*), flood (*ativr̥ṣṭi*), epidemics (*vyādhi*), famine (*durbhikṣa*)⁵⁷⁹

While Hara's conclusions cover much of the semantics around terms related to *ā-viś*, it also covers, interestingly enough, many of the possession etiologies and symptomologies found in the medical literature of this time. As we've seen, and will continue to see, possession states in the medical texts have a range of causes - violent and extreme emotions, vice/sin, physical and/or mental afflictions, trauma, and calamities of various sorts, and finally, supernatural possessing-beings. While these are often listed as the cause of possession, they may also be the result of possession – that is, as their symptoms. As we will see, almost all of Hara's classifications can also be found within the medical texts, showing the depth and nuance that should be understood when discussing South Asian conceptualizations of the term *āveśa* as “possession”. In my final chapter I will once again look at some of these possession etiologies and compare it to modern understandings and recent insights into possession phenomena as understood by the medical sciences. Unsurprisingly, we will see much overlap.

Let us now return to the topic of disease and possession at hand. In chapter two of the CS, the *Nidānasthāna* (The Section on Pathology), where the origin myth of fever was

⁵⁷⁹ Hara (1979: 269-270)

found, it also mentions an eight-fold typology of diseases which is ultimately subsumed under three categories: those diseases born from *lobha* (greed), those born from *abhidroha* (intense malice), and those which arise from *kopa* (anger) (CS 2.1.15). Already we can see the great importance placed on afflictive emotional states as factors in engendering disease (including possession). Here, Fever (*jvara*) is again discussed first and is also classified into eight types, all related to imbalances in one of the three *doṣas* (*vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*) or some combination thereof, while the eighth is said to be due to *āgantū*, exogenous or external factors (CS 2.1.17).

Exogenous fever is further divided into four kinds (1) *abhighāta* - fevers resulting from physical trauma and injury; (2) *abhiṣaṅga* - fevers resulting from possession by malignant spirits (*bhūtābhiṣaṅga*) or, notably, from emotional overload (e.g., passion, grief, fear, or anger)⁵⁸⁰; (3) *abhicāra* - fevers due to malefic sorcery; and (4) *abhiśāpa* - fever brought on by malicious curses by spiritually advanced beings like *siddhas*, *ṛṣis*, etc. (CS 2.1.30; CS 6.3.111-129). The later AHS lists almost the exact same categories – however, *abhiṣaṅga* includes not only possession (*āveśa*) by a *graha* but also possession due to various herbs and poisonous substances.⁵⁸¹

According to this text, while these four types of fever may begin externally, if not treated they will eventually affect all the *doṣas* and cause further afflictions. For example, if fever is due to passion, grief, or fear, it will affect the *vāta doṣa* (wind humour); if anger, it will affect the *pitta doṣa* (bilious humour); possession by spirits (*bhūtābhiṣaṅga*), on the other hand, can affect all three *doṣas* depending on which of the eight classes the possessing being belongs to as detailed in other *bhūtavidyā* chapters (CS 2.1.30 and CS 6.3.115-116).

⁵⁸⁰ *kāma-śoka-bhaya-krodhair-abhiṣaṅj* (CS. 6.3.114.2)

⁵⁸¹ AHS Nidānasthāna (3.2.38-45) - see also Meulenbeld (1999 1A: 415) who discusses this in more detail.

Here we find, potentially, the first mention of possession being interpreted through the lens of the *tri-doṣa* system.

CS 6.3.122-123 gives some of the symptoms of those afflicted with fever due to various sorts of possession (*abhiṣaṅga*): if fever is due to extreme desire or passion, than this will result in obsessive behavior marked by constant sighing; if due to grief, it is marked by abundant tears; if born of fear, it is marked by constant dread; if anger, then extreme agitation; if the fever is due to possession by spirits (*bhūtāveśa*), the victim is marked by various super-human or supernatural (*amānuṣa*) behaviors. Much more is written on the topic of fever, including stages of development and treatments, though little more is mentioned on spirit possession. However, close to the end of this chapter it does suggest treatments for fever caused by spirit possession. It states that one should perform rites involving sacrificial offerings in order to invoke divine intervention (*daivavyapāśraya*; CS 6.3.292), either by worshipping Īśvara (Śiva) along with his *gaṇas* (attendants) and the *Mothers* (*mātrī-gaṇam-īśvaram*; CS 6.3.310), or through recitation of the thousand names of Viṣṇu (*viṣṇuṃ sahasramūrdhānaṃ carācara*) (CS 6.3.311.2), or by making sacrifices to Brahma, the two Aśvins, Indra, Agni (*Hutabhakṣa*), Himālaya, Mother Gaṅgā, and the troop of Maruts (*marut-gaṇa*). A host of other purifying religious acts are also suggested as ways of release from fever (CS 6.3.312-313). Note that Śiva, rather than Skanda as we would expect, is mentioned here along with the Mothers. This may reflect Skanda's ambiguous status in this early text.

POSSESSION, MADNESS (UNMĀDA), & SIN

The *Carakasamhitā*'s first detailed discussion of possession entities is found in chapter seven of its *Nidānasthāna* ("Chapter on Disease Etiologies"), and then chapter nine of its *Cikitsāsthāna* ("Chapter on Treatments). These chapters deal specifically with diagnosing (*nidāna*) and treating (*cikitsā*) insanity (*unmāda*), which is defined as the "wandering about or unsettlement (*brahma*) of mind, intellect, consciousness, knowledge, memory, inclination, manners, activities, and conduct" (CS 2.7.5). Thus, in the CS, and subsequently the SS, possession is relegated as a particular form of "insanity" (*unmāda*). A notable difference in the later AHS, in contrast, is that possession is treated as a separate phenomenon from *unmāda*, though it still recognizes that possession can be a cause of insanity (AHS 6.55.2-58).

As we saw in the previous chapter, the convergence of madness and possession is also one that goes back to the earliest Vedic texts. In the ṚV, however, *unmāda* does not always connote a pathological state, as so often seen in the AV and later medical texts. There are cases in the ṚV, as previously discussed, when *unmāda* is more akin to an ecstatic state that is produced through the ritual consumption of the divine *soma* drink (ṚV 1.83.6) through Vedic recitation (ṚV 8.64.1), or as in the case of the Keśin myth, through ascetic practice (*unmaditā mauneyana*) and the drinking of poison (*viṣa*) which induces possession by the gods (*devāso avikṣata*; ṚV 10.136.2).⁵⁸² In the ṚV then, *unmāda* and related terms could denote a positive or exalted spiritual state akin to pure bliss, divine ecstasy, or euphoria. Thus, Weiss and others have noted the dual meanings of the term *unmāda*, "signifying both a

⁵⁸² See RV 1.83.6; 1.109.4; 2.33.6; 5.4.1; 7.57.1; 8.53.1 for more examples

state of divine ecstasy *and* a psychopathological condition.⁵⁸³ As we will see in the following chapter, this dual understanding is key to tantric conceptualizations of possession as well, paving the way for an array of ecstatic-inducing practices involving various forms of possession.

In the AV, however, the concept of *unmāda*, and by association, possession, is more uniform and almost always seen as something negative, which one needs to counteract against, destroy, or be released from. In AVŚ (6.111), for example, there is a hymn specifically used as a charm against *unmāda* that arises from either possession by a malignant being or a curse from the gods:

O Agni, release this man for me who, bound (*baddha*) and well restrained (*suyata*), utters nonsense (*lālapīti*). When he becomes sane (*anunmaditan*), he shall thereafter make a sacrificial offering to you.
 If your mind is crazed (*udyuta*), let Agni quiet it down for you. I, the wise one, make the medicine (*bheṣaja*) so that you are free from madness.
 Crazed (*unmadita*) due to a curse of the gods (*devainasā*), or insane (*unmatta*) due to a demon (*rākṣas*), I, the skilled one, make the medicine so you are freed from madness.
 May the Apsaras, Indra and Bhaga return you again; may all the gods return you again, so that you may be free from madness.⁵⁸⁴

Here, Agni, (and later other *devas* and *apsaras*), is first solicited in order to release the patient who is described as uttering nonsense (*lālapīti*) and either metaphorically “bound”, having a seizure, or actually physically restrained due to his psychotic behavior, a common form of treatment for possessed persons.⁵⁸⁵ The cure, according to the verses, is

⁵⁸³ Mitchell G. Weiss, *Critical Study of Unmāda in the early Sanskrit Medical Literature: An Analysis of Ayurvedic Psychiatry with Reference to Present-day Diagnostic Concepts*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1977): 10 - emphasis is mine.

⁵⁸⁴ AVŚ 6.111 *imam me agne puruṣam mumugdhy ayam yo baddhaḥ suyato lālapīti | ato 'dhi te kṛṇavad bhāgadheyaṃ yadānunmadito 'sati ||1|| agniṣ te ni śamayatu yadi te mana udyutam | kṛṇomi vidvān bheṣajaṃ yathānunmadito 'sasi ||2|| devainasād unmaditam unmattam rakṣasas pari | kṛṇomi vidvān bheṣajaṃ yadānunmadito 'sati ||3|| punas tvā dur apsarasah punar indrah punar bhagah | punas tvā dur viśve devā yathānunmadito 'sasi ||4||*

⁵⁸⁵ See Kakar (1982) for various examples.

both the medicines (or “spells”, another common reading for *bheṣaja*) prepared by the ritual specialist, as well as the promise of offerings to Agni by the patient. We should also note the early differentiation being made between two causes of madness here – madness due to a god’s curse and madness due to possession by a malevolent demon (*rākṣa*). Additionally, Kenneth Zysk sees two distinct types of madness here due to the passage’s different uses of *ud-√mad*:

...*unmadita*, which implies the demented state brought on by the patient himself as a result of his infringement of certain divine mores or taboos; and *unmatta* which suggests an abnormal mental state caused by possession by demons, such as *rakṣas*.⁵⁸⁶

It is difficult to say whether his assessment is correct or not since little evidence of these terms’ variant usage is given from the AV to back up his claim. It is possible the authors of this hymn were purposefully trying to distinguish between the two forms, or it may have just been poetical license – regardless, the distinction of the two causes (curses by gods vs. demonic possession) is one that continues into medical texts. However, I would have to nuance Zysk’s statement that there is some distinction between negative forms of possession brought on by committing taboos, resulting in possession by gods, versus possession brought on by demons. It’s unclear whether this distinction existed in the early Vedic period, but from at least the time of the Epics, all negative forms of possession (whether by a god or a demon) are ultimately said to be due to various transgressions and sins by the victim. This is an idea, which continues and is amplified in the medical traditions, as we will see.

In fact, the CS goes so far to make the argument that *all* forms of disease are essentially caused by the victim themselves, due to their transgressive behaviors rooted in

⁵⁸⁶ Zysk (1985: 62).

attachment and ignorance. In typical renunciator fashion, the CS argues that attachment (*pravṛtti*) is the main cause of all afflictions (*upaplava*), while detachment (*nivṛtti*) leads to their cessation (*uparama*) [CS 4.5.8]. Interestingly enough, this attachment/ignorance is described as being the result of one who has been “possessed by their (lower) ego” (*ahaṃkāra-abhiniviṣṭaḥ*), which brings about an erroneous perspective (*anyathādṛṣṭi*) of the world and their place in it. In turn, this leads to *aviśeṣa* (lack of discrimination), *abhisamplava* (considering self to be identical with body), and *saṃśaya* (doubt), ultimately resulting in *saṅga* and *vimārga-gati* (wrong actions and following the wrong path). It is these wrong actions, which eventually lead to imbalances and afflictions in the mind and body, and thus illness.⁵⁸⁷

An earlier association between possession and sin can actually be found in the Atharva Veda as well. AVŚ 6.113, for example, discusses an unnamed primordial sin (*enas*), which the gods seemed to have transferred (*āmṛj*) from themselves onto a minor Vedic god by the name of Trita.⁵⁸⁸ In turn, we are told, Trita transferred it to humans (*manuṣa*). The text then states that if one is possessed by a female seizer (*grāhi*) due to sin, the gods can make it disappear through a spell (*brahmaṇā*). However, the sin is never destroyed – rather, the hymn implies that the spell will be transferred to the *grāhi*, here called the *bhrūṇaghni*, “the embryo-slayer”.⁵⁸⁹ Though, the meaning of these verses is a bit obscure, it is clear that this theme of sin and possession (and madness) have a long history – one that continues well into the medical and later tantric traditions.

⁵⁸⁷ CS 4.5.10.4-5; See Meulenbeld (1999 Vol 1A: 43) for more on this topic

⁵⁸⁸ It is believed Trita was a more ancient god, found also in the Persian Avesta, but by this time his prominence had faded and was superseded by Indra, who took on many of his roles. For more on Trita see Doniger (1985).

⁵⁸⁹ AVŚ_6,113.1- AVŚ_6,113.3) *trite devā amṛjataitad enas trita enan manuṣyeṣu mamṛje | tato yadi tvā grāhir ānaśe tāṃ te devā brahmaṇā nāśayantu ||1|| marīcīr dhūmān pra viśānu pāpman udārān gachota vā nīhārān | nadīnaṃ phenāṃ anu tān vi naśya bhrūṇaghni pūṣan duritāni mṛkṣva ||2|| dvādaśadhā nihitam tritasyāpamṛṣṭam manuṣyainasāni | tato yadi tvā grāhir ānaśe tāṃ te devā brahmaṇā nāśayantu ||3||*

POSSESSION ETIOLOGY AND SYMPTOMOLOGY IN AYURVEDA

After the CS defines madness, it classifies it into two types, endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external). Endogenous is again divided into four types - three due to imbalances within a specific humour (*doṣa*), and the fourth due to *sannipata*, “a combination” of imbalances within all three *doṣas*. Exogenous madness, on the other hand, is said to be due to spirit possession and it is here where the cause (*hetu*) is ultimately said to be due to wrong actions in a past life or prevailing “errors in one’s judgments” (*prajñāparādha*), which in turn leads to transgressive acts that cause possession. *Prajñāparādha*, the text states, may cause people to disregard or disrespect the *devas*, *ṛṣis*, *pitṛs*, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *piśācas*, *gurus*, *vṛddhas*, *siddhās*, *ācāryas* and perpetrate other improper acts (*ahitānyācarati*; CS 2.7.10.1-2). Thus, as stated in the following line, “Afflicted men, who are afflicted by their own self, the *devas* etc. make insane.”⁵⁹⁰ The chapter closes out by stating, once again, that ultimately one should not blame the afflicting entities for their afflictions, since they arise out of their own transgressions and intellectual errors - this is ultimately the meaning of the previous verse, “afflicted by their own self”. The patients themselves are, in fact, the authors of their own suffering and pleasure [CS 2.7.19-23].

In its *Cikitsasthāna* chapter (CS 6.9), more etiological factors are given for both endogenous and exogenous mental illness (*unmāda*). Potential causes for *unmāda* can include diet that consists of antagonistic, defective and/or impure foods; disrespect towards gods, teachers, and Brahmins; mental shock resulting from fear or exhilaration; and faulty bodily activity [CS. 6.9.5]. Due to these causes, the text states, the humours in the body get

⁵⁹⁰ *tam ātmanā hatam upaghnanto devādayaḥ kurvanty unmattam* || CS 2.7.10.4

spoiled, which then affects the heart (*hr̥daya*) and intellect (*buddhis*), and, in turn, spoils the channels which carry the mind (*manas*) [CS. 6.9.5]. As a result of this, the mind becomes deranged, leading to confusion, fickleness of mind, restless eyes, unsteadiness, incoherent speech, and mental vacuity [CS. 6.9.6].

As we will see, there is much crossover between endogenous and exogenous symptoms of insanity. Insanity of the endogenous *vāta*-type is particularly interesting and includes many possession-like symptoms: uncontrolled laughing or smiling, dancing, singing, speaking, moving to and fro, and crying, all of which are said to be "out of place" (*asthāna*) i.e., spontaneous.⁵⁹¹ Symptoms of *pitta*-type insanity include intolerance or indignation, agitation, nudity (*nagna*), abusiveness, running about madly, high temperature, uncontrolled anger, craving for shade and cold foods/water.⁵⁹² *Kapha*-type insanity includes slowness of speech and action, loss of appetite, fondness for solitude or women, excessive sleep, vomiting, slobbering, paleness of nails, etc. (CS 6.9.14).⁵⁹³

After discussing these endogenous types, the causes specific to exogenous *unmāda* produced by spirit possession (*abhidharṣaṇāni*; literally “overpowering”) are listed and include: insulting various supernatural beings (*devas*, *ṛṣis*, *piśacas* etc.), failure to properly perform religious duties (*niyama*) and fulfill vows (*vrata*), or due to inauspicious deeds done in a past life (*pūrvadehe*) [CS 6.9.16].⁵⁹⁴ General telltale symptoms (*liṅgam*) are then giving, though specific symptoms for each possessing entity is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. These general symptoms include: supernatural (*atyātma*; CS 2.7.13) displays of

⁵⁹¹ *asthānahāsasmitanṛtyagītabāgaṅgavikṣepaṇarodanāni* | CS 6.9.10

⁵⁹² *amarṣasamrambhavinagnabhāvāḥ samtarjanātidravaṇauṣnyaroṣāḥ/ pracchāyaśītānnajalābhilāṣāḥ pītā ca bhāḥ pittakṛtasya liṅgam* // CS 6.9.12

⁵⁹³ *vākceṣītaṃ mandamarocakaśca nārīviviktapriyatā atinidrā | chardiśca lālā ca balaṃ ca bhūṅkte nakhādiśauklyam ca kaphātmakasya* | CS 6.9.14

⁵⁹⁴ Cakrapānidatta’s eleventh-century commentary on 6.9.16 glosses *abhidharṣaṇāni* with the word *āveśa*

strength (*bala*), virility (*vīrya*), movements (*ceṣṭo*; CS 6.9.17), courage (*pauruṣa*), heroism (*parākrama*), grasping (*grahaṇa*), memory retention (*dhāraṇa*), memory (*smaraṇa*), knowledge (*jñāna*), speech (*vacana*) and understanding (*vijñā*) (CS 2.7.13; CS 6.9.17) The *Suśruta Saṃhitā* follows suit, giving its own summary of possession symptomology:

guhyānāgatavijñānam anavasthā asahiṣṇutā | kriyā vāmānuṣī yasmin sagrahaḥ parikīrtyate || SS6.60.4 Whosoever exhibits supernatural (*āmānuṣī*) actions, who is unstable or quick to provocation, or has knowledge of secrets or future events, he is regarded as possessed (*sagrahan*, literally “seized”).⁵⁹⁵

From this general list of the CS and SS, we can see that possession does not seem to be inherently negative - in fact, certain symptoms such as divine strength or supernatural knowledge, including “secrets” or future events, may actually be desirable and may be a nod to more oracular forms of possession in existence at that time. However, once we get more deeply into symptoms of specific entities, the negative (or at least neutral) traits seem to dominate.

I will now briefly present the collated symptoms of the major categories of possession entities as presented in chapter 6.9 of the CS:

Insanity due to possession by the gods (*devonmattam*): (the victim) has a gentle/calm appearance, is serious and indomitable, not given to anger, disinclined towards sleep or food, has little sweat, urine, stool, and flatulence, body odor is sweet, and face is radiant like a lotus in bloom [CS 6.9.20.1].

The gods (*devas*) attack (*ābhidharṣayanti*) a person of pure conduct, engaged in religious austerities and scriptural study, by noticing a weakness (*chidram*), generally on the first and thirteenth lunar days of the waxing lunar fortnight [CS 6.9.21.1].

Insanity due to possession by a *guru*, elder (*vṛddha*), perfected being (*siddha*), or seer (*rṣi*): their (the victims) actions, diet, and speech bespeak of a curse (*abhiśāpa*), magical spell (*abhicāra*), or desire (*abhidhyāna*) ascribable to any of them [CS 6.9.20.2].

⁵⁹⁵ *guhyānāgatavijñānam anavasthā asahiṣṇutā | kriyā vāmānuṣī yasmin sagrahaḥ parikīrtyate* || SS 6.60.4

Ṛṣis etc. attack a person who is devoted to bathing, purity, solitude, and well-versed in the teachings of sacred law and the Vedas, generally on the sixth and ninth day of the fortnight [CS 6.9.21.2].

Insanity due to possession by deceased ancestors (*pitṛbhirunmattam*): (the victims) look is unfavorable, they are unable to see properly, fatigued, obstructed speech, loss of appetite, and seized by indigestion [CS 6.9.20.3].

The deceased ancestors (*pitṛs*) attack a person who is devoted to service of his mother, father, teachers [guru], elders, perfected ones [siddhas], and spiritual teachers [*ācārya*], generally on the tenth day of the dark fortnight and on the day of the new moon [CS 6.9.21.3].

Insanity due to possession by a *gandharva* (*gandharvonmattam*): (The victim) is passionate, impetuous, fiery, indomitable; fond of instruments played by mouth, dance, song, food, and drink; those fond of bathing, garlands, incense, unguents, red garments, offering sacrifices; they are fond of joking around, and their body odor is pleasant [CS 6.9.20.4].

The *gandharvas* attack a person of pure behavior who is fond of panegyrics, singing, and music, who has lust for other men's wives, perfumes, and garlands, generally on the twelfth or fourteenth day of the fortnight [CS 6.9.21.4].

Insanity due to possession by a *yakṣa* (*yakṣonmattam*): (The victim) frequently sleeps, cries, and laughs, is fond of dance, vocal and instrumental music, reciting sacred texts, telling stories, food and drink, bathing, garlands, incense, and perfume, has red and tearful eyes, speaks ill of twice-born and physicians, and divulges secrets (*rahasyabhāṣiṇam*) [CS 6.9.20.5].

The *yakṣas* attack a person who is endowed with intelligence, strength, beauty, pride, and heroism, those who are fond of garlands, unguents used for the body, and laughter, and who talks aimlessly, generally on the seventh and eleventh lunar days of the waxing lunar fortnight [CS 6.9.21.5].

Insanity due to possession by a *rākṣasa* (*rākṣasonmattam*): (The victim) is afflicted with insomnia, averse to food and drink, is very strong in spite of not eating, fond of weapons, blood, meat, and red-colored garlands, and is threatening or abusive (*saṃtarjana*) [CS 6.9.20.6].

Insanity due to possession by a *piśāca* (*piśāconmattam*): (The victim's) thoughts are morbid, one finds no resting place, they indulge in dance, song, and laughter, they chatters meaninglessly, sometimes with sense and sometime nonsensically; they are fond of climbing and walking on assorted heaps of garbage, rags, grass, stones, and sticks that might be on the road; voice is broken and harsh; they like to runs about in the nude, never remains idle, tells his miseries to others, and suffers from memory loss [CS 6.9.20.8].

The *rākṣasas* and *piśācas* attack a person who is inferior of mind, those who are betrayers, who lust after women, and is deceitful, generally on the second, third, or eighth day of the fortnight [CS 6.9. 21.7].

Insanity due to possession by a *brahmarākṣasa* (*brahmarākṣasonmattam*): One engages in loud laughter and dance, expresses hatred and contempt of gods, *brahmans*, and physicians; recites hymns, Vedas, mantras, and other canonical texts (*śāstra*), and flagellates (*pīḍana*) their own self with sticks, etc. [CS 6.9.20.7].

The *brahmarākṣasas* attack a person who dislikes scriptural studies, religious austerities, fasting, celibacy, and honoring gods, ascetics, and teachers; a *brahman* whose has lost their purity or a non-*brahman* who speaks like a *brahman*, one who is arrogant, and one who is fond of playing and sporting in temple waters, generally on the fifth day of the bright fortnight or on full moon [CS 6.9.21.6].⁵⁹⁶

Very generally we can see that the imagined personalities and behaviors of the possessing entities match the behaviors of their possessed victims. Attacks seem to primarily occur due to disregarding or disrespecting the entities, various transgressive acts, the breaking of vows, and those who are overly proud. Some entities attack humans who in many ways resemble the spirits themselves and their behaviors – but the texts state these entities notice “a weakness” (*chidra* - literally a "crack" or "opening") in them and thus attack. In other cases, such as possession by *devas* or *gandharvas*, we can even see that the symptoms are of a positive, or at least, a neutral nature. However, negative traits clearly dominate these descriptions, commonplace with the attitude of the time that possession was generally unfavorable and possession entities, whoever they were, needed to be exorcised.

In chapter two of the CS [CS 2.7.14], we are further told that human bodies are more permeable and susceptible to possession at certain times, during certain acts, and at certain places. These include:

...in the beginning of a sinful act, at the time of fruition of a past deed; in a deserted house or at a crossroads; carelessness during evenings and twilights, sexual

⁵⁹⁶ "This list appears to be adapted by the Kriyākālaguṇottara, as quoted by Kṣemarāja in his commentary on Netra Tantra 19." (Personal communication from David White)

intercourse in the new moon and the full moon days or cohabiting with a women during menses; impropriety in the observance of scriptural recitation, offerings, auspicious rites and oblations or breaking rules and vows, such as celibacy; during times of great war or the destruction of one's country, family or city; during eclipses; at the time of delivery of women; from contact with inauspicious and unclean objects or creatures; during vomiting, purgation or blood-letting; when visiting holy places and temples while unclean or in an improper state; when leaving remnants of meat, honey, sesame, jaggery and wine; while naked; visiting towns, cross-roads, gardens, cremation grounds or slaughter houses at night, when insulting brahmanas, *gurus*, gods, ascetics or respectable persons; performance of any other inauspicious act- thus are described the times of affliction [CS 2.7.14].

The SS follows suit, adding that those who have become injured should especially be careful of malignant *grahas*, since they harm those who are impure (*aśuciṃ*), unrestrained or disrespectful (*bhinnamaryādaṃ*), or physically wounded (*kṣataṃ*).⁵⁹⁷ From this particular set of data, we see that possession entities tend to possess humans during: some sort of liminal time or state (e.g. beginning of some action, during twilight hours, eclipses etc.), or liminal space (e.g. crossroads, deserted house, cremation grounds), due to impurities or polluting acts (intercourse during menses, contact with unclean object), from sinful or transgressive acts (breaking vows, insulting Brahmins, gods etc.) and finally during periods of trauma or crisis (times of war or catastrophe, extreme physical stress or injury). If one is uninjured and still attacked, the SS accounts for this by stating that these *grahas* do so simply because they have a cruel or violent nature (*hiṃsa*), or it is for sport (*vihāra*), or due to their desire for worship (*satkāra*).⁵⁹⁸ This is in consonance with CS 2.7.15, which states that the ultimate motive for all possessing agents is threefold – either out of their desire for violence (*hiṃsa*), pleasure/lust (*rati*), or for the sake of being worshipped (*abhyarcanam*).

For the physician, the incentive of the possessing agents in each case is to be inferred from differences in the behavior of the victim. As an example, the CS states that one who is

⁵⁹⁷ SS6.60.5ab *aśuciṃ bhinnamaryādaṃ kṣataṃ vā yadi vākṣataṃ*

⁵⁹⁸ SS6.60.5cd *hiṃsyurhiṃsāvihārārthaṃ satkāārthamathāpi vā ||*

afflicted by the *himsa* or "violent" type of possession entity will behave in a suicidal manner - they will enter into fire, sink themselves in water, fall into a pit in the ground, or strike themselves with weapons such as a whip, wooden stick, bricks, their own fists etc. According to the authors, persons afflicted in this manner are classified as incurable, although those afflicted by the other two types are curable through the following remedial measures: recitation of mantras, wearing of roots and gems, auspicious rites, offerings, gifts, oblations, religious rules, taking on vows, propitiation, fasting, blessings, prostration, and visiting religious places etc. [CS 2.7.16] The AHS gives the same three motives, though it states that those possessed by *himsākāṅkṣā* (desirous to kill) entities can be subdued or pacified through sacrificial offerings (*homa*) and *mantras*, while the other two types (lust/worship) are cured by “yielding to their wishes” [AHS 6.3.40-41].

MODUS OPERANDI OF GRAHAS/BHŪTAS

In *Caraka Saṃhitā* 2.7.12, we also learn about the particular mode of possession of each of these insanity-causing entities (*bhūtānām unmādayiṣyatām*): the gods (*devas*) are said to produce insanity through their gaze (*avaloka*); *gurus*, elders, accomplished persons (*siddhas*) and the great sages (*ṛṣis*) by cursing (*abhiśapat*); forefathers (*pitṛs*) by manifesting themselves visually (*darśayat*); *gandharvas* by touch (*sprśa*); *yakṣas* by co-penetration (*samāveśa*); *rākṣasas* through their odor (*gandha*); and finally *piśācas* by “mounting” or riding their victims (*āruhya vahayantaḥ*)⁵⁹⁹. While these classifications are interesting and point to the various modes of entry of the spirits entry through some sense organ, I have not

⁵⁹⁹ *tatrāyam unmādakārāṅkṣā bhūtānām unmādayiṣyatām ārambhaviśeṣo bhavati tad yathā avalokayanto devā janayanty unmādam guruvṛddhasiddhamaharṣayo 'bhiśapantaḥ pitaro darśayantaḥ sprśanto gandharvāḥ samāviśanto yakṣāḥ rākṣasās tv ātmagandham āghrāpayantaḥ piśācāḥ punar āruhya vāhayantaḥ* || CS 2.7.12 .1

seen much consistency in other texts I’ve looked at. It is unclear also what is meant by *samāveśa* and *āruhya vahayantaḥ* (“mounting” is a common term cross-culturally to describe possession as well) in this context and why these are specifically tied to *yakṣas* and *piśācas* respectively. Although each has its particular way of possessing, we are told in a later chapter of the CS that:

All the gods (*devas*) etc. enter (*viśanti*) invisibly (*adrśi*) and quickly into the body (*deha*) of a man through their own innate qualities and power, without causing any contamination (*adūṣayanta*), just like a reflection (*chāyā*) in a mirror (*darpaṇa*) or when sunshine enters a crystal. [CS 6.9.18] ⁶⁰⁰

This is almost the same description given in SS 6.60.19:

As a reflection (*chāyā*) is to a mirror (*darpaṇa*), etc. as cold and heat (*śītoṣṇa*) are to living beings, as a sun’s ray is to one’s gemstone (*maṇi*), and as the one sustaining the body (*dehadhṛk*) is to the body (*deha*), in the same way *grahas* enter (*viśanti*) an embodied one invisibly (*na drśyante*).⁶⁰¹ [SEP]

The *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* (AS) also states, in reference to *bālagrahas*:

Those possessors (*āviśantaḥ*) enter the body of children just like *gandharvas* enters [the body of] a woman – they can only be observed with the pure eye of science.⁶⁰²

So, while different possessors “enter” the body in their own distinct way in different texts, all the texts agree that this entrance is analogous to a reflection or the entrance of light or heat – that is, possession occurs via an invisible energy and through some opening, a channel which the possessor enters into and permeates, “like sunlight in a crystal”. As we will soon see, these concepts of invisible energies and forces (i.e., reflection, light, sunrays, heat, *śakti* etc.) as the mediums of transference between the possessor and the possessed become fundamental to later tantric practices of deity possession.

⁶⁰⁰ *adūṣayantaḥ puruṣasya dehaṃ devādayaḥ svaistu guṇaprabhāvaiḥ | viśantyadrśyāstarasā yathaiva cchāyātāpau darpaṇasūryakāntau* || CS 6.9.18

⁶⁰¹ SS 6.60.19/ *darpaṇādīn yathā chāyā śītoṣṇaṃ prānino yathā/ svamaṇiṃ bhāskarasyosrā yathā dehaṃ ca dehadhṛk/ viśanti ca na drśyante grahāstadvaccharīṇam* //

⁶⁰² AS. Utt.3.11 *āviśantaśca lakṣyante kevalaṃ sāstracakṣuṣā | śuddhena dehaṃ bālānāṃ gandharvā iva yoṣitām* ||

C. THE MECHANICS OF POSSESSION - CHIDRAS AND THE PSYCHOLOGIZATION/MORALIZATION OF POSSESSION

But what are these openings, these entrances, through which possessing agents enter?

In the *Cikitsitasthāna* of the CS we find an important term used by early physicians to describe the mechanics of how possessing entities enter into human beings - through what they call *chidras*, “cracks” or “openings” within a person’s mind-body complex. These cracks are created, as seen in CS 2.7.14, when people commit various transgressive or polluting acts, experience trauma, or if they enter some liminal state or space.⁶⁰³

Though the term literally means a “hole, slit, cleft or opening”, *chidra* is used in the MBh to also represent a “defect, fault, blemish, infirmity, or weak point”.⁶⁰⁴ For example, in the chapter “The Building of the Assembly Hall” of book two of the MBh, we find Pāṇḍu telling King Hariścandra, “It is known that this great sacrifice is beset with many obstacles (*vighna*), O king, for the Brahmin Rākṣasas, those who destroy (*ghnā*) rituals, seek out their weak spots (*chidrāṇi*).”⁶⁰⁵ These *brahmarākṣas*, known possessing entities in the CS as well, seen to look for “weak spots” in ritual performances (or perhaps the ritualist) which they enter into, thus causing obstacles to the completion of the rite. Later in chapter three of the MBH, we also find the term’s use in a short discourse on the nature and effects of performing

⁶⁰³ This term is first briefly mentioned in a verse I quoted above, regarding possession by *devas* (gods) in CS 6.9.21.1: “The devas attack [*ābhidharṣayanti*] a person of pure conduct, engaged in religious austerities and scriptural study, by seeing (*avekṣya*) a weakness [*chidram*] on the first and thirteenth lunar days of the waxing lunar fortnight.” *Avekṣya* can also mean “to look toward” which may be a reference the gods mode of possession and ability to possess through their gaze.

⁶⁰⁴ See Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (2007)

⁶⁰⁵ MBH 2.11.68 *bahuvighnaś ca nṛpate kratur eṣa smṛto mahān | chidrāṇy atra hi vāñchanti yajñaghñā brahmarākṣasāḥ ||* Translation based on (Van Buitenen 1981: 53); The use of the term in MBH 3.8.10 also suggests it is a weakness enemies are looking for in order to exploit: *sarve bhavāmo madhyasthā rājñas chandānuvartinaḥ | chidram bahu prapaśyantah pāṇḍavānām susamvrtāḥ ||*; White also notes the terms use in the contemporaneous *Harivamśa* (HV). White writes “There, we are told that following the gods’ victory over the demon Kālanemi, Brahmā warned them to never let down their guard because ‘the despicable Dānavas always force their way into the openings (*chidreṣu*)” (HV 38.77b–78a) – see White (2012b :7)

sinful acts (*pāpa*), which are said to be analogous to the creation of “holes” (*chidrāṇi*) in a good person’s garments.⁶⁰⁶

A similar understanding is also found in chapter four of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sutra* (circa 1st-5th century CE).⁶⁰⁷ Here *chidras* are understood as breaches in one’s mental defenses caused by *kleśas* (“mental afflictions” or “emotional disturbances”), which can arise (*pratyaya*) in one’s meditation (or more specifically one’s resultant *vivekajam jñānam*, “discriminative knowledge”) due to past actions or residual latencies (*saṃskāras*).⁶⁰⁸ This highly psychologized understanding of *chidras* caused by *kleśas* conforms also with early Buddhist understandings of sin, and even malevolent spirits, as mental projections and afflictions. Its similarity of use in the YS comes as no surprise, given the heavy influence of Buddhist thought on this text.⁶⁰⁹

This concept is quite explicit, in fact, in legends relating to Buddhism’s most infamous demon, the great tempter Māra, often known as Pāpimā, “The Wicked One”, who the Buddha defeats along with his demonic hordes (*maccuseṇa*, “the armies of death”) in a battle prior to the Buddha’s enlightenment. The earliest account of Māra is in the *Padhāna Sutta* of the *Sutta-Nipāta* (SN vs.425-449), where he is first said to take on a human form as Namuci, in an effort to dissuade the Buddha on his path to liberation while engaged in austerities in the forest.⁶¹⁰ The Buddha, of course, immediately recognizes Namuci as the demon Māra and rebukes him, pointing out who his demonic hordes really are⁶¹¹:

⁶⁰⁶ 03.198.52 *vasanasyeva chidrāṇi sādḥūnāṃ vivṛṇoti yaḥ | pāpaṃ cet puruṣaḥ kṛtvā kalyāṇam abhipadyate ||*

⁶⁰⁷ This particular portion may be later than other portions of the text. See final chapter of White’s, *The Yoga of Patañjali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), for many of the theorized dates for this text.

⁶⁰⁸ *Yoga Sutra*’s: *tacchidreṣu pratyayāntarāṇi saṃskārebhyaḥ||4.27|| Hānameṣām kleśavaduktam||4.28||*

⁶⁰⁹ See White (2014: 31-43)

⁶¹⁰ In the *Sutta-Nipāta* of the Khuddaka Nikāya

⁶¹¹ Both Namuci and the Buddhist Māra have Vedic prototypes – Namuci as a drought-causing demon who withheld the life-giving rains (hence his name, “Non-releaser”), and the Vedic Māra who is first mentioned in

Sensual desire is your first army [of demons], the second is called discontent, the third is hunger and thirst, the fourth craving, the fifth sluggishness and laziness, the sixth fear, the seventh indecision, and the eighth disparagement of others and stubbornness: gain, fame, honor, prestige wrongly acquired and whoever praises himself and despises others — these, Namuci, are your armies, the Dark One's [*Kanha*] striking forces. [SN 436-437]

Neither Māra's army nor the ensuing battle is described in this very early account, although later versions embellish these in great detail. In this account, however, it is implied that the battle with Māra was psychological in nature and ultimately thwarted, and that he continued to try and attack the Buddha even after his enlightenment. Māra states, "I've followed the Blessed One for seven years and I've watched every step he's made, and not once have I had access to him (*otāraṃ nādhigacchissam*), he who is completely enlightened and mindful."⁶¹²_[SEP] The term *chidra* is not used, but the idea that the demon was searching for weaknesses in the Buddha to strike at is clear. Interestingly enough, the Pali terms used, *otāraṃ nādhigacchissam*, implies more than just "finding access" or "a chance to strike", as understood in Saddhatissa's translation. Since *otāraṃ* comes from the Sanskrit term *avātara*, which means "descent", one could actually read this as Māra trying to "descend into" the Buddha in order to attack, giving this much more of a possession gloss. Regardless, upon realizing that he would not be able to attack the Buddha, Māra, the "disappointed *yakṣa*" (Pali, *dummano yakkho*) as he is described, vanishes. In Buddhist fashion, Māra, most closely associated with the Vedic gods Yāma (God of Death) and Kāma (God of Desire), becomes recast as a malevolent possessing *yakṣa*, like many other Vedic deities assimilated into the Buddhist pantheon. The 2nd century CE *Mahāvastu* and *Buddhacarita* refers to Māra as a

the Atharva Veda where he is identified as Yāma, the god of Death (also called Pāpiyān, "the Evil One") and later Kāma, the God of Desire.

⁶¹² SN. 448; *sattavassāni bhagavantaṃ anubandhiṃ padā padaṃ | otāraṃ nādhigacchissam sambuddhassa satīmato.*; translation based upon H. Saddhatissa, *The Sutta-Nipata: A New Translation from the Pali Canon*, (London: Curzon, 1994).

piśāca and in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Māra is called a “Great Yakṣa” (*mahāntam yakṣam*).⁶¹⁴

Early artistic representations of Māra frequently depict him as *yakṣa* or as a *bhūtanātha* who rules over a *yakṣa* or *gandharva* army (e.g., in 1st century BCE Sanchi complex). In later accounts as well, Māra’s army is made up of the usual menagerie of grotesque and deformed demonic beings with animal-features (i.e., *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *piśācas*, *arātis*, etc.) that we have become so familiar with in the retinues of Rudra and Skanda.⁶¹⁵ All of this gives further weight to my reading of Māra as a possession entity (*graha*) who was trying to enter into the Buddha through some opening caused by weakness.

In another version of this story, Māra makes a last-ditch attempt after his armies have been defeated, by casting out his shape-shifting daughter spirits to seduce him off the path. In the *Māradhītu Sutta*, these demonic daughters are named aptly, Taṇhā (Craving), Arati (Discontent), and Rāgā (Passion). In the *Buddhacarita* version, these malevolent feminine entities are called Rati (Lust), Prīti (Pleasure), and Trṣṇā (Desire).⁶¹⁶ Three brothers are also mentioned: Vibrama (Confusion), Harṣa (Gaiety), and Darpa (Pride) and Māra himself also identified as Kāmadeva, the God of Desire. This “battle” was, on one level, purely psychological in nature – it is ultimately the Buddha’s total dispassion, mindfulness, and meditative resoluteness which defeats the allegorical demons that try to obstruct him on his path. This process of anthropomorphizing extreme emotions onto demons is not new, of course – we have seen again and again, from the time of the early Vedas to the medical texts, the personification of various afflictions or obstructions as demons and the correlation

⁶¹⁴ See Patricia E. Karetzky, "Māra, Buddhist Deity of Death and Desire", *East and West*. 32 (1-4): (1982): 78-81 for various *yakṣa* and *piśāca* references in regard to Māra

⁶¹⁵ *Arātis* are described by Karetzky (1982: 79) as a “feminine type of goblin, personifying illiberality” who she considers as prototype for Māra's daughters.

⁶¹⁶ See Karetzky, (1982:84) for references

between emotions and mental/physical illnesses. While external demons and disease were certainly a concern to Buddhists, as in the examples already discussed, we also see a shift in Buddhist soteriology at this time to a focus on demons as internal representations of mental afflictions and obstacles to enlightenment, all ultimately seen as projections of one's own mind. Indeed, numerous stories in the *Jātakas* attest to Buddhist monks and nuns being protected from demons thanks to their adherence to Buddhist *dharma* and practice, which acts as a protective armor against the influence of malevolent demons.⁶¹⁷

Though the term *chidra* (or *chidda* in Pali) is not necessarily used in these early texts, we do find it being used by Mahāyāna Buddhists precisely in the sense of a moral fault or weakness, beginning with the second-century CE *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*.⁶¹⁸ Mention is also made of *chidra* as a point of entrance for possessing entities in a description of an initiation ritual in one of the earliest Śaiva tantras, the 4-5th century *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*. Here a group of Śiva's eight *gaṇa*-chiefs are described, each having a specific function to punish those who break Śaiva Siddhāntin orthodoxy by committing various moral or religious transgressions.⁶¹⁹ The term appears in the following verse: "Hear now from me the bonds inflicted by the *gaṇas*...If someone teaches scripture without having first obtained permission, or transmits it to a non-initiate, Gaṇapati searches for some flaw (*chidra*) in the *sādhaka* and destroys his power."⁶²⁰ A similar understanding is found in the contemporaneous Buddhist *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpam*.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ See many of the examples from the Jatakas listed in this and the previous chapter

⁶¹⁸ See Lamotte, *The Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom of Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)*. (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1966b): 1152.

⁶¹⁹ The eight listed are Vidyeśa, Śaṅmukha [Skanda], Gaṇapati, Nandi, Caṇḍīśa, Devī, Hāthakuṣmāṇḍa-Rudra – see Dominic Goodall, "Who Is Caṇḍeśa?", in *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, ed. Shingo Einoo, Shingo, (Tōkyō: Sankibō Busshorin, 2009): 397.

⁶²⁰ *siddhiṃ gaṇapatirhanyācchidraṃ dr̥ṣṭvātusādhake parivarttayati yas tantram. paśujñānena mohitah* 1:102 – translation based on Goodall (2009: 397).

⁶²¹ *chidraprahāriṇo nityaṃ savraṇā doṣadastathā* | *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpam* line 1958 in Ganapati (1920).

In the medical text *Aṣṭāṅgahr̥dayasaṃhitā* (6-7th century CE), this same notion of *chidra* is found and becomes more explicit in relation to possession. In chapter four, “Knowledge Regarding Bhūtas” (*bhūtavijñānīya*), it states that the cause of possession is one’s own transgressions (*prajñāparādhan*) in this or a previous life [AHS 6.4.3-4].⁶²² Due to these transgressions, one becomes unrestrained (*bhinnamaryādam*; literally “one whose boundary has been breached”), and the transgressor (*pāpam*) harms his own self (*ātmopaghātinam*). The result of this, according to the text, is that weak points (*chidras*) are opened within the transgressor, allowing gods and other *grahas* to strike (*prahārin*) and attack (*anughnanti*) [AHS 6.4.5].⁶²³ The following lines (AHS 6.4.6-8) state that these weaknesses (*chidra*) come precisely from the same sort of transgressions as listed in the earlier CS and SS.⁶²⁴

The *Kāśyapa Saṃhitā* (KS), a unique Ayurvedic text focused primarily on pediatrics, also discusses *chidra* in the same way. This text explicitly states that a *bālagraha* (child-seizer) latches (*sajjate*) onto the cracks (*chidreṣu*) of unrighteousness (*adharmadvāreṣu*), opened in evil persons through their sinful acts.⁶²⁵ While it was completed in the 7th century, portions of it may be much earlier, and it has a very similar demonological program and vocabulary to other tantras such as the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* (KG) and *Netra Tantra* (NT),

⁶²² As seen in my previous discussion, this idea is also found in its predecessors, the SS and CS

⁶²³ *taṃ tathā bhinna-maryādam pāpam ātmopaghātinam | devādayo 'py anughnanti grahās chidra-prahāriṇaḥ ||* AHS 6.4.5 ||

⁶²⁴ Again we see references to liminal periods such as the initial stages of undertaking a sinful act (*pāpakriyārambhaḥ*), or at the time of fruition of an evil act done previously, or liminal places such as being alone in an empty dwelling or in a cremation ground (*śmaśana*) at night, or sinful acts such as being naked (in public), libel toward a revered teacher (*guru*), excessive lust (*rati*), not following the rules or performing acts of service, worship of an impure demi-god (*devata*), impurities from a woman who has just given birth, not properly performing sacrifices, fire rituals or pronunciation of *mantras*, or neglecting ones daily work and customs. [AHS 6.4.6-8]

⁶²⁵ Cited from White (2012b: 6) who quotes ‘Revata Kalpa’ 8 see footnote 4 for Sanskrit: *ebhiḥ karmabhiranyaiścāsūbhāiḥ pūrvakaiśceha kṛtai[h] ...chidreṣveteṣvadharmadvāreṣu jātahāriṇī sajjate . . . striyaṃ garbhiṇīm dṛṣṭvā durātmano 'nvikṣate na cāsyāḥ śāntikarma kriyate tadā 'syā jātahāriṇī sajjate ||*

both of which were composed in roughly the same period and use the term *chidra* in the same way.⁶²⁶ While there are clear divergences, the similarities point to a mutual influence between these Ayurvedic *bhūtavidyā* texts as found in the AHS and KS with *bhūtatantra* texts like the KG and NT.⁶²⁷ We will take a close look at the NT’s treatment of *chidra* and possession in the following section.

As a final example, a passage slightly later in the *Ṣaṭṣāhasrasaṃhitā* (ṢSS), an expansion of the 10th century KMT, also displays the same meaning: “Obstacle-beings (*vighna*), Siddhas, and Yoginīs that have penetrated the wind (*vātāviṣṭa*), enter the adept having identified (his) weak spot (*chidra*), and steal away their good fortune.”⁶²⁸

D. THE NETRATANTRA – POSSESSING SPIRITS AND SPIRITS POSSESSING

Let us now take a closer look at the 7-8th century *Netra Tantra* (“Tantra of the Eye”)⁶²⁹, a fascinating early Tantra from Kashmir which discusses not only the mechanics of possession and *chidras*, but also explicitly states the role and importance of the *bhūtanāthas* within the Tantric traditions of this time, bringing together many of the points stated throughout this dissertation thus far.

The *Netra Tantra* may have been derived from the more popular Kashmiri *Svacchanda Tantra* (SvT), but was considered an important enough text to have been

⁶²⁶ White believes that “the NT and KS display both striking similarities and clear divergences, pointing to the likelihood of a common set of oral and written sources, but not of direct borrowing. In the specific matter of the demonological foundation myth, the KS version—which takes its inspiration from the Mahābhārata (MBh) (3.207.2–3.219.43) account of the birth of Skanda and his granting of various powers to the Mothers and Female Seizers—is very likely earlier than that found in the NT.” (White, 2012b: 6)

⁶²⁷ As mentioned previously, the number of possessing *grahas* in the AHS had expanded to eighteen, which matches the same list found within the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*.

⁶²⁸ *vātāviṣṭa praviśyanti cchidraṃ matvā tu sādḥake | vighnāni siddhayoginyah śreyam grḥṇanty anārthataḥ* ||^[1]ṢSS 49/138-146ab as seen in Dyczkowski, (2009 Vol. 1: 538-539).

⁶²⁹ Also known as the Amṛteśavidhāna and Mṛtyujit Tantra

referenced repeatedly by the great tantric exegete Abhinavagupta, and a detailed commentary on the NT was produced in the eleventh-century by his most famous disciple, Kṣemarāja.⁶³⁰ The most important chapter for our current purposes is chapter nineteen, a self-contained *bhūtatantra* that details counteractive rites against malevolent and afflictive possessing beings (*grahadoṣaḥ*, NT 19.124).⁶³¹ We will discuss *bhūtatantras* in more detail in the following chapter, but for now we can generally say that these sorts of texts followed in the tradition of the Atharva Veda, the medical treatises, and other (*bhūtavidyā*) related texts that we've been discussing thus far.

In chapter nineteen, the goddess Amṛtalakṣmī asks her consort Lord Amṛteśvarabhairava (Śiva) about various topics, as is typical in Śaiva and Śakta Tantras. Here she asks Bhairava about the powerful *yoginīs*, who she describes as “exceedingly impure” (*atyantamalina*), “merciless” (*nistrimśā*), “mighty” (*bālānām*) and injurious (*himsakāḥ*) to all creatures, especially children.⁶³² In particular, she is curious how and why *yoginīs* attack and oppress (*bādhante*) people via the *chāyācchidra*, “The Cracks in the Shadows”, and the way to avert its result, the evil-eye (*dṛṣṭi-pāta* literally “The Casting of the Gaze”) [NT 19-3]. In response, Śiva first gives a creation story for these destructive beings, which we unsurprisingly learn he created himself in order to destroy the *daityas* (demons) who had been attacking the gods (*devas*).⁶³³ This was done through his proxy, Svachanda-Bhairava who created the hordes of spirits (*bhūtas*), seizers (*grahas*) and Mothers (*mātrs*) that eventually destroy the *daityas*.⁶³⁴ After completing their task, Śiva

⁶³⁰ White (2012b: 1)

⁶³¹ Sanderson (2004: 293–4). Note the terminology of *grahadoṣaḥ*, a sin- or transgression-seizer

⁶³² *sarvajantūnām bālānām ca viśeṣataḥ* | NT 19-4

⁶³³ According to White (2012b) this myth builds on an earlier version found in the *Kaśyapa Saṃhitā*

⁶³⁴ *tadarthaṃ ca grahā bhūtā mātaro nirmitā mayā* | NT 19-18

“graces” (*prasādataḥ*) them and grants the troop the boon of invincibility (*ajeya*). Shortly after, however, the fierce possessing spirits, due to their inherently destructive natures, set out once again tormenting the whole universe and its inhabitants [NT 19. 21-24]. The gods once again run to Śiva for refuge and plead for him to stop the insatiable appetites of his destructive hordes. To grant their desire, Śiva generates ten million *mantras* and *vidyās* (male and female mantra-beings respectively) out of his anger (*kruddhena*), which he states can be used to destroy (*vināśā*) the various Mothers and Seizers [NT 19.27]. Śiva states additionally, that one should use *mudrās* (ritual gestures) and meditation (*dhyāna*) in order to have control and power over these beings. [NT 19.32]

Most interesting for our immediate purposes is the discourse that follows, which offers insight into the causes and mechanics of possession by noxious agents like these. This section begins by telling us, much like some of the earlier *bhūtavidyā*-related material, that the victims of these seizers are usually wicked-natured (*durātmānam*) or have become impure (*aśuciṃ*) through various transgressive acts (*durācāram*) [NT 19. 34]. This includes “sinners” (*pāpācārāḥ*), those who have corrupt-minds (*duṣṭacittāḥ*), those who are inauspicious (*aśubhāḥ*) or cruel (*dāruṇāḥ*), and women whose character is bad (*striyaḥ dauḥṣṭilyād*). Some specific transgressions are also listed, including performing evil acts of sorcery (*vyabhicārataḥ*), abandoning one’s duties/vows, not honoring one’s parents, being intoxicated (*kṣībatvāt*), being desirous of their guru’s wife, speaking falsely (*asatyavaktārah*), harming their masters (*prabhu*), being envious (*matsarāḥ*) or conceited (*garvitāḥ*), and finally contamination either by outcastes (*pukkāsas* and *caṇḍālas*) or by touching a corpse (*śava*). As we’ve seen this moral dimension to possession is a continuation

of earlier concepts in the medical treatises, which places blame for possession ultimately on the patients themselves.⁶³⁵

However, the text and Kṣemarāja's commentary also recognize that possession occurs involuntarily, through unwilled or ethically neutral acts. While some get possessed simply because of "primal sins" (*ādi doṣair dūṣitā*), others may be susceptible due to not bathing (*asnātvā*), or when becoming greatly aggrieved (*suduḥkhitāḥ*), if suffering from hunger (*bubhukṣitā*), during a woman's menstruation, or if one becomes insane or intoxicated (*unmatta*), or suddenly perplexed (*vidrutā*) or frightened (*bhītāḥ*). All of these people are said to be *mudrita* "marked" or "branded," or as Serbaeva translates it, "possessed" and thus vulnerable to attacks by the seizers and Mothers.⁶³⁶ [NT 19. 34-48]

Like earlier medical texts, these acts, whether volitional or not, are said to create *chidras* (cracks) in people, which enables various afflictive entities to enter and possess them. Once possessed by these seizers, the seizers themselves can then enter into other people if their victim casts their shadow (*chāyā*) upon another. According to White's translation of this section, Śiva states, "By [means of] the shadow's crack (*chāyācchidrena*), the Spirit Beings - and the Mothers who are stronger still - cast their evil gaze" (NT 19.45a-46c).⁶³⁷ Thus, the shadow-crack (*chāyācchidra*) acts as a conduit that allows spirit-beings, through an afflicted person's gaze, to penetrate into and afflict the body of another human. This, the text claims, is ultimately what is happening when one casts the infamous "evil eye" (*dr̥ṣṭi-pāta*). It is not the victim's own eye per se, but rather the gaze of the spirit being which has entered into their body.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ Many of these same sins can also be found in Manu 11.59-67

⁶³⁶ See Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013)

⁶³⁷ White (2012b: 3)

⁶³⁸ See White (2012b) for full description of this

Like other *bhūtavidyā* texts, standard sorts of treatments are given to combat this, including the use of medicinal herbs and the *pañcagavya* incanted with mantras to bathe with.⁶³⁹ In the case of children, these should be poured over their heads [NT 19.52-54]. Another method, also seen in earlier texts, involves making offerings to the *bhūtanāthas*, the lords of these destructive Mothers (*mahāmātṛs tat svāminī*). In Kṣemarāja’s commentary, he states these *bhūtanāthas* are fragments (*aṃśa*) or manifestations of the more powerful goddesses (*mahāmātṛḥ*: “The Great Mothers), and it is they who should be worshipped (*prapūjāyet*) because they ultimately have control over their own manifestations. The text enumerates these Great Mothers as Brahmī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī, and Cāmuṇḍā, who are said to make up the “Seven Mothers” (*saptamātaraḥ*), the sources (*yonayastāḥ*) of all the “Circles of Mothers” (*māṛcakra*) [NT 19.56-57]. By worshipping these Seven Mothers, the text claims, all the multitude of “little mothers” become satisfied and immediately halt their destructive activities. [NT 19.58] Offerings listed include, various-colored flowers, foods made of milk, sesamum, fish, liquor, and various types of cooked and raw meats [NT 19.60].

Similarly, when one is faced with obstructers (*vighnitaḥ*), the text continues, one should appeal to the lord of these obstructers, the *Vighneśas*, which Kṣemarāja glosses as *vināyakas*, the “Removers of Obstacles” [NT 19.63]. These *vighneśas/vināyakas* are to be worshipped with reverence, meditation (*dhyāna*), and with various offerings of sweetmeats, flowers, unguents, garments, gold and jewelry, oil lamps, intoxicants, flesh, and blood [NT 19.65-66]. Likewise, if a man is “possessed” (*mudrita*, in this case literally “sealed”) by either seizers (*grahas*) or spirits (*bhūtas*), one is told to worship the Lord of these Spirits,

⁶³⁹ A mix of five cow products - milk, coagulated or sour milk, butter, and the liquid and solid excreta

here called the *bhūteśvara*. One possessed (*bhāvitā*, literally “pervaded” or “infused”) by a demon (*rākṣas*), for example, is instructed to worship the Lord of Rakṣas (*rakṣodhipa*), which according to Kṣemarāja is Nirṛti (Disorder) [NT 19.68-69]. Likewise, those possessed by *yakṣas*, should venerate Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera) [NT 19.70]. Kṣemarāja gives some commentary on possession symptoms here too, which he states comes from the *Kriyākālaguṇottara Tantra*. Most of the symptoms correlate with past medical treatises - one possessed by *rākṣas* or *yakṣas*, for example, are described as wandering around at night, or running around aimlessly and laughing nonsensically, dwelling in empty buildings, and excessively consuming liquor, flesh, and blood. The NT states further that all eight-classes of female possessing demi-goddesses (*aṣṭayonyah devyah*)⁶⁴⁰ can be appeased simply by performing a sacrifice to Bhairava (*bhairavaṃ yāgam*) [NT 19.71].

From here Kṣemarāja launches into a description of some of these fierce mothers, which include divine and human *yoginīs*, fierce *śākinīs*, *śābarīs* (“tribals” or “barbarians”) and female entities known as *śivās* (“auspicious ones”).⁶⁴¹ The *śākinīs* generally resemble the *yoginīs*, and are described as shapeshifters, fond of terrifying places, able to read the mind of others (*paracittagatijñā*) and “attract” their victims through trickery (*chalena ākṛṣya*). *Śābarīs* similarly desire blood and are said to have complete knowledge of the past, present, and future (*trikālaparivedikāḥ*). Little is written about the *śivās*, except that they are engaged in *mantra* recitation and meditation and have acquired the eight supernatural qualities. All of these entities attack sinful people by sucking out and drinking (*pibati*) their

⁶⁴⁰ Kṣemarāja glosses these demi-goddesses as “those beings beginning with the *piśācas*”

⁶⁴¹ The *yoginīs* are described as having been born from different wombs (*yonis*) - some are mound-born (*pīṭhajāḥ*) or field-born (*kṣetraajā*), while others womb-born, that is they are born from human females (*yonijā*) and have a female form (*rūpiṇī*). These are also known as clan-born (*kulajāḥ*) and said to have distinct markings (*śarīre viśeṣataḥ*) on their bodies signifying their *yoginī* status. See White (2003) for more.

vital fluids (*prāṇipayah*, “liquid” or *amṛta*, “nectar”), causing their sacrificial victims to fall and die.

Particular sacrifices need to be made in specified places, depending on which demigoddesses need to be gratified. Sacrificial offerings may include animals such as bulls, goats, lambs, and fish, or vegetarian offerings such as beans/fruits or rice. These are to be offered to the goddess in various liminal or sacred spaces like agricultural fields, forests, riverbanks, circular goddess temples (*mātṛmaṇḍala*, “Maṇḍala of the Mothers”) or cremation grounds. [NT 19.72-73] As a result of this, the ritualists will attain various worldly “fruits”, including power of remembrance, victory, vigor, prosperity, renown, health, beauty, and happiness (*smṛtimojo jayaṃ vṛddhiṃ vapurāyuryaśaḥ sukham*). [NT 19.76-77]

As in earlier *bhūtavidyā* texts, *Skanda-graha* is briefly mentioned, again as a child-seizing possessor, though the text states his possession can be averted through the use of the *mṛtyujit mantra* (“the Death-Conquering Spell”) [NT 19.78]. Women who have been overtaken by the *rati-grahas* (sex/lust-seizers) are also enjoined to worship Skanda (as Kārtikeya) [NT 19.79]. Kṣemarāja then provides more possession symptomologies, again from the *Kriyākālaguṇottara Tantra*, which parallels other sources we’ve seen.⁶⁴² Anyone possessed by these groups, Kṣemarāja states, should appeal to their respective leaders (i.e., the *bhūtanāthas*) for release.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴² Symptoms of “victims” possessed by deity-seizers (*devādyamśakodbhūtagraha-grhītānām*, literally “those seized by seizers who are born from a fragment of the gods”), for example, include: not being agitated or overly excited, does not experience hunger or sleepiness, and speaks no nonsense. Their excrement is said to be of a pure nature and their face has an appearance of a lotus. One possessed by a *gandharva*, is perpetually good-natured and goes about singing and dancing, and is fond of fragrant garlands and foods made of milk. One seized by a *brahmin* spirit is said to be continually engaged in *tapas* and recitation of the Vedas, is perpetually fixed on purity, and never speaks vulgarly.

⁶⁴³ See commentary following NT 19.80

David White notes that some of these supernatural agents may have actually been humans. His claim is based upon a reference to the *hiṃsakas* in the NT, the “injurious ones”, which White believes may refer to human sorcerers.⁶⁴⁴ Similar arguments have been made by him and other scholars as well about the *śākinis*, who similarly may have been human “witches”.⁶⁴⁵ White’s translation of this section is as follows:

Indeed, the injurious ones who have found their opening (*labdhacchidrā*) cast [their] wild gaze on children out of a wish to destroy [them], and [those] supremely sinful evildoers are [themselves] tormented [or ‘swallowed’: *grastā*] by the Spirit Beings, starting with the Fevers... [NT 19.46 – 47d]

If this is correct, then these *hiṃsaka* sorcerers seem to be modeling their behavior after the *bhūtas* and Mothers – in this case, the sorcerer is the aggressor who actively uses his evil gaze to enter other people’s bodies through the same cracks (*chidra*) used by supernatural agents. Another possible reading is that, like the evil sorcerers referred to in the AV, these sorcerers could be conjuring up *hiṃsaka* spirits who are then cast into the bodies of others through the sorcerer’s evil gaze. This aligns more closely with older descriptions of sorcerers, such as the *yātudhānas* or *kṛtyā-makers*, who conjure or use spirits to perform destructive deeds rather than the sorcerer himself. Regardless of who the ultimate agent is, the text warns there is a grave danger for the sinful sorcerer who will eventually get “swallowed” (*grastā*) by these same spirit beings he is manipulating. Warnings of this type are also found in other magical tantras, particularly those that discuss sorceristic rites involving killing. Aaron Ullrey has recently translated a passage from one of these in the *Uḍḍisatantra* (UT).

⁶⁴⁴ This is based upon an alternate definition of *hiṃsaka* given by Monier-Williams meaning “a Brāhman skilled in the magical texts of the Atharva-Veda”. See White (2012b: 4) for reference.

⁶⁴⁵ See Hatley (2012) and Hatley, “Converting the Ḍākinī: Goddess Cults and Tantras of the Yoginīs between Buddhism and Śaivism,” in *Tantric Traditions in Transmission and Translation*, ed. David B. Gray, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016a), for more on *śākinīs* and *ḍākinīs*.

Murderous sorcery should not be performed frivolously against anybody at any time... Should a fool perform the rituals in this tantra, he will himself be assailed...Only a holy man (*brahmātmaṇa*), having broadly discerned [the rituals and situation], should ever perform murderous sorcery; otherwise, sin (*doṣa*) is incurred (UT 1.223a, 1.224a, 1.225).⁶⁴⁶

Finally, the simplest reading of this passage would have the “sinful evildoers” refer to the hosts who have been “entered into” by the injurious spirits. This reading makes sense also since they must have sinned at an earlier point for the spirit beings to enter them in the first place. If this is the correct reading, then the text is stating that the host themselves will eventually be consumed by the spirit beings if they stay within their body for too long.

HOSTILE POSSESSION IN THE NETRATANTRA

Regardless of the precise meaning of the aforementioned passage, destructive and hostile sorts of possession are, in fact, discussed in the following chapter. This chapter details three types of “*yogas*” - *para-yoga*, (“Transcendent-yoga”), *sūkṣma-yoga* (“Subtle-yoga”), and *sthūla-yoga* (“Gross-yoga”). The third, *sthūla-yoga*, generally involves apotropaic rites used for counter-sorcery and appeasing and protecting against possessing entities, similar to what we’ve seen in other texts. We will therefore not discuss this category and focus instead on the descriptions of the other two.

This chapter begins with the Goddess asking Śiva what the purpose of these wild and destructive possessing entities are, and how they “draw the vital breath from the body of another instantaneously” – in other words, how and why do they kill their victims?⁶⁴⁷ Śiva

⁶⁴⁶ *māraṇaṃ na vṛthā kāryaṃ yasya kasya kadācana | prāṇāṃtasamkaṭe jāte karttavyaṃ bhūtimicchatā || 1.223 || mūrkhena tu kṛte tanre svasminneva samāpatet | tasmādrakṣyaḥ sadā ‘tmā vai māraṇaṃ na kvaciccaret || 1.224 || brahmātmānaṃ tu vitataṃ dṛṣtvā vijñānacakṣuṣā | sarvatra māraṇaṃ kāryamanyathā doṣabhāg bhavet || karttavyaṃ māraṇaṃ cetsyāttadā kṛtyaṃ samācaret || 1.225 ||*

⁶⁴⁷ *yoginyo mātaraścaiva śākinyo balavattarāḥ | kathaṃ parapurāt prāṇān kṣaṇādākaraṣayanti tāḥ || NT 20-2 ||*

explains outright that these beings do not kill out of passion or hatred, or out of confusion or delusion - rather, they are merely following his own orders (*pati-śāsanāt*, “the command of the Lord”), and slaughter their victims (*paśūn*) simply as sacrificial offerings to Bhairava himself, “The God of Gods” (*yāgārthaṃ devadevasya*) [NT 20-5]. This is re-iterated in the next line, perhaps as a way to distinguish these particular types of possessing entities from other *grahas*, as we’ve seen in the medical treatise (such as CS 2.7.15), which were usually classified into three types – those who possess out of a desire for violence, (*hiṃsa*), lust or sport (*rati*), or for the sake of being worshipped (*abhyarcanam*). These fierce female beings, in contrast, kill only to uphold the command of the Lord and to obtain sacrificial offerings for Mahābhairava. [NT 20-6]

The NT gives some creative justifications in regard to this command. First, Śiva argues the victims (*paśavaḥ*) were self-generated by Bhairava himself expressly for this purpose. More importantly, Bhairava explains, is that the so-called “victims” are not really “killed” at all, in an ultimate sense. Rather, their death by the agents of Bhairava should be seen as a manifestation of the Lord’s grace (*anugraha*). By this grace, the *yoginīs* cut away the victim’s sin (*mala*), leading to their purification and reunification with the great god himself, tantamount to liberation itself [NT 20.8].⁶⁴⁸ Their consumption by these goddesses, the text and commentary states, leads them to the highest realms (*ūrdhvatir*) - the realm of pure knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*).

The goddesses and *yoginīs*, Bhairava continues, do this by means of the three types of yoga (here literally, “yoking”) previously mentioned. Before discussion of these *yogas*, the author first provides some important qualities of Lord Bhairava, who is explicitly equated

⁶⁴⁸ *eṣāmanugrahārthāya paśūnāṃ tu varānane | mocayanti ca pāpebhyaḥ pāpaughāṃśchedayanti tān || NT 20-8 ||*

with the Supreme Brahman – he is called the stainless one (*nirmala*), the one who pervades (*vyāpaka*) the whole world, who is the “self” of all beings (*sarvātmako*), and the ultimate cause and agent of the universe (*sarvakāraṇakāraṇam*, literally “the causer of all causes”). At the same time he is described as “the action-less one” (*niṣkriya*).⁶⁴⁹ Kṣemarāja, of course, comments on the non-dual nature of all this - as the causer of all causes, Kṣemarāja states, it is ultimately Śiva who causes the stain of sin in the first place, and therefore He is the only one who can remove it through his grace, all the while being completely untouched by it.⁶⁵⁰ Furthermore, Kṣemarāja states that the Lord is “action-less” because he is eternally “yoked” to his Śakti, who represents his energy of activity in the Universe. This is, explicitly stated in NT 20.12cd as well, which says that the *yoginīs* and mothers “are not separate from him, (for) they have obtained a oneness of being (with him).”⁶⁵¹ This is again, according to Kṣemarāja, because the goddesses are “completely yoked” (*niḥśeṣeṇa yuktāḥ*) to and “possessed” (*samāviṣṭāḥ*) by Śiva.⁶⁵² Thus “by the *yoga* (yoking) of the *yoginīs*”, the text argues, “they (the victims) obtain the state of the nature of Śiva” [*tathā vai yogiyogena śivatvamupayānti te*; NT 20.16].

⁶⁴⁹ Kṣemarāja glosses *sarvātmako viśvābhediparādvaitarūpaḥ* | *sarvātmako* refers to the “Lord’s supreme non-dual form, which is inseparable from the universal whole” and located within the heart of all beings, as understood in the Bhagavad Gita. He also glosses *antarāvasthaḥ antarāvasthaḥ prakāśavimarśātma-hṛdrūpaḥ taduktam gītāsu* | “abides inside means having the form of the heart whose self/nature is both pure effulgence and reflection (*śakti*), that has been said in the *gītas*”

⁶⁵⁰ *akramakriyāśaktyā tu nityayuktaḥ...niṣkrānto malo yasmāt, sa eva hi svarūpagopanayā malollāsakṛd malāsprṣṭāśca*: “But He is yoked eternally with his *śakti* who is the activity which does not relate to the sequence of manifestation. He is the one from whom impurity has departed or gone out, He is the very same one who by virtue of the concealment of his own (true) form, He is both the cause of the appearance of impurity, and He is untouched by that impurity.”

⁶⁵¹ *ekībhāvanamanuprāpya na viyuktāḥ kathaṃcana* | NT 20-12cd

⁶⁵² This is, generally, in line with Alexis Sanderson’s description of *Yoginīs* as “both supernatural apparitions and human females considered to be permanently possessed by the mother goddesses...” See Sanderson, “Trika Śaivism”, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd Edition Vol 12, ed. Mircea Eliade, (London: Macmillan, 1987): 8046.

In other words, because these goddesses are essentially “possessed” by Śiva, they bestow this “oneness of being” to their victims when they consume them. Ultimately the text argues that they are not consuming the victim but liberating them by consuming the ontological stain (*mala*), which binds the *pāsu* (victim) to the world in the first place [NT 20.17-18] - their consumption and death thus purifies these sullied souls.⁶⁵³ Reference is made in these lines to the three-fold impurities (*malas*), which was adopted from Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy – 1. *anava*, the fundamental stain which arises through individualization; 2. the binding force of *karman*, (one’s actions); and finally, 3. *mayimam*, the impurity of differentiated perception (seeing objects). As an embodied being, one is considered a victim (*paśu*) since they are comprised of these three impurities. These must be destroyed in order to achieve liberation and to become a *pati*, a Lord. Thus, the *yoginīs*, the text argues, frees the *paśu* by consuming his fetters, the body itself. NT 20.20 makes this justification explicit – “Liberation by destruction of the body is by no means killing” (*śarīreṇa pranaṣṭena mokṣaṇam nahi māraṇam* || 20.20cd ||)

This yoga of the *yoginīs* who possess, consume, and “liberate” their victims, is what is understood to comprise *para-yoga*. The following section (starting from NT 20.27), then details *sūkṣma-yoga*, which involves the Mothers and *guhnyakas* drawing the life essence (*jīva*) of their victims through the power of their own “subtle” yoga.⁶⁵⁴ This “drawing” or “forcefully attracting” (*ā+kṛṣ*) of the victim’s *jīva* occurs by entering and possessing (*praviśya*) their victim’s body (*paradehataḥ*; NT 20.28), and then overpowering them by “enveloping” the victim’s *jīva* with their own *jīva* (*jīvaṃ jīvena veṣṭayet*; NT 20.29ab).

⁶⁵³ *atyantamalinasyāsya pūrvoktasyādhikāriṇaḥ | malapradhvastarūpasya nairmalyaṃ vyañjayanti tāḥ* || NT 20-17

⁶⁵⁴ *jīva ākṛṣyate kṣipraṃ paśūnām yogavīryataḥ* || NT 20-27

While this is also considered a *yoga* of the *yoginīs*, it is clear that human *yogis* can practice this as well for the purpose of achieving various *siddhis*. This is done, according to the text, by means of “subtle meditation” (*sūkṣmadhyāna*), which involves “the yoga of entering into the *cakras*” (*cakrānugamayogataḥ*) via the path of one’s own energy (*svaśakti*) and then by “piercing of the knots” (*granthibhedena*), knots being an early analogous term for *cakras* [NT 20.44]. Although no explications of the *cakras* are found in this chapter, there is mention of them in chapter seven of the NT, though rather than knots to be pierced, they are described as objects of meditation or visualization.

Here is the full description of the practice of subtle (*sūkṣma*) yoga, based upon White’s translation:⁶⁵⁵

Having mounted an assault (*kramya*), out through the upper or lower entrance [of his subtle body], into that other body’s living self (*jīvam*), which is situated in that person’s heart, and having attacked its unity (*ekībhāvam*), [the yogi] should overpower [that self’s] equanimity [and then], attaching [himself] to its agency [*kāraṇam* i.e., the ego], he should overpower (*ābhyaset*) its autonomy. With his own all-pervasive energy (*śakti*), he should burst apart the other’s life energy. Having encapsulated it, he should then cut off the other’s *śakti*. Thereupon . . . the connoisseur of yoga . . . should heat up [the other body’s self] with . . . the solar nature of his mind-stuff (*citsūryatvena*). Situated in the other [body’s heart], one should melt the rays of the other with (his own) rays, which are like the sun. He should then yoke, in the [other body’s] heart, all the sense faculties, beginning with the organ of speech etc. and associated elements and qualities, [which have become] liquefied. [And then], having seized the accumulated debris of [the other body’s] inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*) with his own consciousness (*svacetasā*), the yogi should then enter (*praviśet*) [that body] having assaulted (*kramya*) that body-fortress (*pura*) from every side. He should quickly bring all that has been melted down, into his own self [i.e., his own body or heart]. At that very moment, he should (also) bring the [other’s] living self (*jīva*) [into his own heart], through the use of seals (*mudrās*) and spells (*mantras*). By this method, the yogi should practice subtle yoga. [NT 20.29-36]

Kṣemarāja’s commentary on this section helps to elucidate portions of this passage. In particular, we are told that the *śakti*, the medium this “energy” uses to go from one body to

⁶⁵⁵ Translation from reading we did in class, with a slightly altered translation of my own. See also White (2009: 162-163).

the other, is through the breath (*prāṇa*). Additionally, the points of entrance for possession are either through the upper entrance, the *brahmarandhra*, an opening located at the head, or through the lower entrance, the *pādaśākhā*, which refers to the big toe.⁶⁵⁶

More importantly, however, is Kṣemarāja's mention of the method, known as the "globule practice" (*golakābhyāsa*), which he explicitly states is a form of possession (*samāviśya*).⁶⁵⁷ This practice results in the *yogi* reducing his "self" to the size of a globule through breath control and then entering into the body of another person. This is done by yogically dissolving and subsuming the various constituent elements (*bhūtas*) that make up a person (wind, intellect, ego etc.) back to their most fundamental essence – pure consciousness. Using the breath, this consciousness is then ejected out of the body through rays (*raśmis*) from the eyes (*caṅṣu*) which then enter and fill another person's body, giving the *yogi* full control over the other's faculties.

Kṣemarāja also provides some details regarding the *mudrās* and *mantras* used in this procedure – when leaving one's own body one is to use the *karāṅkiṇī* ("skeleton") *mudrā*; when invading the other's body the *krodhanā* ("wrathful") *mudrā*; the *lelihānā* ("licking") *mudrā* when liquefying the other's rays etc.; the *khecarī* ("flying") *mudrā* when leaving the other's body; and finally the *bhairavī* ("terrifying") *mudrā* when returning to one's own heart.⁶⁵⁸ Interestingly enough these are also the exact same five *mudrās* used in the liberating

⁶⁵⁶ Interestingly, the toes as an entrance point in deity possession is found in a number of possession practices, including China (see section on "the Devil-Subduing Seals and Great Spirit-Spells of Consecration as Spoken by the Buddha") and in contemporary practices in Kerala, which I observed myself during my field research. The ritual specialist, who belongs to a caste known as the Pulluvans, informed me that the serpent-deities enter the women who were to be possessed via the big toe - see Chapter 5 for more.

⁶⁵⁷ Kṣemarāja reads *praviśya* as *samāviśya* throughout his commentary. He also states this practice is originally from the *Tattvārthacintāmaṇi*, a lost text attributed to the late ninth century Kallaṭabhaṭṭa, a disciple of Vasugupta, the author of the *Spandakārikas*." See White (2009: 163) for more.

⁶⁵⁸ The mantras used here, according to Kṣemarāja, include the *kālarātri* ("the night of all-destroying time") mantra, the *ṣurikā* ("knife" or "razor") mantra, and the *pañcapīṇḍa* ("five-globs") mantra, each of which,

Śaiva initiation known as *yoganikā* (“joining”) or *nāḍīsamghaṭṭa* (“fusing of the channels”) in which the *guru*’s consciousness enters (often *praviśya* or *samāviśya*) the body of their disciple in order to transform and set them on the path towards liberation. This transformation involves the guru linking his consciousness to the disciple and taking it on an ascent to the highest levels (*tattvas*) of the Universe, ultimately back to its source. The guru is said to enter the disciple’s body through various openings – either through the central channel, the sense faculties, or directly into one of the *cakras* themselves. Like the *yoginīs* of the NT, the guru also moves into the heart of the disciple where he cuts the principle of consciousness using “cutting” *mantras* and *mudrās*. The guru then mingles with that glob of consciousness, which is visualized as a ball (*golaka*), and drags it up and out of the body through the *cakras* via the central channel to the highest *tattva* of Śiva (or Bhairava). The disciple then experiences a temporary state of liberation, and it is believed this experience eventually guarantees a permanent liberation sometime in the future. Eventually the guru returns the mingled consciousness back into his own body and the disciples.⁶⁵⁹

What is also of interest, is that these are not just names of *mudrās*, but also names of well-known *yoginīs*, vampiric female entities which tantric practitioners often hoped to be possessed by or modelled their own behavior after in order to possess and extract vital fluids from other human bodies. Though we will discuss *mudrās* in more detail in the next chapter, it is sufficient to say for now that they become an essential technology employed by tantric adepts for a variety of purposes, including inducing possession. Some scholars even believe

according to Kṣemarāja, comes from the *Śripurva* (*Malinivijayottara Tantra*) and the *Śrigupta tantra* (“*Secret Tantra*”).

⁶⁵⁹ This is a summary based upon chapter 3 and 4 of the *Svacchandabhairava Tantra*, also described Serbaeva-Saraogi, “When to Kill Means to Liberate: Two Types of Ritual Actions in Vidyāpīṭha texts” in *Grammars and Morphologies of Ritual Practices in Asia*, ed. Axel Michaels et al., (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

that *mudrās themselves* arose out of possession-related practices and possession-states, a point we will return to.⁶⁶⁰

Given this association of *mudrās* with possession practices and possession entities (e.g., *yoginīs*), allows for us to speculate and interpret the "globular" and *yoganikā* rites in a new way. These ritual specialists, who were at once *mantravits* (specialists in *mantras/vidyās*) and *bhūtanāthas* (master of spirits), may have, in fact, originally understood these *mudrās* as being the *yoginī* spirits themselves, who they employed in these rites. In other words, rather than visualization or meditation, as is common with these rites in later tantric texts, the original form of these rites may have resembled other sorceristic rites that employed and manipulated various spirits to do their bidding. In this interpretation then, the *yogi* would be the one who possesses and controls the *yoginī*, which he then casts out (much like the *yātudhānas*, etc.) to perform his sorcery. In the case of the "globular practice", this means the tantric adept invokes and casts out the various spirit-*mudrās* who enter the victim's body, liquifies their vital fluids, and then returns to the body of the practitioner. As we will see in the next chapter, these sorts of sorceristic rites, where the practitioner becomes like a *bhūtanātha* (or possessed by one) and then casts his *bhūtas* to do various deeds, becomes common in various Hindu and Buddhist magical tantras.

The practice of entering another person's body existed before the NT's exposition, however, as White and others have pointed out - it is these sources we shall turn to next. This practice is foundational in understanding the mechanics of possession as it was

⁶⁶⁰ I will discuss this in chapter four. For now, see James Mallinson, *The Khecarividya of Adinatha: An Early Haṭhayogic Text*, (London: Routledge, 2006), Somadeva Vasudeva, *The Yoga of Mālinīvijayottaratantra: Chapters 1-4, 7-11, 11-17*, (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2004) and David Gray, "Imprints of the 'Great Seal' – On the Expanding Semantic Range of the Term of Mudrā in Eighth through Eleventh Century Indian Buddhist Literature." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 34.1-2: (2013): 421-481.

conceptualized in the early part of the millennia to the medieval period – mechanics that not only inform the NT, but all deity possession practices of the Śaiva and Buddhist Tantras.

This “science” is found in early Yoga and Tantric texts and is known as

parakāyapraveśavidyā, “The Science of Entering Another’s Body”, or more simply, *paraśarīrāveśa* (as in YS 3.38) “*Possession of Another’s Body*.”⁶⁶¹

E. THE "SCIENCE OF ENTERING ANOTHER'S BODY"

Parakāyapraveśavidyā, “The Science of Entering Another’s Body” has recently been examined in detail by David White in an enlightening chapter from his book, *Sinister Yogis*. In texts such as Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*⁶⁶², the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, and various tantric texts, this ability is often seen as a supernatural power (*siddhi*) one could attain and accomplish through various yogic practices and tantric rites. Much rarer are depictions of this *siddhi* as a technique one could learn, though we do find this in later yoga texts such as the *Yogaśāstra* and *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, discussed below.

The model for this practice is actually most clearly seen in various legends from the MBh, though this motif becomes widespread in the South Asian imagination and found in a variety of literature, especially fictional.⁶⁶³ One early example is the story of Vipula

⁶⁶¹ According to Maurice Bloomfield, "On the Art of Entering Another's Body: A Hindu Fiction Motif", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. LVI, No.1. (1917): 6-7, details can be found in Merutuṅga's *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* (1889: 12) where it is known as *parapuraprāveśa*; in Kathās. 45. 78, 79 where it is known as *dehāntarāveśa*, or *anyadehapraveśako yogah*; in the Jain *Pārśvanātha Caritra* (1. 576; 3. 119); in the Metrical Version of the *Vikrama Carita* (story 21, lines 109-110); in the *Bühler* manuscript of the *Pañcatantra*, and in Meghavijaya's version of the same text as *parakayapraveśa* (see WZKM. XIX, p. 64; ZDMG. LII, p. 649). The same designation is used in the *Vikrama* story in a manuscript of the *Vetalapañcaviṃśati*.

⁶⁶² YS 3.38

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

Bhārgava, a descendant of the Bhr̥gu clan, as narrated in MBh. 13.40.⁶⁶⁴ These passages have been discussed in detail by a number of scholars, so I will refer readers to their work for more detailed treatments.⁶⁶⁵ Briefly, the story describes the Vedic sage Devaśarman who orders his beloved pupil, the ascetic-hermit Vipula, to protect his wife Ruci from the aggressive sexual advances of the god Indra while he is away. The story is embedded in a larger (albeit misogynistic) story about the inherent wantonness of women - so Devaśarman's fears has as much to do with Ruci acting upon her own base impulses and temptations, as it does with the ambivalent god Indra. Vipula ruminates how he can protect her, given that Indra is a shapeshifter who he worried could take on the form of wind in order to enter her. Devaśarman tells Vipula, "When invisible, he (Indra) can only be seen with the eye of gnosis (*jñānacakṣuṣā*)...Therefore, O Vipula, great effort must be taken in protecting the one with the slender waist." ⁶⁶⁶

Since no physical barriers will oppose the clever Indra, Vipula decides to yogically enter (*yogena-anupraviśya*; MBH 13.40.50a) and possess the body of Ruci. To allay fears of causing some type of impurity or sin from performing such an act on Ruci, he states explicitly that his entrance would be like a drop of water on a lotus, which he claims does not taint the lotus petal it is attached to. "In the very same way," Vipula states, "I will dwell in

⁶⁶⁴ We should also note the lineage of Vipula who is said to have belonged to the Bhārgava clan. In regard to this White (2009: 150) writes, "Specialists of the destructive charms and spells of the *Atharva Veda* (AV), they are generally portrayed negatively in the epics as "military brahmins" whose supernatural powers are often linked to violence, sorcery, confusion, and hostility to the gods. The *Taittirya Araṅyaka* (TA) describes the casting of a curse that involves looking upon one's victim "with the evil eye of the Bhr̥gus." White further argues here that with the Bhr̥gavas we may find "an epic bridge between 'the vedic 'warrior aspect of yoga,' and the yoga of later tantric yogis", pointing to figures like Bhargava Kāvya (from *kavi*, "mantic poet") Uśanas's who come from a common Indo-Iranian tradition where extraordinary powers such as possessing another's body were familiar.

⁶⁶⁵ White (2009), Smith (2006), Bloomfield (1917), and Christopher D Wallis, *To Enter, To Be Entered, To Merge: The Role of Religious Experience in the Traditions of Tantric Shaivism*, (Ph. D. Dissertation in South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley 2014).

⁶⁶⁶ MBH 13. 40.37-38. Note the reference from the AS. Utt. 3.11 to the "eye of wisdom/science" as the only way to see these sorts of supernatural beings

her body, fully absorbed in concentration (*samāhita*)” (MBH 13. 40.52). Having decided this, Vipula, through the power of his *tapas* (yogic heat), possesses the body of Ruci:

With [his] two eyes conjoined (*samyojya*) in her two eyes, having conjoined [her] sense-rays with his rays (*raśmi*), Vipula entered into (*viveśa*) [her] body like wind enters the sky. With his mouth [yogically] conjoined with her mouth, and his sexual organ with her sexual organ, the sage remained motionless inside her, like a shadow. Having entered into (*viṣṭabhya*) the body of guru’s wife, the yoked one (*yukta*) [Vipula], dwelt in protection, and she was not aware of him.⁶⁶⁷

Having pervaded Ruci's body, Vipula is now described as having full motor control over her body and speech, though his own physical body becomes completely inanimate. Her mind, however, is still her own, and despite her internal musings and advances towards Indra, Vipula is able to keep her immobile, having bound her faculties (*indriya*) with “the bonds of yoga” (*yoga-bandhanaiś*, MBH 13. 41.11). Indra soon comes to realize that something is amiss and with his own “divine eye” (*divyena cakṣuṣā*) is able to see the sage inside her body, which is described as being “like a reflection in a mirror” (*pratibimba*, MBH 13. 41.17).⁶⁶⁸ Realizing the great yogic power (*tapas*) required for such a feat, Indra abandons his lustful aims out of fear of being cursed by the mighty Vipula.

This fascinating story provides us with yet another variant possession form – in this case, the external agent Vipula causes his rays (*raśmi*), akin to his vital spirit (*jīva*) or consciousness, to go out and join the rays of Ruci, allowing him to enter into her body. Ruci’s mind, however, is not completely displaced as seen in the story. Rather, only her motor functions are taken over, implying in this kind of yogic possession, two different consciousness’ could exist independently in the same body.

⁶⁶⁷ MBH 13. 40.56-58 Translation based upon White (2009: 148)

⁶⁶⁸ Note the similar reference to possession being like a "reflection", as discussed earlier in contemporaneous medical texts.

A similar understanding of yogic possession is seen in another story from the MBH (15.33), involving the wise ascetic Vidura, who, at the time, was engaged in terrible (*ghora*) austerities in the forest, surviving solely on air for nourishment. However, before attaining complete liberation and leaving his body, his nephew King Yudhiṣṭhira happens to be visiting the same forest and comes upon him. Vidura decides to enter (*viveśa*) into his nephew's body by conjoining their respective rays (*raśmi*) in the same exact way as we saw with Vipula and Ruci.⁶⁶⁹ While Vidura possesses the body of the king, all of the yogi's qualities transfer to Yudhiṣṭhira, who is described as becoming radiant with energy (*tejas*) more powerful and virtuous. In addition, he gains wisdom (*vidyāvān*) of Self (*ātman*), of the past (*paurāṇam*) and everything in regard to the practice (*dharma*) of yoga. The text states that Vidura's own body loses consciousness and dies, but he comes to "permanently cohabit", as White puts it, the body of Yudhiṣṭhira.⁶⁷⁰

As White has effectually argued in *Sinister Yogis*, this foundational concept of rays (*raśmi*) emanating from the body as conduits of life energies, as well as the notion of yoga in its most literal sense as "yoking" (from the root *yuj*), both of which are seen in the MBh, NT, and other tantric literature, has its origins in the earliest Vedas and is associated with the warrior's final journey at the time of death. This final "journey" involved *raśmis* (rays) of light, which, in the RV, were originally akin to luminous "reins" or "cords," that "yoked" the warrior to the world of the gods and ancestors "beyond the sun".⁶⁷¹ This very early concept, White argues, remains operative in descriptions and language of various yogis and chariot warriors in the MBh, which depicted "the apotheosis of the chariot warrior as an ascent,

⁶⁶⁹ See translation from White (2009: 142)

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ White (2009: 67)

usually via the rays or reins (*raśmi*) of the sun, to the ‘highest path’ (*paramāṃ gatim*), the world of the absolute brahman, the place of the immortal gods.”⁶⁷² In later portions of the MBh, however, a shift begins to occur and the process becomes internalized with the rise of new Upaniṣadic/Śramanic revelations, though the earlier language and conceptions remain much the same. Rather than earlier Vedic notions involving a literal ascent to the sun, the new Upaniṣadic understandings involved a visionary and gnostic ascent, an inner journey through the cosmos of the body. This journey culminates in the realization that one's individual self (*ātman*), likened to a luminous thumb-sized *puruṣa* (person) or a "mini-sun" that resided in all beings, was ultimately *brahman*, the absolute ground of All-Being, equated with the central Sun of the cosmos.⁶⁷³

This gnostic ascent into inner space, as White shows, is most clearly described in Maitreya Upaniṣad 6.28. Through this journey, the yogi's consciousness is said to become purified, allowing for the individual to realize their ultimate identity (*ātman*) with the Absolute (Brahman).⁶⁷⁴ White also points out that it is in this Upaniṣad where one first finds the mention of the *suṣumna* as a subtle channel of the body. According to the text, through the “...the conjunction of breath, the syllable OM, and the mind, one may advance upward (*utkramet*) to the World of Brahman (*brahmaloka*), also described as the highest path (*param gatim*)” [MU 6.21].⁶⁷⁵ Traces of early subtle-body conceptions, which become key in later tantric possession rites, are also found in the earlier *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (ChU 8.6.6), which mentions one hundred and one multi-colored channels (*nāḍīs*) that are said to be

⁶⁷² White (2009: 69)

⁶⁷³ As White (2009: 83) puts it, “the old paradigm of ‘going’ was yielding to one of ‘knowing’”.

⁶⁷⁴ Maitreya Upaniṣad 6.28: Someone has said: “The supreme abode, which is bliss, is a casing whose contours are the space within the heart’...To gain access to this inner abode, the practitioner, advancing beyond (*atikramya*) the elements and the sense objects, must first strike down the gatekeeper of the ‘door of brahman’ with an extended utterance of the mantra OM!” Translation by White (2009: 93-94).

⁶⁷⁵ Translation by White (2009: 90)

centered in the heart (*hṛidaya*). These channels are also identified as "rays" (*raśmis*), likened to a two-way road that goes in between villages. White translates this section of the ChU as follows:

But when he is departing from this body, then he advances upward (*utkṛāmati*) along these very rays (*raśmibhiḥ*). Verily, he speaks the word “OM” [and] he rises up. As soon as he casts his mind there, he goes to the sun. That is truly the door of the world (*lokadvāram*), an entrance for those who know, but a barrier for those who do not know. On that subject, this verse: “There are a hundred and one channels of the heart. One of these passes up to the crown of the head. Going by that one, one goes to immortality. The others, charging upward (*utkramaṇe*), charge upward in all directions.” [ChU 8.6.1–2, 4–6]

Though unnamed in this early text, by the time we reach the MU this channel becomes identified as the *suṣumna*. These ideas develop further within yogic and tantric circles into the complex subtle body systems made up of the *cakras* and *nāḍīs* that is now commonplace. As White has pointed out, this particular text “constitutes an important bridge between epic narrative and early Vedic and Upaniṣadic speculation on the one hand, and Purāṇic and tantric cosmology and soteriology on the other.”⁶⁷⁶

These earlier notions were founded on the belief that not only are all living beings connected to the sun (i.e., *brahman*) through these two-way rays, but also that all beings are potentially linked to one another (i.e., *ātman*), “through the rays emanating from their incandescent inner selves...and outward via their sense organs...”⁶⁷⁷ These ideas conform with what White calls the “projective model” of perception common to early philosophical schools, most succinctly articulated in the “direct realism” theory of perception of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas who state, “Perception (*grahaṇam*) is a consequence of contact between a ray

⁶⁷⁶ Coeval with the other major early syntheses of yoga theory (the YS as well as the BhG and MdhP) - see White (2009: 89).

⁶⁷⁷ White (2009: 129-131) also mentions how the rays as sense perceptions (sight, speech, breath, etc.) has its origins in the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* (JUB).

(*raśmi*) and an object”.⁶⁷⁸ This “ray” originates from the inner luminous self (“the microcosmic sun”) and is emitted from the organ of the eye, where it goes out and literally grasps or seizes its object. Note the use of the term *grahaṇa* here, which I believe is significant. As seen in later yogic and tantric texts, such as the NT, advanced beings such as *yogis* or *siddhas* could use these subtle rays of consciousness to “pierce”, “penetrate”, “possess” and even “eat” its object.⁶⁷⁹ According to White's theory then, it is through this transfer media of "rays" that explains how *yogis*, with their special powers of perception, are able to penetrate other bodies in the many narratives we’ve discussed thus far. These ideas can be extended to divine and demonic beings as well – as we’ve seen in various sources, *yoginīs* and other possessing agents possess their victims through a variety of sense perceptions. As we will see in the following chapter, these "rays" are analogous to *śakti* (divine feminine energy), *prāṇa* (breath) and consciousness as transfer media, which are foundational in tantric deity possession rites.

YOGIC POSSESSION: POSSESSING "OTHERS" IN YOGA LITERATURE

Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras* (YS), composed sometime between 325 and 425 CE, makes a very brief mention of *para-śarīrāveśa* as a *siddhi*.⁶⁸⁰ It should be noted, however, that *siddhis* were generally seen in renunciant traditions (including Jain and Buddhist) as obstacles towards enlightenment.⁶⁸¹ These accomplishments naturally arise as one begins to yogically

⁶⁷⁸ NS 3.1.35: *raśmyarthasannikarṣaviśeṣāt grahaṇam*; See White (2009: 125; 127-131) for more on the historical sources for the “projective model” of perception

⁶⁷⁹ See White (2009 and 2012b)

⁶⁸⁰ Dating according to James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*. (London: Penguin, 2017).

⁶⁸¹ Although Patañjali recognizes that *siddhis* arise from both voluntary and involuntary causes, such as birth (as a result of *karma*), the use of herbs, *mantras*, asceticism (*tapas*), or meditation (*samādhi*) [YS 4.1], he also

transform oneself into to a more advanced state of being, the yogi acquiring powers and qualities typical of divine and supernatural beings. The fear, of course, is that the adept will become distracted from their consummate goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) by these newfound powers, or worse, use these powers for nefarious purposes. As Sarbacker concisely states,

...the aspiring practitioner of Yoga obtains, or becomes capable of obtaining, all of the powers of a *saguṇa* (form) deity before abandoning them and entering into a final spiritual transformation into a *nirguṇa* (formless) form. Patañjali's Yoga sutra thus demonstrates a significant preoccupation with the powers (*siddhi*) of Yoga, minimally as potential distractions from a spiritual path and maximally as accouterments of a quasi-divine being that has reached the threshold of liberation or has gone beyond it altogether.⁶⁸²

The brief mention of *para-śarīrāveśa* first comes in chapter three, which reads:

bandhakāraṇaśaithilyāt pracārasaṃvedanāc ca cittasya para-śarīrāveśaḥ | YS 3.38
Possession of another's body is [possible] due to complete knowledge of the mind's movements and it's loosening from the causes of bondage

In Vyāsa's famous commentary to the YS, he clarifies that the cause of bondage and embodiment is *karma*, and this is what is ultimately "loosened" (*śaithilyā*) through yogic practice and *samādhi*. Once this is loosened, consciousness (*citta*) is able to leave the body and free to enter the bodies of other beings.⁶⁸³ In his 16th century commentary the *Yogavārttika*, the Vedantin Vijñānabhikṣu adds that "the movement (*pracāra*) of consciousness from one body to another is conducted along a certain subtle nerve (*nāḍī*) and through these channels one's mind can leave and enter."⁶⁸⁴

states, "These powers are accomplishments for the mind that is awakening (*vyutthāne*), but obstacles (*upasargāḥ*) to *samādhi*" [YS 3.37].

⁶⁸² Stuart Ray Sarbacker, "Herbs (*auśadhi*) as a Means to Spiritual Accomplishments (*siddhi*) in Patañjali's *Yogasūtras*". *International Journal of Hindu Studies*. 17 (1): (2013): 41.

⁶⁸³ "Extracts the *citta* from his own body and deposits it in other bodies" (*yogī cittam sva-śarīrān niṣkṛṣya śarīrāntareṣu niṣīpati*) see James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga-system of Patanjali, or the Ancient Hindu Doctrine of Concentration of Mind*, (Cambridge, U.S.A: Harvard University Press, 1927): 266-267.

⁶⁸⁴ *anayā nāḍyā evaṃ prakāreṇa cittam śarīre praviśati nirgacchati* - see Wallis (2014: 154) for reference

One of the most developed and descriptive sources discussing *para-śarīrāveśa* is found in the Jain monk/scholar Hemacandra’s (1088–1172) *Yogaśāstra*, a text heavily influenced by Yoga traditions and Śaiva/Buddhist Tantras. It is in this text where we find the ability to possess other bodies explicitly understood through the lens of the subtle body, an interpretation that arguably arose from the tantric traditions and their practices of possession, as we will see in the next chapter. YŚ 5. 264-273 describes this practice as being rooted in *prāṇāyāma* (breath control), where the aspirant can willfully move one’s breath (*vāyu*) and consciousness throughout their body. The text states that when the breath is withdrawn from the heart-lotus (*hrīpadma*) and expelled upwards, the current will pierce the obstructive knot (*pathagranthi*), causing the heart-lotus to burst open. From this, one can lead their consciousness out of their body through the *brahmarandhra*, the aperture on the top of the head.⁶⁸⁵ At first the yogi is instructed to try and join (*saṃyojana*) their breath to small inanimate objects such as a piece of cotton, flowers, and camphor or sulfur, and “penetrate” (*vedha*) them while in a state of “absorption” (*samādhi*) [YŚ 5.266-267]. Subsequent practices are to be performed on more complex objects starting with the dead bodies of birds, black bees, and deer, to the dead bodies of horses, elephants, and finally to men. The section ends by stating, “In this way, one may enter (*praviśet*) into the bodies of dead creatures through [one’s] left nostril (*vāmanāsa*). However, entering into living bodies has not been described out of fear of sin (*pāpa*)” [YŚ 5.272].

So, although it is implied that entering a live person is possible, and this is clearly evidenced in non-Jaina texts and traditions, this particular text does not offer the details to

⁶⁸⁵ YŚ 5.4-12; 5.264-271

this practice since it may violate Jain law. However, Quarnstrom notes that Hemacandra does, in fact, mention it in his auto-commentary, the *Svopajñavivarāṇa*:

Having exited [the breath] through the *brahmarandhra* (“aperture of brahma” at the top of the head), one should enter (*praviśya*) [the other body] through the *apānavartmanā* (downward moving breath, located in the anus). Having entered the navel-lotus (*ānābhyambujam*), one should move [the breath] to the heart-lotus via the *suṣumna* channel. There one should stop the movement of the other’s *prāṇa* (breath) with one’s own breath (*nijavāyu*). After that, unconsciousness sets in [to the other] as long as the Self is [separated] from the body. When that other body has been completely liberated [of its previous occupant], the *yogin* whose actions and senses have come alive in all the activities [of the other] should commence movement as if in his own body. Thus, the wise [yogin] may sport in another’s body for half a day or one day. [After that] he may enter into his own body (*puram*) again through the [same] method.⁶⁸⁶

Here we can see the reason why Jain law would prohibit such an act – it explicitly states that one would have to stop the *prāṇa* (breath) of the one they are entering, implying they would, or at least could, be killed. This form of possession, then, is quite different from that performed by Vipula in the MBh, though quite similar to Vidura’s possession of King Yudhiṣṭhira, which results in the death of his own body.

Frederick Smith also points to another description of this same process in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (YV), a syncretic text written roughly between the 10th-13th century and influenced by Vedānta, Yoga, Sāṃkhya, Śaiva Siddhānta, Jainism, Mahāyāna Buddhism and, of course, Tantra. In this chapter, Vasiṣṭha, Rama’s guru, describes various *siddhis* and presents a long discussion on possessing another person’s body. This full section has been

⁶⁸⁶ *brahmarandhrena nirgatya praviśyāpānavartmanā | śritvā nābhyambujam yāyāt hṛdambhojam suṣumṇayā ||1|| tatra tatprāṇasaṃcāram nirudhyān nijavāyunā | yāvad dehāt tato dehī gataceṣṭo viniṣpatet ||2|| tena dehe vinirmukte prādurbhūtendriyakriyaḥ | varteta sarvakāryeṣu svadeha iva yogavit ||3|| dinārdhaṃ vā dinaṃ veti krīdet parapure sudhīḥ | anena vidhinā bhūyaḥ praviśed ātmanaḥ puram ||4||* SV 5.272, translation based upon Olle Qvarnström, *The Yogaśāstra of Hemacandra: A Twelfth Century Handbook of Śvetāmbara Jainism*, (Cambridge, Harvard University, 2002): 142 and Smith (2006: 289).

translated by Smith and is worth reading, but I offer only small a portion that is most relevant to our immediate discussion:

Like a line of smoke rising from fire, the *kuṇḍalinī* energy [*śakti*], freed through the channel [*nāḍī*] rising from the energy center at the perineum [*mūlā-dhāra*], merges into the cosmic void [*vyoman*]. This citizen [*nāgarī*, viz. *the kuṇḍalinī*], like a puff of smoke, is a spectacle vibrating internally, enveloped by the ego sense [*ahaṃkāra*], which comprises the living being [*jīva*] constituted of the embrace of mind [*manas*] and intellect [*buddhi*]. She is capable of moving about at will, entering into [*niryāti*] a lotus stalk, a mountain, grass, a wall, a rock, the sky, or the surface of the earth. She [*kuṇḍalinī*] alone becomes consciousness, establishing itself step-by-step, filled from beginning to end with its essence [*rasa*]... O Rāma, filled with such essence, this quickly assumes any desired shape... O Rāghava, know this truth which has been formulated by the learned, that the energy of a living being [*jīvaśakti*] can constitute itself into anything, from Mt. Meru to a patch of grass....

Consciousness itself [*cinmātram*] as known here is one, pure, quiescent, devoid of any defining characteristic, subtler than the subtle, peaceful, and is neither the world nor actions within the world. As consciousness constructs the self with the self, a self in which will becomes expectant, the result is a living being [*jīva*] whose consciousness then becomes turgid [*āvilatām*] [with desire] ... Just as a being after waking from sleep no longer sees a dream, similarly, when this truth arises, the *jīva* will no longer see this body. When what is unreal is justified through an attitude that it is real, the *jīva* becomes firmly entrenched in the sense of the reality of the body. But due to the meditative experience [*bhāvanā*] of the singularity of reality, the disembodied (*jīva*) becomes gloriously happy...when the experience of the self [*ātmabhāva*] is with the self alone, then consciousness itself [*cinmātram*] is revealed as all pervasive, stainless, and pure; through the sun of knowledge the sense of “I am” is destroyed... When the body is seen as a body, it is that alone which becomes real; but when it is seen with an attitude [*bhāva*] that it is unreal, then the body becomes a part of the atmosphere...

The *jīva* is lifted from the sheath [*gr̥ham*; lit. “house”] of the *kuṇḍalinī* through the yogic practice of breath retention after an exhalation [*recaka*]. It is then joined [within another body], as the fragrance of a flower carried by the wind. The body (of the yogin), its vibrations stopped [*virataspandan*], becomes like wood or stone. He then submerges his *jīva* in the body, *jīva*, and mind of the other person, carefully, like sprinkling water on plants. The prepared *jīva* enters inside anything fixed or mobile, in order to enjoy that state according to his own desire. In this way the yogin enjoys the glory of *siddhis*. If it is still existent, the yogin then may reenter his own body, or he can enjoy that of another...In this way, through an act of pervasion, a yogin, through any of these bodies, can fill all other reflected forms [*bimbān*], or he can establish himself completely by filling up the entire universe with consciousness

[*saṃvit*].⁶⁸⁷

Here we are presented with a highly developed understanding of the mechanics involved in the transference of consciousness and possessing another's body – here, however, it is not light rays (*raśmis*), but rather *prāṇa* (vital breath), *jīva* (vital life force), and *śakti* (divine feminine energy) which are considered the transfer media through which one exits and enters the subtle/gross body. It is notable also that *śakti* here is equated with *kuṇḍalinī*, which we will see is a concept that arises in the Tantras and becomes one of the many lenses used to interpret possession phenomena. Also note the mention of the metaphors of reflection, and how one can enter a body untainted like water on a plant – clear references to the language of possession as seen in the medical and epic texts we've looked at so far. Finally, note the importance placed on perception in the second paragraph – if the *jīva* (vital essence) identifies with the body, then the *jīva* will become bound by that body. In contrast, if one attains correct knowledge and correct perspective that the body is ultimately unreal, then the bonds began to dissipate, and consciousness returns to its “all pervasive” natural state.

As we will soon see, many of these ideas are foundational in the tantric literature, particularly in their discussion of tantric deity possession and sorceristic rites. The notion of transforming one's perception through knowledge and identification with "the pervasive self" (i.e., one's true nature, equated with the Supreme Being) is paramount in tantric practice, particularly in deity possession (*āveśa/samāveśa*) rites. So too is the idea of rays (i.e., *prāṇa*, *śakti*, etc.) as the medium of transfer in Śaiva tantric initiations (e.g., *yoganikā* or *nāḍīsaṃghaṭṭa*, *śaktipāta*, *āveśa*, *śivahasta*) and to invoke, control, and manipulate spirit

⁶⁸⁷ YŚ 6.1.82 – Translation based on Smith (2009: 290-293).

beings. In general, the pan-South Asian concept of the self as permeable is what makes these transfer media salient, allowing the transference of qualities, knowledge, energies and even identities/consciousness, as in the case of possession, to take place between various beings. We will return to all these concepts again in the tantric literature in the following chapter, as it was likely these ideas that informed the accounts of *para-śarīrāveśa* in the YŚ and YV.

THE PĀŚUPATAS: POSSESSING THE DEAD

One group who employed this science of *parakāyapraveśa* or *para-śarīrāveśa* (“possessing another’s body”) is the early proto-tantric Śaivas known as the Pāśupatas. The Pāśupatas are mentioned for the first time in Indian literature in chapter twelve of the MBh [12.337.59-62], alongside other schools of philosophy (*darśanas*) that were prominent in this period.⁶⁸⁸ Their doctrine, according to the MBh, was promulgated by Śiva, known here also as Śrikanṭha (i.e., Rudra) and significantly, Bhūtapati, “The Lord of Spirits”.⁶⁸⁹

Sanderson believes the earliest physical evidence for the Pāśupatas comes in the form of a late 2nd century inscription from Junāgaḍh in Kathiawar, though the evidence is not conclusive at this point.⁶⁹⁰ Much more certain evidence is found in a series of seven copperplate inscriptions dated to 374-77 CE in Bāgh, Madhya Pradesh.⁶⁹¹ These inscriptions recorded land grants given by the tribal kings of the Valkhas, subordinates of the Gupta Empire. The first Valkha chieftain mentioned retains a tribal or non-Sanskritic name (Bhulunda), while all latter had Sanskrit names which has led to the suggestion that the

⁶⁸⁸ These others school included Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pañcarātra, and the Vedas and lastly Pāśupatas [MBh 12.337.59].

⁶⁸⁹ MBh 12.337.62

⁶⁹⁰ Sanderson, “Śaivism and Brāhmanism Lectures”, (University of Kyoto, 2012): 10-11.

⁶⁹¹ K.V. Ramesh and S.P. Tewari, *A Copper Plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh*, (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1990).

Gupta emperors were attempting to Brahminize or Sanskritize areas in ancient Madhya Pradesh which were still tribal lands.⁶⁹² What is especially interesting about these inscriptions is that we get a picture of Pāsupatas not only as sole ascetics, but also as temple priests (*devakarmin*) for a variety of deities including Śiva, the Vaiṣṇava Nārāyaṇadeva, Mahasenadeva (i.e. Skanda), the Mothers (*māṛsthānadevakula*), and an unknown deity known as Bappapiśācadeva “Lord of Piśācas”. This latter figure seems to have had some importance as he is mentioned in four out of the seven plates and was likely a local *bhūtanātha*-type deity associated with the dangerous *piśāca*-spirits or may have even been another name for Śiva. Regardless this deity’s inclusion and prominence is significant since it may signify that becoming a “Lord of Spirits” may have been a goal of the Pāsupatas as well.

I should note here a very early reference to a group of *śramaṇic* ascetics in a Buddhist text written before the common era on monastic conduct (*vinaya*) who were derided by the authors as "*piśāca*-worshippers" (*pisācillikās*) and described as carrying begging "bowls made of skulls" and having taken on vows to wear or use nothing except what could be procured from "dust-heaps or cemeteries".⁶⁹³ While it is impossible to be completely sure who this

⁶⁹² These inscriptions are interesting in that they paint quite a different scene from the initial picture of the strict ascetic system of the Pāsupatas which focused only on the individual practitioner as described in the *Pāsupata-sūtra*. Besides the lone initiated renunciant, the Pāsupatas, like the Buddhists and Jains, also seemed to have their own *acāryās* who fulfilled priestly services in temples dedicated to Śaiva and non-Śaiva deities and served the needs of the larger lay Śaiva community and royalty. They likely followed the Buddhist and Jain structural model, which allowed them to compete with these other systems for royal patronage, a successful strategy given their popularity and spread throughout all of South Asia (and even in Cambodia).

⁶⁹³ In the Chapter 10, Khandaka 5 of the *Cullavagga* entitled "On the Daily Life of the Bhikkhus". See Sukumar Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism 600 B.C.-100 B.C.*, (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1924): 45 and Chakravarti, "Antiquity of Tantricism", In *The Indian Historical Quarterly* Vol. VI, No.1 March, (1930): 123-124 for discussion on this. Here is Rhys-David & Oldenberg's (1885: 89) translation of the Pali: "Now at that time a certain Bhikkhu, who had taken upon himself a vow to wear or use nothing except what he could procure from dust-heaps or cemeteries, went on his rounds for alms carrying a bowl made out of a skull. A certain woman saw him, and was afraid, and made an outcry, saying, 'O horror! This is surely a devil!' People murmured, were shocked, and indignant, saying, 'How can the Sakyaputtiya Samaṇas carry about bowls made out of skulls, as the devil-worshippers [*pisācillikās*] do?' They told this matter to the Blessed One. 'You are not, O Bhikkhus, to use bowls made out of skulls. Whosoever does so, shall be guilty of a *dukkāṭa*. And you are not, O Bhikkhus, to take a vow to wear or to use nothing except what you procure from dust-heaps or cemeteries. Whosoever does so, shall be guilty of a *dukkāṭa*.'" See Rhys-Davids & Oldenberg, *Vinaya Texts - The*

group, as we will see, they are likely related to one of the Śaiva Atimārga groups, which Sanderson believes includes the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas, the Lākulas/Kālāmukhas ("Black-faced")/Mahāvratas and the Kāpālikas.⁶⁹⁴ We will discuss these groups in more detail in the following chapter.

This *siddhi* of *para-śarīrāveśa* appears, in fact, in one of their foundational myths as seen in Kauṇḍinya's *Pañcārtha Bhāṣya* (PSBh), a commentary on the school's root text, the *Pāśupata Sūtra* (2nd-century CE). This text states simply that Lord Śiva incarnated (*avatīrṇa*) in the form of a human on earth by entering and animating the body (*kāya*) of a dead Brahmin in Kāyāvātāra Forest ("The Forest of the Incarnation of the Body"), believed to be in the modern town of Karvan, in Gujarat.⁶⁹⁵ This same narrative is further developed in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, parts of which may have been composed as early the 3-4th century CE, where we introduced for the first time to the Pāśupata's legendary progenitor, Lakulīśa ("The Lord with the Club").⁶⁹⁶ In this account, Śiva states he will descend and incarnate on the earth,

...through the magic power of yoga (*yogamāyayā*). I will then become a [new] self through yoga (*bhaviṣyāmi yogātmā*) in the body of a chaste brahmin student, to the

Kullavagga, IV-XII in Volume XX of F. Max Muller's *The Sacred Books of the East*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885).

Dutt (1924: 44-45) notes also that a group known as *pisācās* are mentioned in the *Milinda Pañha* [100BCE-200CE] in long list of *śramaṇic* sects (called "*gaṇas*") prevalent at this early time. He believes these groups to be the same.

⁶⁹⁴ Recall the Pāśupata inscription listing the worship of Bappapiśācādeva (Lord of Piśācas). As we will see the *kapālavrata* vow of the Lākulas, Kālāmukhas, and Kāpālikas, and the nine vratas of the BYT, particularly the *Kucaīlina-vratra* and *Kravyādavrata* matches these early descriptions.

⁶⁹⁵ *tathā śiṣṭa prāmānyāt kāmītvād ajātatvācca manuṣyarūpī bhagavān brāhmaṇakāyam āsthāya kāyāvatarāṇe avatīrṇa iti | PSBh 1.1:39* This passage echoes the *avatāra* language found in the coeval Bhagavad Gīta. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which may be as ancient as the PS, and certainly earlier than the PSBh, it is known as Kāyāvarohaṇa (The Descent into/of the Body), which holds a similar meaning.

⁶⁹⁶ Scholars such as Jitendra Nath Banerjea in his *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956): 450 believe that Lakulīśa was more responsible for the cult's great growth and systemization, rather than its actual founder. Davidson (2002: 341–43) also states that the Pāśupatas were responsible for the composition (or re-composition) of several Purāṇas in the centuries that followed (including the *Vāyu Purāṇa* and original Skanda Purāṇa in which Lakulīśa appears). He writes, "Their institutional presence is widely documented in nearly one hundred medieval inscriptions attesting to lands, monasteries, and temples donated to or administered by the Pāśupatas between the fifth and twelfth centuries CE".

wonder of the world. Seeing a dead body left unprotected on a cremation ground, I will enter [into it] (*praviṣṭaḥ*) through the supernatural power of yoga, for the welfare of *brahmins* . . . Then I will become the one known by the name of Lakulin, and that perfected field (*siddhakṣetra*) will thus be known as (The Place of) "The Descent of the Body" (*kāyāvarohaṇa*).⁶⁹⁷

From the forest it is said Lakulīśa walked to the cremation ground of Ujjayinī, where he covered himself with ashes and took a flaming log as his club in his left hand. Here he is said to have initiated his first four disciples and recited the *Pāśupata Sūtra* as their doctrine. In the *Pāśupata Sūtra* itself, this ability to "enter into anyone" (*sarvāṃś cāviśati*, PS 1.25), whether alive or not, is one of the eight supernatural qualities (*siddhis*) which are attained by Pāśupata practitioners on their way to becoming a *mahāgaṇapati* ("Great Lord of Gaṇas"), the ultimate goal of Pāśupata yoga, modeled upon the archetypal *bhūtanātha*, Lord Śiva. This, however, is only achieved and fully realized after bodily death.

This feat of entering other's bodies (*para-śarīrāveśa*) becomes a cultural episteme throughout the Epic and Purāṇic literature in the medieval period, popular especially in fictional literature such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara* which describes a decrepit Pāśupata ascetics possessing other bodies, usually deceased, for various magical and spiritual purposes.⁶⁹⁸ This *siddhi*, often listed simply as *āveśa*, is also mentioned in the *Caraka Saṃhitā* as well as numerous yoga and Tantra texts, including the *Yogasūtras* (YS) of Patañjali and the Netra Tantra.

⁶⁹⁷ Translation based on White (2009: 193-194), based on chapter 23 of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*.

⁶⁹⁸ As seen in examples above and as detailed by White (2004: 624), Smith (2006), Bloomfield (1917: 10).

PĀŚUPATA DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

As stated, the Pāśupatas took the *bhūtanātha* Śiva as their model in terms of behavior and practice, but also as their ultimate goal. As White has pointed out, their goal was union and identification with Lord Śiva (or more specifically Maheśvara, “the Great Master”), through their particular practice of yoga. Through this yoga, they claim to be able to achieve various attributes of the Lord, including the eight supernatural powers or “masteries” (*aiśvaryam*). It is this understanding of yoga, White argues, which becomes operative in all subsequent tantric systems that follow – White writes:

...yoga is a soteriological system that culminates in union or identity with a supreme being. Accordingly, yogis are persons whose religious vocation is the quest for such a union or identity, including the power to enter into, to permeate, the creator’s every creature.⁶⁹⁹

Interestingly enough the PS itself states that the Vedic Indra was the first to observe the Pāśupata vow, something he may have in fact stolen or acquired from the Āsuras (anti-gods) - “Indra verily, in the beginning, observed the Pāśupata (vow) among the Āsuras. He took from them the merit of the sacrificial acts and of the charities (*iṣṭāpūrta*). He acquired (it) with well-performed magic (*māyā*).”⁷⁰⁰ The *Pāśupata Sūtras*, especially the mantras and prayers, clearly draw from earlier Vedic texts, and philosophically they are aligned with other early Śaiva traditions as found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, where the status of Rudra/Śiva was raised to that of the supreme absolute, Brahman.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ White (2009: 29)

⁷⁰⁰ *indro vā agre asureṣu pāśupatam acarat | sa teṣām iṣṭāpūrtam ādatta | māyayā sukṛtayā samavindata* | (PāSū 4.10-2); Translation by Bischoff. This reference alludes to a myth narrated in the *Atharva Veda* [*PaiS* 3.25 and 17.27-9; *Śaunakasaṃhitā* 4.11] and *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (TaiBr 2.3.9.9)

⁷⁰¹ See Hara, *Materials for the Study of Pāśupata Śaivism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1966): 121 and Bischoff and Griffiths (2003).

Despite drawing on these orthodox sources, the Pāśupatas were considered ambiguous, a quality shared, as we've seen, with their own supreme deity, Rudra/Śiva. In various stanzas from the *Bhāgatava Purāṇa*, one would be hard-pressed to distinguish whether the agent of this description was Rudra/Śiva or a Pāśupata ascetic, as we will see below:

Daśa states he is impure (*aśuci*) who has violated and broken the boundaries of religious acts (*luptakriyā; bhinnasetu*; BhP 4.2.13). Furthermore, he dwells in terrifying abodes of the dead (*pretāvāseṣu ghoreṣu*) surrounded by troops of ghosts, and spirits (*pretair bhūtagaṇair vṛtaḥ*; BhP 4.2.14a). He wanders around like a madman, nude, hair disheveled, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying (*aṭaty unmattavan nagno vyupta-keśo hasan rudan*; BhP 4.2.14b). He bathes in ashes from the funeral pile (*citābhasmakṛtasnānaḥ*) and is adorned with human bones and garlands of the recently dead (*pretasraṇnrasthibhūṣanaḥ*; BhP 4.2.15). He is intoxicated and loved by intoxicated people (*matto mattajanapriyaḥ*), the lord of the demonic *pramathas* and spirits (*patiḥ pramathabhūthānām*) who are of the nature of darkness (*tamas*) itself [BhP 4.2.15], the lord of madmen (*unmāda-nāthāya*; BhP 4.2.16), impure and evil-minded (*naṣṭa-śaucāya durhr̥de*; BhP 4.2.16).

The Pāśupatas presented themselves in the PS as a new revelation that was said to "go beyond" (*atimārga*) or transcend the orthodox Vedic stages of life, with extreme but efficacious practices to end suffering. It is for this reason they were later considered the first subdivision of the Śaiva *Atimārga* ("The Path Beyond"), which we will discuss in the following chapter.

In this sense they were similar in many respects to other *śramanic* groups such as the Buddhists and Jains. The goal of Pāśupata yoga, very briefly stated, was *rudra-sāyujya* - absorption, communion, or identification with Rudra, or according to Kauṇḍinya's commentary, *ātmeśvara-saṃyoga*, the "yoking" or union of the individual soul (*ātman*) with the Lord (*Īśvara* i.e., Śiva). Kauṇḍinya makes clear, however, that this was not a union in the sense of a total absorption into the Godhead, as found in later tantric or Vedantic schools, but

rather, by virtue of this yoga, the *sādhaka* partakes in the attributes of Maheśvara (Śiva), implying a type of identification or connection, and involving a transference of qualities, with the deity. While hints of non-dualism are present within this system, it is ultimately dualist since the *sādhaka* can acquire all of Rudra’s qualities, except his office (*adhikāra*), as the creator, maintainer, and destroyer of the universe, which He alone holds. These qualities are said to be attained through five stages involving a variety of observances (*vratas*) and practices as described by the *Pāśupata Sūtra*, which we shall now turn to.

In the first stage, *sādhakas* were ordered to live in the grounds of a temple (*yatanavāsī*), bathe in purified ashes three times a day, sleep on ashes, wear sectarian marks and left-over garlands that were offered to Śiva (*nirmālyam*), and make their own offerings of laughter, singing, dancing, the sound *huḍuṃ* (like the bellowing of a bull⁷⁰²), and mantra repetition, to the Lord.⁷⁰³ Furthermore, the *sādhaka* should either be naked or wear only one piece of clothing and they should never ever talk to women or *śūdras* (low-caste) during this stage. By following these vows, we are told, the *sādhaka* will achieve purity of mind and various supernatural powers (*siddhis*) - such as being able to see or hear things from a great distance, reading other people’s minds, knowledge of all scriptures (*viññānāni*; PS 1.19), omniscience (*sarvajñatā*, PS 1.20), swiftness of mind; (*manojavitvam*; PS 1.21), shape-shifting (*kāmarūpitvam*; PS 1.22), liberation from the sense organs (*vikaraṇa*), virtuousness (*dharmitvam*), the ability to control the will of others (*sarve cāsya vaśyā bhavanti*, PS 1.23), the ability to enter/possess any being (*sarvāṃś ca-āviśati*; PS 1.25), and finally, the ability to

⁷⁰² In a recent article, Diwakar Acharya (2013) argues that “making the sound *huḍuṃ*” refers to the practice of bellowing like a bull

⁷⁰³ *hasita-gīta-nṛtya-huḍumkāra-namaskāra-japyopahāreṇopatiṣṭhet*

kill others (*sarve cāsyā vadhyā bhavanti* PS 1.27).⁷⁰⁴ Kauṇḍinya adds that one has to be careful in attaining these *siddhis* as they can become obstacles (i.e. pride) or cause insanity (*mada*).⁷⁰⁵

Having attained these qualities, the *sādhaka* is said to become fearless, indestructible, ageless, and deathless, and moves in the world unimpeded. The following line states: “United with these qualities of the Lord Mahādeva, one becomes a *mahāgaṇapati*, a great Lord of the *Gaṇas*” (PS 1.30).⁷⁰⁶ Kauṇḍinya is again quick to comment that being a *mahāgaṇapati* does not make one become Śiva, the Absolute Godhead, rather the transference of qualities makes the adept *like* Śiva, except, of course the few roles that only Śiva holds.

Part two of the *sūtras* states that through this yoga the *sādhaka* will achieve all his desires (*sarvakāmika*; PS 2.2) and through their observances anything that is inauspicious becomes auspicious (*amaṅgalaṃ cātra maṅgalaṃ bhavati*, PS 2.3), similarly stating that “the left becomes the right” (*apasavyaṃ ca pradakṣiṇam* PS 2.4), a concept core to all later tantric traditions. The *sādhaka* is further told to worship Śiva exclusively as he contains all the Vedic gods and ancestors within him (PS 2.5-6). Due to all these factors the Pāśupata path is declared by the text as the highest of all paths. Kauṇḍinya points out, however, that this is also what makes this path un-Vedic and unorthodox, since it involves breaking with Brahmanical duties.

Part three and four of the PS gives some of the more bizarre and extreme observances for which the Pāśupatas have become so infamous. In this stage the Pāśupata is supposed to leave the temple, conceal all sectarian marks, and enter the world wandering about as a *preta*

⁷⁰⁴ Kauṇḍinya clarifies that “thinking” means perceiving the thoughts of others, while “knowing” refers to knowledge of what is in all scriptures.

⁷⁰⁵ *tesu madam akurvan harsāpramādi bhavati* (PABhp. 65, 19); see Hara (1967: 597)

⁷⁰⁶ PS 1.30 *ity etair guṇair yukto bhagavato mahādevasya mahāgaṇapatir bhavati*

(*pretavat-careta*, 3.7), an outcast/ghost from society. Kauṇḍinya expands upon this in his commentary stating:

He should appear as though mad, like a pauper, his body covered with filth, letting his beard, nails and hair grow long, without any bodily care. Hereby he becomes cut off from the respectable castes and conditions of men, and the power of passionless detachment is produced.⁷⁰⁷

As a *preta*, the *sādhaka* is told to wander alone in the world, act like a madman (*unmattavad eko vicareta loke*, PS 4.4), and ordered to feign common possession-like symptoms such as snoring (*rātheta*, 3.8), tremors (*spandeta*, 3.9), and limping (*maṅṭeta*, 3.10), so that everyone will think, “He is a madman, he is a fool” (*unmatto mūḍha*, 4.6). They are told to do or say whatever is necessary, even make lewd sexual gestures (*śṛṅgāreta*, 3.11), in order to court contempt and abuse from others (PS 3.8-11). In this practice, dishonor (*asaṃmāna*; 4.7) is said to be the highest of all disciplines (*uttamaḥ smṛtaḥ*; 4.7) and the true path (*satpathaḥ*; 4.12).

Most scholars offer a superficial reading of these acts, which they argue involves a transfer of merit based upon karmic law as conceived by the Pāśupatas – the abusers in effect acquire the *sādhaka*’s bad *karma* or sin, while the *sādhaka*, in turn, receives their merit. Therefore, the *sādhaka* is told to go about getting blamed, because, as Kauṇḍinya points out, these actions are actually blameless (*aninditakarmā*; PS 4.15) since they were ordered by Lord Pāśupati (Śiva) himself and followed even by the Vedic Indra. However, on a deeper level, it is clear these acts help to cultivate extreme egolessness, humility, and more importantly, contempt for the physical world, or what Wallis calls “world-weariness”, a practice of “radical detachment” which he argues is necessary for peacefully leaving the

⁷⁰⁷ Translation based on Ingalls, "Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor". *The Harvard Theological Review*. 55 (4): (1962): 289.

world at death in order to achieve final liberation in the fifth stage. This is commonly found in all *śramaṇic*/renunciant traditions.

We should also note, as mentioned earlier, the parallels between symptoms prescribed for the *sādhakas* and those who are possessed by *bhūtas*, as found in coeval medical texts of the CS and SS. I would argue that it is implied that the Pāśupata ascetic acts as if possessed, due to its close association with madness/insanity and that they were symptoms the public were familiar with. Alternatively, it could also be seen as one acts possessed and mad in imitation of Rudra/Śiva. While Rudra never seems to explicitly possess Pāśupata ascetics, there does seem to be some crossover between possession and Pāśupata practice, at least conceptually. This is borne out in the next stage of practice, in which the text states the *sādhaka* attains *rudra-samīpaṃ*, the “presence” or “nearness” of Rudra (4.14), resulting in “never again returning” to cyclical existence or going backwards on their path.⁷⁰⁸

Now reborn as a truly independent *yogī* (*asaṅga-yogī*; 5.1) after stage two, the *sādhaka* begins stage three involving his retreat to either an empty house or cave (*śūnyāgāra-guhāvāsī*; 5.4) where he is told to constantly recite prescribed mantras and hymns (5.13-15), meditating only upon Rudra (5.5) and the syllable OM (5.17), and subsisting only on alms (5.7-8).⁷⁰⁹ Following this is the fourth stage, where the *sādhaka* is told to dwell in a cremation ground and subsist on whatever food he finds there. It is here, by constantly remembering Rudra in his mind (*sadā rudram anusmaret*, 5.22), that the *sādhaka* will finally achieve communion with Rudra (*labhate rudra-sāyujyam*; 5.21). Having cut (*chittvā*) the root (*mūla*) of his impurities (*doṣa*), described as a “net of causes” (*hetujāla*, 5.23), the

⁷⁰⁸ *anena vidhinā rudrasamīpaṃ gatvā na kaścīd brāhmaṇaḥ punar āvartate PS 4.14*

⁷⁰⁹ Mantras can be either the Aghora mantra, the Raudrī [Gāyatrī] or the Bahurūpī, all from the ṚV

sādhaka establishes (*sthāpayivā*) his own consciousness (*svaṃ cittam*) in Rudra [5.24].⁷¹⁰

The fifth and final stage, briefly remarked on, simply states that the *sādhaka*, now established in Lord Rudra, “attains the end of suffering, through the grace of the Lord” (*duḥkhānām antam īśa-prasādāt*; 5.26).

As stated previously, the *sādhaka* does not achieve a state equal to Śiva – while some hints of non-dualism are found throughout the PS, Śiva is still needed at the final moments in order to give his liberating grace (*prasāda*) to the aspirant. It is ultimately this required grace of Rudra that allows the *sādhaka* to achieve the state of a *mahāgaṇapati*. Full liberation is not actually achieved until the Pāśupata's body has been shed in a yogic liberative death, reminiscent of the *utkrānti* rites White described earlier. At the time of death, the *sādhaka*, now a *mahāgaṇapati*, is said to achieve a transcendental plane of existence just below the Supreme God-head - “a sort of antechamber to the ‘true’ locus of salvation” as White puts it.⁷¹¹ It is only in later tantric non-dual schools where achieving the state of Śiva (or Rudra/Bhairava etc.), which involves a complete identification with the supreme god Lord, becomes an explicit goal.

Towards the end of their life, the *sādhakas* are ordered to reside in cremation grounds and end their life by yogic suicide. While the cremation ground may have originally used in order to help with engendering world-weariness, as argued by Wallis and others, it was also where meetings with the denizen spirits (*bhūtas, grahas, gaṇas etc.*) of the cremation grounds took place. It is here and among these sorts of cremation ground ascetics where I would argue the revolutionary concept of becoming or assimilating (as a *bhūtanātha*) the powers of these supernatural beings likely arose. Living here meant they had to be aware of

⁷¹⁰ *chittvā doṣāṇām hetujālasya mūlam | buddhyā svaṃ cittam sthāpayivā tu rudre || PS 5.23.-24*

⁷¹¹ White (2009: 110).

exorcistic and apotropaic rites to keep these demons at bay, and given the locale, possession was likely commonplace.

Pāśupata rites are detailed in later texts as well, such as the *Nisvāsātattvasaṃhitā* [NTS] (4th-5th CE), often considered the first surviving Tantric Śaiva Siddhantin text, along with the *Atharva-Veda Pariśiṣṭas* [AVP], a ritual appendix to the Atharvaveda. Recent studies of these texts demonstrate some diversity regarding doctrine and practice within the Pāśupata cults, leading some to believe there were multiple Pāśupata sects (such as the Mahāpāśupatas or Kālamukhas), in contrast to just the Pāñcārthikas of the PS.⁷¹² The inclusion of their practices in the NTS and AVP reflects the importance Pāśupata Śaivism must have had during the period of these texts' composition.

There is no conclusive dating of the *Atharva-Veda Pariśiṣṭas* corpus, but Modak believes their composition begin in the Christian era and continued for several centuries.⁷¹³ Pāśupata rites such as the *Pāśupatavrata* and the *Ucchuṣmakalpa*, which invokes Ucchuṣmarudra and his Ucchuṣmarudras, were included in this text, though likely in its later portions. Sanderson believes these to be pre-Mantramārgic and thus older than most Śaiva tantras, which is what makes these adaptations of interest to us. Sanderson has further argued that their assimilation into the AV corpus was a reaction by Atharvavedic *rājapurohitas* (“king’s chaplain”) whose patronage was being diminished from the fifth century onwards by Śaiva officiates throughout the Indian subcontinent.⁷¹⁴ The *rājapurohitas* long held this position, performing a wide range of rituals for the royal family, including consecration ceremonies, rites of protection (*śantikam karma*) and wellness rites (*pauṣṭikam karma*) as

⁷¹² See Sanderson (2002), Bakker (2000) and Bisschop and Griffiths (2003).

⁷¹³ Modak (1993: 470-473). See also Geslani (2018) for a more up to date discussion of the dating of this collection.

⁷¹⁴ See Sanderson (2004) and (2007).

well as hostile sorceristic rites to attack enemies of various kinds (*ābhicārakam karma*). The Śaivas offered new and more powerful protective, and hostile ritual technologies that were in demand at the time – thus allowing them to take over the traditional role of the brahmanical chaplains. Thanks to this patronage, Śaiva tantric traditions rose to pre-eminence throughout South and Southeast Asia. In order to compete, the Atharvavedins’ appropriated the Śaiva rituals to their own repertoire as reflected in the AP.

CĀṄḌEŚĀ & UCCHUṢMA

A few recent articles have also shown the growing importance in this period of two deities worshipped by the Pāśupatas - Caṅḍeśa and Ucchuṣma. Diwakar has argued that certain early sculptures originally thought to be Lakulīśa, may actually be Caṅḍeśa, a predominantly South Indian Siddhantin deity known to not only punish transgressors within the tradition (as mentioned earlier in the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā* literature), but also a deity who was given the left-over or fallen offerings (*nirmālya*) made to Śiva, much in the same way Pāśupatas wore *nirmālyas* during their first stage of practice. This suggests Caṅḍeśa may have also been one of the deities the ascetics modeled themselves after. Because the remainders of the offerings were considered dangerous and impure, it was believed Caṅḍeśa was the only one fierce and powerful enough to bear this task, a role he continues to have at various Śaiva shrines throughout South Asia, including the most famous at Pāśupatināth Temple in Nepal.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁵ See Acharya, “The Role of Caṅḍa in the Early History of the Pāśupata Cult and the Image on the Mathurā Pillar Dated Gupta Year 61.” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 48.3–4 (2005): 207–22, Goodall (2009), and Bisschop, “Once Again on the Identity of Candésvara in Early Śaivism: A Rare Candésvara in the British Museum?” *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 53.3: (2010): 233-249, for their studies on Caṅḍa.

This role and association with impurity is shared by Ucchuṣma (“One Whose Crackling Becomes Manifest”) as well, who, like Caṇḍeśa, is also mentioned in the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* (NTS). Both become important figures in later magical tantras as deities that both afflict and heal. An interesting link between the two can be found in the *Niśvāsaḡuhya* portion of the NTS in which Ucchuṣmarudra is invoked and stated to preside over the Ucchuṣmā Pātāla, a subterranean region between the hells and earth where people who have allowed the offerings and substances leftover from Śiva’s worship to fall to the ground go. It is not all together clear if Ucchuṣma *is* invoked alongside Rudra as an independent deity as found in later texts, or if it is simply an adjective modifying Rudra to designate a more wrathful form of the deity. Regardless, those who live in this liminal world are said to worship, Caṇḍeśa, described as a ferocious Gaṇa of Śiva, to whom such dangerous remnants are to be offered.⁷¹⁶

A goddess Ucchuṣmā figures in several Śaiva Tantras as well, including one of the earliest Vidyāpīṭha texts known as the *Brahmayāmala* (aka *Picumata*), which mentions multiple Ucchuṣmā goddesses who were considered the principal Śaktis of the supreme deity, Bhairava Kapālīśa.⁷¹⁷ It has been noted that the BY sometimes calls itself the *Ucchuṣmatantra*, though a separate text, now lost, may have existed as well.⁷¹⁸ Sanderson remarks that the designation as an *Ucchuṣmatantra* “alludes to the strict indifference to

⁷¹⁶ See Goodall (2009: 394-395) who also quotes Sanderson

⁷¹⁷ She is often associated with four goddesses who were installed at four important Goddess Pīṭhas: Raktā in Oḍḍiyāna, Karālī in Jālandhara, Caṇḍākṣī in Pūrṇādri and Ucchuṣmā in Kāmarūpa. Heilijgers-Seelen, *The System of Five Cakras in Kubjikāmatatantra 14-16*, (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1994): 92–93 observes Ucchuṣmā in *Kubjikāmatatantra* 2.24. See also Bisschop and Griffith, (2003: 3); Goudriaan & Gupta (1981: 43); and Sanderson, “Maṇḍala and Āgamic identity in the Trika of Kashmir,” in *Mantras et Diagrammes Rituelles dans l’Hindouisme*, ed. Padoux, (Lyon: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1986): 184. Dyczkowski (1988: 110), also states that the *Jayadrathayāmala* holds *Ucchuṣmatantra* to be among the eight root Tantras of the Mata traditions.

⁷¹⁸ See Bisschop and Griffith (2003: 4)

impurity or rather to the cultivation of contact with impurity as a means to power and liberation that characterizes this scripture.”⁷¹⁹ The 11th century exegete Kṣemarāja similarly mentions in his commentary on the NT an *Ucchuṣmatantra* associated with magic and sorcery. He also describes a female demon named *Ucchuṣmikā* as “She who, going about at night with disheveled hair, without clothes, urinating in a circle, feeds blood (*prāśayed raktam*) causes pain - she should be recognized by the adepts as *Ucchuṣmikā*, the mistress of heroes (*vīranāyikā*)”.⁷²⁰

What is interesting about the *Ucchuṣmakalpa* in the AVP is that it has some features that conform to later tantric rites (of the *mantramārga*), though it lacks most of the fundamental features involving its usage of mantras, as well as its lack of *nyāsaḥ* and *dhyānam*. Rather, Sanderson argues that the *Ucchuṣmakalpa* is more archaic than tantric texts and is more reminiscent of earlier types of protective texts such as the Buddhist *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī* (3-4th century AD) and later Śaiva *Bhūtatantras* such as the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*.⁷²¹ It also, according to Sanderson, resembles the *Mahāgaṇapatividya* of the *Gaṇeśadurgāstotrāvalī*, a long protective mantra recited to ward off assaults by demons by summoning the aid of the *bhūtanātha* *Ucchuṣmarudra* and his host of *Ucchuṣmarudras*.⁷²² Given the deities they invoke and the name of the spell it is very possible this may have originated with the Pāsupatas. Regardless, in both of the text’s possession is a feature, but as a form of hostile sorcery. In the *Mahāgaṇapatividya*, *Ucchuṣmarudra* is invoked and asked to

⁷¹⁹ Sanderson (2007: 198-199)

⁷²⁰ Translation by Bisschop and Griffith – see (2003: 5) for Sanskrit reference and translation

⁷²¹ Sanderson notes the first two Chinese translations of which were listed in the *Qin lu*, a catalogue of the period AD 350–431, according to that compiled by Yuan Zhao in AD 800; (Sanderson, 2007: 199); See Sanderson note about similarities of the mantras with the *Khaḍgarāvaṇa-kalpa* of the *Kriyākālaguṇottara*.

⁷²² Sanderson (2007) quotes the *Mahāgaṇapatividya*. As we saw in the previous chapter there is also an important Tantric Gaṇapati sect, and the second most popular deity invoked by this group is none other than *Ucchiṣṭa-Gaṇapati*. See Bühnenmann (1987).

“Possess! Possess the human body!” (*manuṣyaśarīram āveśaya āveśaya*), implying some sort of aggressive attack against an enemy. Similarly, in the Ucchuṣmakalpa (UK) of the AVP, Ucchuṣmarudra too is invoked, but is asked to cause his *rudra-gaṇas* to possess (*raudreṇāveśayāveśaya*), followed by a litany of imperatives for them to “strike!” (*hana*), “burn!” (*dāha*), “boil!” (*paca*), “destroy!” (*mātha*), “crush!” (*vidhvamsaya*), and again, “possess his enemies!” (*āveśayed ripūn*; UK 12.1).⁷²³ Various other hostile sorceries are detailed in the text, such as subjugation, killing, attraction, and even causing madness in others (UK 28.1). There are also multiple warnings not to abuse these dangerous mantras, as they can cause sickness, disease, unconsciousness, ruin of family, and even death (UK 8.4-8.5) to the practitioner. A request is also made to the dangerous *rudras*, not to attack the ritualist himself (UK 9.3).

Ucchuṣma is also the first of a series of ten Rudras according to various Śaiva tantras, often enumerated as: Ucchuṣma, Śavara, Caṇḍa, Mataṅga, Ghora, Yama, Ugra, Halahala, Krodhin, and Huluhulu.⁷²⁴ These ten Rudras, and their corresponding consorts and mantras are also found in number of Buddhist *dhāraṇī* and protective (*rakṣa*) spells of the period, such as the 653–654 CE Buddhist *Dhāraṇīsamgraha* and the *Āryamahābalanāmamahāyānasūtra* (53.2-3), the latter also invokes Ucchuṣmakrodha Mahābala, the Buddhist equivalent of Ucchuṣma.⁷²⁵ The parallels between the Hindu/Buddhist Tantras again suggest a common substratum and indiscriminate borrowing between the respective pre-Mantramārgic Śaiva and a proto-Tantric Mahāyāna protective and

⁷²³ 9.3 – see Bisschop and Griffith (2003: 24-25) for full Sanskrit and translation

⁷²⁴ See *Tantrabhidhanakhosa* I: 225

⁷²⁵ See Castro-Sánchez, *The Indian Buddhist Dhāraṇī - An Introduction to its History, Meanings and Functions*, (MA Thesis, Sunderland University, 2011): 19, Skilling (1992: 155), and Yang (2013) for a number of sources and reference. According to some of Yang's findings, Ucchuṣma may have been originally a Buddhist deity - which White (2020) also argues.

exorcist traditions, which the Atharvaveda *Parīṣiṣṭas* also seems to have assimilated into their repertoire. This is further seen in magical portions of the Buddhist manual, the *Sādhanamālā*, where wrathful Ucchuṣma-forms of Kubera (also known as Jambhala), are mentioned.⁷²⁶

Like their Śaiva counterparts, Ucchuṣma-Jambhala is also notorious for his connection with impurities and among several early eighth-century Chinese/Daoist texts he was known as the “Vajra-being of Impure Traces” (*Hui-chi chin-kang*). Through the Buddhists, Ucchuṣma-Jambhala traveled throughout China where he becomes the principal patron of therapeutic sealing and Taoist-style talismans as well as exorcistic and possession practices involving child-mediums, a topic we will return to again in the following chapter.⁷²⁷

As an independent deity, Ucchuṣma was also well established in early Buddhist Tantras, invoked as a wrathful subjugator of demons and to remove the impure left-overs (*ucchiṣṭam*) and human waste by devouring them.⁷²⁸ The former function is seen in the *Mahābalasūtra* (8th century), for example, where Vajrapāṇi is said to teach Bhūtādhipati (the Buddha?) the Maṇḍala of Ucchuṣmakrodha which is said to protect the ritualist’s body against disease and possession by demons, among other things. In the same text, a variant of Śākyamuni’s battle with Māra and his demon hordes is given. In this version, a ray of light is said to emerge from Śākyamuni, and from this light the fierce Ucchuṣma is summoned, terrifying all the demons, and causing them to flee.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁶ *Sādhanas* 291–295 in the edition of Bhattacharya's *Sādhanamālā*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1968, vol. II: 569).

⁷²⁷ See Strickmann and Faure (2005: 156-161), Yang (2013), and Hsieh Shuwei, “Exorcism in Buddho-Daoist context: A Study of Exorcism in the Method of Ucchuṣma and Luminous Agent Marshal Ma” in *Exorcism in Daoism: A Berlin Symposium*, ed. Florian C. Reiter, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) for more on the Buddhist Ucchuṣma

⁷²⁸ Sanderson (2007:197) references the Buddhist *Mahābalasūtra*, dated sometime before the 8th century

⁷²⁹ *ibid.*

F. CONCLUSION

With our discussion of the Pāśupatas we are now coming closer to the standard forms of tantric deity possession as it becomes characterized by Śaiva tantric groups that arise out of the Pāśupata, Atharvanic, and Mahāyāna Buddhist protective and exorcistic traditions. At this point the primary concerns of proto-tantric actors such as the Pāśupatas were magical and sorceristic rites, often involving the conjuring of various spirit beings, the quest for supernatural powers, warding off possessing demons, and liberation. An interesting confluence of ideas, concepts and practices come together with the Pāśupatas, which in many ways sets the stage for what is to come next with the Atimārga and Mantramārga traditions of the Śaivas in which deity possession becomes institutionalized. This confluence involves ideas of self-identifying with deity (in hopes of transferring the deities qualities) through various meditational, psychological, perceptual, and yogic practices; residing in cremation grounds, where interactions with supernatural beings were common and involved either exorcistic, protective, and in some cases magical rites involving control over supernatural beings, in a similar manner to their *bhūtanātha* lord, Śiva (aka Rudra); and finally possession as an attained supernatural ability, which in this case implied the possession of other's bodies either by the *sādhaka* himself, or through a spirit proxy.

From here it seems just a short step to the recognition that one could attain the energy, powers, and qualities of a spirit, or even a deity, through the practice of possession. With the arrival of Atimārga/Mantramārga traditions we began to see this realization in practice, where a mingling of concepts involving spirit possession, non-dualism, and the revelation that oneself could become a *bhūtanātha* by mimicking and self-identifying with the deity. Possession thus became understood as a means and efficacious method within

Tantra to realize the *sādhakas* dual goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) and worldly pleasure (*bhoga*) - both of which were beginning to be understood as possible through the lens of possession and concepts surrounding possession, which prevailed in this time period.

IV. CHAPTER 4: THE HISTORY, EVOLUTION, AND REFORMULATION OF DEITY POSSESSION (ĀVEŚA) IN ŚAIVA AND BUDDHIST TANTRAS

A. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In this chapter I will trace the conceptual evolution and discourses surrounding deity possession in the Śaiva and Buddhist Tantric traditions. Due to the immense number of tantric texts, I have limited my examination to select Śaiva and Buddhist Tantras from the medieval period, beginning with what has been called the earliest surviving Śaiva Tantra, the 4th-5th century *Nisvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, and ending with the 11th century Buddhist Tantra, the *Kālacakratāntra*. My focus is particularly on Tantras which discuss and employ *āveśa* and related terms (e.g., *śaktipāta*; *adhiṣṭhana*, *anugraha*, etc.) and practices where possession rites are involved. My overview is generally chronological, though dates for many Tantras are speculative. The bulk of the chapter is largely confined to Śaiva literature, due to the large number of textual sources available in Sanskrit and due to its considerable influence on other Tantric systems and ritual throughout South Asia.

One of the principal goals of all tantric practice, whether Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain, was to attain supreme power and mastery over the cosmos, by uniting with, or becoming, a deity (or enlightened being). This goal led to one of the hallmarks of Tantra, the practice of self-deification - what comes to be known as *samāveśa* among the Śaivas and "Deity Yoga" in Buddhism. A key component of my argument is that *āveśa* (divine possession or embodiment) and related terms, are a central and fundamental feature of Tantric philosophy and practice, one that gives Tantra its specificity. Gavin Flood actually claims that "It would be possible to read the history of religion in South Asia in terms of possession as the central paradigm of a person being entered by a deity which becomes reinterpreted at more 'refined'

cultural levels." ⁷³⁰ In many ways this may be true, though I believe his argument most applies to the history of demonology and Tantra. Since Tantra's origins, various forms of possession (*āveśa*) have been among the primary techniques to aid in their quests toward power and salvation.

What makes this textual material unique is its extensive documented history and abundance of primary scriptures, along with their commentarial traditions, providing us with a diachronic view of *āveśa's* development. This allows us to see how notions and interpretations of the phenomenon evolved and changed over time, particularly in connection with varied soteriologies of the Tantric schools. The data gleaned from this material is also valuable more generally for the field of cross-cultural possession studies. Not only will we see a more expanded notion regarding the self and possession, but also important data on the various ways possession is engendered and how it manifests. Though its use and understanding changes over time, much of the language of possession, as we will see, remains.

I will begin my overview with a summary of the various Śaiva schools, beginning with the Atimārga ascetic traditions which, in many respects, lay the foundations for what is to come in the later tantric traditions. From here, I will move to what becomes the bulk of this chapter, examining primary scriptures from the Mantramārga and Kulamārga traditions. We will see how early concepts surrounding possession and divine embodiment, which first arise among the Atimārga, continue in later tantric traditions, though often reformulated with their own changing and evolving perspectives. In some cases, possession was employed as a tool to gain supernatural powers or knowledge, while in other schools, possession shifts from

⁷³⁰ Flood (2006: 87).

being just a method to the final goal - a religious experience equated with liberation. In many early traditions the language of possession is quite overt and explicit, while in later tantras we see a domestication, sanitization, and refinement of possession rites and concepts, interpreted with new lenses from the ever-evolving cosmological systems developed over the course of Tantric history. With Trika-Kaula schools, for example, *samāveśa* ("co-possession") becomes the preferred term over *āveśa*, and possession becomes reformulated as a completely internal and non-dual phenomenon, where one immerses oneself into their higher nature.

The final section of this chapter will look at how many of these ideas were shared by the Buddhists and Jains, generally paralleling the Śaiva sources though adding their own philosophical interpretations and adaptations to the methods employed.

B. THE ŚAIVAS - THE ATIMĀRGA, MANTRAMĀRGA, AND KULAMĀRGA

Before looking at the Tantric literature itself, I wanted to give a brief summary and categorization of the Śaiva schools which emerged after the Epic period to the medieval period. More extensive and detailed work on this has been done by others, so I will refer the readers to their work in my footnotes.⁷³¹ It is within these schools where many of the elements that come to characterize tantric deity possession coalesce. The Śaiva Tantras held that their special revelation came directly from Śiva or his Goddess consort, and that their texts offered insights and practices that were more powerful than Vedic, Jain, or Buddhist

⁷³¹ See Alexis Sanderson, 1985. "Purity and Power Among the Brahmins of Kashmir," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Carrithers et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Sanderson (1988) and (2009), White (1996; 2000; 2003), Hatley (2012 and 2015) and Hatley, *The Brahmamalatantra and Early Śaiva Cult of Yoginīs*, (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

traditions, their primary competitors at the time. Tantras do not belong solely to the Śaivas, of course, the Vaiṣṇavas had their own corpus of texts known as the *Pāñcarātratantras*, and the Jains and Buddhists had their own large corpora. In most cases, the tantric teachings of these systems were considered esoteric and primarily for initiates, in contrast to exoteric oriented traditions practiced by more orthodox and lay communities. These esoteric teachings often involved more transgressive practices, transcending the orthodox rules of conduct (*ācāra*) associated with Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism, and "right-handed" forms of Śaivism.⁷³²

According to one of the earliest surviving Śaiva Tantras, the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* [NTS] of the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas, the Śaiva initiatory traditions can be divided into two branches or streams (*stotras*) – the Atimārga ("The Transcendent Path") and the Mantramārga ("The Path of Mantras"). The two streams ultimately had the same goal, *śivatvābhivyaktiḥ*, the manifestation of one's innate divinity, "through which one's equality or unity with Śiva is realized".⁷³³ To this end, the early Atimārga (i.e., Pāśupatas) was primarily oriented towards renunciants, similar to other *śramanic* and ascetic traditions of the time, though, theoretically, initiation was supposed to be restricted to Brahmin men.⁷³⁴ The Mantramārga, in contrast, was said to be available to all, regardless of caste, social standing, gender, or religion. Though renunciants and ascetics of various sorts were part of the tradition, the Mantramārga became primarily made up of, and oriented towards, initiated

⁷³² For a more detailed introduction to what "Tantra" is please refer to the excellent works of White (2000 and 2003); Sanderson (1985 and 1988); Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Hatley 2007.

⁷³³ Wallis (2014: 25).

⁷³⁴ See Sanderson, Alexis. 2006. "The Lākulas: new evidence of a system intermediate between Pāñcārthika Pāśupatism and Āgamic Śaivism", *Indian Philosophical Annual* no. 24: 143-217. However, if various fictional accounts of the Kāpālikas are considered true, then females may have also been initiated as well.

householders.⁷³⁵ The Mantramārga presented itself as offering not only liberation (*mokṣa*), the primary goal of the Atimārga, but also *bhoga* (pleasure) and the attainments of *siddhis* (supernatural powers), with a much greater emphasis on ritual and mantra. Both groups, of course, employed mantras, but for the Atimārga it was generally a tool for purification, used only towards their goal of liberation. For the Mantramārga, however, mantras were considered deities themselves, propitiated not just for liberation, but as a means of access to supernatural powers of all kinds and used in protective, apotropaic, therapeutic, destructive, and empowering rites.⁷³⁶

Historically the Mantramārga is later than the Atimārga, although certain elements within the Mantramārga appear to be from a more archaic strata, some which prefigure Tantric Śaivism. Sanderson argues that the Atimārga prioritized the solitary ascetic form of Śiva/Rudra in his archetypal role as the Mahāyogi, which arose from earlier Upaniṣadic and *śramanic* renunciant traditions. However, as we've also seen, Śiva/Rudra *bhūtanātha* form was also operative. The Mantramārga, on the other hand, seem to emphasize this older and more fierce *bhūtanātha* form of Śiva, particularly as Bhairava and his host of possessing female spirits and seizers as seen in the MBH and early medical traditions.⁷³⁷ It is this association with female entities (his *śaktis*) which becomes one of the primary distinctions between the Atimārga and Mantramārga, but also within the Mantramārga itself, between the "right-handed" male-oriented branches (Mantrapīṭha) which maintained a degree of Śiva as

⁷³⁵ Rather than the Atimārgic ascetic/*sādhaka* as the primary seeker of liberation, in the Mantramārga it was the ascetics who sought *siddhis* (the "power-seekers", as Sanderson puts it), while the householders seem to have been most concerned with liberation - see Sanderson (1987).

⁷³⁶ Sanderson (2012, Handout 4: 5)

⁷³⁷ See Sanderson (1988); White (2003); and Hatley (2007).

the Mahāyogi, and the left-handed branches which centered around the feminine aspect (Vidyāpīṭha).

Based on evidence from the tantric literature, Sanderson initially hypothesized that the Atimārga had two principal divisions, the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas (Atimārga I), and its more radical descendants, the Lākulas/Kālāmukhas (Atimārga II).⁷³⁸ More recently, however, Sanderson has become convinced that a third branch also developed from the Lākulas - the even more radical Śakta oriented skull-bearers known as the Kāpālikas, also identified as the Somasiddhāntins (Atimārga III).⁷³⁹ The Kāpālikas, however, have no surviving texts at all, leading many, including David G. White to rightly question whether an order of Kāpālikas actually existed or not. Some scholars believe it may have been a non-institutional and non-sectarian group of itinerant ascetics who had taken specific vows, while others believe it may have just been a trope which became popular in the South Asian imaginary.⁷⁴⁰

The other two groups, the Pāśupatas and Lākulas, do have a surviving corpus, though small in comparison to the massive corpus of the Mantramārga that developed throughout the medieval period (5th-12th century CE). While the Mantramārga drew primarily from Atimārga II and III, evidence from the NTS suggests it coexisted with all three.⁷⁴¹ If the Kāpālikas are added as a third branch, as Sanderson has proposed, then the earlier characterizations of the Atimārga must be adapted, since their Śakta orientation, transgressive nature, and worship of Bhairava do not fit his earlier characterization.

⁷³⁸ Sanderson (1988)

⁷³⁹ Sanderson (2014: 4-14)

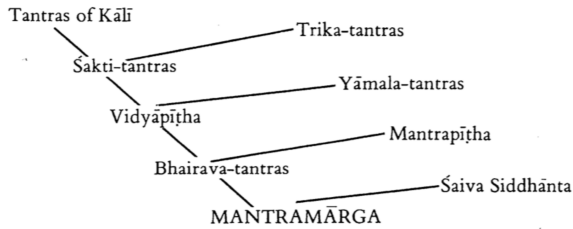
⁷⁴⁰ See White (2003: 152–155) and White, "Review of Indian Esoteric Buddhism, by Ronald M. Davidson", in *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 1 (October 2005): 9.

⁷⁴¹ Sanderson (2012).

The Mantramārga literature can be divided most generally into two branches - the first and largest being the Śaiva Siddhānta corpus, while the second branch consists of varied schools and philosophies collectively known as the *Bhairavāgamas* or *Bhairavatantras*. Broadly speaking, the Siddhānta literature dealt with a more auspicious and tranquil form of Śiva as Sadāśiva, adapted from Śiva's *Mahāyogi* archetype, and its practices were relatively orthodox in comparison to the *Bhairavatantras*, which centered around the fierce Rudra/Bhairava and his consort, and more “impure” forms of worship utilizing taboo substances and transgressive practices. Another primary difference is that the Siddhānta systems are explicitly dualist, while some of the non-Saiddhāntika systems of the *Bhairavatantras* espoused forms of non-dualism. The *Bhairavatantras* saw the Siddhānta as a valid path but saw their own traditions as representing more esoteric teachings and more powerful methods to achieve superior goals. This brand of Mantramārga promised not only individual liberation for initiates, but also the ability to accomplish supernatural effects (*siddhis*), such as the averting or counteracting of calamities (*śānti*) and the warding off or destruction of enemies (*abhicāra*). They further argued that their particular and elaborate form of *dīkṣā* (initiation) eliminated most of the initiate's *karma*, allowing for the possibility of liberation within one's own lifetime.

A further division is seen also within the *Bhairavatantras* themselves – between the corpus of literature known as the Mantrapīṭha (The Seat of Mantras), again more orthodox and Siddhānta oriented, while the Vidyāpīṭha (The Seat of Feminine Spells) was more heterodox and Śakta oriented, the feminine aspect, in many ways, dominating over the masculine principle. In some of these Vidyāpīṭha texts a stricter form of non-dualism is also seen, resulting in the emergence of more extreme and transgressive rites that come to

characterize this branch. The Vidyāpīṭha texts, in turn, are divided into two – the *Śakti Tantras* and the *Yāmala (Union) Tantras*. A final division can be seen with the *Śakti Tantras* – the *Trika Tantras* and the *Kālī Tantras*. See the following graphic from Sanderson, which lays out the various branches and divisions of the Mantramārga⁷⁴² - as Sanderson points out, this structure is hierarchical - “whatever is above and to the left sees whatever is below it and to the right as a lower revelation...As we ascend through these levels...we find the feminine rises stage by stage from subordination to complete autonomy.”⁷⁴³



Recently Sanderson has also proposed that the Kulamārga should be distinguished as a third branch of Śaivism, a later phase that developed around the ninth century and came to pervade many branches of the Mantramārga. These traditions were even more Śakta in orientation and had their own distinct rites, practices, and independent scriptures known as the *Kulaśāstras*, exemplified by texts such as the *Kulasāra*, the *Kulapañcāśikā*, *Kulānanda*, the *Kulakrīḍāvatāra*, as well as older texts such as the *Timirodghāṭana*, the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, and the *Ūrmikaulārṇava*. Sanderson also includes more Śakta-oriented texts such as the *Mālinīvijayottara* and portions of the *Jayadrathayāmala* in this category, many which we will be examining. According to Sanderson, the distinguishing features of these texts include:

1. Initiation through the induction of possession (*āveśaḥ*) by the Goddess and the consumption of ‘impure’ sacramental substances (*caruprāśanam*, *vīrapānam*); 2.

⁷⁴² Sanderson (2012).

⁷⁴³ Sanderson (1988: 669).

Sexual intercourse with a consecrated consort (*dūtī*) as a central element of private worship (*ādyayāgaḥ*); 3. Sanguinary sacrifices; 4. Collective orgiastic rites celebrated by assemblies of initiates and women of low caste (*anuyāgaḥ*, *cakrayāgaḥ*, *mūrtiyāgaḥ*, *cakramelakah*, *vīramelāpaḥ*).⁷⁴⁴

Though this phase appears relatively late, its roots are more ancient as seen in its distinguishing features, which parallel the early practices of the so-called Kāpālikas of Atimārga III, who Sanderson believes were the direct ancestors of the Kulamārga (though, heavily influenced especially by Atimārga II also). Though the Kaulas "inherited and perpetuated the Atimārgic Śākta tradition", various Śaiva branches domesticated and sanitized some of these originally Kāpālikas practices in this later phase.⁷⁴⁵ Abhinavagupta and his brand of Trika-Kaula, for example, completely rejected the external bone accoutrements the Kāpālikas were so well known for. This was not the case, however, among more radically Śākta-oriented branches, such as the followers of the Krama (Kālī) form of Kaula worship, who continued to take on Kāpālika observances (*vratas*).

In some schools and texts, particularly of the Vidyāpīṭha, both Kaula and non-Kaula systems are incorporated. In these cases, we find two sets of practices and initiations, the *tantraprakriyā* and the *kulaparakriyā* (or *kaulikī prakriyā*), "with the understanding that the latter is a higher path reserved for an elite, one that can be accessed only through a higher Kula initiation (*kuladīkṣā*)."⁷⁴⁶ According to Wallis,

...the original tradition saw "Tantric" and "Kaula" as near-antonyms, the former denoting Śiva-centered orthopraxy, controlled ritualism, and a transcendent-focused theology, while the latter denotes Śakti-centered transgression, quasi-shamanic rites of possession, and an immanent-focused theology.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁴ Sanderson (2012 Handout 5: 5)

⁷⁴⁵ See Sanderson (2012 Handout 5: 6-9) and (2014: 57)

⁷⁴⁶ Sanderson (2012 Handout 5: 6-7)

⁷⁴⁷ Wallis (2014: 31).

Before we discuss the so-called Kāpālikas any further, let us first take a closer look at the Atimārga II.

1. ATIMĀRGA II - THE LĀKULAS/KĀLĀMUKHAS

Although Sanderson now holds there are three divisions of the Atimārga, the earliest Śaiva Tantras, such as the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā* [NTS], stated there were just two.⁷⁴⁸ The first division was those that follow the *atyāśrama-vrata* ("the vow which goes beyond"),⁷⁴⁹ referring to the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas of Atimārga I, discussed previously. The second division is known as the *lokātītas*, literally "those beyond the world", the implication being the world of convention and bondage. These *lokātītas* are said to follow the more extreme *mahāpāśupata-vrata* ("The Great Pāśupata Observance" (NTS 4.128cd), which refers to the Lākulas, also known in various texts as the Kālāmukhas ("Black-faced") or Mahāvratas ("followers of the Great Vow"). They were *lokātītas* not only because they presented their practices as more powerful and efficacious than previous schools, but also because of their radical disregard for "conventional notions of ritual purity...intensifying the power of their inauspiciousness".⁷⁵⁰ Sanderson notes importantly, however, that the Lākulas chose not to transcend the convention of celibacy, placing them in between the relatively "orthodox" celibate Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas and their much more radical and transgressive counterparts, the Kāpālikas of Atimārga III.

⁷⁴⁸ *atyāśramavratam khyātam lokātītam ca me śṛṇu* (4.87cd). From the *Niśvāsamukha* portion of the NTS. See Nirajan Kafle, *The Niśvāsamukha, the Introductory Book of the Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā: Critical edition, with an introduction and annotated translation appended by Śivadharmaśaṅgraha 5-9*. (PhD Dissertation, Leiden University, 2015) for Sanskrit passages.

⁷⁴⁹ Meaning going beyond the Vedic *varṇāśrama-dharmas*

⁷⁵⁰ Sanderson (2006: 166)

The Lākulas/Kālāmukhas, like the so-called Kāpālikas, practiced the *kapālavrata* (vow of the skull), which was central to both systems. A characterization of this is seen in the tenth century Vaiṣṇava *Āgamaprāmāṇya*, by Yāmunācārya, who derides the unorthodox nature of the Kālāmukhas, stating:

The Kālāmukhas too are outside the Veda; [for] they claim to be able to obtain miraculously all that they desire, whether visible or invisible, simply by eating from a bowl fashioned from a human skull, bathing in the ashes of the dead, eating them [mixed with their food?], carrying a club, installing a pot containing alcoholic liquor and worshipping their deity in it - practices which all the *śāstras* condemn.⁷⁵¹

While the Lākulas/Kālāmukhas maintained some of the same vows as their forerunners, the Pāñcārthikas, (for example, they also had their own vow they called *unmattavrata*, paralleling stage two of the Pāñcārthikas⁷⁵²), it was really the *kapālavrata* which set them apart and paved the way for much of what was to come in the Vidyāpīṭha. While some Pāśupatas may have donned the celestial skeletal ornaments in their efforts to imitate Śiva as the Brahmin-slayer,⁷⁵³ with the *kapālavrata* vow of the Lākulas/Kālāmukhas, their use becomes explicit and institutionalized in later tantric sources as “The Six Seals” (*ṣaṇ-mudrā*), consisting of necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and a hair-pin, all made from human bone, along with a sacred thread made from human hair of a corpse.⁷⁵⁴ The final

⁷⁵¹ Translation and Sanskrit from Sanderson (2006: 183).

⁷⁵² Sanderson (2006: 209). "This, according to Abhinavagupta's commentary on *Bharatanāṅhyaśāstra*, was the practice of Lākulas in the advanced 'Paramayogin' stage of their practice."

⁷⁵³ As mentioned in previous chapters, this association with the cremation ground is found within the MBH itself where Rudra is described as and known as the mighty “Lord of the Gaṇas” (*mahāgaṇapatiṃ prabhum*), “the madman of the cremation ground (*śmaśānavāsinaṃ drptaṃ*), who wears a "garland of skulls” (*kapālamālina*, MBh 10.6.33c), holds a Skull-staff (*khaṭvāṅgadhāriṇaṃ*) and smeared with ash (*bhasma*). In the same line he is described as an ascetic whose hair is either shaven or matted and is celibate. MBh 10.7.4: *śmaśānavāsinaṃ drptaṃ mahāgaṇapatiṃ prabhum | khaṭvāṅgadhāriṇaṃ muṇḍaṃ jaṭilaṃ brahmacāriṇaṃ ||*

See also MBh 12.47.52 and 13.14.153c for other references. Elsewhere in MBh 13.17.32-33 we also find mention of his residing in the cremation ground (*śmaśānacārī*) and again disguising oneself as a madman (*unmattaveśapracchannah*) and being the lord of the “*khacaras* and *gocaras*” (*bhagavān khacaro gocaro*)

⁷⁵⁴ See David Lorenzen, *Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972): 78-79 for summary of myth Śiva as the Brahmin-slayer.

“ornament” was the smearing of the *sādhaka*’s body with ashes from the funeral pyre, which was in contrast to the Pāñcārthikas who bathed in ashes from a regular ritual fires.⁷⁵⁵

It has been speculated that one of the possible origins of this *vrata* lies in ancient law texts, such as the *Dharmasāstras*.⁷⁵⁶ According to these early sources, a criminal guilty of brahminicide was known as a *kapālin*, “one who carries a skull”, who could only expunge this sin by removing themselves from society for twelve years while living in a cremation ground, begging for food, and carrying a skull-staff and skull-bowl, among other acts.⁷⁵⁷ In the *Viṣṇu-smṛti* this penance is explicitly called the *mahāvratā*, a name, as we’ve seen, often used for the Lākulas and their vows.⁷⁵⁸ The Lākulas adoption of this vow makes sense if we recall the inviting of abuse in stage two of the Pāñcārthika Pāsupatas. As we saw, Pāsupatas invite abuse since one of its results is an accumulation of positive karmic and religious merit, in turn strengthening their supernatural powers (*siddhis*). This later *kapālavratā*, of course, would have been considered a much more radical vow since the killing of a brahmin is the most heinous of crimes, transforming the followers of this penance into the lowest of all criminals and thus inviting the most censure. Using this logic, we can suppose that this more extreme practice may have been considered a more efficacious method to achieving their desired *siddhis*. As Lorenzen states:

⁷⁵⁵ See Lorenzen (1972: 2-4). According to Wallis (2014 note 155), Sanderson gave him the following sources for *ṣaṅ-mudrā* which include the *Svacchandoddyota* ad 3.2b; *Brahmayāmala* 21.104; Yāmunācārya’s *Āgama-prāmāṇya* p. 93; *Somaśambhu-paddhati* vol. 3, p. 681n7; and many passages in the *Jayadratha-yāmala*. Sanderson (2014 note 170) states one of the earliest references may be found in the Chinese translation of the “Bodhisattva Womb Sūtra” (*Pusa chu tai jing*), 384-417 CE, which mentions ascetics who clothe themselves in bones and make their food vessels out of bone.

⁷⁵⁶ See Lorenzen (1972: 74-77) for various sources

⁷⁵⁷ In the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 3.243 description of this penance, the vow-holder is called a *kapālin*, “one who carries a skull.” See Lorenzen (1972: 75). Sanderson (2012) has pointed to a number of other sources which describe Brahmanical penance for brahminicide as well: *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* 2.1.2-3; *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 1.24.11-20 and 2.28.21-1.29; *Gautamadharmasūtra* 3.4.4-5; *Mahābhārata* 12.36.2c-3; *Dharmasāstras Manusmṛti* 11.71 and *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 3.243

⁷⁵⁸ See Lorenzen (1972: 74).

They were at the same time the holiest of all ascetics and the lowest of all criminals. As in the case of the *dombi* (and the Kapālin) of Kānhapāda's songs, that which is lowest in the realm of appearance becomes a symbol for the highest in the realm of the spirit.⁷⁵⁹

Thanks to the recent publication of the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā* [NTS], we now have a clearer picture of the Lākulas practices and beliefs as seen in its *Niśvāsamukha*, one of the earliest texts to give a detailed description of this group:

Hear now the Lokāṭīta. When he has been initiated after being touched (*ālabdhah*) with the five *Guhyas* [mantras = *Brahmamantras*] he should wander, carrying a skull-topped staff and a skull[- bowl], with his hair in matted braids or shaved bald, with a sacred thread made from [twisted strands of human] hair [taken from a corpse], adorned with [a chaplet of] human heads [carved from bone], wearing only a loin cloth, his body dusted with ash, and embellished with the wondrous adornments [of bone]. Devoted to Rudra, he should consider the whole world as Rudra, holding fast to his observance. He may eat and drink anything. No action is forbidden to him. He should remain immersed in contemplation of Rudra, (thinking) “None but Rudra can save me. He is the deity supreme.” Having understood the Eleven Levels [of Reality] (*adhvan*), he should practice [this vow], free from inhibition (*nirviśaṅka*).⁷⁶⁰

Following this passage, the various levels of reality (*adhvan*) are described, from the lowest hell (Avīci) up to the world of Dhruva (Rudra), which the officiant is supposed to meditate upon and then ritually purify. The text continues:

Then [when he has] purified that hierarchy, he [the guru] should initiate [him] by means of the word ‘*atha*’. Initiated through the descent of that word (*athaśabdanipātena*), he will cease to be a soul in bondage (*apaśur bhavet*). Provided that [the initiate] maintains the observances, he attains liberation [at death], even if he is a sinner. Of this there is no doubt. I have now explained the *lokāṭīta*.⁷⁶¹

Of interest in these passages is the mention of being "touched" (*ālabdhah*) with the five "secret" mantras, the purification of the *tattvas* (i.e., here known as *adhvans*), and the "Descent of the Word" (*śabdanipātena*), all ideas, as we will see, which continue in later

⁷⁵⁹ See Lorenzen (1972: 77).

⁷⁶⁰ *Niśvāsamukha* 4.88d-92, Sanskrit and translation based on Kafle (2015: 281) and Sanderson (2012 Handout 2: 8-9).

⁷⁶¹ *Niśvāsamukha* 4.97-98c. Sanskrit and translation based on Kafle (2015: 282)

Mantramārga scriptures. We also learn in section 12 of the *Niśvāsaguhya* that the *mantras* employed are none other than the five *brahmantras* of the Pāñcārthika Pāśupatas, used by the Lākulas in their own quest for union with Rudra: "Initiation, gnosis and religious observance, certainty about the supernatural powers of the [five Brahma]mantras, and religious observance with a view to [obtaining] the power of the [five Brahma]mantras, lead to unity with Rudra."⁷⁶²

Sanderson suggests that these rites correlate with initiations of the Mantramārga, which we will examine in detail shortly. He believes the initial "touch" by the *brahmantras*, a *nyāsa*-like rite which we can assume was done by a guru, corresponds to the preliminary initiation of the Mantramārga known as the *samaya-dīkṣā*, when a guru transforms his hand into the "Hand of Śiva" (*Śiva-hasta*), which is used to purify the disciple for further initiation. The Lākula initiation proper, involving the purification of the various levels of reality (*adhvan*) and the "Descent of the Word", similarly corresponds with the Mantramārga's liberating initiation (*nirvāṇadīkṣa*).⁷⁶³ As we will see shortly, *nirvāṇadīkṣa* in the Mantramārga usually involves the conquest of the *tattvas* (*tattvajaya*) and *śaktipāta* (The Descent of Power) and/or *āveśa*. Sanderson believes the word "*atha*", which is the first word in the *Pāśupatasūtras*, became understood as a symbol of Śiva's Power and thus the expression *athasābdanipātena* was synonymous with *śivaśaktinipātena*, also found in the *Niśvāsanaya* of the NTS: *śivaśaktinipātena dīkṣā jñānaṃ prayacchati* - "Initiation bestows

⁷⁶² *dīkṣā jñānaṃ ca caryā ca mantrabhūtinirṇayam | mantrabhūtārthacaryā ca rudrasāyogyagāminī || Niśvāsaguhya* 12.1–6. Sanskrit and translation from Andrea Acri, "The Śaiva Atimārga in the Light of Niśvāsaguhya 12.1–22ab", *Cracow Indological Studies*, 16, (2014) 12-13. Acri (2014: 11) also notes, "The five Brahma-mantras constitute the early Mantric substratum common to both Atimārga and Mantramārga Śaivism yet, it is the earliest sources that devote to them the highest attention. For instance, each one of the five sections making up the PS [Pāśupata Sūtras] is closed by an invocation to the aspect of Śiva characterized in the respective *Brahmantra*. The five mantras remain central in the NTS, especially in *Niśvāsaguhya* 12–15."

⁷⁶³ On *samaya*- and *nirvana-dīkṣa* see also Richard H. Davis, *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 89-92.

knowledge through the Descent of Śiva's Power".⁷⁶⁴ We will return to both these rites in the next section.

We should note also a few Atimārga ritual texts recently discovered by Diwakar Acharya that further help to characterize Lākula/Kālāmukha doctrine and practice - the *Prāyaścittavidhi*, *Pātravidhi*, *Anteṣṭividhi*, and *Samskāraavidhi*. These manuscripts have been dated to the 14th century, but portions of it may be as early as the 4th century CE.⁷⁶⁵ The *Samskāraavidhi*, for example, states that only those who undergo initiation are authorized to practice this system. This is described as a process that begins when someone is "impelled" (*pracoditaḥ*) by Śiva himself to approach a *guru* and become initiated.⁷⁶⁶ Wallis notes that similar language was used in Kauṇḍinya's 4th-5th century commentary on the *Pāśupatasūtra* (the *Pañcārtha*), when describing the meeting of Lakulīśa and his first disciple, Kuśika: "Then the blessed Kuśika, impelled by Rudra, approached the master."⁷⁶⁷ In verse 21 of the *Samskāraavidhi*, we also find a *guru* stating: "If this brahmin is purified by a fall of Śiva's glance (*śivadrṣṭinipāta*), then by your command, O best of gods, I will initiate this best of brahmins."⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁴ See Sanderson (2006) and (2012: Handout 2) for more on these connections between the Ātimārga and Mantramārga.

⁷⁶⁵ See Acharya "The Samskāraavidhi: A Manual on the Transformatory Rite of the Lakulīśa-Pāśupatas." In *Mélanges Tantriques à La Mémoire d'Hélène Brunner*, ed. Goodall et al., (Pondicherry: Institut français de Pondichéry, 2007a): 27, as well as Acharya, "The Anteṣṭividhi: A Manual on the Last Rite of the Lakulīśa Pāśupatas" in *Journal Asiatique*, 298.1, (2010): 133–156 and Acharya, "The Pātravidhi: A Lakulīśa Pāśupata Manual on Purification and Use of the Initiate's Vessel", in *Samskṛta-sādhutā: Goodness of Sanskrit. Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok N. Aklujkar*, Ed. Chikafumi Watanabe et al., (Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2012) for these texts.

⁷⁶⁶ *yo jijñāsati nānyāni śivenaiva pracoditaḥ | upasanno guroḥ samyak taṃ parīkṣeta brāhmaṇam || 10||* See Acharya (2007a: 29-30) for Sanskrit passages.

⁷⁶⁷ *ato rudra-pracoditaḥ kuśika-bhagavān abhyāgatya cārye |* See Wallis (2014: 156) for Sanskrit passage and more references of this nature.

⁷⁶⁸ *śivadrṣṭinipātenapūto 'yaṃ yadibrāhmaṇaḥ | tavājñayā suraśreṣṭha samskaromi dvijottamam || 21||* Acharya (2007a: 30). Translation by Wallis (2014: 156)

From these verses, it appears that early in the Atimārga there was an idea that a sort of divine intervention by Śiva/Rudra was involved during the initial awakening of the individual, causing them to be seekers. Sanderson and Wallis argue that these verses, including the "Descent of the Word" (*śabdanipātena*) from the *Niśvāsamukha*, "...parallels and presages the Tantric doctrine of *śaktipāta*, according to which someone conceives faith in the Śaiva path and its rites, and approaches a guru, due to God's power of grace "falling" upon him (*śaktipāta*)."⁷⁶⁹ As we will see, *śaktipāta*, the "Descent of Power", becomes a fundamental feature in later Śaiva tantric initiations and shares similar conceptual territory with the notion of *āveśa*. This is particularly the case with the "Descent of Śiva's Glimpse" (*śivadr̥ṣṭinipāta*) in the *Samskāraavidhi*, which both "impels" the seeker and qualifies him for initiation. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was often through the glimpse that various entities could enter and possess other bodies. While it is not explicit here, I do believe possession discourses may have informed these early conceptualizations and are significant to understanding what is being implied here. We will return to these ideas as we continue examining the Mantramārga texts.

As seen in *Niśvāsamukha* 4.97-98c, the ultimate aim for these Atimārga adepts was a mystical identification or communion with the archetypal *bhūtanātha* and *mahāyogin* Rudra. To this end, early Atimārga practitioners tried to emulate and identify with Rudra/Śiva by taking on vows such as the *kapālavrata* in imitation of the Lord's own mythological acts. In this way, these early Śaiva ascetics believed they could be graced by their Lord and partake in his qualities and attributes, eventually achieving full identification with Him at the time of death.⁷⁷⁰ Let us now examine the Atimārga III in more detail.

⁷⁶⁹ Wallis (2014: 157)

⁷⁷⁰ See Acharya (2010: 133–156).

2. ATIMĀRGA III - THE KĀPĀLIKAS/SOMASIDDHĀNTINS AND POSSESSION

As stated earlier, Sanderson has argued that the Kāpālikas and Somasiddhāntins (also known as the Mahāvratins) were likely identical and constituted a third more radical sect of the Atimārga, obliterating all social constructs as a radical revolt against Brahmanical values and laws.⁷⁷¹ According to Sanderson, the Kāpālikas added and further developed the following elements to Lākula/Kālāmukha repertoire: (a) sanguinary practices for the propitiation of the fierce gods Bhairava and Cāmuṇḍā (b) initiation through the consumption of consecrated liquor (c) erotic ritual with a female companion (d) the notion that supernatural powers may be attained through yogically extracting the vital essences of living beings (*parakāyapraveśavidyā*) and finally, (e) the centrality of states of possession (*āveśa*).⁷⁷² As stated, these parallel much of the rites of the later Kulamārga, who Sanderson believes are the direct descendants of the Kāpālikas. Sadly though, no surviving Kāpālika/Somasiddhānta scriptures exist except for a variety of passages that Sanderson believes may have been redacted into various Mantramārga/Kulamārga scriptures, some of which we will be examining shortly. However, before getting into any primary scriptures, which will be the bulk of this chapter, I wanted to mention some descriptions of Kāpālika and Kāpālika-like figures in the fictional literature of the early medieval period, since some of this material constitutes the earliest references to them.

⁷⁷¹ Sanderson (2014: 57-58 fn. 220).

⁷⁷² Sanderson (2012: Handout 3: 1).

THE KĀPĀLIKAS IN SECONDARY AND FICTIONAL LITERATURE

The earliest reference to the Kāpālikas is perhaps found in King Hāla's *Sattasaī*, which has been tentatively dated to the 3rd to 5th centuries CE.⁷⁷³ In this we find a verse describing a female Kāpālika "who incessantly besmears herself with ashes from the funeral pyre of her lover".⁷⁷⁴ Another reference is found in Agastyasimha's 5th century commentary on the Jain *Dasaveyāliyasutta*, where Kāpālikas are grouped together with so-called *dravyabhikṣus*, or "ascetics who do not practice celibacy".⁷⁷⁵ From the sixth century onward Kāpālika references become more commonplace, though usually referenced indirectly and depicted negatively in regards to their behavior, doctrine and practice. In most of these cases, it is often difficult to separate fictitious and biased opinions from fact.

One of the earliest and most famous descriptions of a Kāpālika comes from the seventh-century Bāṇabhaṭṭa who wrote the fiction novels *Kādambarī* and *Harṣacarita* ("The Story of King Harṣa").⁷⁷⁶ In the *Kādambarī*, we find a fascinating, but comical, portrait of a decrepit Atimārga ascetic from South India (*draviḍa-dhārmika*) who is said to have "written down the doctrine of Mahākāla [Śiva], which is the ancient teaching of the Mahāpāsupatas,"

⁷⁷³ Acri, "Kāpālikas" in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions, Encyclopedia of Indian Religions Vol. 1*, edited by P. Jain et al, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022).

⁷⁷⁴ Lorenzen (1972: 13).

⁷⁷⁵ Gāthā 237 in Dundas, *The Jains*, (London: Routledge, 2003): 6.

⁷⁷⁶ According to the traditional account, it is believed that Bāṇabhaṭṭa was a great devotee of the goddess Caṇḍika. Because of his jealousy of a contemporary poet's reputation, he is said to have gone to a temple of Caṇḍika where he composed the *Caṇḍisataka*, a poem about the Goddess's greatness and cut off his own hands and feet in order to propitiate her. The Goddess Caṇḍika, greatly pleased with his devotion and skill in poetry, restored his limbs. See Sharma, *Bāṇabhaṭṭa: A Literary Study*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968): 32. Bāṇa was also said to have wandered around greatly and was associated with a motley crew of friends including Sudras, a Bhashakavi (vernacular poet), an ascetic widow, a betel-bearer, a snake-doctor, a mendicant, a Śaiva devotee, a magician, a Jain monk, a treasure-seeker, a juggler, a goldsmith, a scribe, a painter, two singers, a drummer and piper, a dancing girl, a dicer, and a gambler. See Cowell and Thomas, *The Harṣa-carita of Bāṇa*, (London: Albemarle, 1897): 33.

along with a collection of manuscripts “containing magical spells, mystical formulas, and incantations which were written in letters of red lac on palm leaves tinged with smoke.”⁷⁷⁷ He is said to have been the superintendent of a Śabara tribal temple dedicated to the fierce goddess Caṇḍikā, whose “religion is offering human flesh” and contained “heaps of skulls (that were) like fruits”.⁷⁷⁸ We come to learn that the disabled ascetic was crippled primarily due to his own actions - foolish penances, fights with wild animals and travelers, snake bites from sleeping in dangerous places, and his failed attempts at alchemy (*dhātuvāda/rasāyana*), resulting in his ill health. Furthermore, he was said to be obsessed with obtaining supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and “superstitious” beliefs - including his search for the nine treasures of Kubera by using an eye-salve (which eventually made him blind), a belief that being possessed by *piśācas* (*praveśa piśācena*) will lead him to the netherworlds to find more treasure, and a “foolish desire”, according to the text, to become the lover (and controller) of a Yakṣa maiden.⁷⁷⁹ He also seems to have been an exorcist of sorts, as his ears (*cipaṭī* or nose?) were said to be flattened by possessing ghouls (*piśācagr̥hītakaiḥ*) who would slap him whenever he threw incanted white mustard seeds (*abhimantritasiddhārthaka*) at them.⁷⁸⁰

In Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s *Harṣacarita*, we are introduced to King Harṣa’s guru, another Atimārga figure said to be from South India, by the name of Bhairavācārya.⁷⁸¹ Like the ascetic from the *Kādambarī*, Bhairavācārya is said to live on the margins of society near an old temple dedicated to the Mother Goddesses (*Mātrikās*) and was famous for his “excellence

⁷⁷⁷ Lorenzen sees Bāṇa’s account of these manuscripts as the “earliest clear reference to Tantric texts” found in literature Lorenzen (1972: 16-18) and C. M. Ridding’ translation of *The Kādambarī of Bāna*, (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1896): 288.

⁷⁷⁸ Lorenzen (1972: 16) and Ridding (1896: 31).

⁷⁷⁹ Ridding (1896: 21). We should note again the very early mention of *piśācillikās* in Buddhist Vinaya texts such *Cullavagga* texts, which referred to a group of *śramanic* ascetics who were described as “*piśāca*-worshippers” and carried begging bowls made of skulls. See Dutt (1924: 45) and Chakravarti (1930: 123-124)

⁷⁸⁰ Ridding (1896: 21)

⁷⁸¹ He ruled parts of North India from 606-648 CE

in multifarious sciences”, referring to his knowledge of alchemy, magic, *mantra*, *yantra*, and *tantra*.⁷⁸² It was due to his great powers that he was invited to meet the king, a common way, as evidenced by the many inscriptions throughout South Asia, that many *tantrikas* entered the royal world. In contrast to the *Kādambarī*, Bhairavācārya is depicted as a respected and revered ascetic, suggesting that Bāṇa’s sympathetic portrayal meant that “by the seventh century tantric religion, even of the so-called ‘left-hand observance’ (*vamacara*) type, was accepted and supported by many persons of learning and high social status.”⁷⁸³

In the *Harṣacarita*, Bhairavācārya is depicted as performing mortuary rites, and one of his disciples was said to carry a begging bowl made of a skull (*bhikṣā-kāpālika*). At the time Lorenzen wrote his book, he argued this character was a Kāpālika, though no such explicit reference is made in the text. This was because early Śaiva texts, such as the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, were not available at the time and thus most scholars could only speculate about their identity. As we've seen, however, the Kāpālikas were not the only ascetics to observe the *kapālavrata*, nor were mortuary rites exclusively Kāpālika. In fact, a latter line in the *Harṣacarita* states that Bhairavācārya “had observed the vow of celibacy since childhood” (*kumārabrahmacāriṇam*), and around “his shoulder hung a Brahmanical thread”, qualities which make this figure much closer to the Lākulas/Kālāmukhas rather than the so-called Kāpālikas.⁷⁸⁴

In the *Harṣacarita*, Bhairavācārya performs a cremation ground rite, which Bāṇa calls the *Mahākālahṛdaya* (“The Heart of Lord Mahākāla”). Although an exact rite like the *Mahākālahṛdaya* is not found in any tantric text, the great vividness in detail suggests that

⁷⁸² Cowell and Thomas (1897: 86).

⁷⁸³ Lorenzen (1972: 22).

⁷⁸⁴ Translation from Cowell and Thomas, (1897: 93; 265). See Lorenzen (1972: 21) note on Cowell and Thomas' mistranslation of *kumārabrahmacāriṇam*.

the author likely based his description on some real ceremony. The story states that the ritual was held on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight and presents Bhairavācārya at the center of a great circle (*maṇḍala*) of white ashes, seated on the breast of a corpse that was anointed with red sandalwood paste and wearing red garlands, clothes and ornaments. Bhairavācārya himself is described as wearing a turban, unguents, amulets, and garments of all black, and had begun a fire rite in the corpse's mouth, with offerings of black sesame seeds. The rite, of course, resembles various corpse practices (e.g., *sava* or *vetāla sādhanas*) we've seen in tantric grimoires, though in this case the invoked spirit is a Nāga named Śrīkaṇṭha. We are further told that Bhairavācārya's goal for this mortuary rite was to be transformed into a *vidyādhara*, which he achieves thanks to a boon from the Goddess Śrī Lakṣmī: "...by the words of the goddess and the full performance of the rite, instantly [he] acquired the hair-lock, diadem, earring, necklace, armllet, girdle, hammer, and sword, [and] became a *vidyādhara*", flying into the sky at the end of the story.⁷⁸⁵

These *siddhi*-oriented forms of tantric practice become quite common in the Tantric literature, and may represent a continuity with earlier proto-tantric magical practices of diverse groups involved in *bhūtavidyā*, healing, exorcism, etc. It was these earlier systems which become integrated into tantric soteriological systems which aimed for *siddhis* and liberation. As Hatley states, "This pursuit of power was, in the broadest sense, a quest for superhuman agency: to embody the powers of deities."⁷⁸⁶

Between the 7th and 13th centuries of the common era we see a flood of literature from the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains involving Kāpālika figures, trying to achieve such goals. We find, for example, in Bhavabhūti's fantasy-drama, the *Mālatīmādhava* (8th century CE), a

⁷⁸⁵ Translation from Cowell and Thomas (1897: 98).

⁷⁸⁶ Hatley (2007: 99).

virtuous Buddhist nun named Saudāminī, who gave up her Buddhist robes and is said to have studied the path of the Kāpālikas at Śripārvata (Śrisailam, Andhra Pradesh). She is said to have excelled quickly in her practice and obtained many supernatural powers (*siddhis*), particularly the power of flight (*khecari*), making her one of the first Buddhist *Siddhas* ever mentioned in Indian literature. Her protagonists are the evil Kāpālika Aghoraghaṇṭa, and his female Kāpālīni consort, Kapālakuṇḍalā, who are also said to have gained the *siddhi* of flight. Kapālakuṇḍalā states:

Beholding by the power of resorption the eternal Supreme Spirit in the form of Siva [who], superimposed upon my six members [and] placed in the six *cakras*, manifests himself in the midst of the heart lotus here I have now come without experiencing any fatigue from my flight by virtue of my extraction of the five nectars of people, [which I have affected] by the gradual filling of the channels.”⁷⁸⁷

From the text we see that Kapālakuṇḍalā's ability to fly was achieved through yogic methods, specifically the possession and extraction of the vital fluids from other living beings. This is, of course, precisely the method used by the *yoginīs* and *sādhakas* of the Netra Tantra discussed in the previous chapter. Although a fantasy story, it is apparent that Bhavabhūti was aware of similar rites that were *en vogue* at the time.

Kāpālikas often become stock figures as villains in fictional literature of this period, due to their radical and transgressive nature. This is seen, for example, with another contemporaneous South Indian play known as the *Mattavilāsa*, a one-act farce attributed to King Mahendravarman of the Pallava dynasty (600-630 CE). Here again we are presented with a satirical view of a drunken Kāpālika adept, Satyasoma, accompanied by his Kāpālīnī

⁷⁸⁷ *iyam aham idānīm— nityam nyastaṣaḍaṅgacakranihitam hr̥tpadmamadyoditam paśyantī śiva rūpiṇam layavaśād ātmānam abhyāgatā | nāḍīnām udayakrameṇa jagataḥ pañcāmṛtākaraṇād aprāptotpatanaśramā vighatayanty agre nabhombhomucaḥ || 2 || Mālatīmādhava act 5, verse 2, Sanskrit verses, in M. R. Kale, Mālatīmādhava by Bhavabhuti with the commentary of Jagaddhara, (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1967): 95-96. Translation by White (1998: 196).*

consort, Devasomā. The Kāpālikas are depicted in this drama as hedonists, addicted to sex, liquor and eating meat, a mischaracterization of their unorthodox practices.⁷⁸⁸ Smith also notes that in the prologue to this play we find one of the earliest uses of the term *bhāvāveśa* ("divine possession"). The main Kāpālika character is said to be “one whose pilgrimage through the three worlds is characterized by many moods (*rasa*) as a result of immersion in (divine) experience (*bhāvāveśavaśād*).”⁷⁸⁹

In Kṣemāvara’s 10th century *Caṇḍakauśika*, we find another description of a Kāpālika *tantrika*, who comes to a cemetery in search of “buried treasure” and employs a *vetāla* (animated corpse) to carry a “treasure of minerals”, used for alchemical purposes.⁷⁹⁰ Other medieval texts including Kāpālika figures was the popular *Kathāsaritsāgara* [KSS] (“The Ocean of Rivers of Stories”),⁷⁹¹ Kalhaṇa’s *Rājatarangiṇi* (“River of Kings”), the 11th century play *Prabodhacandrodaya* [PC] (The Rise of the Moon of Awakening” of Kṛṣṇamiśra, and Rājaśekhara’s Prakrit drama *Karpūramañjarī*, among others.⁷⁹²

Kṛṣṇamiśra’s portrayal in the PC is particularly interesting, describing a Kāpālika named Somasiddhānta who is said to follow “the precepts of Mahābhairava” (*mahābhairavānuśāsane; Act III*) and dwells in a cremation ground (*śmaśānavāsī*), ornamented with a beautiful necklace made of human bones (*narāsthimālākṛtacārubhūṣaṇaḥ*), while eating from a human skull (*nṛkapālabhojanaḥ*).⁷⁹³ In

⁷⁸⁸ I.e., the five M’s: liquor, meat, fish, parched grain, and sexual intercourse (*madya, māṃsa, matsya, mudrā, and maithuna*)

⁷⁸⁹ Smith (2006: 356). We find this usage in later tantric and bhakti texts as well, as we shall soon see.

⁷⁹⁰ Dasgupta, Sibani, *The Caṇḍa-kauśika of Ārya Kṣemīśvara*, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1962): 193.

⁷⁹¹ Which also contains the popular *Vetālapañchaviṃśati*, “The Twenty-five Tales of the Vetāla.”

⁷⁹² See White (2003) and Lorenzen (1972) for more references

⁷⁹³ Act III, v. 12ab in Kapstein, *Prabodhacandrodaya*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009). Many of the characters seem to be named after their particular religious view – in essence being a personification of their doctrine.

the story, Somasiddhānta himself offers a picture of their grisly religious practices and soteriology:

Offering into the sacrificial fire oblations of human flesh augmented by brains, intestines, and fat, we break our fast by drinking fermented liquor [from a vessel] made from the skull of a brahmin. Our duty is to worship the deity Mahābhairava with offerings of human victims bright with the flood of gore that gushes from their thick freshly cut necks... I worship the consort of Śiva together with the horde of spirits summoned by the sound of my rattling damaru drum with streams of blood full of foaming bubbles gushing from the necks that I have cut with this fearsome sword... There is no evidence of pleasure without the objects of the senses. How could one seek a liberation devoid of awareness of bliss, a condition of the soul in which its state is like that of a stone. The consort of the Goddess Mrḍānī has taught [in our scriptures] that one rejoices in the state of liberation when embodying Śiva one is blissfully embraced by one's beloved as the simulacrum of Pārvatī.⁷⁹⁴

Among the Jain literature, there is also the *Ākhyānakamaṇikośa* by Nemicandra, who depicts a *mahāvratin* named Ghorasīva (“Terrible Śiva) as being “an expert in the control of Grahas, Piśācas, and Dākinīs, in curing fevers and other illnesses with herbal amulets, in propitiating Yakṣiṇīs, in alchemy (*dhātuvādah*), in counteracting poisons, and in all the aggressive magical arts.”⁷⁹⁵ All of this evidence shows that by the medieval period we have a very developed characterization of the so-called Kāpālikas' practices, appearance, and occult arts, which included the donning of bone accoutrements, cremation ground rites, the use of transgressive substances and practices, sexual rites, magic and healing/exorcistic rites involving the manipulation of spirit beings, animal and human sacrifice, alchemy, and the attainment of supernatural powers. While some of these depictions were surely mischaracterizations, there are also kernels of truth - which will become apparent when we examine some of the primary scriptures.

⁷⁹⁴ PC Act III v. 13-16 in Kapstein (2009). Translation by Sanderson (2012: handout 3; 2-3).

⁷⁹⁵ Sanderson (2012: Handout 6: 20)

THE MEDICAL TANTRAS: THE BHŪTA, BĀLA, AND GARUḌA TANTRAS

The Kāpālikas' association with these sorts of occult practices and arts did not just belong to the domain of fiction and may have made up portions of the now lost *Bhūtatantras*, direct descendants of the diverse *bhūtavidyā* scriptures and traditions which, as we've seen, have existed in some form since at least the time of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad [7.1.2].⁷⁹⁶ Kashmiri Śaiva theologian Abhinavagupta (975-1025 CE) stated that the *Bhūtatantras* made up part of the “Western Stream” (*paścimasrotaḥ*) of the scriptural corpus of the Mantramārga associated with those “who live in cremation grounds adorned with chaplets of skull-bones” (*kapālamālābharanāḥ śmaśānapadavāsinah*).⁷⁹⁷

As seen in the previous chapter, classical Āyurvedic texts classify *bhūtavidyā* into three types, which were more or less adopted in the medical Tantras as well - the *Bhūtatantras*, the *Bāla/Kumāratantras*, and the *Garuḍatantras*. The *Bhūtatantras*, as the name suggests, dealt primarily with exorcising afflictive spirits of all types, while the *Kumāratantras* (“Rituals Related to Childhood”) dealt with child-rearing (*kaumarabhṛtya*), including cures to fight off child-seizers who may possess and harm children. The final group, the *Garuḍatantras* focuses on curing snake bites and illnesses due to poison.⁷⁹⁸ The Śaiva scripture *Śrīkaṇṭhī*, a work frequently cited by Abhinavagupta’s disciple Kṣemarāja (ca 1000–1050 C.E.), provides a list of twenty *Bhūtatantras* (alongside a list of twenty-eight *Garuḍatantras*) and a brief, but fascinating insight into the subjects covered by them: exorcism (*Karaṅka, Caṇḍa, Bhūtrāsa, Śikhārāva Tantras*), alchemy (*Muṇḍamālā*), finding

⁷⁹⁶ See previous chapters for more on this

⁷⁹⁷ Sanderson (2012: Handout 3: 5) states these characterizations come from the *Mālinīvijayavārttika* 1.232ab

⁷⁹⁸ Michael Slouber has recently done some groundbreaking work on the latter in his 2017 book *Early Tantric Medicine: Snakebite, Mantras, and Healing in the Garuḍa Tantras*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

and attracting treasures (*Karkoṭa*), curing seizure by planets, fevers, and other illnesses (*Khadgarāvaṇa*, *Gharghara*, *Ghorāṭṭahāsa*), the use of medicinal herbs (*Caṇḍāsīdhāra*), and aggressive rituals (*Ucchiṣṭa*).⁷⁹⁹

Michael Slouber has argued that the medical Tantras as a distinct literature likely arose around the late Gupta era (ca. sixth century CE) and blossomed until roughly the tenth century, a timeframe which parallels the emergence and development of the Mantramārga. The earliest Śaiva and Buddhist Tantras, including the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, *Brahmayāmala*, *Netratantra* and *Mañjusriyamūlakalpa*, for example, heavily incorporate material from these medical tantras, showing the interdependence of these two traditions.⁸⁰⁰ In most of the surviving fragments of *bhūtatantra* literature we have today, the three branches are found together, since all involve healing practices and possession to a degree. The 10th century *Kriyākālaguṇottara* [KKG], portions of which are found in Kṣemarāja's commentary on the *Netratantra*, is an example of one of these early tantric compendiums, incorporating all three branches throughout its text.⁸⁰¹

Diwakar Acharya has recently discovered three fragmentary folios from a 9th century Nepali manuscript, which he identifies as *Bhūtatantras* composed by Mahāmaheśvara.⁸⁰² In these fragments, we unsurprisingly find Skanda, who calls himself “The Lord of All Spirits” (*sarvabhūtādhipa*) and the “Son of Agni” (*vahnīsūna*), at the center of the ritual cult and *maṇḍala*, surrounded by a host of *grāhis*, *bhūtas*, and *yakṣas*. The fragments describe rites strongly resembling earlier Atharvavedic and Ayurvedic procedures, though with the

⁷⁹⁹ Sanderson (2012: Handout 3: 6)

⁸⁰⁰ Slouber (2017: 39-42)

⁸⁰¹ See Slouber (2017: 9)

⁸⁰² See Acharya's 2016 article “Three Fragmentary Folios of a 9th-Century Manuscript of an Early Bhūtatantra Taught by Mahāmaheśvara,” in *Tantric Studies: fruits of a Franco-German collaboration on Early Tantra*, (Paris, École française d'Extrême-Orient), 157-179.

addition of new tantric technologies, including the drawing of a *maṇḍala* on the ground and the use of empowered *kalaśas* (water pots), which were said to destroy evil spirits.⁸⁰³

In this text, the ritual specialist is ordered to draw a *maṇḍala* on the ground with colored powders of the various deities, including Skanda, groups of *vidyās* (*vidyāgaṇam*), *bhūtas* (*bhūtakulāni*), *nāgas* (*nāgakulāni*), eight mother goddesses (*māṛkulaṃ*), and the Ayurvedic medicine god, Dhanavantari, surrounded by four Yakṣa kings, among other divinities. The text states that the ritualist's mind should be absorbed in a visualization on these various deities, along with their respective *mantras* (*dhāraye' mantrasaṃyuktam sarveṣāmm eva mānasā*).⁸⁰⁴ Though the text is fragmentary, the rite also involves the use of a stake/peg (*kīlaka*) made of iron (*loha*) or Acacia Catechu wood (*khādira*). For malevolent rites, a water-jar (*kalaśa*) of iron should also be used. As we saw in the previous chapter, iron objects of these sort have a long history in exorcist traditions to drive away troublesome spirits, a practice which still exists to this day.⁸⁰⁵

The fragments go on to describe various practices and vows the ritual specialist (*bhūtavaidya*) must keep, including ten observances (*niyamas*; only four are readable - truth-speaking, not stealing, no deceit, and celibacy), dietary restrictions, fasting, avoiding inauspicious people and objects, and how and where to prepare the fire altar. The final line of the fragmentary manuscript states "... the seizers (*grahās*) fall into his power and conform to his wishes; there is no doubt. They will bestow upon him the supernatural powers of Vayu, the God of Wind. He would easily earn money in this world."⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰³ Acharya (2016: 161 fn. 13) states that, "The use and worship of full jars, especially filled with Soma, can be traced back to the Śrautasūtra texts."

⁸⁰⁴ Sanskrit from Acharya (2016: 162-171).

⁸⁰⁵ See White (2008) and Dwyer (1999) and (2003) for examples.

⁸⁰⁶ *grahās ca vaśam āyānti siddhyante ca na saṃśayaḥ | diśanti vayusiddhiṅca sukham arthārjanaṃ kṣitau ||* See Acharya (2016: 171 and 177) for Sanskrit and his translation.

Although not much can be gleaned from these fragments, a few interesting points can be seen that give an overall picture of what *bhūtatantra* texts and rites looked like at this time. As we will see in other Mantramārga sources, this text also includes hallmark tantric practices, such as the drawing of *yantras/maṇḍalas*, the use of visualization as a tool to become absorbed into the image of the deity, the adoption of various vows, and finally, control over the malignant spirits they are exorcising. While much of the AV is viewed from the perspective of those who were counteracting other “sorcerers” and driving away evil spirits like the *kṛtyās*, in this text the ritual specialist is the sorcerer who now has control over these very same spirits.⁸⁰⁷

Most of the surviving medical tantras, now incorporated in other tantras (e.g., the KKG in Chapter 19 of the Netra Tantra), follow these same ritual patterns. In more developed medical tantras, we also see this absorption (*saṃyuktam*) into the deity's image through visualization, as seen in the above fragments, being understood as a sort of possession or transformation of the practitioner's identity into the deity. For example, in chapter six of the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* [KKG], a healing rite describes how the ritualist should divinize their external body through mantric installation (*nyāsa*), beginning with the "Hand of Tārksya" rite, an analog to the *śivahasta* and *śaktihasta* rites we will see in Mantramārga texts, in which Śiva or the Goddess is believed to possess and empower the ritualists hand.⁸⁰⁸ In this case, of course, it is Tārksya (i.e. Garuda) who empowers and embodies the hand of the ritualist, a necessary prerequisite in order to make rites effective (*eṣa sāksādbhavettārksya sarvakarmaprasādhakaḥ* | KKG 6.21). After this, they divinize the

⁸⁰⁷ For more on *kṛtyās* as "Human simulacra created and manipulated by sorcerers" see chapter 3 in White (2021).

⁸⁰⁸ Hand of Tārksya rite from KKG 6.15-22

rest of their body, and then perform internal rites to "install Śiva inside their own body"

(*kṛtvā svadehe vinyasecchivaṃ* || KKG 6.32). Some verses later, the practitioner is again told to visualize oneself as the deity:

One should visualize oneself as two-fold, taking any form desired, incomparable, pervading the whole world, effector of creation and destruction, surrounded by garlands of flames, extending to the world of Brahma, ten-armed, with a fierce expression, yellow-eyed, trident in hand, gaping mouth with teeth exposed, very ferocious, three-eyed, and crowned with the crescent moon. At the time of the ritual one should always (visualize) oneself as Bhairava for the destruction of Bhūtas, [or] indeed as Tārksya [Garuḍa] of fearful power for the sake of destroying snakes [KKG 6.47-49].⁸⁰⁹

The chapter ends, according to Slouber, "with a statement that snakes as well as various kinds of demonic beings flee on sight of such a man possessed by Garuḍa."⁸¹⁰

Chapter nine of the KKG discusses similar rites, particularly for exorcism and controlling spirits, with the apotropaic deity known as Khaḍgarāvaṇa.

"The Sword-Rāvaṇa".⁸¹¹ This chapter begins with Skanda asking Śiva to reveal the mantras and *vidyās* which are sovereign over ghosts [KKG9.1]. Śiva gives a long narrative describing how the mantras were born from his own body and eventually provides a lengthy mantra, the heart of which is said to be "ॐ BHŪTAPATI SVĀHĀ" [after v. 9.38]. The text states that if it is recited one hundred thousand times all Bhūtas, humans, and even Devas will come under his control and he will be able to perform the six magical rites (here listed as driving away, attraction, enmity, paralysis, death, and *kīla* protective rites). Of special interest is the next few lines, which states that if the mantric spells are installed into the practitioner's limbs

⁸⁰⁹ Translation of full chapter can be found at Slouber (2017: 156-159), Sanskrit of this passage is on page 227.

⁸¹⁰ Slouber (2017: 69)

⁸¹¹ See Slouber, *The Cult of Khaḍgarāvaṇa*, (Master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2007) for his discussion on the apotropaic nature of Khaḍgarāvaṇa

(*vidyāṅga nyāsaḥ*), one would be able to perform these acts simply with their thoughts (*cāṅgabhedam ca kurute cintitena tu*) [9.39-44], becoming, in essence, a *bhūtanātha*.⁸¹²

In many of the *Garuḍatantras* Slouber has recently examined, he states that practitioners who become "possessed by Garuḍa to cure envenomation"⁸¹³ were known as Gāruḍikas. Although we do not see the explicit use of *āveśa* to describe this transformation in these passages, it is implied throughout many of the texts (e.g., the "Hand of Tārksya" rite, *vidyāṅga nyāsaḥ*, etc.), as well as the terminology Slouber chooses to use throughout his own work, writing:

"Possession" is not a bad rendering of what these elaborate mantras and visualizations were supposed to engender in the snakebite doctor, but "spiritual transformation" may be more accurate. Unlike demonic possession, which was thought to spontaneously strike vulnerable people, the practitioner's transformation into Garuḍa was a gradual and fully controlled process. Some texts use the language of "becoming," whereas others tend more toward "being like...." However, it is described, this self-divination was the pinnacle of the ritual and a hallmark of early Tantric medicine.⁸¹⁴

As we will see, both understandings by Slouber are valid - in many of the earlier Mantramārga texts we will look at the language of possession is much more explicit and overt. However, by the time we arrive to the Trika-Kaula traditions of Abhinavagupta, even though much of language of possession remains, it has become reformulated and emphasized as a "spiritual transformation." Despite the language used, the most important point Slouber makes is that "self-divination was the pinnacle of the ritual and a hallmark of early Tantric medicine," one that continues throughout the Mantramārga texts we will be turning to momentarily.

⁸¹² See Slouber (2007: 72-75) for his edition of chapter 9 KKG

⁸¹³ See Slouber (2007: 148)

⁸¹⁴ Slouber (2017: 70)

THE KĀPĀLIKAS AND POSSESSION IN EXEGETICAL LITERATURE

The Kāpālikas association with possession was considered a given by the time the sixteenth century South Indian Śivāgrayogin Jñānaśivācārya wrote his *Śaivaparibhāṣā*, which gives a description of four Śaiva sects (Mahāvratins, Pāsupatas, Kāpālikas, and Siddhānta) and their particular views on liberation.⁸¹⁵ All four agree, he states, that the ultimate state of liberation can be characterized as *śiva-sāmyam*, “equality with Śiva”, however each school has their own perspective on how this state is engendered: arising (*utpatti*), transference (*saṅkrānti*), possession (*samāveśā*), and manifestation (*abhivyakti*). According to Śivāgrayogin, the Mahāvratins (Atimārga II aka the Lākulas) are said to attain equality (*sāmyam*) through the arising (*utpatti*) of the qualities of Śiva, i.e., omniscience (*sarvajñatva*) and omnipotence (*sarvakarṭṛtva*), which is said to occur at the time of death. In other words, through knowledge and loosening the bonds of *karma*, Śiva’s qualities begin to arise in the aspirant, which eventually leads to equality with Him when they have shed their body. The Pāsupatas, in contrast, reach equality through the transference (*saṅkrānti*) of Śiva’s qualities. Śivāgrayogīndra compares this to the way the smell of musk is transferred to a cloth. For the Kāpālikas, Śivāgrayogīndra writes,

kāpālikāḥ samāveśena sāmyam upagacchanti |
yathā grahāḥ puruṣeṣv āviśanti tathesvaraguṇā mukteṣv āviśanti ||
The Kāpālikas arrive at equality [with Śiva] by possession (*samāveśa*): just as “seizers” (*grahas*) possess people, in the same way the qualities of the Lord possess the one who is liberated.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹⁵ Sastri (1982: 341-2).

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

However, Śivāgrayogin argues that the goal of a liberative *āveśa* for the Kāpālikas is ultimately not valid, since the individual loses all autonomy (*svātantrya*), an essential quality of Śiva, in the same way one loses autonomy when possessed by a spirit (*bhūtāviṣṭa*) - thus he argues it is impossible for the individual to have true omnipotence.⁸¹⁷ The final group Śivāgrayogin mentions, which relates to his own system of the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas, claims liberation is achieved through manifestation (*abhivyakti*). That is to say, the qualities of Śiva are inherent within the *sādhaka* and manifest once the *jīva* (soul/living being) has been purified of all impurities (*mala*). Once this occurs, he argues, the adept's innate qualities manifest spontaneously.

Sanderson has pointed out that these characterizations are found even earlier in the 7th-8th century CE Siddhānta text by Sadyojyotis known as the *Paramokṣanirāsakārikā* (“An Inquiry into The Nature of Liberation”), along with its commentary by Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha (c. 950 CE).⁸¹⁸ In this text, twenty different philosophical schools and their perspective on liberation are presented and ultimately refuted by the author. As a Saiddhāntika, Sadyojyotis, echoed later by Śivāgrayogīndra, states that manifestation (*abhivyakti*) is the superior view (*parā gītā*) in comparison to other Śaiva groups who believe in the doctrines of arising (*samutpatti*), transference (*saṅkrānti* – here transference is analogous to one flame of a lamp lighting another), and possession (*āveśa*).⁸¹⁹ While Sadyojyotis does not identify the various schools, Rāmakaṇṭha does so in his later commentary, though gives no explicit identity regarding those who follow the "doctrine of

⁸¹⁷ 36. . . . *bhūtāviṣṭasyevāsvātantryāpattyā puruṣārthatvāyogāt . . .* in Sastri, (1982: 342).

⁸¹⁸ See Sanderson (2006: 180) and Alex Watson, *An Enquiry into the Nature of Liberation: Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭhas Paramokṣanirāsakārikāvṛtti, a commentary on Sadyojyotiḥ Refutation of Twenty Conceptions of the Liberated State (Mokṣa)*, (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2013): see 281 and fn. 283 for Sanskrit passage.

⁸¹⁹ *samatā samutpattisaṅkrāntyāveśapakṣataḥ | abhivyaktiḥ parā gītā buddhivācām agocarā ||* 7 of the *Paramokṣanirāsakārikā*, as seen in Sanderson (2006: 180).

possession", (*āveśa-vāda*). Those who hold to the "doctrine of transference" (*saṅkrānti-vāda*) are identified as Pāśupatas, while those who adhere to the "doctrine of arising" (*utpatti-vāda*) are said to be Kālāmukhas (i.e., Lākulas). Finally, those who hold his own view on the "doctrine of manifesting" (*abhivyakti-vāda*) are listed simply as the Śaivas.

Rāmakaṅṭha comments on the followers of the "doctrine of possession"

(*āveśapakṣaḥ*), stating:

Still others, [hold] the position of possession, i.e., that a perfected [soul] at the time of [liberation] is possessed by the qualities of the Supreme Lord that remain in their own substrate (i.e., in the Lord), as a person [is possessed] by spirits (*grahas*).⁸²⁰

Like Śivāgrayogīndra, Sadyojyotis refutes this simply by stating simply “*āveśe na svatantratā*” - “If [liberated souls] were possessed (*āveśa*), they would not be autonomous.”⁸²¹ Rāmakaṅṭha expands upon this, commenting,

In regard to the perspective that sameness (*sāmya*) [to Lord Śiva] at liberation results from possession by the Lord’s qualities (*īśvaraguṇāveśān*), the soul (*pumso*) would not be autonomous, just as someone is who is possessed by a spirit (*bhūtāviṣṭa*); thus, they would not be equal to the Lord (*īśvara*) at all.⁸²²

As we've seen, the *Āveśavāda* is attributed to the Kāpālikas only later in the *Śaivaparibhāṣā*, which is also attested in the coeval 16th century Siddhānta commentary the *Pauṣkarabhāṣya*.⁸²³ However, we do find an earlier attribution in the 11th century Siddhānta text, the *Sarvamatopanyāsa*, which states:

At that time [of liberation] the qualities of the Lord, while remaining in their substrate [i.e., the Lord], automatically enter the Siddha, in the way that an [ordinary] person is

⁸²⁰ *anyais tu tadā parameśvaraguṇaiḥ svāśrayasthair eva siddhaḥ samāviśyate grahair iva puruṣa ity āveśapakṣaḥ* || 2.18.3 as seen in Utpaladeva - see Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñānakārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, (Roma: Ist. Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1994): xxxiii, fn. 49.

⁸²¹ *āveśe na svatantratā* (13b of the *Paramokṣanirāśakārikā*): see Watson (2013: 303).

⁸²² *īśvaraguṇāveśān muktisāmyapakṣe 'pi bhūtāviṣṭasyeva pumso muktāv asvātantryam eva, na tv īśvarasamateti*, section 3.8 of Rāmakaṅṭha's commentary see Watson (2013: 303) for their translation.

⁸²³ *kāpālās tu tasya samāveśam ahuḥ* - see Watson (2013: 281 fn 283) for Sanskrit passage.

possessed by spirits. Thus, the Kāpālikas have taught that liberation is analogous to possession.”⁸²⁴

3. THE MANTRAMĀRGA - PRIMARY SOURCES FOR ĀVEŚĀ

All of this evidence on the Kāpālikas and their association with possession, however, has been secondary. To get a better understanding possession within the Śaiva Tantras, we will now begin our examination into various texts of the Mantramārga, a few of which have been identified by Sanderson and others as belonging to a lost Kāpālika/Somasiddhāntin corpus.⁸²⁵ No full "Kāpālika" text has survived or been discovered yet, though it has been argued that portions may be found in texts of the *Vidyāpīṭha*, such as the *Jayadrathayāmala* and *Brahmayāmala*. These passages exhibit archaic language and content compared to most of the Mantramārga and seem to have been influenced by Kāpālika practitioners. For example, in the *Brahmayāmala*, the two primary cult deities invoked are Kapālīśabhairava (“Bhairava, The Lord of the Skull-bearers), and his consort Candākāpālīnī (Fierce Bearer of the Skull). In this text, we also find possession by Bhairava as one of the primary goals of their practice, related to a vow they call the *mahāvratā*, and *bhairavavratā*. Besides these, we will examine several other *Mantramārga* texts beginning with the *Niśvāsattvasaṃhitā* and look at the various references to possession (*āveśa/samāveśa*) and related terms to see how the discourses around these concepts were adapted and employed by the various scriptures and their associated traditions.

⁸²⁴ *nijāśrayasthitair eva tadānīm aiśvarair guṇaiḥ | svayam āviśyate siddhaḥ puruṣas tu grahair iva || ity āveśena kāpālās tatsamāṃ muktīm ūcire. || Sarvamatopanyāsa - as seen in Sanderson (2012 Handout 3 :6). Watson (2013: 281 fn 238) also points to the Pauṣkarabhāṣya, (4.4 8 ab, p. 232) which gives the same conclusion: svayam āviśyate siddhaḥ puruṣas tu grahair iva | itthaṃ caiva tu kāpālās tat sāmyaṃ muktīm ūcire ||*

⁸²⁵ See Sanderson (2006; 2009; 2012; 2014) and Törzsök et al. (2009)

THE NIŚVASATATTVASAṂHITĀ AND THE ŚAIVA SIDDHĀNTA

Sanderson, Goodall, and Aciri have argued the *Niśvasatattvasaṁhitā* [NTS], is perhaps the earliest extant tantric Śaiva scripture. Though a text of the Śaiva Siddhānta, it contains portions which appear to be heavily indebted to proto-tantric Śaiva sects of the Atimārga, as we saw earlier.⁸²⁶ The oldest portions of the NTS (e.g., the *Nayasūtras*) have been tentatively dated to between 450 and 550 AD.⁸²⁷ Sanderson believes other Śaiva Tantras may also have been composed in the same period, such as the *Vāmasrotas*, though only fragments of this corpus still survive. It has many similarities, for example, with the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* (VST), particularly its magical rites, causing some to speculate the VST and NTS were composed in the same period.⁸²⁸ Goodall et al., however, believe the VST to be slightly later since the NTS has more archaic notions of the yogic or "subtle" body (*Uttarasūtra* 5:37) and later ubiquitous tantric terms, such as *nyāsa*, are absent within it. The VTS, in contrast, seems to have much more complex and developed understanding of the *nāḍīs* and uses the term *nyāsa*.⁸²⁹

The NTS also has much in common with the early *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* [MK], a Buddhist text on magic, which shares many of the same early ritual technologies, grimoires, and soteriological goals. For example, its account on a *vetālasādhana* corpse ritual, which leads to the accomplishment of being a *Vidyādhara*, is paralleled almost exactly in the NTS.⁸³⁰ In terms of ritual, the *Guhyasūtra* of the NTS is heavily focused on the attainment of

⁸²⁶ See Sanderson (2001: 29), Aciri (2014), Goodall, Sanderson, and Isaacson, *The Niśvasatattvasaṁhitā: The Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra*, (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2015).

⁸²⁷ Aciri (2014: 8)

⁸²⁸ Goodall et al. (2015: 31-32)

⁸²⁹ *ibid.*

⁸³⁰ See Goodall et al. (2015: 26-30 and 60-62) where accounts from the following sections are compared: *Niśvasaguhya* 3.54c-64; 11.87 and 14.127-129 and *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa* (Ch. 55, p. 713). A similar account is also found in the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* (vv. 190ff) as seen in Csaba Dezso, "Encounters with Vetālas - Studies on Fabulous Creatures", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 63.4 (2010): 397.

siddhis via cremation ground rites, the use of magical substances (*siddhadravayas*), and even coital rites, again foreshadowing much of what is to come in the *Bhairavatantras*.⁸³¹ In short, the NTS and texts such as the MK were produced in a shared atmosphere and, according to Goodall et al, "reflect a religion of spell-masters questing for empowerment (*bhukti*) and liberation (*mukti*)".⁸³²

Since portions of the NTS have now recently been published, various scholars have shown how it contains important data regarding the formative phase of the Mantramārga. Though classified as a Mantramārga/Saiddhāntika text, it contains many elements from the Pāñcārthika Pāsūpata and Lākulas. Acri states,

The text was composed in a historical period in which the traditions of the Atimārga and Mantramārga shared several elements in common and were just beginning to differentiate themselves as distinct, and competing, systems of salvation within the Śaiva stream (*Śaivamārga*).⁸³³

This was a view shared earlier by Sanderson in his 2006 article on the Lākulas, where he showed the doctrinal continuity, particularly in cosmography and initiation, between the Atimārga and the NTS, arguing that the former was a direct ancestor to what becomes the more orthodox Śaiva Siddhānta tradition.⁸³⁴ The NTS also becomes important for later non-dualist Śaiva schools, particularly through the adoption of more than a thousand verses by the important *Svacchandatantra*, which was famously commented on by Kṣemarāja in the 11th century and adapted into Trika texts such as the *Tantrasadbhāva*.

⁸³¹ See Hatley (2016: 9); Sanderson (2001 and 2009); and Goodall et al. (2015: 347)

⁸³² Goodall et al. (2015: 59)

⁸³³ Acri (2014: 9)

⁸³⁴ Sanderson (2006)

YOGA AND THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE (ŚAKTI) IN THE NTS

In later tantric traditions of the *Vidyāpīṭha*, it is the goddesses and their hordes of *yoginīs/ḍākinīs* who populate their pantheons and become key components of their systems. While Shaman Hatley states there is “little cultic emphasis upon goddesses” in the NTS, there is, in fact, a wealth of historical data on *Māṭṛs*, *bhūtas*, and goddesses throughout the text. Also, while a fully formed tradition of the “Great Goddess” becomes explicit only later within the Mahādevi/Mahavidyā traditions, traces of this concept can also be found within the NTS. Much of this data shows the historical importance of this text since certain elements may have been pre-cursors to the developing *Vidyāpīṭha* traditions.⁸³⁵

Hatley points out, for example, that in the NTS’s discussion of *laukikadharmā*, the non-initiatory religion of the laity, mention is made of the worship of the “Great Goddess” (*mahādevyās tu pūjanam*, NTS *Mukhāgama* 3.107d). There is also mention of Śiva’s consort, Pārvatī/Umā, who is described as the foremost leader of a host of goddesses, which include Kātyāyanī, Durgā, Rudrā, Subhadrikā, Kālarātri, Mahāgurī, Revatī, Bhūtanāyikā, Āryā, Prakṛtirūpā (“She who takes the form of Prakṛti”), and Gaṇanāyikā (*gaṇānām nāyikā*, “Leader of Śiva’s Troops”) (NTS *Mukhāgama* 3.108c–9). Some of these names we saw in earlier Epic texts and medical lists as possessing goddesses. Also note the important mention of female *bhūtanātha* names such as Bhūtanāyikā and Gaṇanāyikā - both implying these goddesses were leaders of *bhūtas* and *gaṇas*. Various groups of unnamed *māṭṛs*, resembling those mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and medical literature, are also described as temple cult deities belonging to the lay religion (*laukikadharmā*) [NTS *Mukhāgama* 2.28cd–30ab].⁸³⁶

⁸³⁵ Hatley (2016: 2)

⁸³⁶ See Hatley (2016: 8-9)

In another passage of the NTS (*Uttarasūtra* 1.26–39), the goddesses Kālī and Vijayā, important figures in later tantras of the *Vidyāpīṭha*, are listed as “interlocutors involved in the revelation of tantric literature”.⁸³⁷ They are listed alongside a variety of gods, *bhairavas*, *yakṣas*, *guhnyakas*, *rākṣasas*, *gaṇas* (such as Mahākāla), *nāgas*, and *ṛṣis*, as well as groups of fierce female entities such as *māṭṛs* (Mothers), *bhaginīs* (Sisters), *kapālamāṭṛs* (“Skull-Mothers”) and *yogakanyās* (“yoga-maidens”) who are described as “possessing great power” (*mahāvīryāḥ*) and presiding deities (*patayah*) over the seven netherworlds (*pātālas*). Hatley, Goodall, and Sanderson all believe the inclusion of *bhairavas*, *Māṭṛs*, and *bhaginīs* in this list of “interlocutors” raises the possibility of a diverse tantric literature at this time beyond the canon of twenty-eight texts the NTS lists, prefiguring scriptural genres such as the *Bhairavatantras*, and those dedicated to goddess cults (e.g., the *Bhaginītantras*, *Māṭṛtantras*, *Ḍākinītantras*, etc.).

Finally, we should mention that the *Nayasūtra* and *Uttarasūtra* also contains some of the earliest material on the Alphabet Goddess Māṭṛkā, who figures heavily in later Trika and Kaula traditions.⁸³⁸ Māṭṛkā is defined as a Vidyā (female mantra), but also said to be the source of all words, *mantras*, and *śāstras*, and is identified as the Śakti (Power) of Sadāśiva [*Uttarasūtra* 4.49].⁸³⁹ The text makes clear that practices and rites associated with her result in the accomplishment of various magical acts and transforming the *sādhaka* to “be like Śiva” (*śivatulya*).⁸⁴⁰ The verses on Māṭṛkā in the *Nayasūtra* are also significant in that correspondences are made between her, the mantras, the *tattvas* (levels of reality), and the

⁸³⁷ See Hatley (2016: 9)

⁸³⁸ See Törzsök (2016)

⁸³⁹ The use of the compound *māṭṛkāśiva* throughout the NTS (e.g., *Uttarasūtra* 1.41) also signifies this same idea

⁸⁴⁰ *Uttarasūtra* 5.7cd–8ab: *ekaikākṣarayogena abhyasen māṭṛkāśivam || vidyāsiddhim avāpnoti śivatulyas ca jāyate |*

body of the practitioner, resulting in early *nyāsa*-styled rites, which become common throughout the subsequent tantric literature. Her growing importance is made clear, for example, in *Nayasūtra* 1.75cd–78ab:

He who knows this form of Māṭṛkā in his body and, in the same way, in the letter "A", shall be released from this existence. This is the highest, supreme knowledge, the greatest of all secret teachings. Knowing the true nature of Māṭṛkā, the guru can destroy the bonds [that tie the soul to this world]. All the mantras shall be under his sway and obey his commands when instructed. For he shall be like Śiva (*śivavat*) on the surface of the earth. The guru is known as the liberator.⁸⁴¹

While Māṭṛkā and other goddesses are never really worshipped independently of Śiva, there is much emphasis on the evolving concept of *śakti* throughout the scripture, particularly in its system of yoga. One could argue that these become the seeds for much of the goddess-oriented worship we will see in the texts of the *Vidyāpīṭha*. For example, chapter five of the *Uttarasūtra*, which is concerned with yoga and the attainment of *siddhis*, states that the primary goal for the initiate is to cultivate a sense of Śiva's "pervasiveness" (*sāmarasya*), which corresponds to a particular state of consciousness known as *śaktisamarasa* that leads to union with Śiva (*śivasāyojyatāmvrajet*) [*Uttarasūtra* 5.4-5]. *Śaktisamarasa* refers to a state wherein everything is experienced and understood as being of the same "flavor" (*rasa*), a sort of non-dual perspective where everything in the cosmos is seen as Śiva's Power (*śakti*). In the mature Kaula, the term *sāmarasya* remains an important concept, usually referring to a mystical experience of fusion with the guru or a deity, as seen in Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* [TĀ] [29.272-5], a text we will return to later in the chapter.⁸⁴²

⁸⁴¹ Sanskrit and translation based on Törzsök (2016: 142)

⁸⁴² Wallis (2014: 298)

Chapter four of the *Uttarasūtra* further states that success in its yoga system is wholly dependent on achieving this state of *śaktisamarasa*, equated with the knowledge of the levels of reality (*tattvasadbhava*) [*Nayasūtra* 4.61-62]. Since Śiva pervades everything, the *sādhaka* is instructed not to seek Śiva through sense objects, but within one's own body [*Nayasūtra* 4:11] and to see Śiva and their own soul as one and the same, both ultimately pervading the entire Universe [*Nayasūtra* 4:48c-55]. Even enemies and friends or *brahmins* and polluted "dog-cookers" should be considered equal, according to the text, since everything is ultimately Śiva [*Nayasūtra* 4.56-8]. Through this yoga, which involves a combination of mantra enunciation and *prāṇāyāma*, the text states one can mentally "burn" one's own body and transform it into Śiva. After six months of this practice one can attain the eight powers (*siddhis*), including the ability to enter or possess other bodies and knowledge of the past, present and future, before achieving the final state of equality (*samarasa*) and identification (*tanmayatva*) with Śiva.⁸⁴³ Having attained such a state, the text claims the *sādhaka* will be able to liberate other creatures simply through his sight, voice, touch, mind or water and achieve any *siddhi* he desires [*Nayasūtra* 4:38-45]. This too, as we will see, is a clear precursor to the more developed *śaktipāta* ("The Descent of Power") and *āveśa* rites in later traditions, involving the possession or transference of divine energy to the disciple by the guru.

Another relatively new feature found in the NTS, is the yogic conquest of the *tattvas* (*tattvajaya*), the levels of reality, through meditation and visualization. This is discussed in various sections throughout the NTS, particularly in the *Mūlasutra*, which describes how the soul of the initiand is lifted and placed sequentially in each of the *tattvas* of the Universe by

⁸⁴³ See *Uttarasūtra* (5.42-3) and *Nayasūtra* (4.106-7 and 4.137-144b) in Goodall et al. (2015) for more on the NTS' treatment of *śaktisamarasa*

the guru until he unites with the highest *tattva* at the level of Śiva. The direct predecessors of these practices, as mentioned earlier, comes from Lākula initiations, involving the "touch of the five *brahmamantras*" (*ālabdhaḥ pañcabhir guhyair dīkṣitāś*; *Niśvāsamukha* 87.cd), and the purification of the various levels of reality (*adhvan*) that lead towards Śiva, as described in chapter four of the *Niśvāsamukha*.⁸⁴⁴ Before beginning this visionary ascent, the *Mūlasūtra* states that a preliminary initiation known as the *vidyādīkṣā* or *samayādīkṣā* must first be accomplished, involving the installation of mantras (*nyāsa*) on to the guru's hand, which is said to empower it with the energy of Śiva and transform into "the hand of Śiva" (*śivahasta*) [*Mūlasūtra* 4.14]. This is the rite Sanderson believes corresponds with the "touch" of mantras mentioned in the earlier Lākula initiation.⁸⁴⁵ With this empowered hand, the guru lays it upon the disciple's head, symbolically cutting the bonds or fetters of this world using the *brahmamantras*.

What is also fascinating is the mention of these *tattvas* being visualized as various goddesses in the *Nayasūtras* of the NTS, including Prakṛti, Niyati, Māyā, Vidyā, and the transcendent Śakti, some who are wrathful in nature [*Nayasūtra* 3.20-41].⁸⁴⁶ The visualization of Māyā (3.34c–35) provides an early example and incorporation of a wrathful tantric goddess, following the pattern of earlier *bhūtas* and *grahas/grāhis* we've seen - a deity "black in color, red-eyed, with long teeth, very hairy, with tawny hair ... coarse-bodied, big-bellied, [she is the one] who causes [all] creatures, from Brahmā downwards, to fall again and again."⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁴ See Goodall (2015: 44-46 & 279) and Sanderson (2006: 188-190)

⁸⁴⁵ *Mūlasūtra* 4.14ab: *nyāsam ālabhanaṃ caiva śivahastam pāśakṛntanam*; Note the use of *ālabh* in both the *Lākula* and *Siddhānta* initiations.

⁸⁴⁶ See Goodall (2015: 452-457)

⁸⁴⁷ See Hatley (2016: 18-19)

Following the *śivahasta* rite, the guru then begins the liberative initiation (*muktidīkṣā*; *Mūlasutra* 5), employing first the *śakti-mantras* of the Goddess Vāma to unite (*samyojya*) the *sādhaka* into the lowest *tattva* realm, the world of Kālāgnirudra. The guru then purifies the soul of the initiate using the *śakti-mantra* of Jyeṣṭhā, and then raises it to the next level by using the *śakti-mantra* of Raudrī (*Mūlasutra* 5.3-4). This ascension of the initiates soul continues through the subterranean levels, the earth levels, the heavenly realms and up towards the higher *tattvas*, culminating first in the *Sakala-tattva*, the realm of form, associated with Lord Sadāśiva, and finally the *Niṣkalatattva*, the formless realm, also known as the *Śivatattva*. Sanderson states the climax of the initiation results in "fusion with Śiva" (*śivayojanikā*),

...when the officiant, seen not as an agent in his own right but as a vessel through which Śiva himself is acting, enters the initiand's body through the flow of the breath, takes hold of his soul, visualizing it as a point of brilliant light, draws it out and into his person with the return of the breath, fuses it with his own, and then as he exhales raises them up as one to exit through the cranial aperture to unite with the deity.⁸⁴⁸

"BECOMING ŚIVA" AND ŚAIVA SIDDHĀNTA COSMOLOGY

In this very early *śivahasta* ("hand of Śiva") rite, we see one of the first mentions and employment of the tantric technology known as *nyāsa* (installation of mantras onto the body), which becomes ubiquitous in later tantric practices and texts, particularly to transform and divinize objects, *murtis* (icons), and even bodies. Its use in the NTS and other texts of this period, such as the Buddhist MK, is rare, however. In later tantric texts, the terms *mantranyāsa* or *sakalīkaraṇa* are more commonly used, but these are not found in the earlier literature, though conceptually the ideas are operative here. In other parts of the NTS, such as

⁸⁴⁸ See Sanderson (2012: Handout 5, 1-2)

Uttarasūtra 2.8ab, there is mention of consonants (*bījas*) and vowels (*yoni*) which are to be installed on the right and left sides of the body of the *sādhaka*, leading to the transformation of the body into a divine "mantric" body and resulting in the worshipper "becoming Śiva" (*śivībhūtaḥ*).⁸⁴⁹ However again, the term *nyāsa* is not employed in this section. Elsewhere, in a portion of the text believed to belong to an earlier stratum, it states that, "Well girt with the principal mantra and with the body-part-mantras, he should afterwards undertake [ritual] action", meaning that with this new mantric body, the practitioner can then commence the worship of Śiva.⁸⁵⁰ Goodall and Isaacson believe that an evolution of ideas of the term *nyāsa* and its usage and meaning may have occurred within the NTS itself, from the earlier *Mūlasūtra* portion to the later *Uttarasūtra* chapter. In the *Mūlasūtra*, it is clear that the mantras serve as protection, acting as a mantric body of armor (*kavaca*, as it becomes commonly known in later tantras) for the ritualist, while in the *Uttarasūtra* it is implied that body is actually transformed and divinized to "be like Śiva" by this rite.⁸⁵¹ This aligns with the idea that many of the precursors of tantric technologies may have originated in protective (*rakṣā*) and *śanti* (appeasement) rites as seen in the Atharva Veda, and other early Hindu and Buddhist apotropaic-oriented traditions and texts.

Closely allied concepts with *nyāsa* also include *pratiṣṭha* rites, used to enliven icons (*murtis*), and early royal consecration rites (*abhiṣeka*), which were both adapted in the NTS and evolved in a similar manner as *nyāsa* throughout the Tantric literature.⁸⁵² The NTS, in fact, gives a detailed account of a *liṅgapratiṣṭhā* (enlivening of the aniconic form of Śiva) in

⁸⁴⁹ *śivībhūtaḥ prasannātma śivasyārcanamārabhet* | *Uttarasūtra* 2.8cd. *Nyāsa* is also used in *Uttarasūtra* 3.21, see Goodall et al. (2015).

⁸⁵⁰ *Mūlasūtra* 1.20cd: *tattvāṅgaiś ca susannaddhaḥ paścat karmma samārabhet*; translation by Goodall et al. (2015: 46)

⁸⁵¹ Goodall et al. (2015). See a parallel of this evolution also in the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (2015: 47-49)

⁸⁵² See Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) and Geslani (2018) for more on the overlap between these concepts.

chapter two of its *Guhyasūtra*. Goodall et al believes this may be the earliest such account to survive, likely based upon an earlier Vaiṣṇava rite and Atharvavedic texts such as the *Gr̥hyapariśiṣṭas*.⁸⁵³ As one would imagine, possession rites, the installation of deities into icons, and consecratory rites share much of the same ritual technology and syntax within the Tantras, something we will continue to see in the texts we examine.

The idea of the practitioner "becoming Śiva" through ritual divinization or transformation also becomes common throughout the Śaiva Āgamas and Tantras, which often begin their accounts of Śaiva worship with the well-known benediction *śivībhūya śivam yajet* - "Having become Śiva, one should worship Śiva".⁸⁵⁴ In dualist Śaiva Siddhānta schools, this does not mean that a worshipper actually *becomes* Siva since Siddhāntins maintain that the individual soul and Śiva are always ontologically distinct entities. This dualist ontology was inherited from classical Sāṃkhya philosophy, which held that everything that exists in the cosmos is made up either of "Spirit", which is immaterial, animate, sentient and consists of the nature of consciousness (in Sāṃkhya *puruṣa*, while in Siddhānta primarily *cit*), or that they are simply inanimate and unconscious Matter (in Sāṃkhya *prakṛit*; in Siddhānta *jaḍa*) - both being fundamentally distinct in nature from each other. According to the Siddhāntin *Mrgendrāgama* [MA] (aka *Mrgendratantra*), inherent within the concept of consciousness (*cit*), are two primary feminine powers which give agency to conscious entities: the power to know (*jñānasakti*) and the power to act

⁸⁵³ Goodall et al. (2015: 60) mention Vaiṣṇava texts such as the *Svāyambhuvapāñarātra* 5:95 and older in *Gr̥hyapariśiṣṭas*, particularly *Atharvavdapariśiṣṭa* (21.4:4-21.6:6). For more on the latter see Einoo (2005: 13-20).

⁸⁵⁴ See Davis (1992: 110-111).

(*kriyāśakti*). Though each function differently, the powers are not fundamentally distinct and ultimately are one and the same power (*śakti*).⁸⁵⁵

Bound within the lower "impure" realms of *prakṛti/jaḍa*, all the classic twenty-three *tattvas* from Sāṃkhya derive in descending order: the intellect (*buddhi*); the principle of self-identity (*ahaṃkāra*); the eleven faculties of sense and action (mind, ears, skin, eyes, tongue, nose, mouth, hand, anus, reproductive organs, and feet); the five subtle elements (sound, touch, form, taste, and smell); and the five gross elements (ether, air, fire, water, and earth). While some of the human faculties mentioned appear immaterial in nature, this system considers them to have no autonomous power since they require consciousness to act upon or through them, making them ultimately inert on their own, and thus material in nature. According to the Siddhāntins insentient matter is stimulated/animated only through Śiva's power (*śakti*), making up both the material and immaterial Universe - including the various worlds, bodies, internal faculties, etc.

Siddhāntins and other Śaiva traditions modified and adapted this originally atheistic Sāṃkhyan structure in various ways depending on what school they belonged to. For most of the Śaivas, even the highest level of *Puruṣa* for the Sāṃkhyan was part of the impure *tattvas* and worlds (*bhuvanas*) of the cosmos. After the classic twenty-three given previously, the Śaivas added five more "coverings" (*kañcukas*) to the impure (*asudhadhvan*) levels, collectively known as the *māyā-tattva*, which are said to further bind and limit the individual soul: *niyati* (limitation of place), *kāla* (limitation of time), *rāga* (limitation of attachment or dependence/passion), *vidyā* (limitation of knowledge), and *kalā* (limitation of creativity).

⁸⁵⁵ "Śiva's power, Aghoraśiva tells us, is in essence a single power. However, because of an 'apparent' distinction (*upddhi*) between the spheres of knowing and practical activity, this power seems to take on forms suitable to its tasks in each domain." (Davis 1991: xi)

Above these are the five pure levels (*sudhadhvan tattvas*) of the cosmos, in ascending order: *Vidyā*, *Īśvara*, *Sadāśiva*, *Śakti*, and finally, *Śiva*.⁸⁵⁶

Within the domain of “Spirit”, the Siddhāntins also posited a distinction between the Supreme Lord (*pati*) and individual souls (*paśu*). As stated previously, the two are ontologically distinct - an individual can become “like Śiva” but can never completely “become Śiva” since it is only the formless and unembodied Śiva who has the divine qualities of limitlessness, eternalness, omniscience, omnipotence etc., and is comprised of pure consciousness (*cit*) - all other beings have various degrees of limitations or “impurities”, as listed above. Although these impurities are considered subtle in nature, they are believed to be substantive fetters (*paśas*), having the nature of *jaḍa*, which literally and physically bind the individual soul/spirit to the body and world of *saṃsāra/māyā*. So, while each individual soul has an immaterial *ātman* which, like Śiva, is the nature of pure consciousness, this consciousness is bound and fettered in a body and a world comprised of matter. Thus, the bound soul partakes of both *cit* and *jaḍa* in what Davis calls “an unstable and finally alterable mixture. This ambiguity and mutability inherent in the human situation”, Davis continues, “are at the center of all Śaiva philosophy and ritual action.”⁸⁵⁷ It is for this reason that individual souls are called *paśus*, which most literally means a “beast” or “sacrificial animal”, implying the souls are fettered in *māyā* and unenlightened, and thus likened to a sacrificial victim.

In Śaiva Siddhānta, however, even if the fetters are destroyed and the soul is liberated, the individual soul is still considered ontologically distinct from Śiva - the individual never fully become Śiva himself. Rather, the Saiva Siddhāntin aspires to reach a

⁸⁵⁶ Davis (1991: 45)

⁸⁵⁷ Davis (1991: 24)

state of separate but equal-ness with Śiva, to become "a second Śiva", expressed by the term *śivatva* (Śiva-ness). According to Davis, "This is, in fact, the Śaiva-Siddhānta definition of *mokṣa*: a liberated soul becomes an autonomous theomorphic entity, distinct from Śiva but with all his powers and qualities."⁸⁵⁸ As we will soon see, in non-dualist Śaiva traditions the two are not considered ontologically distinct, and thus their goal was to attain identity, unity and consubstantiality with Śiva - to *become* Śiva - in some cases, through possession.

Thus, three primary entities make up the Śaiva Siddhānta cosmos, all of which become foundational, albeit in various ways, in subsequent Śaiva traditions of the Mantramārga: [1.] Śiva, who is the Supreme Spirit and Lord (*pati*), [2.] matter, which is the material and manifest universe which binds (*paśa*), and [3.] the individual soul, which is referred to as *paśu*, "a sacrificial beast". Śiva, as the Lord (*pati*), performs five divine and universal activities (*pañcakṛtya*) which shape the individual and the cosmos. The first three activities deal with creation, preservation, and destruction, or in Siddhāntin terminology, emission (*śṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), and reabsorption (*saṃhāra*). As stated previously, it is Śiva who ultimately "agitates" *māyā*, the material cause of our world at the time of each creation and emits the universe from himself in a sequential order with his powers (*śaktis*), which make up the various *tattvas* of the Universe. At the time of dissolution (*pralaya*), the *tattvas* become reabsorbed one by one in the opposite order and get reintegrated back into *māyā*, the source of the mundane Universe, until it is once again emitted by Śiva in the next creation. As Davis puts it,

Emission indicates a movement from subtle (*sūkṣma*) to gross (*sthāla*), from pure to impure, from superior to inferior; reabsorption indicates the converse. The rhythm of the manifest universe is an oscillation back and forth between these opposite poles,

⁸⁵⁸ See Davis, "Becoming Śiva and Acting as One in Śaiva Worship", in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism*, eds. André Padoux, and Teun Goudriaan, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993): 111.

under the direction of Śiva and his animating powers.⁸⁵⁹

For the Siddhāntins, the primary bonds or fetters are also three: 1. Primal Impurity (*mala*), 2. Primal Matter (*māyā*, and the collective of *māyātattva*) and 3. *karma*. For Siddhāntins this impurity (*mala*) is innate, beginningless, and without a cause. These fetters are directly related to the other two divine actions of Śiva which are performed upon the soul/spirit of the individual. The first of these two is *tirobhava*, the act of "veiling" absolute reality from bound souls (*paśu*), which is ultimately the cause for individuation. Like a cloak, *mala* limits a person's faculties of knowledge and action, binding one further in *māyā* in the form of individual bodies and the external material world. However, while the material body and world acts as a fetter, it is also what allows the soul to become an "experiencer" (*bhokṛtva*), which is necessary for one to eventually "consume" one's *karmas*, the third bond, and a pre-requisite for liberation. The Siddhāntin *Kiraṇatantra* states this succinctly:

The soul is bound for the sake of liberation; this [liberation] does not come about for him otherwise. Until he is linked to a body he cannot experience [the fruits of his past actions]. His body is derived from primal matter; if he has no body then he cannot be liberated....⁸⁶⁰ Without a body there can be no liberation, [because there can be no] consumption [of the fruits of past actions], [no powers of] knowledge and action, and no teacher.⁸⁶¹

Thus, the body and the material world are at once the fetters and the means towards liberation, a concept foundational throughout the Tantras. The destruction of these bonds is said to occur only through knowledge and ritual action, though depending on what Śaiva school, one was often emphasized over the other. However, because Śiva is the original cause, it is ultimately He who liberates the bound soul from this veil of illusion with his final

⁸⁵⁹ Davis (1991: 43)

⁸⁶⁰ *muktyartham sa paśur baddho nānyathā sāsyā jāyate | yāvac charīrasaṃśleṣo na sañjāto na bhogabhuk || 7 || Kiraṇatantra II. 7. Translation from Goodall, "The Kiraṇa Tantra", in *Hindu Scriptures*, ed. Goodall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 346.*

⁸⁶¹ *evam etad anantena sṛṣṭam dehanibandhanam || na dehena vinā muktir na bhogaś cītkriyā guruḥ | Kiraṇatantra IV. 28cd-29ab Translation by Goodall (1996: 357).*

divine action of *anugraha*, "grace", which is granted to souls, when they are ripe and ready.⁸⁶² The *Mrgendrāgama* states:

Among these [powers] there is [also] the power of the great Lord (*māheśvarī śaktiḥ*), which is auspicious (*śivā*) and bestows grace on everything (*sarvānugrāhikā*)... And this [power which bestows grace] causes these [impurities] to transform (*pariṇāmayati*) until their obstruction ends. When [the power of the Lord] brings about the unfolding [of the souls] through the light of consciousness of the Lord (*Īśāna*) it is called "grace-bestowing" (*anugrāhikā*).⁸⁶³

The MĀ further states that this process of transforming impurity occurs only through the Lord's divine power because the bonds, which are inert, need to be set in motion by what is conscious - in other words, through Śiva's power (*śakti*), which is also identified as his Grace.⁸⁶⁴ For individual souls then, this act of *anugraha* is the most paramount of His activities. It becomes a key act in Siddhānta and Mantramārga philosophies, and becomes closely associated with the concept of *śaktipāta*, "The Descent of (Śiva's) Power", which in turn becomes associated and even conflated, in certain texts, with the experience of possession/immersion (*āveśa/samāveśa*). While aspects of this nexus of ideas of *śaktipāta* and *āveśa* may have pre-tantric roots, it is primarily in the Tantric traditions where these two ideas become developed and come to the fore.⁸⁶⁵

There are two interesting references to *āveśa* in the MĀ, which should be noted, since it's mention is rare in this and other early Siddhānta texts. In reference to the category of the Siddhāntin scriptures known as the *Rudrāgamas*, a verse in chapter three ensures the readers

⁸⁶² Note that *anugraha* is formed from the verbal root √grah, "to take possession" or "seize" - when preceded by the prefix anu, the term becomes anu-√grah, meaning, "to show favor", "conferring benefits", or "assistance" (See Monier-Williams)

⁸⁶³ MĀ 7.11-12: *tāsāṃ māheśvarī śaktiḥ sarvānugrāhikā śivā... pariṇāmayaty etāś ca rodhāntaṃ kārkacittviṣā | yadonnīlanam ādhatte tadānugrāhikocyate || 12 ||*

⁸⁶⁴ MĀ 7.16-17. *na sādḥikāre tamasi muktir bhavati kasyacit | adhikāro 'pi tacchakteḥ pariṇāmān nivatate || 16 || so 'pi na svata eva syād api yogyaśya vastunaḥ | sarvathā sarvadā yasmāc citprayoḥyam acetanam || 17 ||* See Alberta Ferrario, *Grace in Degrees: Śaktipāta, Devotion, and Religious Authority in the Śaivism of Abhinavagupta*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2015): 117-118 for more discussion of this idea.

⁸⁶⁵ See Sanderson (2006: 191–92) for more on the pre-tantric roots of these ideas.

that it is ultimately Śiva who teaches the Rudra-division of their *agāmas* because these were "cast forth by *Rudras* who have been 'possessed by Śiva' (*śivāviṣṭair*), not by their own intellects."⁸⁶⁶ So, even though these are considered distinct Rudra scriptures, it claims that Śiva is the ultimate agency behind them, since Śiva possesses and has entered (*āviṣṭa*) into them. Earlier, in chapter one, we are similarly told that it is Lord Śiva who also "possesses" (*āviśya*) a number of other Lords (*patīs*), such as Ananta, etc. who act as overlords over the various levels of the Universe.⁸⁶⁷ In both these cases, I would argue the use of *āveśa* has clear possession overtones.

GRACE & ŚAKTIPĀTA IN THE SIDDHĀNTA

Another important element in these early Siddhānta texts of the NTS, is the primacy and role that *śakti* has in grace, initiation, the attainment of *siddhis*, and even liberation. The basic premise, of course, is that Śiva's grace (*anugraha*) operates through his *śakti* (feminine power), making the concept of *śakti* an essential component in tantric initiation. This concept becomes core, of course, in the more Śakta oriented *Vidyāpīṭha* schools, in some cases the feminine eclipsing the masculine principles completely. For these groups, one did not have to only approach Śiva/Bhairava to achieve their goals - Śakti becomes seen either as the primary gateway to reach salvation, or the formless Śakti herself becomes the final goal. Because of this, the *Vidyāpīṭha* begins to leave behind the male dominated pantheons of the Siddhānta and *Mantramārga*.

⁸⁶⁶ MĀ 3.42-43ab *śaivā raudrā mahābhedā daśāṣṭādaśa cordhvake // raudrā rudraiḥ śivāviṣṭair udgīrṇā na svabuddhitāḥ /*

⁸⁶⁷ MĀ 1.4.9-10: *tato 'nantādyabhivyaktaḥ patīnām granthitattvataḥ | kalādyārabdhadehānām karoty aṣṭādaśam śatam || tān apy āviśya bhagavān sāñjanān bhuvanādhipān | yebhyaḥ sarvam idaṃ yesām śaktiḥ karmanibandhanā ||*

The earliest occurrence of *śaktipāta* in the Śaiva literature can be found in the first chapter of the *Nayasūtra* of the NTS, a section describing the characteristics of a devotee of Rudra (*rudrabhakta*). The text states:

One who has faith, possesses *dharma*, who makes an effort to perform auspicious rites/good deeds, and who seeks wisdom is on the Path to Heaven, and he [will] sport in paradise. When he falls from there, he is born in the best [kind of] family. Through the Descent of Śiva's Power (*śivaśaktinipātena*), he is granted [both] initiation and knowledge. Grace is taught thusly; Sadāśiva himself is its Giver.⁸⁶⁸

Here we find the Siddhāntin's interpretation regarding both the causes and results of the "Descent of Power" - the causes being faith, following *dharma*, auspicious deeds, etc., which result in a kind automatic initiation into the Śaiva path and attainment of Śaiva knowledge, both given by Sadāśiva himself as a sign of his grace. In chapter four of the same text, we are also told that a guru, who "brims with Śiva's *śakti*" (*śivaśaktyopabr̥ṃhitah*) through his invocation of the "*śaktitattva*" ("Tattva of Power"; 4.27cd–29, 38–40), enables the guru to transmit this divine grace and power through his gaze, speech, or touch. Transmitting energy or power via these modalities (gaze, speech etc.) is, of course, an idea we saw in earlier medical sources. This transmission also becomes foundational in later Śaiva schools as a method to pass on divine energy directly from a guru to a disciple.

Slightly later, in the Siddhāntin *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* [SSS], we find a more developed description of *śaktipāta*, a text that Somadeva Vasudeva argues heavily influenced later Trika scriptures, particularly the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* [MVT], which we will be examining shortly.⁸⁶⁹ SSS 1.16-1.19 states:

Due to Śiva's will (*śivecchayā*), the primordial, ancient, eternal, Śakti (Power) of Śiva, which grants the Śaiva goals (*śaivārthadāyikā*), descends (*āpataty*) upon a

⁸⁶⁸ *śraddadhāno dharmavataḥ śubhakarmasu ceṣṭate | vidyānveśī svargagatiḥ svargaloke tu krīḍate || tatraiva tu paribhraṣṭo jāyate cottame kule | śivaśaktinipātena dīkṣājñānaṃ prayacchati || 1.88 so 'nugrahaḥ smrto hy eva[m] dātā caiva sadāśivaḥ | Nayasūtra 1.87-88. Translation based on Wallis (2014: 189) though modified.*

⁸⁶⁹ See Vasudeva (2004: XXIX, XL; 149, 167, and 221)

person in their last birth. Due to its descent (*nīpātāt*) one's impurity, which is the cause of the cycle of suffering (*samsāra*), is dissolved. Destroying this, one desires to go toward the Ultimate Bliss (*niḥśreyas*). Having obtained a spiritual master/guru (*deśikam*), his bonds cut through initiation, purified and free from affliction (*nirupaplavaḥ*), he attains identification/absorption with Śiva (*śivasāyujyam*). Through this sequential process (*kramayoga*), he attains the highest liberation. Because he is [now] devoid of beginningless Impurity, he does not attain another birth.⁸⁷⁰

In this passage we see the importance of Śiva's will (*icchā*) and its association with Śakti, which plays an essential role in granting the grace required to achieve Śaiva goals. A shift can be seen here when comparing this with the previous *Nayasūtra* passage - rather than faith, good deeds, ritual etc. culminating in *śaktipāta*, we see in the SSS that it is the "descent" of *śakti* that occurs first, resulting in the recipient's purification and leading them to become a seeker of liberation. From this point, the seeker goes on to find a guru and formal initiation and eventually achieves unification with Śiva. This is more explicitly stated by the famous Siddhāntin exegete Sadyojyotis, who comments on this verse:

Krama-yoga is union (*yoga*) with the sequence [of events], beginning with the union with *śakti* (i.e., *śaktipāta*), then the melting away of impurity (*mala*), then union with the desire to leave [*samsāra*], then with the guru, then with initiation, (and) then with the cutting of [the final] bonds.⁸⁷¹

Thus, an explicit sequence is laid out here, starting with the *śaktipāta* as the primary cause, instigated by Śiva, who impels the seeker onto the Śaiva path. This sequence is similarly found in the 9th century Siddhānta *Mataṅgapārameśvara Tantra*, which essentially states that even if one is ignorant and deluded, one can spontaneously achieve liberating knowledge through *śaktipāta*. Through this union the Lord Himself impels (*yuktaṃ prerayati*

⁸⁷⁰ *śivecchayā purānantā śaivī śaivārthadāyikā | sā śaktir āpataty ādyā puṃso janmany apaścime || tannipātāt kṣaraty asya malaṃ samsārakāraṇam | kṣīṇe tasmīn yiyāsā syāt paraṃ niḥśreyasaṃ prati || sa deśikam anuprāpya dīkṣāvichinnabandhanaḥ | prayāti śivasāyujyam nirmalo nirupaplavaḥ || anena kramayogena parāṃ kevalatām gataḥ | anādyasuddhiśūnyatvāt prāpnoti no bhavāntaram || SSS 1.16-1.19*

⁸⁷¹ *krameṇa yogāḥ kramayogaḥ pūrvam śaktiḥ saha yogāḥ tato malakṣaraṇena yogāḥ tato yiyāsāyā tato deśikena tato dīkṣayā, tato vicchinnabandhanatvena - Sadyojyotis's commentary on SSS I.19*

prabhuḥ) the recipient to seek initiation.⁸⁷² This concept of *śaktipāta* as a prerequisite to become initiated onto the Śaiva path becomes an important distinction taken up by the Trika schools, which we will discuss below.

Returning to the *Mr̥gendrāgama*, the experience of *śaktipāta* is also expressed by several "signs" (*liṅgam*) in the recipient:

Those embodied souls on whom [Śiva's] Power descends (*śaktiḥ pātati*) in order that [their transmigration] may cease, show as the sign of that [descent] (1.) a longing to be liberated, (2.) hate for the fact that they remain in the world [of bondage], (3.) devotion to the devotees of Śiva, and (4.) faith in their *guru* and [Śaiva] rites.⁸⁷³

Slightly earlier, in chapter five of the eighth century Siddhāntin text, the *Kiraṇatantra*, a chapter fully devoted to the Descent of Śakti (*śaktipātapaṭala*), mention is also made of similar signs (*cihna*), though it adds some interesting details about the precise causes which may engender the experience:

Just as a guru awakens sleeping disciples in his presence with a stick, so too does Śiva awaken those asleep in the sleep of delusion (*mohanidrāyām*) with his Power (*śakti*). When one recognizes one's true nature (*svarūpavijñānam*), then it is said that [*śakti*] has "fallen" (*patitā*). On account of that, a "Descent of Power" (*śaktinipātaḥ*) happens. "Descent" [is used because it] expresses the signs (*cihnas*). The time of the descent occurs when there is an equivalence of karmas. The time of these karma's equivalence is either when they are destroyed or made equal. Thus, when this subtle (*sūkṣmaṃ*) equivalence [happens], in that time that [*śakti*] illuminates one's own nature (*svarūpaṃ dyotayati*) immediately with that power (*balena*) [of *śakti*] which manifests as awakening... It's distinguishing mark (*vilakṣaṇā*) [as a result of *śaktipāta*] is devotion (*bhakti*). That very time is "skillful," [as] it is a gracing of the soul by the Power [of the Lord]. Because [the soul] is connected to beginningless *karma*, Lord Śiva knows and waits for the time called "the hole in time" [*kālacchidram*]. [KT 5.6cd-10; 13cd].⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷² *Mataṅgapārameśvara Tantra* 4.43-4.48; see Wallis (2014: 192) for Sanskrit and his translation.

⁸⁷³: *yeṣāṃ śarīriṇāṃ śaktiḥ pataty api nivr̥ttaye | teṣāṃ talliṅgam autsukyaṃ muktau dveṣo bhava-sṭhitau || bhaktiś ca śivabhakteṣu śraddhā tacchāsake vidhau | Mr̥gendrāgama 5.4-5ab*. Translation based on Sanderson, "The Doctrines of the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*", *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honour of André Padoux*, ed. Padoux and Goudriaan. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992): 286, fn. 24.

⁸⁷⁴ *gurur yathāgrataḥ śiṣyān suptān daṇḍena bodhayet || 5.6 || śivo 'pi mohanidrāyām suptān chaktyā prabodhayet | yadā svarūpavijñānaṃ patiteti tadocyate || 5.7 || tasmāc chaktinipātaḥ syān nipātaś cihnāvācakaḥ | tannipātasya saḥ kālaḥ karmaṇāṃ tulyataiva ca || 5.8 tulyatvaṃ karmaṇaḥ kālaḥ kṣiṇaṃ vā yadi vāsamaṃ | evaṃ sūkṣmaṃ samānatvaṃ yasmin kāle tadaiva sā || 5.9 || svarūpaṃ dyotayaty āśu bodhacihnabalena vai | 5.10ab || ...tasya bhaktir vilakṣaṇā || 5.13cd || anādikarmasambandhāc chivaḥ kālam*

This is an interesting passage in that it explains *śaktipāta* as occurring whenever one has a spiritual experience of their own true nature, and that this experience happens on the subtle level when two karmas of equal strength come to fruition at the same moment or cancel each other out, leading ultimately to the *karma's* transcendence. At this very moment, the *Kiraṇatantra* posits that a *kālacchidram* (“a crack in time”) opens in the devotee, a very similar idea to the *chidras* (“cracks”) we discussed earlier in the medical texts, where daemons of various sorts seize upon and enter through into their victims. However, rather than through some transgression or sin, the text states it is the “equivalence of *karmas*” (*karma-sāmya*) that can also create these fissures, which Śiva then seizes upon and makes His Power (*Śakti*) descend into the person. Rather than any negative effect, as in the case of demonic possession, Śiva, in contrast, causes his “victims” to experience their true nature and awakening.

The *karma-samaya* doctrine became quite popular at this time in Siddhānta circles and beyond. However, non-dualist Śaivas, such as Abhinavagupta rejected this cause and reasoning outright, as we will soon see, since it implied that Śiva was somehow limited or bound by the laws of *karma*. This went against non-dualist beliefs that asserted Śiva’s Power was absolutely independent and free (*svātantriya-śakti*). We will return to these arguments again shortly.

apekṣate || 5.14 *kālacchidram iti proktaṃ taj-jñāś ca bhagavāñ chivaḥ* | *Kiraṇatantra*. Translation in consultation with Wallis (2014: 193-194).

THE SVACCHANDATANTRA AND THE MANTRAPĪṬHA - Bridging the Siddhānta and the Vidyāpīṭha

We now turn to the texts of the *Mantrapīṭha*, exemplified by the *Svacchandatantra* [SVT], which has been dated to around the 6th or 7th century, though it was likely expanded upon until at least the 9th century.⁸⁷⁵ It's high standing among Kashmiri Śaivas can be seen from its reception by the likes of Abhinavagupta and his disciples who considered it one of the first non-dual texts of what were to become the sixty-four Bhairava scriptures. This was, of course, his own spin on the early Tantra, since most of the text predates any such split between dualistic and non-dualistic or Saiddhāntika and non-Saiddhāntika classifications, actually sharing elements with both traditions.⁸⁷⁶ While it becomes an important scripture for the *Mantrapīṭha* and, according to Sanderson, the basis for nearly all surviving Kashmiri non-Saiddhāntikas *paddhatis* down to recent times, it also held great authority among many Saiddhāntika circles.⁸⁷⁷ Rather than Sadāśiva of the Siddhānta, however, the SVT identifies the supreme being as Svachchandabhairava, though it follows much of the standard Saiddhāntika ritual, practices, and cosmology. It is also unique in that it contains many elements which are patently Atimārgic in orientation, making it clear that Pāśupata Śaivism had some influence in the formation of the cult, at least at the scriptural level.⁸⁷⁸ Textual research by Sanderson, White, and others also clearly shown continuous scriptural threads that begin with the Lākulas/Pāśupatas into the Saiddhāntika NST, the SVT, that continue into

⁸⁷⁵ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2010: 212); The *Mantrapīṭha* generally includes eight Bhairava texts, though only the *Svacchandabhairava* [SVT] exists today. These eight may have included the, SVT, the Caṇḍabhairava, Krodhabhairava, and Unmattabhairava Tantras. The other four vary from list to list (Dyczkowski 1988: 45).

⁸⁷⁶ See William J. Arraj, *The Svachchandatantram: History and Structure of a Saiva Scripture*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988): 8-9 and Hatley (2007: 150).

⁸⁷⁷ See Sanderson (1985: 204) and (2004: 359–60, fn. 27 and 28); See also Sanderson "History Through Textual Criticism in the study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras," in *Les Sources et le Temps. A colloquium*, ed. François Grimal, (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2001): 21–22 n. 26; and Sanderson, "The Śaiva Literature," *Journal of Indological Studies*, no. 25 (2014): 36-37.

⁸⁷⁸ Arraj (1988: 40-46)

Vidyāpīṭha texts, particularly the *Netratantra*, *Tantrasadbhāva*, and the *Kubjikāmatatantras*, as we shall soon see.⁸⁷⁹

The Mantrapīṭha is primarily represented by the cult of Svachchandabhairava, who is described in texts as being terrifying, gross-bodied, and black. This is a considerably fiercer form of Śiva compared to the solitary ascetic oriented Sadāśiva of the Siddhānta tradition. As with many figures in the Tantric pantheon, Svachchandabhairava may have originated from earlier *graha* or *yakṣa* related cults, whose main concerns often dealt with protection and combating disease. Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of the popular epithets of Svachchandabhairava was Vyādhibhakṣa, “The Devourer of Disease”.⁸⁸⁰ In many ways the cult, iconography, and scriptures of Svachchandabhairava can be seen as intermediaries between the milder Sadāśiva of the Siddhānta, and the increasingly fierce Kāpālika-like deities Bhairava and the various Goddesses of the *Vidyāpīṭha* cults, leading Hatley to label the SVT cultus as “mildly Kāpālika”.⁸⁸¹ Svachchandabhairava’s consort, Aghoreśvarī, also known as Bhairavī and Caṇḍā Kāpālinī, is also significant as she becomes one of the central deities of the much more radical *Yāmalatantras*. She is worshipped in the SVT, though always subordinate to Sadāśiva.

The SVT contains much of what comes to characterize subsequent *Bhairavatantras*, including the worship of Bhairava as the central deity in the *maṇḍala*, surrounded by a

⁸⁷⁹ See Sanderson (2001: 29). A fascinating contemporary “net result”, as Dyczkowski (2004: 236-237) puts it, of these threads can be seen in Newari cults in Nepal associated with Guhyakālī. In this cult, Guhyakālī is the primary deity, though she is also secretly worshipped as an aspect of Kubjikā. Her consort, on the other hand, is Pāśupati, who is also worshipped secretly in conjunction with Kubjikā, as Sikhā-Svacchandabhairava. See Dyczkowski, *A Journey in the World of the Tantras*, (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004). See also White (2003 & 2012b).

⁸⁸⁰ Sanderson (1988: 670). Sanderson (2014: 36 fn. 131) also mentions that Kṣemarāja believes this was also the name of a Mantrapīṭha text.

⁸⁸¹ Hatley (2007: 150). There is similarity in the identity of Svachchandabhairava’s five faces and those of Pāśupati, on the one hand, and Sadāśiva of the *Siddhāntāgamas*, on the other.

retinue of eight subsidiary *bhairavas*; worship by a solitary adepts in a desolate location or burning ground; the use of divinization technologies such as *nyāsa*⁸⁸², breath-control, and the *Śivahasta* ("Hand of Śiva") rite⁸⁸³; *nāḍīsandhāna*, or "fusing of the channels" of the disciple's subtle body to the guru's;⁸⁸⁴ Saiddhāntika styled rites blended with cremation ground practices and Kāpālika paraphernalia, including the use of skulls and mildly transgressive substances, such as wine or human flesh, as offerings (but not consumed as in the more transgressive *Vidyāpīṭha*); encounters with *yoginīs* (*melaka*)⁸⁸⁵; and finally the culmination of its practices in what William Arraj calls an "identifying possession" by Lord Bhairava, which bestows both *siddhis* (powers) and *mukti* (liberation) to his devotees.⁸⁸⁶

However, *āveśa* terminology in the SVT is rare, save one passage at SVT 4.152: "A *guru* possessed by Śiva (*śivāveśī guruḥ*) knows the principle (*tattva*) of mantras. With mantras, the Immoveable one (Śiva) can swallow (destroy) the bonds (*pāśa*), which are like poison (*viṣa*), in an instant."⁸⁸⁷ Though *āveśa* as possession is not explicitly used in the SVT elsewhere, there are a number of passages that discuss how one cultivates the conviction (*abhimānas*) that "I alone am the supreme Haṃsa, Śiva, the ultimate cause [of all]" [SVT 4.399]⁸⁸⁸ as well as descriptions of the *sādhakas* visualization and subsequent identification with Bhairava (e.g. SVT 2.54cd *ātmānaṃ bhairavaṃ dhyātvā tato hr̥dyāgamācaret*), or

⁸⁸² For examples, SVT 2.38 and 3.136 where it is known as *śaktinyāsa*; other examples include SVT 4.58

⁸⁸³ *Śivahasta* rite is mentioned at SVT 3.31cd–32ab; 3.141–143; 4.29; 4.39; 4.58; 4.221

⁸⁸⁴ *Nāḍīsandhāna* mentioned at SVT 3.49–3.53; 3.95 and 3.149

⁸⁸⁵ SVT 15.17 and 15.32cd–33

⁸⁸⁶ See Arraj (1988: 49) for related passages

⁸⁸⁷ *viṣāṇām iva pāśānām mantraiḥ kavalanaṃ dhruvam | karoti mantratattvajñāḥ śivāveśī guruḥ kṣaṇāt ||* SVT 4.152. I believe this may be an allusion to the famous story of Śiva drinking the poison from the Churning of the Ocean myth.

⁸⁸⁸ SVT 4.399: *tadvad evābhimānas tu kartavyo daiśikottamaiḥ / aham eva paro haṃsaḥ śivaḥ paramakāraṇam ||* "In the same way, the best preceptors should cultivate the elated conviction: I alone am the supreme Haṃsa, Śiva, the ultimate cause [of all]." Compare this later with the "Vajra pride" in the Deity Yoga of Tantric Buddhists. As a side note, Kṣemarāja locates the *haṃsamantra* within the body as the *kuṇḍaliniśakti* in his commentary on the SVT. See Simone McCarter, "The Body Divine: Tantric Śaivite Ritual Practices in the *Svacchandatantra* and Its Commentary", *Religions*, 5.3, (2014): 744.

achieving a state “like” Bhairava (e.g. *svacchandasadṛśo bhavet* | 6.54ab).⁸⁸⁹ In one example, achieving identification with Bhairava occurs during a *yoginīmelāpa*, a hallucinatory-like encounter with fierce *yoginīs* in a cremation ground. As commonplace in later *Vidyāpīṭha* and Tantric Buddhist scriptures, if the *yoginīs* are pleased by the offerings of the *sādhaka* during these encounters, they will bestow *siddhis* to the *sādhaka*. In this case, the text states that the *yoginīs* bestow a food offering (*caru*) to the *sādhaka*, which upon consumption, transforms the *sādhaka* into an equal to Bhairava himself.⁸⁹⁰

Though not explicitly a dualist or nondualist text, Abhinavagupta's disciple, Kṣemarāja, puts his own non-dual spin in his commentary on the SVT, stating again and again that these acts and rites of identification are in reality "possession by Bhairava" (*bhairavasamāveśa* or *bhairavāveśa*).⁸⁹¹ In his PhD dissertation on the SVT, William Arraj also suggests that possession concepts may have been operative at this time and that certain passages could “plausibly be read either as a statement of non-dualist doctrine, or the culmination of a possession rite.”⁸⁹² For example, SVT 7.260-7.261ab states:

*yogī svacchandayogena svacchandagaticārīṇā | sa svacchandapade yuktaḥ
svacchandasamatām vrajet || svacchandaścaiva svacchandaḥ svacchando
vicaretsadā*

The yogi, being in the condition of absolute independence (*svacchanda*), by means of the yoga of Svachchanda[-bhairava], is united in the state of absolute independence (*svacchanda*) and attains equality with Svachchanda[-bhairava]. Svachchanda[-bhairava] always rambles about spontaneously and of his own free will.

⁸⁸⁹ *triguṇena tu japyena svacchandasadṛśo bhavet* | SVT 6.54ab. See also *ātmano bhairavaṃ rūpaṃ jñātvā ghoram subhīṣaṇam | kruddhaḥ samuccarenmantrī dvātriṃśāḥśarasaṃmitam* || SVT 6.91 ||

⁸⁹⁰ *satatābhyāsayogena dadate carukaṃ svakam | yasya samprāśanād devi vīreśasadrśo bhavet* || SVT 15.37 “Due to [his] engaging in constant practice, she bestows her own caru, by the mere consumption of which, O Goddess, he would become equal to [Bhairava,] Lord of the Heroes.” We should note that passage comes from the final chapter, which is believed to be later in date compared to rest of the text.

⁸⁹¹ See for example Kṣemarāja's commentary on SVT 2.105; 2.136; 3.128; 4.54; 4.116; as just a few examples of many. For more on nondualism in early Tantras, see Törzsök, “Nondualism in Early Śākta Tantras: Transgressive Rites and Their Ontological Justification in a Historical Perspective.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, (2014): 195–223.

⁸⁹² Arraj (1998: 200). Arraj also believes that this evidence suggests that "Kāpālika" circles originally cultivated and transmitted the practices in this book.

Whether the authors of the SVT had possession in mind here, is unclear, though it could be interpreted as such. David White has translated a few lines before this passage as well (SVT 7.258, 260) where there is clear mention of *parakāyapraveśa* being involved:

He [the yogi] is able to displace his identity by means of another [person's body] (*pareṇa*), and death cannot carry him off, not even for a billion eons . . .⁸⁹³

Though possession is not that explicit in the SVT, in another contemporaneous text we will examine, the *Brahmayāmalatantra*, it certainly is.

THE BRAHMAYĀMALATANTRA AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE VIDYĀPIṬHA

The *Brahmayāmalatantra* (BYT) is one of the oldest surviving *Bhairavatantras*.⁸⁹⁴ Dated to around the 6th-8th century, it explicitly mentions deity possession as a stated practice and goal.⁸⁹⁵ Although relatively forgotten until recent times, it once commanded great authority as seen in the writings of Abhinavagupta, who cites and paraphrases the BYT throughout the *Tantrāloka*. It also had a significant influence on Buddhist Tantra, as noted by Sanderson, who has shown how the foundational *Laghuśaṃvara Tantra* [LST] of the Buddhists borrowed extensive passages from it and a number of other early Śaiva tantras.⁸⁹⁶ At the same time, recent evidence also shows that some of the sorceristic rites and classification systems found in the BYT may have actually been drawn from various Buddhist *Kriyātantras*, such as the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, as well as nominally Śaiva

⁸⁹³ See White (2009: 197)

⁸⁹⁴ Also known as the *Picumata* and the *Ucchuśmatantra*

⁸⁹⁵ See Hatley (2007: 76)

⁸⁹⁶ See Sanderson (2001: 41-47) and (2009); see also Hatley (2007: 104-114). They claim other *Bhairavatantras* redacted by the LST include the SYM, *Tantrasadbhāva*, *Niśisañcāra*, and *Yoginīsañcāraprakaraṇa*

medical *tantras* such as the *Bhūta/Bāla/Garuḍatantras* and likely some lost Atimārga III sources.⁸⁹⁷

In terms of non-Saiddhāntika literature, the BYT gives prominent place to the *Vāmatantras* associated with the cult of the Four Sisters (*bhaginīs*) of Tumburu which, like the Cult of the Seven Mothers, is an archaic goddess-oriented system, predating the *Vidyāpīṭha*. In this regard it shares some themes with the Buddhist *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and the Śaiva *Netra Tantra*, which also give prominence to Tumburu and his *bhaginīs*.⁸⁹⁸ Hatley thus suggests that the BYT had "a comparatively early historical horizon", since these are some of the earliest tantric works mentioned by Dharmakīrti (550-650 CE) and in manuscripts from Gilgit dating around the same period.⁸⁹⁹

The text seems to define itself primarily against the Siddhānta scriptures, which were considered the mainstream and orthodox Śaiva tradition of the time. The BYT mentions various *Siddhāntatantras*, yet only incorporates verses from the more intermediate *Niśvasa* corpus. It does, however, adopt and adapt much of the *Siddhāntatantras* framework and practices, though the BYT adds its own cosmological twist to them.⁹⁰⁰ In contrast to tantric texts of *Mantrapīṭha*, which focus predominantly on male divinities (and their associated mantras), the BYT is the first text to classify itself as a *Bhairava-Tantra* belonging to the *Vidyāpīṭha* in which feminine divinities (Devīs, Mātṛs, Yoginīs etc.) and use of feminine mantras/spells (*vidyās*) predominate. The primary deities of the BYT *maṇḍala* is centered on the couple (*yāmala*) Kapālīśabhairava and Caṇḍākāpālīnī (also called Aghoreśī or Bhairavī)

⁸⁹⁷ Hatley (2007: 114-120) and Törzsök, "Yoginī and Goddess Possession in Early Śaiva Tantras", in "Yoginī" in *South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2013): 179-197 argue that Atimārga sources were redacted for certain chapters of the BYT, specifically those dealing with possession.

⁸⁹⁸ Hatley (2007: 92-96) for references

⁸⁹⁹ See Hatley (2007: 96-97) and Sanderson (2001: 11-12) and (2014: 49).

⁹⁰⁰ Hatley (2007: 82-88) argues this is primarily only from the *Uttarasūtra* and *Niśvāsakārikā*

who are surrounded by Four Devīs (also known as the *guh yakās* Raktā, Karālī, Caṇḍākṣī, and Mahocchuṣmā) and Four Attendants known as *Dūtīs* (aka the *kin̄karīs* Karālā, Danturā, Bhīmavaktrā, and Mahābala). This formation of the deity couple surrounded by four *devīs* and *dūtīs*, is believed to have followed the model of the Bhaginī cult of the *Vāmatantras*. However, it adds several other fierce feminine entities to its *maṇḍala*, including the Six *yoginīs* and the Eight Mothers (*mātr̥s*).⁹⁰¹ Other minor *yoginīs* such as the child-disease causing Pūtanā, Viḍālī (The Cat), Ulūka (The Owl) are also mentioned in descriptions of the various *maṇḍalas*.⁹⁰²

This *maṇḍala* is fascinating and unique for its time due to its unusual amount of malignant cremation-ground and possessing spirits. Obviously, its emphasis on fierce goddess and *yoginīs* in the pantheon re-calls many of the Mothers, *grāhis* and other possessing feminine spirits and demons described in the MBH and *bhūtavidyā*-related texts. It's clear that these beings were adopted, adapted, and systematized from these earlier sources and associated *grāha* cults, as well as the more Brahmanical-oriented cult of Seven Mothers, both of which were popular in the Kuṣāṇa era preceding the BYT's composition. The continuities are unmistakable – the various female goddess and spirits of the BYT take on many of these earlier attributes (fangs, ability to shapeshift, dwelling in liminal spaces, zoomorphic or avian qualities, feeding on blood and flesh etc.) including the potential for them to bestow powers, protection, and wisdom. As mentioned earlier, inscriptional evidence places members of the early Atimārga directly in contact with and, in some cases,

⁹⁰¹ The Six *Yoginīs* are listed as Kroṣṭukī, Vijayā, Gajakarṇā, Mahāmukhī, Cakravegā, Mahānāsā and the Eight Mothers (*Mātr̥s*) are Maheśvarī, Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Kaumārī, Vaivasvatī, Indrānī, Caṇḍikā, and Aghorī.

⁹⁰² Csaba Kiss, *The Brahmayāmala Tantra or Picumata. The Religious Observances and Sexual Rituals of the Tantric Practitioner: Chapters 3, 21 and 45 Vol. II Vol. II*, (Institut français de Pondichéry: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 2015): 29.

control of these early Mother goddess-focused cults, so their incorporation in the BYT comes as no surprise.⁹⁰³

The *maṇḍala* prescribed in the BYT is employed in several of its rites, including initiation (*dīkṣā*), image installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) and, most importantly, the *mahāyāga*, or “Great Sacrifice”. Initiation is said to be of two types, one ordinary and one in a cremation ground, involving the use of transgressive substances and offerings to entities within the BYT pantheon. The culture of cremation-ground ascetics and cults seem to be an essential feature of the BYT - the whole *maṇḍala*, in fact, is supposed to be visualized as various cremation grounds popular throughout North India at that time, the central one being the great cremation ground of Prayāga (modern day Allahabad).⁹⁰⁴

According to chapter three [BYT 3.178-202], during the preliminary rites for initiation, *maṇḍalas* of these cremation grounds are to be drawn (*ālikha*) on the ground while worshipping various *rudras*, *bhūtas*, and goddesses. The *sādhaka* is ordered to draw these beings with terrifying faces (*bhīmavaktra*), holding skull-topped staffs (*khatvāṅga*), severed heads (*muṇḍa*), and mounted upon corpses. Any ritual items such as clothing, threads, pots etc. should also come from the cremation ground or the corpses within. As a further preliminary, the text states a peacock feather enlivened with *mantras* is used to purify and cleanse the *maṇḍala* grounds, a common tool, as we've seen, of exorcists throughout South Asia. Having completed the preliminary rites, the text states the *sādhaka* should be naked

⁹⁰³ A land-grant made for the support of a shrine of the Mothers established by a Pāsupata Ācārya Lokodadhi is dated roughly 375-377 C.E. which made endowments to fund ongoing worship and sacrifices to the Mothers. The famous inscription of Gaṅdhār (around 423-5 CE) also attests to “extremely terrifying temple” (*veśmātyugram*) that is filled with *dākinīs* and Mothers “who make the oceans tumultuous through powerful winds arising from tantras” (*tantrodbhūta*). Hatley writes that “This inscription thus associates the Mothers simultaneously with hordes of female spirits (*dākinīs*), magical powers, and a temple cult, also providing early and significant occurrences of the terms *dākinī* and tantra in the context of Mother-goddess worship.” Hatley (2007: 44-48) for more on these and other early inscriptions.

⁹⁰⁴ Hatley (2007: 232-233)

with disheveled hair and should first worship Śiva, then the Goddesses (the *Guhyakās/Devīs*), the *Dūtīs* (messengers), the *Yoginīs* and finally the Mothers (*mātrīs*) with various transgressive offerings including incense made of garlic, bdellium, flesh, *liṅgamala* (i.e. smegma, the secretion of the male organ) lamps made of human skulls filled with human fat, food offerings of raw and cooked meats of various sorts, mung beans, alcohol, and water.⁹⁰⁵ The *sādhaka* then enters the *maṇḍala* having recited the prescribed mantra (i.e. the *vidyā*) of the goddess Caṇḍākāpālīnī (here known as Avadhūtā) eight hundred times. Through this the *sādhaka*'s body becomes transformed and divinized as denoted by the term *avadhūtatanu* (3.197cd; 3.202), which Törzsök notes is one of the most common expressions to “describe the body of the practitioner as transformed into the deity”, in this case, Kapālīśabhairava.⁹⁰⁶

It is here where we find our first occurrence of possession in the BYT, albeit not deity possession, but the "possession of a victim's body" (*paśudeham viśet*; BYT 3.202), as seen among the Pāsupatas. This is an earlier version of the *paraśarīrāveśa* practice seen in the *Netratantra*, and may potentially be, according to David White, the earliest prescriptive account and "tantric adaptation" of the possession techniques employing solar rays used by the Yogin's from the Epic period. White argues that this can be seen with the BYT's reference to terms such *śaktitantu* [BYT 45.104; 108], “the *śakti*-fibre that spans from Śiva down to earth [*tattvas*]” as well as the associated “fusing of the channels” rite (*nāḍīsandhāna*) [BYT 45.114; 118]. White believes these are “clear adaptations of the Chāndogya Upaniśad’s (8.6)

⁹⁰⁵ Kiss (2015: 203)

⁹⁰⁶ See Törzsök's 2012 article "The (Un)dreadful Goddess: Aghorī in Early Śakta Tantras." David G. White further notes the importance of the term Avadhūtā, a variation on Avadhūtī: “the Buddhist tantric cognate of the Hindu Kuṇḍalinī, a term that had not yet appeared in the Hindu tantric canon of the period,” suggesting, according to White, that “Avadhūtā/Avadhūtī was a non-sectarian term belonging to a shared early medieval tantric lexicon.” According to White, the term Avadhūtā/Avadhūtī later becomes a synonymous with advanced beings like Siddhas, particularly their use of unconventional practices and attainment of supernatural powers. See White (1996: 367 note 93) and more recently, White, "Book Review: The *Brahmayāmalatantra* or *Picumata*, vol. II". *Journal of American Oriental Society*. 138 (3): (2018): 676.

channels of the heart, which morph into the solar rays by which the deceased was said to rise up to or through the orb of the sun.”⁹⁰⁷

Like the *yoginīs* and *sādhakas* of the NT discussed previously, the *sādhaka* in the BYT is similarly described as entering into a victim’s body in order to extract their constituent elements i.e., their blood, fat, skin, marrow, and flesh. The *mantras* employed to accomplish this are known as the *Paśu*-seed and *Raktā mantras*. "Rakta" literally means blood, but as the feminine *Raktā*, the term also denotes one of the four Goddesses/Guhyakas which surround Kapālīśabhairava in the primary *maṇḍala* of the system. Two methods seem to be mentioned, however. The first method [BYT 3.198-201ab] involves the casting of the *Raktā* goddess (*vidyā*) by the “Mantra master” (*mantrajña*) while in a state of *samādhi* (*samādhista*) into the body of the victim, allowing them to draw out the victim's blood. This blood is then placed in a skull with flowers and given as an offering (*argha*) to the goddesses (*devīs*) and Kapālīśabhairava to consume. If accepted, the text states the adept will achieve power over the three worlds. The second method [BYT 3.201cd-207ab], involves the adept yogically entering the body of the victim themselves, as seen in the later NT. It is here where we see yogic terminology used – the specified *mantras* are driven along the *udāna* (the upward breath) after his own body has been empowered by the *Avadhūtā mantra*, while in "a state that transcends convention" (*nirācāreṇa bhāvena*). It is in this state that he is now able to enter the body of the *paśu* (victim), seize (*graha*) its bodily constituents and then quickly re-enter his own body through the *apāna* (downward breath). The constituents (blood, meat, skin, and marrow) are then said to be placed in a skull and fed to the various goddesses ⁹⁰⁸ while the fat is reserved for Bhairava, who is said to reside in the "Five Voids"

⁹⁰⁷ White (2018: 676).

⁹⁰⁸ *Raktā*, *Karālī*, *Caṇḍākṣī*, and *Mahocchuṣmā* respectively

(*pañcavyoman*), an early system associated with the five *cakras*.⁹⁰⁹ If the entities are gratified, they will reward the practitioner with the power of flight and other *siddhis*. This section ends stating:

This is the supreme secret [now taught] to you, the worship of Yoga Goddesses (*yogeśī*), which provides Mantrins who strive for Sky-walking (*khecaratva*) with powers (*siddhi*). It should be guarded by all means if he wishes to live long.⁹¹⁰

Following this section is the initiation itself [BYT 3.212cd-230], which is also of two types – one "ordinary" and one in a cremation ground. The first involves the pupil entering the *maṇḍala* if they have been “attracted previously to the *maṇḍala* by the *śaktis*” (*dīkṣayen maṇḍale paścād ākrṣṭaḥ pūrva śaktibhiḥ*; 3.213ab), which I take to mean that the initiate, as in some texts of the Siddhānta, were "impelled" by the Goddesses themselves to perform the rite. Once in the *maṇḍala*, the guru is supposed to enter and possess the body of his disciple and fuse (*yojayet*) their two souls together, taking the fused soul up to the highest ontic cosmic level (*tattva*) via the spell (*vidyā*) of Goddess Vāmā, a rite similar to what we saw earlier in the NTS and SVT.⁹¹¹ After achieving this, the guru then draws out the soul of the pupil with the aid of Goddess Raudrī, and places it into his own heart. From here the "Full Oblation" (*pūrṇāhuti*) ritual takes place and the pupil's soul is joined with all the various ontic levels (*tattvas*), from Bhairava to the Earth.

The second form of initiation [BYT 3.217-230] takes place within the cremation ground and is known as the *Mahāyāga*, "the Great Worship". Again, blood and flesh, a skull cups of flowers, and wine are used for worship and offerings (*argha*) to entice the cremation ground denizens to come forth. The guru and pupil partake in the consumption of a

⁹⁰⁹ See *Tantrābhidhānakośa II* (2004: 177)

⁹¹⁰ *etat te paramaṃ guhyaṃ yogeśīnām tu pūjanam | siddhyarthaṃ caiva mantrīnām khecaratvajigīṣīnām || gūhītavyaṃ prayatnena yad icche dīrgha jīvitum |* BYT 3.206-207ab ||

⁹¹¹ See Kiss (2015: 207 fn. 214) for NTS references.

transgressive offering (*caru*), which the text says immediately grants various *siddhis*. Fire-offerings are then made, followed by the *sādhaka* visualizing himself on Bhairava's throne and meditating upon the transcendent state (*nirācāra*), resulting in the *sādhaka* becoming joined (*yojayet*) and united (*yuktam*) with the Great God Bhairava. However, there is a distinction seemingly being made in the text that the *sādhaka* will "be like Bhairava" (*bhairaveva*), as in the Siddhānta, rather than "be Bhairava", though he will enjoy many of Bhairava's qualities and powers, including knowledge of the three times (past, present and future), ability to transcend dualities (*jitadvanda*), flight, the ability to enter other being's bodies (*paradehe praveśam*) and shapeshifting into any form desired (*svatantra tanu kurvate*). While in his body, the text states, the *sādhaka* will ascend (*utkrāmayati*) to the level of the God of gods (i.e., Bhairava).⁹¹²

The first occurrence of explicit deity possession in the BYT can be found much later in chapter twenty-one, which lists a series of nine *vidyāvratas* the tantric *sādhaka* is supposed to practice in the first phase of his path after initiation.⁹¹³ The general aim of this series of observances, which become gradually more unconventional (*nirācāra*) and transgressive as one proceeds, is self-purification, though more importantly it leads to the invocation of the fierce *yoginīs* in hopes of obtaining an encounter (*melaka*) with them. After a *sādhaka* has successfully practiced these observances for at least six months, the text states the *yoginīs* will appear and bless the practitioner with supernatural powers, knowledge, and instructions for further tasks.⁹¹⁴ All nine observances involve wandering about throughout the day, four

⁹¹² *nirācāraṃ tato dhyātvā yojayet tatra sādhaḥ || yuktas tu caruḥ bhakṣe bhairaveva prajāyate | trikālaṅ jītvando yateṣṭaṃ ceṣṭate tu saḥ || utpate gaganābhogāṃ sarvāṃ gacche yathepsayā | paradehe praveśaṃ ca svatantra tanu kurvate || utkrāmayati dehasṭha devadevāni sādhaḥ |* BYT 3.227cd-230ab

⁹¹³ The nine *vidyāvratas* correspond to the nine syllables of Caṇḍā Kāpālīnī's primary mantra (*vidyā*)

⁹¹⁴ Kiss (2015: 31)

daily rituals, eating only during the night and remaining chaste during the prescribed period of the vows. The nine observances are summarized below, as listed from BYT 21.1-46ab⁹¹⁵:

1. *Nagnavrata* - “Naked Observance”: involves roaming around naked (at least the upper half of body) all day, being covered in ashes, and having unbound hair.
2. *Kucailinavrata* - “Observance of the Badly-Clothed”: involves wearing dirty rags found on the roads and maintaining general uncleanliness.
3. *Malinavrata* - “Garlanded Observance”: *Sādhaka* should wear leftover/sullied garlands and colorful strips of cloths (as often seen on temple images or sacred trees) all over his body if they were not previously offered to Śiva. At night he should remain naked.
4. *Unmattakavrata* - “Being Like a Madman Observance”: This is essentially the same as the madman observance of the Pāśupatas, except he is explicitly told not to abuse others. While the goal of the Pāśupatas was the transfer of merit by his provocation of would-be abusers, the goal here, according to Kiss, is “to concentrate on the gradual adoption of non-conventional practices (*nirācāra*), which prepares the *sādhaka* for the extreme rituals to be performed after this introductory test period”.⁹¹⁶
5. *Kapālavrata* - “Skull-Observance”: The *sādhaka* is ordered to fix a skull on a stick and wander about during the day clothed, hair unbound, silent and fully immersed in meditation.
6. *Muktabhairavavrata* - “The Observance of the Liberated Bhairava”: During the day he wanders about, adorning the five bone ornaments (*pañcamudrā*). These are to be removed at night, when the *sādhaka* can then eat again as in previous observances.
7. *Bālakavrata* - “The Observance of Being Like a Child”: The *sādhaka* acts and enjoys the world as if he was a child, at times putting his underwear on his head, playing in the sand or with toys and other childish games.
8. *Kravyādavrata* - “The Raw Flesh-Eater Observance”: The *sādhaka* is now ordered to roam around and observe complete silence during the day, intent on meditation, and eating only raw flesh with human blood (*mahārakta*) in imitation of the *piśāca* demons. He may not consume anything else during this observance.
9. *Vardhamānavrata* - “The Platter Observance”: In this observance he emulates Bhairava himself - carrying a skull in his right hand, donning ashes, the five bone ornaments (*mudrāpañcaka*) and Śiva's trident. He is ordered to roam about constantly in cremation grounds, making howling sounds like a jackal (*śivarava*) and playing Śiva's *ḍamaru*-drum while worshipping the *yoginīs* and *pūtanās* at night.

From this list of observances, we can see a gradual increase in transgressive practices and radical behaviors from vow to vow, culminating in identification with the *piśācas*, the worship of known possession entities (e.g., *yoginīs* and *pūtanās*), and finally, identification

⁹¹⁵ Summarized from Kiss (2015: 211-230)

⁹¹⁶ Kiss (2015: 33)

with Bhairava. Though possession is not made explicit, there are some parallels in terms of behavior when one is possessed by a *piśāca*, *rākṣasa* or other flesh-eaters as seen in earlier medical texts (e.g., eating flesh, wearing rags, insanity, etc.), implying that this may be what is happening, or at least what they desire to happen.

Besides these *vratas*, the same chapter [BYT 2.46cd-102ab] offers five alternative observances if these do not result in their final aim, which ultimately, we learn, is possession by Lord Bhairava himself. The first four deal with "becoming like" the four *Guhyakās* of the BYT maṇḍala - Raktā, Karālī, Caṇḍākṣī, and Mahocchuṣmā. That is to say, the *sādhaka* is ordered to imitate these entities' qualities, including the donning of their respective colors, attributes, and accoutrements.⁹¹⁷ Through meditation one then achieves the "transcendent state" (*nirācāra*), and divinizes the body with mantras (*nyāsa*), leading the *sādhaka* to fully identify with the *Guhyakās* in the hope that they will lead the *sādhaka* to the final goal of Bhairava himself. Along the way they achieve and master various supernatural powers (*siddhis*) such as the ability to fly (*khecaratva*), as well as lordship as a *bhūtanātha* over humans, *mātr̥s*, and *yoginīs* and other supernatural beings.⁹¹⁸

The final observance [BYT 21.102cd-123] is the *Bhairavavrata*, which is considered a condensed version of all other *vratas* and thus the most powerful and most difficult practice to perform.⁹¹⁹ It is this *vrata* which leads explicitly to deity possession, involving the entrance (*praviśya*) of Kapālīśabhairava into the body of the *sādhaka*:

Now I shall teach you the auspicious *Vidyāvratas* in combined form (*samudāyena*). His limbs should be covered in ashes, his matted locks fastened like a crown, and his head adorned with skulls. He should have bones on his ears, head and arms and a

⁹¹⁷ Raktā (white), Karālī (red), Caṇḍākṣī (yellow), and Mahocchuṣmā (black)

⁹¹⁸ BYT 2.46cd-102ab. See Kiss (2015: 119-123) for Sanskrit verses, and (218-222) for his translation

⁹¹⁹ Kiss (2015: 33) believes this is the fifth of the five observances, though it may be its own *vrata* altogether as there is one more observance known as the "Milk-drinkers Observance". He believes, however, that this is an interpolation as it does not fit with the other observances mentioned.

sacred thread and belt made of human hair from a corpse...his body should be covered with mantras (*mantravighraha*) and carry a skull-topped staff decorated with human hair (*khaṭvāṅga*) and a trident. He should play his drum (*paṭahī*) and wear a garland of bells on his belt, feet, and hands. He should wear divine arm-bracelets and draw a third eye on his forehead. He should utter a jackal cry (*śivarāva*) together with the *mukhamuṇḍāstra* (shaved-head face weapon mantra?). This observance, called the *mahāvratā* ("The Great Observance"), is difficult to practice even for the thirty gods. He should practice the *bhairavavratā* in the cremation ground, a terrifying forest, or the seashore...He who practices it even for one day, concentrated, will gain powers (*siddhis*). As soon as the (Mantrin, who has) mastered the observance, fuses (*yojayet*) with the uttered mantras he will master the unmasterable quickly, have no doubt! He will master the Devīs and the troops of Maruts will be pleased. The Lord Kapālin himself will come, surrounded by the *guhyaakās*. Praised by the Maruts, the excellent one will obtain a boon.

[Kapālīśabhairava will say] "Good, good, you of great heroic spirit (*mahāsattva*), who is firm in this observance! You have accomplished the *mahāvratā*, which is difficult even for the Devas and Gandharvas. Choose the boon you desire, my dear, and tell me. [The *sādhaka* should say] "If you are pleased with me, Lord, enter my body (*praviśya mama vighraha*)." [The Lord will say] "Open your mouth" and the mighty Lord enters (*praviśya*) his heart (*hṛdaya*). Bhairava will be situated in his heart, the [four] *guhyaakās* in his throat, the *māṭṛs* in his limbs, the *yoginīs* in his joints, and the *śakinīs*, *pūtānās*, etc. in his pores. He will be Śiva in bodily form (*sākṣā*), with form and without (*sakalanīṣkala*) – all-pervasive, unmanifest, free of volitional mind (*amanas*), and transcending mind (*manonmanah*). He will be surrounded by troops of *vidyās* and mantras (*vidyāmantragaṇair*) of many forms and shapes (*anekākārarūpais*). The *māṭṛs*, *yoginīs*, the troops of *vidyeśvaras* (spell-lords), the *rudras*, the *mahocchuṣmās* with their *kinḅaras* (servants), the *devīs* with their great-souled *dūtas* on their aerial cars (*vimanas*) – all will emerge from his body and praise him. This is the glorious rise (*udaya*) of the Yoginīs, which bestow boons on all creatures. In heaven, on earth and underground, in the sky and in the tattvas, he appears everywhere, O Goddess, as the Skull-bearing Lord (*devo kapāladhrk*). This is the siddhi (power) arising from this *vratā*, which has never been taught to anyone. This secret that comes from Śiva has been taught, O Varārohā.⁹²⁰ [BYT 21.102-123]

The chapter ends with a description of the accompanying *nyāsa* rites, which involves visualizing a garland of lotuses attached to a *śakti*-fibre (*śaktitantu*), and installing various gods/goddesses (Guhyaakās, Dūtīs, Yoginīs, Māṭṛs, Bhairavī/Bhairava) on the nine *granthis*, or "knots", of the body, a pre-cursor to the later concept of *cakras*. This section ends with the verse, "Turning his body into Śiva, the *sādhaka*, as both Śakti and the one who possesses

⁹²⁰ Translation based upon Kiss (2015: 225-227), though modified. Sanskrit text can be found on pgs. 123-124 in same book

Śakti, should practice observances of five kinds"[BYT 21.144].⁹²¹ As implied, this state of possession or union with Śiva is not the final goal, but another temporary state and step towards a longer path detailed in subsequent chapters.

In chapter forty-six of the BYT, a second passage also describes possession by Bhairava along with a host of unnamed goddesses. This was identified by Törzsök, who argues that this and the subsequent two chapters may have been redacted from a now lost Kāpālika texts of the Atimārga III.⁹²² Possession occurs as a result of a mortuary rite called the *Mahāmanthāna*, “The Great Churning”, a reference to archetypal Epic/Purāṇic period myth of the great churning of the ocean of milk (*kshirasāgara-manthana*) done in ancient times by the gods and demons in order to obtain the divine nectar (*amṛta*).⁹²³ In the BYT, however, the churning is performed on top of a corpse and in a cremation ground, the *sādhaka* having transformed his body into the skull-bearing Lord as prescribed by the *mahāvratā* (*mahāvratā-tanusthita*), and involving the worship of *maṇḍala* deities in nine skulls filled with blood, alcohol (*madirā*) and sexual fluids (*picu*).⁹²⁴ The churning itself uses various materials obtained from the cremation ground, including human hair and intestines from a corpse for the rope and a large bone for the churning stick. As in the original Epic myth, various supernatural objects, beings, and powers are said to emerge from this magical churning. In the rite, the *sādhaka* is told to churn the *picu* in his skull vessel and empower it with *vidyāṅga* mantras. He then offers the empowered substance as a gift offering (*argha*) to

⁹²¹ Kiss (2015: 230).

⁹²² Törzsök (2013: 182-183).

⁹²³ This famous myth can be found in the MBh, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and Viṣṇu Purāṇa, among others

⁹²⁴ See Törzsök (2012: 10).

the goddesses and Bhairava. If gratified, the text states, they will enter (*viśanti*) the *sādhaka's* body.⁹²⁵

Well done, well done great being, you who are honored by gods and demons alike. You have performed a true miracle here, concerning this *sādhana*, my son. You have become the ornament of the world, the most excellent man. Sit on my lap, my son, and choose yourself the right boon: immortality, *bhairava*-hood, through which you can fulfill [even] the wishes of Brahmā, Viṣṇu or Indra, or whatever you wish, my dear son, together with your fellow practitioners. [BYT 46.111cd-114ab]

The *sādhaka* replies: If you are satisfied with me, O Goddess, then give me your breast, O Mother. Hearing these pleasant words of the *sādhaka*, the Goddess [says]: Come, come, noble being, drink from my breast, my adopted son. Which other great being than you would deserve to be my son? [BYT 46.114cd-116] Therefore, I shall embrace you, heroic practitioner, and give you my breast. [...]

The goddess then does so and the eminent practitioner, after drinking the nectar of immortality left-and-right [i.e., from both breasts] will become omniscient within a second. He will become Bhairava in person, the Lord of Guhyakās. All the seventy-million mantras will enter (*viśanti*) his heart [BYT 46.120-1].⁹²⁶

In chapter forty-seven of the BY, the chapter on the *Siddhi-maṇḍala*, we find a similar description of possession, but by Bhairava alone, and as a result of a much grislier cremation ground rite, known as the *Mahāmakha*, (“Great Sacrifice”) or *Mahāsādhana* (“Great Practice”). The text claims, this was practiced in ancient times by both the *devas* (gods), and *asuras* (demons) [BYT 47.1]. The *sādhaka*, having performed the prescribed mantra recitations, *nyāsa*, and transforming his body into Bhairava's (implied again by the term *mahāvratatanusthita*),⁹²⁷ is ordered to prepare the impure *picu* and smear it on sacred

⁹²⁵ *kapālaṃ picunā pūrṇaṃ vidyāṅgābhiḥ sumantritāṃ || tenārghaṃ tu pradātavyaṃ devīnāṃ bhairavasya tu | datte 'rghe tu prasidhyanti sādhakasya viśanti ca ||* (BYT 46.105cd-106ab) as found in Törzsök (2013: 192 fn 41).

⁹²⁶ *sādhu sādhu mahāsatva surāsuranamaskṛtaḥ // mahāścaryam idam vatsa kṛtan te sādhanam prati / prthivyān tilako jātam tvam eṣa puruṣottamaḥ // utsa[ṅge] tiṣṭa me putra varam vṛṇīṣva sobhanam / amaratvam bhairavatvañ ca brahmaviṣṇendrakāmadaṃ // yañ ca yācayase vatsa sakhāyaiḥ saha putrakah / 46.111cd-4ab. sādhakovāca: yadi tuṣṭāsi mān devi stanaṃ me dada ambike // srutvā vākyam tato devyāṃ sādhakasya susobhanam / ehi ehi mahāsatva stana me piba putrakah // tvaṃ muktva tu mahāsatvaḥ ko nyo putratvam arhati / pariṣva[jya] tato vīram stanam dadāmi sādhakah // BYT 46.114cd-116. evam kṛtvāpi vai devi m amṛtam sādhakottamaḥ / savyāsavyan tato pītvā sarvvajño bhavate kṣaṇām // bhairavo tha svayam sākṣā guhyakānām prabhu bhavet / saptakotyas tu mantrāṇām viśanti, tasya vai hṛdi // BYT 46.120-1. Sanskrit and modified translation based on Törzsök (2012: 11 fn 57 and 58).*

⁹²⁷ "Having the marks of the *mahāvrata* on his body" (*mahāvratatanusthitaḥ*), which likely refers the bone ornaments, third eye etc. as seen in the BYT *mahāvrata* of chapter twenty-one.

ground and construct a "Terrifying Pavilion" (*maṇḍapikāṃ ghorāṃ*), known as the *siddhimaṇḍapikā*, ("The Pavilion for Supernatural Powers") made of out of human skin and other corpse remains. Here is a partial translation of this section, based on Wallis' edition of the Sanskrit:

Resorting to his mental visualization of the deity-retinue, the *sādhaka* should install the spell (*vidyā*), enclosed [with the proper *bījas*], on the corpse... Venerating Śiva, he should write [the mantras] on the corpse.... While remembering Aghorī, whom he has already summoned, totally focused, powerful female spirits (*mahābhāgā sākinī*) with strange faces suddenly arrive from every direction (18c-19). He should not be afraid of them, but [give the guest offering from] his chalice as before. For when the *arghya* is offered, they are won over, and become boon granters (20).

He should rise at dawn and remain standing half the night. He will [continue to] see *siddhas*, *yakṣas*, *nāgas*, and *rākṣasas* (22). Having seen them, he should offer them *arghya*, and remember the *vidyā*. Should he remain [standing and practicing] up until midday [of the following day], he will see the six Yoginīs (23). At the waning of the day, he will see the [four Guhyakās] goddesses in the cremation ground. Offering to them alcohol [mixed] with blood (24), then, delighted, they say to him: "Choose a boon, *sādhaka*."

[The *sādhaka* replies]: "If you are now pleased with me, O goddess, make my temple successful" (25) When midnight [comes], should he remain up, proud, and strong, [and] Aghorī [herself will appear]. Seeing her, the *yakṣas*, *nāgas*, and *rākṣasas* will vanish (26). Seeing her, beautiful and radiant, the skillful *sādhaka*, *arghya* in hand, should make obeisance to her with all eight limbs, according to rule, in total submission (27). She protects that *sādhaka* like a son. He should remain there, standing, until the following midday.

Suddenly the three worlds burst into flame (28). After seeing zombies (*vetālas*) with deformed faces, and creatures with huge and fierce forms, the "Great Heroes" come, bearing the appearance of Bhairava (29). He should not speak to them, nor offer *arghya* or mantras. Making the *vidyā* into a ball [of energy], he should release it as a weapon (30). They are instantly destroyed simply by that casting, just as Bhairava's words [can do], as he remains standing, fixed, his mind one-pointed (31).⁹²⁸

This vivid hallucinatory description gives a graphic and dangerous picture of the world the *sādhakas* dwell in. As if from a passage of the Tibetan *Bardo Tholol*,⁹²⁹ the practitioner similarly encounters various fierce demonic-like beings and told again and again

⁹²⁸ Tentative translation and text based on Wallis who received a copy of the Sanskrit text from Kiss and Hatley. See Wallis (2014: 162-166).

⁹²⁹ Commonly known in English as The Tibetan Book of the Dead, though more accurately translated as "Liberation Through Hearing During the Intermediate State"

to not be afraid and remain steady, in this case while making guest-offerings to these dangerous beings. An earlier passage, in BYT 14.214-218, provides a harrowing account of the perils posed by these *yoginīs* of the cremation grounds:

The [*sādhaka*] of great spirit (*mahāsattva*) should recite the mantra, naked, facing south. After seven nights, the terrifying (*mahābhayāḥ*) *yoginīs* come, natural-born killers (*māraṇ ātmikāḥ*) with dreadful forms (*raudrarūpās*), impure (*aśuddhā*) and enraged (*sakrodhā*). But, having seen them, the heroic-spirited *mantrin* should not fear. Making a prostration, one should impart to them the guest-offering (*arghaṃ*). They are pleased with the *sādhaka* who is endowed with the [heroic] spirit, without a doubt. And having touched him, they tell the truth of that which is good and bad. If by carelessness a *sādhaka* of weak spirit (*sattvahīnas*) should tremble (*kṣubhyeta*), the *yoginīs*, proud with their yoga, devour him at that very moment. Even if the mighty Rudra were to come himself, he would not be able to save him.”⁹³⁰

While dangerous to non-initiates, these same demonic *yoginīs* become all-beneficent to the skilled tantric practitioner, often simply called a “hero” (*vīra*) for the courage and bravery they must face in these dangerous and arduous rites. The aim, of course, is invoking and encountering (*melāpaka*) the *yoginis* themselves to receive blessings, boons, *siddhis*, and knowledge. As we’ve seen, since the time of the AV fierce feminine seizers (*grāhis*) and other *bhūtas* can be won over, not only with offerings, but also by remaining courageous and steadfast in one’s religious vows. As one would imagine, such rites must have been dangerous and exhausting – the practitioner is told to undergo many sleepless nights, standing for dozens of hours at a time in a frightening *maṇḍap* made of corpses. It comes as no surprise then that the *sādhaka* begins to have hallucinatory-like experiences as he breaks through the ordinary world into the supernatural world. Serbaeva-Saraogi's analysis of

⁹³⁰ *japet mantrō mahāsattvo digvāso dakṣiṇāmukhaḥ | saptarātreṇa yoginyo āgacchanti mahābhayāḥ || 214 raudrarūpās tathāsuddhāḥ sakrodhā māraṇ ātmikāḥ | tad dṛṣtvā tu na bhetaṇyaṃ vīrasattvenamantrinā || 215 arghaṃ tāsāṃ pradātavyaṃ praṇipātekrtesati | tuṣyante nātra sandehaḥ sādhaḥ sattvasaṃyukte || 216 kathayanti ca taṃ sprṣtvā yathārthaṃ ca śubhāśubham | pramādād yadi kṣubhyeta sattvahīnas tu sādhaḥ || 217 || tatṣaṇād devi khādanti yoginyo yogadarpitāḥ | na taṃ rakṣayituṃ śakto rudro 'pi svayam āgataḥ || 218 || Text found at Hatley, "What is a yoginī? Towards a polythetic definition," in 'Yogini' in South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches, ed. István Keul, (London; New York: Routledge, 2013): 15 fn. 44. My translation differs slightly from his own.*

similar rites and experiences described in the JYT, which we will see in detail shortly, also points to these self-mortifying and transgressive practices as voluntarily inducing "artificial psychological trauma", or what I would call "ritual marginalization" of oneself, which seems to be necessary for these sort of possession practices - a point I will return to in the following chapter. Serbaeva-Saraogi writes

...it is clear from the prescriptive texts that the *sādhaka* employs a number of techniques liable to induce modifications of normal, waking consciousness. These include body postures, breathing exercises, repetition of the mantra, alcohol, terrifying surroundings, and transgressive offerings (the last two perhaps constituting a sort of artificial psychological trauma). And in such circumstances the modification of a 'normal' state of consciousness could easily be produced... In short, the text describes phenomena that could be termed 'prearranged hallucinations', provoked by alcohol, unnatural positions, and movements of the body, and by extremely transgressive offerings.⁹³¹

Returning to the BYT account, these types of acts result in an altered state marked by a visionary ascent through the *Brahmayāmala* hierarchy of its pantheon - each being more frightening than the last. If he proves his mettle and maintains his courage and practice, it is said that thousands of *cāmuṇḍas* (fierce goddesses) and millions of Great Heroes (*vīras*) will eventually come to bestow boons on to the seeker [BYT 14.32]. If he can maintain his practice for one more night, the text states that Bhairava himself will finally appear and possess him. As in the previous possession account in the BYT, Bhairava enters (*praviś*) the *sādhaka*, endowing (*samanvitaḥ*) him with all the qualities (*dharmaiḥ*) of Lord Bhairava, and then flying up (*utpateta*) to the sky.

[*Sādhaka*:] "Oh God, Bearer of the Trident, if you are satisfied with me, give me a boon. Accept me as your son, oh Lord, and may my sacrificial pavilion succeed."
[Bhairava:] "Well-done, great man, master of *sādhakas*, great ascetic. Who other than you would merit to be my son, oh Lord of Men? Open your mouth, my child, I shall enter (*viśami*) the cavity of your heart, by which you will very quickly become my equal in strength and power."

⁹³¹ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 199-200)

Then, the mantra-knowing practitioner must perform circumambulation clockwise and open his mouth. [Bhairava] shall enter him, there is no doubt about that, and when he has entered, [the *sādhaka*] will become Bhairava. The great practitioner shall fly up as the Lord, together with his sacrificial pavilion...and will be God Maheśvara. He shall take up any form at will (*kāmarūpo*), he shall be a supreme being, [luminous] as myriads of suns. He shall be Bhairava with his *maṇḍapa* [and] the goddess Bhairavī. He will see with his own eyes whatever exists from [the level of] Śiva down to the Avīci-hell. He shall be worshipped as Śiva.⁹³²

A few other brief passages from the BYT mentioning possession are also worth noting. Like many other texts, *āveśa* is often mentioned throughout the text simply as a superpower in a list of *siddhis* that can be achieved by the practitioner.⁹³³ The precise meaning in these passages of BYT, however, is unclear and could refer either to *paraśarīrāveśa*, possession of another's body, or *svasthāveśa*, which are oracular types of practices as found in the *Niśvāsa*. Törzsök notes a brief reference in chapter ninety-eight in the context of a practice known as *kulayoga*, which is said to result immediately (*kṣipram*) in signs of possession in the body of the practitioner (*svadehāveśalakṣitam*), who becomes one with the deity (*tanmayatām*).⁹³⁴ Unfortunately, the exact signs referred to are not given in this section.

A final passage also very briefly mentions possession, in chapter eighty-seven. This one references a more powerful ritual technology involving *Mahāmudrā* ("The Great Gesture") to induce possession by Bhairava:

⁹³² 47.39cd-46. *sādhakovāca // yadi tuṣṭo 'si mām deva varaṃ dadasi sūlina // putraṃ mām grhṇa vai deva maṇḍapaṃ mām prasidhyatu / sādhu sādhu mahāsattva sādhakendra mahātapaḥ // muktvā tvaṃ puruṣeśāna ko 'nyo putratvam arhati / vaktraṃ prasāryatām vatsa guhyaṃ hr̥di viśāmy ahaṃ // bhavase yena vai śīghraṃ mama tulyabalavīryavān / pradakṣiṇaṃ tataḥ kṛtvā vaktraṃ prasārya mantravit // praviśen nātra saṃdeho praviṣṭe bhairavo bhavet / utpateta mahāvīro maṇḍapyā sahito prabhuh // sa vai (sa vai em.:śavai MSS) sakhāya-sahito bhavet' devo maheśvaraḥ / kāmarūpo mahāsattvaḥ sūryakoṭisamaprabhaḥ // maṇḍapo bhairavī devī ātmanena sa bhairavaḥ / śivādyāvīciparyante yāvato kiñci' vartate // pratyakṣaṃ vartate tasya śivavat pūjyate tu saḥ / Sanskrit based upon on a collation by Csaba Kiss and Shaman Hatley and given to Törzsök, thus it is not a critical edition. See Törzsök (2013: 192 fn. 39) for Sanskrit text. My translation is based upon her translation on pg. 183, though modified.*

⁹³³ See for example BYT 22.64 & 88.46

⁹³⁴ BYT 98.14cd: *kṣipram tanmayatām eti svadehāveśalakṣitam*. Sanskrit from Törzsök (2013: 191)

O fair-faced one, the Mahāmudrā of Bhairava draws every Mudrā nigh. When it is employed correctly with full subjective immersion the [deity of the] Mantra immediately becomes manifest. [The Mudrā] brings about possession (*āveśam*) in the *sādhaka* without [need of] Mantra-repetition or visualization (*japadhyā*).⁹³⁵

Though little more is said here, it is a fascinating statement showing how *sādhakas* were continually developing more efficient ways to achieve their desired goals – in this case, possession by Bhairava through the ritual technology of *mudrās* (divine gestures). We will return to the topic of *mudrās* in connection with possession shortly, as this becomes commonplace throughout the tantric literature.

THE YOGINĪSAÑCĀRAPRAKARAṆA

We will now turn to another text which Sanderson claims may be a Kāpālīka text, or at least shows heavy Kāpālīka influence. This is the eleven chapters of the *Yoginīsañcāraprakaraṇa* [YSP], embedded within the third chapter of the *Jayadrathayāmala*. Though the *Jayadrathayāmala*, categorized as a Kaula text of the Kālīkula, is later than the BYT, Sanderson, Törzsök, and others believe the YSP was redacted originally from an earlier independent text due to its differences in content, style, and register of Sanskrit.⁹³⁶ They argue that the practices found in this text are explicitly Kāpālīka in orientation and integrated into the *yoginī* cults as represented by the YSP. In this text we find mention of possession not only by Bhairava, but also by Mother Goddesses.

In the eighth chapter of the YSP, details are given for an initiation rite involving a guru who is described as wearing the typical *ṣaṇmudrā* ornaments of the Kāpālīkas. The rite

⁹³⁵ (87.126c–128b): *bhairavasya mahāmudrā mudrāsānāidhyakārikā | prayuktā tu yadā mudrā lakṣaṇena varānane | bhāvātmakavidhānena sadyo mantrō vijṛmbhati || karoti sādhakāveśam japadhyā navivarjitā ||* Sanskrit and translation from Sanderson (2009: 133–134 fn. 311)

⁹³⁶ Possibly the now lost *Yoginījālasaṃvara*, see Sanderson (2009: 187 note 451)

begins with the guru touching the initiand's head with his skull-bowl, the limbs with his skull-staff, all while sounding his *ghaṇṭā* (bell) and *damaru* drum. From here the guru leads the blindfolded initiand to a grisly *maṇḍala* like the *Siddhimaṇḍala* of the BYT, which is said to have been drawn on the floor with cremation-ground ash and outlined with "cords" or sinews of corpses soaked in blood or with corpse hair.⁹³⁷ In the center of the *maṇḍala* is Mahābhairava with his consort Aghorī/Cāmuṇḍā, surrounded by ten circuits (*āvaraṇas*). The first circuit consists of a set of eight deities, beginning with two popular *bhūtanāthas*, Nandin and Gaṇapati, followed by six *mātr̥s* (Karṇamoṭī, Umā, Ghoravadanā, Krodhamūrtijā, Krodharaudrā, and Yogasambhavā). The other circuits consist of varied numbers of possessing entities including *yoginīs*, *pretas*, *rākṣasas*, *bhūtas*, *sākinīs*, *guhyakās*, and *grāhas*, but also the five elements, *nakṣatras* (constellations), and even oceans (YSP 8.10c-17b). Like the *maṇḍala* of the BYT, the YSP too is unique its unreserved incorporation of malignant and dangerous beings as its core pantheon.⁹³⁸ The overarching idea in the YSP, of course, is that practices associated with this *maṇḍala* will lead to the *sādhaka* having control over these fierce and powerful beings.

In the YSP, the initiand is ordered to cast a flower in the *maṇḍala* to determine which one of the eight *mātr̥kula* ("Clan of the Mothers") he will belong to, whereupon the guru will give them the appropriate *tilaka* of blood on his forehead (YSP 8.3-28). This basic form of the initiation rite (minus the bloody *tilaka*) was carried over into later Mantramārga and Kulamārga sources, meaning the source for this essential part of Tantric initiation may again have come from rites of the Atimārga III.⁹³⁹ Having received initiation and consecration

⁹³⁷ JYT, 3.200r5– 6: *sūtrayed rudhirāktena śavasūtreṇa*; JYT 3.181r4: *ālikhenmaṇḍalavaram tato raudreṇa bhasmanā | prathamam sūtrayitvā tu śavamūrdhajarajjunā ||* In Sanderson (2009: 209 fn. 479)

⁹³⁸ See Wallis (2014: 63)

⁹³⁹ See Wallis (2014: 62) for more on this

(*abhiṣekaḥ*), the *sādhaka* then adopts one of two *vidyāvratas* - the *Bhairavavrata*, which is alternatively known as the *Kāpālavrata* (as in the BYT) or the *Triṣaṣṭikulavrata*, the "Observance of the Sixty-three Clans (of Mothers).⁹⁴⁰ The second alternative *vrata* is known as the *Cāmuṇḍāvrata*. The first matches much of what we just saw in the BYT - the *sādhaka* dresses like Bhairava, adorning Kāpālika accoutrements, and after sixty-three days of wandering in silence in a cremation ground, the text says, he will attain divine possession. However, unlike the *Bhairavavrata* in the BYT, the YSP version results in possession by the Mothers rather than Bhairava - "At the end of this observance, O fair-hipped Lordess of the Gods, the Mothers certainly enter (*viś*) his body and bestow the highest Siddhi" - echoing chapter forty-six of the BYT.⁹⁴¹ Due to their similarities, Törzsök suggests that these sections of the YSP and chapters forty-six and forty-eight of the BYT likely came from the same Atimārga III source text.⁹⁴²

The second *vrata* listed is the *Cāmuṇḍāvrata*, essentially a femininized version of the *Kāpālavrata* wherein the *sādhaka* dresses up and imitates the behaviors of Cāmuṇḍā, paralleling the *Guhyakās* observances we mentioned in chapter two of BYT.⁹⁴³ Though it does not explicitly state possession as the final goal, the act of mimicking the goddesses implies possession concepts may be operative as in the *Kāpālavrata*. However, possession, or at least identification, is with Cāmuṇḍā rather than *Bhairava*:

[The practitioner] must always wear black garments and cover himself with black sandalwood paste. He ought to have a black garland and be decorated with earrings, bracelets, jewels, and jingling anklets. He wears a red dress and has red feet, having the form of a divine woman. [Thus] he must perform his *vidyāvrata* in silence, in a

⁹⁴⁰ Yoginīs are usually depicted as being sixty-four in number - so this is a unique numbering - perhaps the *sādhaka* becomes the sixty-fourth by virtue of this practice?

⁹⁴¹ YSP 8.43 *vrātānte tu varārohe śarīre mātaro dhruvam | viśante devadeveśi dadante siddhim uttamām* See Sanderson (2009: 134 fn. 311) for full Sanskrit and his translation

⁹⁴² See Törzsök (2013) and Sanderson (2014: 11-12), who believes the same

⁹⁴³ See BYT 2.46cd-102ab

hidden and abandoned place. The master of mantras must do this for a month or for twelve months [if he does this as] the *mahāvratā*. After a month, the great yogi shall see (*paśyat*) the *yoginīs* if he wishes. Surrounded by them, if he prepares the *caru* [of impure substances], he will be able to traverse the three worlds in a second. He shall be omniscient and omnipotent, performing both creation and destruction.’⁹⁴⁴

THE SIDDHAYOGĒŚVARĪMATATANTRA AND THE TRIKA

The earliest surviving *Bhairavatantra* from the *Trika* branch of the *Mantramārga* is the 6-7th century CE *Siddhayogēśvarīmatatantra* [SYM], “The Doctrine of the Perfected Yoginīs”, which also explicitly incorporates possession into its ritual schema.⁹⁴⁵ Like the coeval BYT, it is oriented towards the attainment of *siddhis* via female spirits (*yoginīs*, *ḍākinīs*, *śākinīs*, etc.) and various observances (*vidyāvratas*).⁹⁴⁶ Tradition holds the text was transmitted to the human world directly by the *yoginīs* themselves. Though only portions have been published to date, it was historically an influential text - Abhinavagupta considering it to be the root text of the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* (MVT, 700 CE), the central text of his own Trika-Kaula school. Törzsök has argued that the SYM represents a syncretic text, which fuses two streams – that of the exorcistic traditions associated with the cult of the Mothers (*Mātṛs*) and orthodox Brahmanic Hinduism.⁹⁴⁷

The first chapter of the SYM opens with a question from Goddess Bhairavī asking her consort Bhairava why some practitioners are obstructed (*kleśa*) from achieving *siddhis* promised by the *mantras* and rites prescribed by Him. Bhairava replies, “The *mantras* I have

⁹⁴⁴ Translation and Sanskrit found in Törzsök (2013:193-194 fn. 49)

⁹⁴⁵ See Judit Törzsök, *The Doctrine of Magic Female Spirits: A Critical Edition of Selected Chapters of the Siddhayogēśvarīmata (Tantra)*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1999): lxxix regarding dating.

⁹⁴⁶ There is some evidence that the texts were coterminous and may even mention each other - see Hatley (2007: 100) and Törzsök (1999: ix).

⁹⁴⁷ Törzsök, "Tantric Goddesses and their Supernatural Powers in the Trika of Kashmir (Bhedatraya in the *Siddhayogēśvarīmata*)", *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali*, 73.1-4, (1999b): 143.

already taught can bestow all the *siddhis* that one may desire (*kāmasiddhidāḥ*), but they are all protected (*gopita*) through my own *śakti* (power)” [SYM 1.11]. He explains further that the *mantravīrya*, or vigor of all His mantras, had been made secret and impotent because so many people had abandoned their purificatory rites of initiation (*saṃskārarahitam*) and had violated their sacred pledges (*vibhedam samayānām*) [SYM 1.12-13]. Thus, even if recited 1,000,000,000 times, the result would be fruitless [SYM 1.14]. If one wanted to be successful, Bhairava states, the *sādhaka* needs the knowledge of how to be “possessed by the energy of Rudra” (*rudraśaktisamāveśam*) to invigorate these *mantras* [SYM 1.17]. *Rudraśakti* is stated again and again throughout the chapter to be the ultimate source of all energies and powers found within the cosmos.

Chapter two stresses the importance of first having a guru who has also been “possessed by the energy of Rudra” (*rudraśaktisamāveśam*) and how such a guru is to be recognized:

rudraśaktisamāveśād divyācaraṇalakṣaṇam ācārye lakṣayet tatra tato mantragrahaḥ smṛtaḥ || rudraśaktisamāveśād ācāryasya mahātmanaḥ śaktir utpadyate kṣipram sadyaḥpratyayakāriṇī || 2.4-5

One should recognize the divine signs and behavior in the preceptor due to him being possessed by the energy of Rudra (*rudraśaktisamāveśa*). Then the mantra can be grasped from him. Due to being possessed by the energy of Rudra, the power (*śakti*) of the high-souled master instantaneously arises, producing the proofs (*pratyaya*) [i.e., the signs of his possession] immediately.

It then goes on to list the five signs of proof that a guru has been previously possessed by the energy of Rudra (*rudraśaktisamāveśa*): resolute devotion (*bhakti*) to Rudra, the attainment of supernatural powers through mantras (*mantrasiddhis*), the ability to subjugate all beings (*vidheya*), completing rites which one has started (*prārabdhakāryaniṣpatti*), the ability of speaking enchanting and ornate poetry, and finally, the ability to paralyze another person’s power to speak (*paravākśaktistambham*) [SYM 2.6-8]. If the guru is endowed with

these five signs and has full knowledge of initiation, the *tattvas*, and how to draw the secret *maṇḍala* (*guhyaṁaṇḍala*), the text claims he would be able to bestow grace (*anugraha*) upon the world and grant whatever his devotees desire [SYM 2.9-10]. Bhairava goes on to state that anyone who has experienced *rudraśaktisamāveśa* should exhibit these signs and should be considered a guru equal (*sama*) to Bhairava himself, with the ability to manifest the hidden vigor of the mantras [SYM 2.11].⁹⁴⁸

Essentially, Bhairava is stating here that mantras are powerless until the guru or disciple empowers them, which can only occur if they know how to become possessed by Rudra's *śakti* (*rudraśaktisamāveśa*) - the primary power behind all mantras. This is a fascinating understanding of possession (*āveśa*), which is not just about possessing or empowering bodies and objects, but also *mantras* themselves. This recalls BYT 46.120-1, which also states that it was the *vidyās*, the sonic/mantric forms of the goddesses, who were doing the possessing by entering the body of the *sādhaka*, further expanding our notion of possession in these traditions.

Bhairava then explains how one comes to obtain the sacred teachings of the SYM, which will produce the signs of possession immediately [SYM 2.19-20]. Here again we learn that the ultimate source (*yoni*) of the powerful (*mahābalāḥ*) *yoginīs* is *rudraśakti* – the energy or power of Rudra [SYM 2.21]. The whole cosmos and all its inhabitants are, in fact, said to be pervaded (*vyāpya*) and empowered (*udbalitāḥ*) by Rudra's *śakti*, a form which is transcendent yet immanent (*parāpararūpeṇa*) throughout the cosmos and which is deified as the goddess Yogeśvarī, "The Mistress of Yoga".⁹⁴⁹ Yogeśvarī, as the ultimate source of

⁹⁴⁸ See Wallis (2014: 171-172). These same signs of the guru, as we will soon see, are found also within the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* and later Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*

⁹⁴⁹ *tayaivodbalitāḥ sattvāḥ krīḍante te 'viśaṅkitāḥ | sā parāpara-rūpeṇa vyāpya sarvam idaṁ sthitā || SYM 2.22*

power, is said to be three-fold in form – Aghorā (“The Auspicious One”), Ghorā (“The Terrible One”), and Ghoratarā (“She Who Surpass Even the Terrible Ones”) [SYM 2.23-31]. These three aspects are said to "possess" (*āviṣṭāḥ* and *samadhiṣṭhitāḥ*⁹⁵⁰, used here interchangeably) the multiple Rudras who are involved in the creation and destruction of the world, who in turn also "play" (*krīḍante*) in the bodies of humans like a child plays with toys [SYM 2.27], "*krīḍa*" being a popular euphemism for "possession".⁹⁵¹ Note the similarities of this idea with the Siddhāntin MA discussed earlier in which the Rudras were also said to have been "possessed by Śiva" (*śivāviṣṭair*).⁹⁵² The SYM goes on to state that possession by any of these three powers (*śaktitrayasamāveśa*) is always auspicious, perhaps as an attempt to demarcate this particular form of possession from negative or demonic forms (SYM 2.30-31a).⁹⁵³ Additionally, through these three powers, one can gain access to all the *yoginīs* since, the text reiterates, they are all empowered (*upodbalita*) by Yogeśvarī, the source of all feminine powers (*yonih sarvaśaktīnām*; SYM 2.32-33).

Again, we see the *bhūtanātha* model at work here – Yogeśvarī is understood as the Lordess of all the *yoginīs*, and it is she who has control over them. By worshipping, or uniting with her, one can similarly gain access to her powers of lordship and become a *bhūtanātha*. The passage is also fascinating for the cosmological and ontological assertion

⁹⁵⁰ According to Monier-Williams, *adhiṣṭhita* means “inhabited, governed,” whereas *samadhiṣṭhita* has the same meanings but also that of “mounted upon, ridden by, guided by;” and “filling, penetrating,” - as we will see, this is a term used predominantly over *āveśa* in Tantric Buddhism

⁹⁵¹ *yogeśvarīti vikhyātā tasyā mūrtis tridhā priye | tāsām bhedaṃ pravakṣyāmi yathā viśve vyavasthitāḥ || pramṛjyājñānatimiraṃ paśudehe vyavasthitam | yāḥ śaktayo 'nugrḥṇanti aghorās tāḥ śivapradāḥ || rudrās tābhir aghorābhiḥ śaktibhiḥ samadhiṣṭhitāḥ | sadāśivārpitadhiyo bandhanān mocayanty aṇum || < . . . > muktimārganirodhinyo ghoratayā tu tāḥ smṛtāḥ āviṣṭāḥ śaktibhis tābhiḥ sargapralayakāriṇaḥ || krīḍante vai tanau rudrā bālā mṛdvṛṣabhair iva || adhaḥsrotavidhāyinyāḥ pudgalaṃ rañjayanty api | bhogeṣv eva paśutve ca pudgalaṃ rañjayanti yāḥ || muktimārganirodhinyo ghorataryās tu tāḥ smṛtāḥ | upodbalitacaitanyā rudrās tābhir adhiṣṭhitāḥ || SYM 2.23-29*

⁹⁵² *śaivā raudrā mahābhedaḥ daśāṣṭādaśa cordhvake || raudrā rudraiḥ śivāviṣṭair udgīrṇā na svabuddhitāḥ | MĀ 3.42-43ab*

⁹⁵³ *śaktitrayasamāveśo yasmāt sarvatra śamkaraḥ | SYM 2.30cd-31ab*

that is being made by the SYM - that all beings in the world are, and have always been, "possessed" on one level or another. Humans get possessed by Rudras who "play" in their bodies, while the Rudras themselves are said to be possessed on a higher ontic level by Yogeśvarī. Practically speaking then, the ultimate goal of the *sādhaka* should be to seek union or possession by the source behind of all these powers, identified as *rudraśakti* and embodied by the Goddess Yogeśvarī.

The text then goes on to give Yogeśvarī's sonic form (*vidyāmurtir*, SYM 2.33b), which includes the mantras of Parāpara, Aparā, and Parā, (SYM 2.34-40), the three primary goddesses of the subsequent Trika traditions. David White suggests that these three goddesses may have their origins in an earlier triad of fierce Mothers which included Jyeṣṭhā, Vāmā, and Raudrī, who also become identified with the three Śaktis, or Powers of Rudra - *Ichhāśakti* (Power of Will), *Jñānaśakti* (Power of Knowledge), and *Kriyāśakti* (Power of Action).⁹⁵⁴ The chapter ends stating that performing *uccāra* (utterance/arising) of the prescribed mantras along with the prescribed bodily gestures (*mudrā*) will result instantaneously in deity possession along with the associated signs in one's own body (*svadehāveśalakṣaṇam*) and fulfill everything one desires (*sarvakāmaphalapradaḥ*) [SYM 2.41].⁹⁵⁵

The term *uccāra* is technical term found in early yoga texts and becomes a central mantric practice in many tantric traditions, particularly the Trika schools. Padoux argues that

⁹⁵⁴ White (2003: 231)

⁹⁵⁵ *uccāre tu kṛte tasyā mantramudrāgaṇo mahān | vidyāgaṇaś ca sakalaḥ sarvakāmaphalapradaḥ | sadyas tanmukhatām eti svadehāveśalakṣaṇam || SYM 2.41* The last stanza is also found verbatim in the *Tantrasadbhavā* and *Parātriṃśikā*, as we will see further on in this chapter.

the practices origin's likely lie within the Upaniṣads,⁹⁵⁶ and its use can be found throughout the SVT, which heavily influenced the SYM.⁹⁵⁷ Padoux explains its practice concisely:

Mantras...are not merely present in the imaginary body of the Tantric adept. They move inside it, spreading out their power, divinizing the adept, and/or uniting him with the supreme godhead, leading him towards liberation... The very term *uccāra*, used for an action which both enunciates a mantra and activates its power, underlines the bodily basis of this process. For *uccāra* denotes the ascending movement (*uc-√CAR*) of the vibrating subtle phonic substance of the mantra, the *nāda* (it is the *nādoccāra*), the inner ascent which goes together with the movement of *prāṇa* in the yogic body. It is an inner, intra-corporeal movement of the vital breath, together with a movement of consciousness towards the deity. The fact that this breath is ascending, associated with the ascent of *kuṇḍalinī*, shows that it is not a respiratory breath. It does take place in the adept's body, but on the level of the yogic body 'intraposed within the visible body'...⁹⁵⁸

Thus, as explained by Padoux, *uccāra*, which begins from the base of the body/spine to the crown of head, is not just the breath, but also the consciousness, which ascends the different internal *tattvas*, leading the yogi back to their primordial source of power, which, in the SYM, is understood as *Yogeśvarī*. Though *kuṇḍalinī* is not mentioned in this text, the connection between the two, as pointed out by Padoux, becomes more explicit in later Tantric texts.

As Törzsök has pointed out in her 2013 article, the mantra of the Goddess *Parā* seems to be the one most closely associated with deity possession.⁹⁵⁹ Chapter three describes the raising of the three *mantras* (*Parāpara*, *Aparā*, and *Parā*), involving first the drawing of *Yogeśvarī yantra* in her form as the "Goddess Who Comprises All Letters" (*sarvākṣaramayī devī*, SYM 2.37), a precursor to the "Alphabet Goddess" known as *Mālinī* in the MVT.

⁹⁵⁶ Implicitly within the *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣads*, and more explicitly in the later *Maitrī* and *Haṃsa Upaniṣads*. See André Padoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1992): 25-29.

⁹⁵⁷ See Padoux (1992) and Padoux, *Tantric Mantras: Studies on Mantrasastra*, (London: Routledge, 2011) for numerous examples.

⁹⁵⁸ Padoux (2011: 106)

⁹⁵⁹ Törzsök (2013: 187).

Following this, the *sādhaka* is told to raise the three *mantras* - the raising of Parāparā's *mantra* results in destruction of all sin (*sarvapāpa*) and various *siddhis*, while the Aparā *mantra* is said to bestow all desired fruits (*sarvakāmaphala*) [SYM 3.39]. Parā, the last, is said to be the most powerful and bestows complete success within just seven days. Just knowing the *mantra*, the text states, one becomes a "Knower of all *śaktis*" (*jñāyate sarvaśaktibhiḥ*). Through the performance of its *uccāra*, one's body becomes "possessed by hundreds of Mothers" (*mātrāsatena cāveśam śarīre*), and immediately manifests signs of possession such as trembling (*kampate*) and flying or jumping in the sky (*utpatate*) [SYM 3.48-50].⁹⁶⁰ Furthermore, if one remembers the doctrine of the SYM readily, one will be able to master all *mantras* and *mudrās*, grasp the ultimate meaning of any *śāstras*, and answer any questions regarding past or future events, (*atītānāgatān arthān prṣṭo 'sau kathayiṣyati*).⁹⁶¹ The chapter ends emphasizing once again that it is these three *śaktis* who are the essence or "heart" of all the other *śaktis* (*hṛdayam sarvaśaktīnām*) and who are able to bestow divine supernatural powers (*divyasiddhis*) and identification with the Supreme Goddess [SYM 3.54].

The visualization of the three goddesses is given in chapter six. Here we see explicitly Kāpālīka-styled deities – all are identical, with three glowing eyes, huge fangs, raging brows and flickering tongues, each bearing a trident and skull staff and wearing garlands of skulls and human corpses, earrings of severed limbs, and a serpent as a sacred thread. They are all described as sitting atop Sadāśiva, signifying their superiority over the Siddhānta system

⁹⁶⁰ *tatṣaṅgocārānād vāpi pratyayaś cātra jāyate || kampate dehapiṇḍas tu drutaṃ cotpatate tathā || mātrāsatena cāveśam śarīre tasya jāyate | yaḥ samuccārayed bhaktyā namaskārābhir udyataḥ || SYM 3.48cd-50*

⁹⁶¹ *sa badhnāti tadāvaśyaṃ mantramudrāgaṇam param || udgrāhayati cāvaśyaṃ śāstrasadbhāvam uttamam atītānāgatān arthān prṣṭo 'sau kathayiṣyati || SYM 3.52*

[SYM 6.19-28]. Visualization is followed by internal and external worship, the latter involving transgressive offerings such as human flesh and wine. Initiates are blindfolded and led to the *maṇḍala* of the goddesses and instructed to cast a flower. As in previous Śaiva initiations, where the flower lands in the *maṇḍala* will decide which goddess clan (*kula*) he will belong to and his initiation name. We should note that possession is not mentioned as a requirement here, unlike subsequent Trika and Kaula initiations which we will be examining shortly.

Chapter seven continues the initiation, which begins with the guru purifying the disciple's body and "transforming" it into the body of Bhairava. This and other rituals in the SYM are supposed to be done in regions commonly known to be inhabited by *bhūtas*, *grahas*, and *yoginīs* of various sorts – a cremation ground, a temple of the Mothers, a confluence of rivers, a mountain top, etc. Purification is done with the mantras of each of the deities and through the "seizing and joining" of the disciple by the guru, as described previously. The guru, having possession of the disciple's essence, purifies the disciple with the mantras and the ascent through the various *tattvas*, resulting in him being transformed and "reborn" [SYM 7.7-10]. If the practitioner wants to achieve supernatural powers, the text states he should be joined with the Parā *mantra* to the non-transcendental level (second to highest level); the *sādhaka* desiring liberation should be joined to the transcendental level (highest level) with the same *mantra* [SYM 7.16]. Because the Parā *mantra* can grant both worldly power and liberation, the text states that this *mantra* is considered the most powerful in the system.

Following this, the guru transforms the disciple's body into Bhairava by divinizing it with the installation of mantras (*nyāsa*). The text states that the *sādhaka* must always be

transformed in this way if they wish to succeed in any acts of worship or ritual. An alternative method to accomplish this is given as well, involving the visualization of the three goddesses within the practitioner's own body - Parāpara in the lotus of his heart, Parā at the region of the head, and Aparā at the feet, along with a host of other tantric goddesses throughout his body.⁹⁶²

In chapter eleven, “The Practice of Conquering Death” (*Mṛtyuṃjayasādhana*), Parā, called the “Power of the God of Gods” (*sā śaktir devadevasya*; SYM 11.10) is again invoked. Through her visualization, she bestows the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), which “flows from her like milk” and enters (*viśat*) the body of the *sādhaka* through the cranial aperture (*brahmabilen*; SYM 11.11cd). If one practices this meditation and her mantra for six months, they will attain immortality [SYM 11.12]. In chapter twelve, Parā is again said “to enter into” (*praviśet*) the practitioner's body in the form of the goddess of wealth, Śrī, and bestow various royal powers.⁹⁶³

Chapters thirteen through sixteen describe a cremation ground ritual involving the invocation of *yoginīs* into a *maṇḍala* who are given offerings of human flesh [SYM 13.10]. The *sādhaka*, after fasting, is supposed to conduct the ritual at night on 14th day of the dark half of the month, fully unclothed. Having performed the prescribed recitations and meditations, the text states the *yoginīs* will then emerge – described as being very fierce, with intoxicated and rolling eyes, some with red-eyes, and some camel, tiger or donkey-faced [SYM 13.13-18]. Upon their arrival, the *sādhaka* is entreated to display unwavering courage and offer blood to them from his left limb. In return, the SYT claims, the goddesses will

⁹⁶² Aghorā, Paramaghorā, Ghorarūpā, Ghorāsyā, Bhīmā, Bhīṣaṇā, Vamanī and Pibanī (The One who Drinks [liquor or blood]).

⁹⁶³ *śrīrūpeṇa tadāgatya praviśet sādhakena ca* | SYM 12.20cd. See Törzsök (1999: 8, fn 74)

fulfill every wish and power he desires. Chapter thirteen ends with the *sādhaka* achieving the state of a *bhūtanātha*: "Acting according to his wish, he plays (*krīḍate*) [with these Powers] everywhere at ease. They [the Yoginīs] come immediately, impelled (*codita*) by the force of their own Power (i.e., the *Parāparāmantra*)".⁹⁶⁴ The use of *krīḍa* again, reinforces the idea that the *sādhaka* is now like *Yogeśvarī* and is able to possess and manipulate other spirit beings, as explicitly stated in SYM 2.27.

Chapter fourteen is very brief and involves a practice of the Goddess *Aparā* (*aparāsādhana*). It is also in the cremation ground and states that the *sādhaka*, besmeared with ashes and armored with *mantras* through *nyāsa* rites, should mentally recite the prescribed mantras hundreds of thousands of times while making offerings of human flesh (*phalguṣam*) to the goddesses. Having done this, the text states the *sādhaka's* own Self will unite with "the very mighty Śakti (Power) of Rudra" (*sādhakātme susaṃyuktām rudraśaktiṃ mahābalām*; SYM 14.4ab), resulting in the divine vision of the goddess *Aghoreśvari* and overall success.⁹⁶⁵ The rites for *Aparā* continue a few chapters later in chapter nineteen, beginning with further purification of the practitioner's body through breath control, *mantra* recitation and the yogic withdrawal of the sense-faculties. One is then told to ritually "burn" away the body through visualization and reconstitute oneself as a body of female mantras (*vidyādeham*) [SYM 14.2c-3]. He then performs *nyāsa* and transforms his body into *Bhairava* using the *Navātma mantra* [SYM 19.4-5]. Having become *Bhairava*, he then installs *Aparā* into his own heart and after several other rites, has a vision of the Goddess and unites with

⁹⁶⁴ *yateṣṭaceṣṭaḥ sarvatra krīḍate ca yathāsukham | prayānti tatkaṣṇād eva svaśaktibalacoditāḥ* SYM 13.22; Translation by Törzsök (1999: 150).

⁹⁶⁵ *sādhakātme susaṃyuktām rudraśaktiṃ mahābalām | aghoreśvararūpeṇa dr̥ṣṭvā siddhim avāpnuyat* || SYM 14.4

her.⁹⁶⁶ Alternative rites are also given, which result in the *sādhaka* becoming a *bhūtanātha*, a Lord over the fierce *yoginīs*, *ḍākinīs*, or *śākinīs*, depending on what kind of offerings are given. Chapter twenty also lists a variety of rites which it says will result in the *sādhaka* becoming the "Lord of Female Powers" (*patiḥ sarvaśaktīnām*) and ruler of the three worlds [SYM 21.24]

Chapter fifteen is similarly brief and describes "Permeation by the Goddess Parā" (*parāvyāptim*), permeation essentially being a synonym for *āveśa*. It is the same rite as the previous chapter, just with the use of the Parā mantra rather than Aparā mantra. After achieving a vision of the Goddess Parā, it states one will achieve various *siddhis*, including flight, shapeshifting, and lordship over innumerable beings, including the gods. The chapter ends stating that if the *sādhaka* desires liberation, they may also achieve this [SYM 15.3-5]. Rites for Parā are also mentioned in chapter seventeen, resulting in, as Törzsök has pointed out, signs of success (*siddhilingāni*) [SYM 17.29-34]. Though not explicitly listed as possession symptoms, the signs imply that something similar is happening - the signs including trembling of the body (*dehakampādiṣu*; 17.29d), various odd ways of walking or by frog-leaps,⁹⁶⁷ rolling and closing of eyes, etc.⁹⁶⁸

Chapter sixteen is much longer and describes how the circle of Mothers (*mātrivargam*) is also established (*avasthita*) in the body of Bhairava himself. It is explained in terms of syllables being the various goddesses, each of which has a place in the body of Bhairava (e.g., the nose is letter "a", right shoulder is "ka", left arm is "cha" etc.). The

⁹⁶⁶ Note the similarities of this with Deity Yoga practices of the Tantric Buddhists in the last section of this chapter.

⁹⁶⁷ *urasā darduraplutyā udareṇa gatis tathā | pādānguṣṭhe gatis caiva prṣṭhataś cāpasarpaṇam ||* SYM 17.30. See Törzsök (2013: 195 fn. 77)

⁹⁶⁸ *kvacin nimīlitākṣasya uccadrṣṭigatasya ca |* SYM 17.31cd

collection of syllables is then described as the Alphabet Goddess Mātrkā, which is equated with the Bhairava *mantra* and the body of Bhairava [SYM 16.10-11ab]. To become Bhairava (*sakalīkaraṇam*), the *sādhaka* then installs the mantras (*nyāsa*) on to their own body in the same way, with the understanding that it is the Mothers who will divinize and empower the *sādhakas* body (*mātrkā mātṛbhir dehaṃ*) [SYM 16.39]. As in other rites of the SYM, the *sādhaka* is to offer his own blood and he will achieve visions of the goddesses, who will grant him various boons. [SYM 16.51-52]

Chapter eighteen describes the *sādhana* of Parāparā, which is similar to the *sādhanas* of the other two goddesses, involving the offering of flesh and his own blood, the vision of the Goddess Parāparā, the transformation of the practitioner's body into Bhairava (*sakalīkṛtavinyāsa* i.e., *nyāsa*) [SYM 18], and then finally the placing of Parāparā into the *sādhaka's* (as Bhairava) heart, leading to all sorts of *siddhis*.

All together, we find in the SYM implicit and explicit use of possession concepts and ideology throughout the text, and a further feminization of the *maṇḍala* and ritual/mantric system. This is a trend which continues well into the Trika and Kaula schools we will begin to look at next, though as we will see, a process of sanitization and domestication, as Sanderson describes it, begins to occur here on out.⁹⁶⁹

THE MĀLINĪVIJAYOTTARATANTRA [MVT]

We now turn to the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* [MVT], “The Higher Scripture on The Victorious Garlanded Goddess,” a 7-8th century Trika text which, as stated previously,

⁹⁶⁹ See Sanderson (1985, 1986, 1987) and Sanderson, "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir," in *Mélanges Tantriques à la Mémoire d'Hélène Brunner*, eds. Dominic Goodall and André Padoux, 231-442, (Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie, 2007b) for more on this process of domestication throughout the Trika.

considers itself an abbreviated version of the SYM.⁹⁷⁰ Besides the SYM, the MVT also heavily relies on and integrates Sāṃkhya, Siddhānta, Yoga, and Kula/Kaula sources.

Additionally, it integrates the language of possession throughout the text, leading Somadeva Vasudeva to characterize its teachings and practices as a "domesticated yoga of possession":

...what is presented is really a synthesis of three (or four) originally independent systems, produced with the definite aim of harmonising a theistic yoga, ultimately related to, or even derived from the Sāṃkhya, with practices originating in convulsive rites of possession. In this respect it may be helpful to regard the *Mālinīvijayottara*'s systematisation as a domesticated "yoga of possession".⁹⁷¹

The MVT is therefore much more sophisticated, developed and complex compared to its purported root text, the SYM. From the Śaiva Siddhānta, the text incorporated the doctrine of the "hierarchy of perceivers" (*pramātr*) and adapted their own "Yoga of Six Ancillaries" (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*).⁹⁷² Much of the text is concerned with the conquest of the various levels of reality (*tattvajaya*), thirty-six in number, the highest level being that of Sadāśiva/Śakti, to which all paths ultimately lead. There are six such paths and, as in the SYM, which path one follows depends on the ultimate goals (*siddhis* or *mokṣa*) sought by the practitioner. However, Vasudeva argues that the MVT also offers a series of innovative "short cuts", which lead the practitioner directly to the highest *tattva*. Vasudeva lucidly explains:

...the most important of these [short cuts] is an innovative, visionary ascent retracing the evolutionary path of the seven classes of perceivers, from the bound Sakala-experient [gross/material] back to the Śiva-experient. At the first stage of these meditations, the Yogin contemplates his body as the own-nature (*svarūpa*) of a *tattva*. He must completely identify with this own-nature (*svarūpa*) until the subjective and objective aspects of cognition are both merged in it. Once this has been achieved, the

⁹⁷⁰ Vasudeva (2004: 45) notes that Goddess Mālinī is never actually described as bearing a garland, though has been translated as such by others. The *śīromālā* referred to in MVT 3.37ab is in fact a chaplet of skulls, so the translation "Crowned Goddess" is more appropriate, according to Vasudeva.

⁹⁷¹ Vasudeva (2004: 185)

⁹⁷² Vasudeva (2004: 167) argues that the *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* (SSS) is "the source for much of the material that the MVT has adopted from the Śaiva Siddhānta".

Yogin passes on to cultivate the awareness of the perceiving subject, the Sakala. This Sakala perceiver in turn becomes the own-nature (*svarūpa*) contemplated in the subsequent stage; that higher perceiver himself then becomes the object of contemplation, and so on until Śiva is reached. As the Yogin ascends, the lower perceivers are retracted and the dimensions of cognisedness collapse in pairs. Because this new ascent can start with any *tattva*, it constitutes a considerable short-cut when compared with the lengthy journey of the Saiddhāntika Yogin's introspection of each single *tattva* in turn.⁹⁷³

Thus, in this system, the path through the *tattvas* involves a perceptual ascension to higher and higher levels of consciousness, the highest and original source agent being, of course, Śiva. Although there are an infinite number of experiencers in the cosmos, according to the MVT there are seven primary agents/observers (*saptapramāṭṛs*) who exist in all beings and make up the rungs of the ladder known as the "course of principles" (*tattvādhvan*). As the yogin ascends each *tattvādhvan*, achieving the perceptual state of one of the *saptapramāṭṛs*, the lower awareness levels are absorbed into each new level accessed. According to Vasudeva, the lowest perceivers in the hierarchy are the "Sakala-experiencers", aptly named since they are only capable of perceiving objects based upon material or gross realities, from the element Earth up to "Unmanifest Matter" (*prakṛti*).⁹⁷⁴ They are characterized as being focused primarily on the external world and external objects, and only secondarily on awareness of their own self. According to the MVT, once the focus of attention and awareness turns inward, the practitioner may be capable of directly perceiving their own self, the *puruṣa*, as an object - as Vasudeva puts it, "observing oneself being an observer of an object".⁹⁷⁵ If they succeed, they will achieve the next level and become, for example, a *Pralayākala* (one who is freed from the fetter of *kalā*, "Time" and thus cosmic

⁹⁷³ Vasudeva (2004: 204)

⁹⁷⁴ Vasudeva (2004: 192) states, though, that they are also able to perceive other Sakala-experiencers transmigrating within these realities.

⁹⁷⁵ Vasudeva (2004: 193)

dissolution). To attain even higher levels, the experient must go through the same process of "watching the watcher of the watcher of the object", resulting in a further loosening of different fetters at each level.⁹⁷⁶ This process continues to a depth of seven levels, culminating in the highest level of Śiva (*Sakala*-> *Pralayākala* -> *Vijñānākala*, *Mantra* -> *Mantrēśa* -> *Mantramaheśa* -> *Śiva*), with the preceding perceivers being subsumed into the expanded subjectivity of each new experiential level.

The MVT homologizes and synthesizes this graded hierarchy of perceivers with the Kaula version of yogic ascent through the *tattvas* known as the sequence of four "immersions" (*samāpatti* or *samādhi*) - [1.] *piṇḍastha* (Abiding in the Body), [2.] *padastha* (Abiding in the Word/Locus), [3.] *rūpastha* (Abiding in Form) and [4.] *rūpātīta* (Abiding Beyond Form). Abhinavagupta, who comments heavily on the MVT, treats these as four consecutive trance experiences (*samāpatti*) which transform four aspects of the Yogin's cognition: [1.] the objectivized thing (*adhiṣṭheya*), [2.] the process of objectivization (*adhiṣṭhāna*) [3.] the objectivizer (*adhiṣṭhātr*) and finally [4.] the pure awareness underlying all the others. Abhinavagupta explains that the Kaula term *piṇḍastha* denotes the achievement of identity (*tādātmya*) with the object of contemplation by one-pointed focus and immersion (*samāpatti*) into that which is objectivized (*adhiṣṭheyasamāpatti*). It is through this transformation at each rung, that the Yogin continues to ascend upwards to the level of Śiva (*śivapada*), the underlying pure awareness and Ultimate Agent. According to Vasudeva, these "Four Immersions" are further homologized with the "Five States of Lucidity" (*jāgradādyavasthā*) - 1. *jāgrat* ("waking state") which, is linked to *piṇḍastha*; 2. *svapna* ("dreaming"), which is linked to *padastha* and *vyāpti*, the "State of Pervasion"; 3.

⁹⁷⁶ ibid.

suṣupti ("deep sleep/dreamless state"), which is linked to *rūpastha* and *mahāvvyāpti*, the "State of Great Pervasion"; 4. *turiya* ("The Fourth State" - i.e. a state in-between yet beyond previous three states), which is linked with *rūpātīta* (beyond form) and immersion of Transcendent Power (*Paraśakti*); and finally, 5. *turyātīta* ("Beyond the Fourth State"), which, as implied in the name, transcends all previous states and is equated with *śūnya* (voidness) and the highest state of Śiva.⁹⁷⁷ Abhinavagupta states in his commentary that there is no yogic synonym for this final level because "yoga" is no longer meaningful since subject-object and all other dualities no longer apply and have been transcended. Only gnosis, which arises from the continuing expansion of the Self/awareness is the means to realize its true nature [TĀ 10.278–284b]. These five phases are further homologized with the five powers of Lord Śiva which Abhinavagupta interprets in the TĀ to represent the subtle internal cogitations of Śiva [TA 10.185-186]. Somadeva Vasudeva lays out some of these in a table, which I have expanded upon with some of the other homologies the TĀ and MVT present:⁹⁷⁸

<i>Immersion</i>	<i>Epistemological (from the TĀ)</i>	<i>Experient</i>	<i>Five States of Lucidity</i>	<i>Powers of Śiva</i>
<i>piṇḍastha</i> (Abiding in the Body)	the objectivized thing (<i>adhiṣṭheya</i>) itself	Sakala Pralayākala	<i>jāgrat</i> - waking state	Kriyā-śakti
<i>padastha</i> (Abiding in Word)	the process of objectivization (<i>adhiṣṭhāna</i>)	Vijñānākala	<i>svapna</i> - dreaming state <i>vyāpti</i> - pervasion	Jñāna-śakti
<i>rūpastha</i> (Abiding in Form)	the objectivizer (<i>adhiṣṭhātr</i>)	Mantra, Mantreśa Mantramahēśvara	<i>suṣupti</i> - deep sleep <i>mahāvvyāpti</i>	Icchā-śakti
<i>rūpātīta</i> (Abiding Beyond Form)	the pure awareness underlying the others	Parāśakti	<i>turya</i> - "the 4th state"	Ānanda-śakti

⁹⁷⁷ MVT 2.36–39b

⁹⁷⁸ See table 12 in Vasudeva (2004: 219)

		Śiva	<i>turyātita - "beyond the 4th"</i>	Cit-śakti
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As we can see, this is a very complex system, which has been commented upon at length by various Kashmiri exegetes such as Abhinavagupta, Kṣemarāja, Jayaratha, etc. This is not the place to go over the complexities and details, but what is important for our purposes is the essential role identity, subjectivity, and cognition play in understanding the transformative yogic program laid out in the MVT.⁹⁷⁹ I mention all these homologies primarily because they also become linked to the three types of possession (*āṇava-*, *śākta-* and *śāmbhava-āveśa*) presented in the MVT, which Vasudeva claims are "innovatively presented as three meta-categories under which all yogic exercises can be subsumed."⁹⁸⁰ That is to say, for the compilers of this work, possession began to be interpreted using these newly integrated system and understood as spiritual states that were essential for their religious goals.

Indeed, the experience of possession becomes so important in the MVT, that it becomes a requirement during initiation to proceed on its path. As stated, the MVT integrates much of the language and practices of possession from previous texts we've looked at. As we saw in the SYM, possession was also stated to be requirement in practice – not necessarily in initiation, but rather in its emphasis that the guru and *sādhaka* must show signs of possession by *rudraśakti*, in order empower the mantras for successful practice. In the MVT, we find this same charismatic guru of the SYM - a powerful master who shows signs (*cihna*) of possession (*samāveśa*; MVT 2.13), and whose mere touch or vision can serve as a kind of initiation and transmission of divine power:

⁹⁷⁹ For more detail on all this see Vasudeva (2004)

⁹⁸⁰ Vasudeva (2004: 369)

*yah punaḥ sarvatattvāni vetty etāni yathārthataḥ | sa gurur matsamaḥ prokto
mantravīryaparakāśakaḥ || MVT 2.10*

He who correctly knows all these *tattvas* (principles/elements), is said to be a guru and equal to me [Bhairava]. He is the illuminator of the power of the mantra.

*dr̥ṣṭāḥ sambhāṣitās tena spr̥ṣṭās ca pr̥itacetasā | narāḥ pāpaiḥ pramucyante
saptajanmakṛtair api || MVT 2.11*

Those people who are seen, spoken to, or touched by him with a joyful heart, they are freed from sins (from this life) as well as sins that have been committed over seven lives.

*ye punar dīkṣitās tena prāṇinaḥ śivacoditāḥ | te yatheṣṭam phalaṃ prāpya gacchanti
paramaṃ padam || MVT 2.12*

Those sentient beings, impelled by Śiva (*śivacoditāḥ*) repeatedly, then become initiated by him [the guru]. They obtain whatever fruit they desire and go to the supreme level.

*rudraśaktisamāveśas tatra nityaṃ pratiṣṭhitāḥ | sati tasmimś ca cihnāni tasyaitāni
vilakṣayet || MVT 2.13*

The co-penetration of the power of Rudra is always firmly established in him. These signs (*cihna*) of that (*samāveśa*) may be observed in him.

The MVT then enumerates similar signs (*cihna*) of the true guru as seen in the SYM, which includes unwavering devotion in Rudra (*rudre bhaktiḥ suniścalā*, 2.14ab), the perfection of mantra (*mantrasiddhiḥ*) (2.14cd), the power to subjugate all beings (*sarvasattvavaśitvaṃ*, 2.15ab), completing actions/rites which one has undertaken (*prārābdhakāryaniṣpattiś*, 2.15cd), and finally poetic skill (*kavitvaṃ*, 2.16ab). However, rather than the power to subjugate another's speech, as seen in the SYM, the MVT adds to the list the knowledge of all the *śāstras* (*sarvaśāstrārthavetṛtvam*, 2.16cd).

In contrast to the SYM, however, the MVT takes the necessity of possession a step further, requiring that the prospective *sādhaka* can only begin his yogic practice, specifically the conquest of the *tattvas* (*tattvajaya*), after he has experienced possession (*samāveśa*) by the Goddess Parā. In fact, even those who have received the standard tantric initiation (*tantraprakriyā*), must first undergo a new Kaula form of initiation (*kulaparakriyā*) by

performing a brief *sādhana* on their own, given in chapter twelve, and which is said to bring about possession by the Goddess Parā within seven days:

[The *sādhaka*], his soul purified by initiation and homa (fire offerings/rites), the recipient of explanatory teachings relating to possession (*samāveśopadeśa*), wishing to succeed at yoga, should initially observe [the following rite]. That wise one should first fix (*nyāsya*) the seed-mantra of Parā (*parābijam*) into his two hands and meditate (*anusmaret*) upon the Śakti [Power = Parā] as a fire blazing up from the tips of his feet to his head, while performing the Great Gesture (*mahāmudrā*) from bottom to top.⁹⁸¹ Then, folding his hands in homage and retaining his breath at the level of the heart, he should meditate (*anusmaret*) upon the seed-mantra of Parā, blazing in its own natural form. He should then visualize (*dhyāyet*) its three syllables [traversing the central channel and] entering the three voids in the head (*kakhatraya*). The Yogin will then obtain *samāveśa* (possession) after a hundred measures. Even a killer of a Brahmin [will succeed] after seven days should he practice daily. Once his body has been possessed (*āviṣṭadehas*) in this way, he should proceed with the aforementioned rite [MVT 12.15–20b].⁹⁸²

This requirement of possession serves, according to Vasudeva, "to raise the yoga taught in the *Mālinīvijayottara* above its Saiddhāntika competitors: Not only is the Trika's yoga more sophisticated, but it also requires extraordinary qualifications."⁹⁸³ The Kaula-form of initiation itself is given in chapter eleven. Like some of the other initiations we've seen, it too is Saiddhāntika-styled, though reformulated to make the possession state the central feature of the rite. This initiation becomes the basis for all subsequent Kaula initiation rites where possession becomes an absolute requirement for following the Kaula path.

According to the text, the initiate is ordered to enter the ritual arena, which is decorated in flowers and smeared with the excrement of cow and sandalwood paste. They are to meditate on "the blazing śakti" (*dīptāṃ śaktim anusmṛtya, 11.4ab*) within their body, and

⁹⁸¹ On this *mahāmudrā* see MVT 7.13c–15b

⁹⁸² Translation adapted from Vasudeva (2004: 303-305); *homadīkṣāviśuddhātmā samāveśopadeśavān | yaṃ siṣādhayiṣur yogam ādāv eva samācāret || hastayoḥ tu parābijam nyasya śaktim anusmaret | mahāmudrāprayogena viparītavīdhau budhaḥ || jvaladvahnipratīkāśāṃ pādāgrān mastakāntikam | namaskāraṃ tataḥ paścād baddhvā hr̥di dhṛtānilaḥ || svarūpeṇa parābijam atidīptam anusmaret | tasya mātrātrayaṃ dhyāyet kakhatrayavinirgatam || tatas tālaśatād yogī samāveśam avāpnuyāt | brahmagṛho 'pi hi saptāhāt pratīvāsaram abhyaset || evam āviṣṭadehas tu yathoktaṃ vidhim ācāret | MVT 12.15ab-12.20ab:*

⁹⁸³ Vasudeva (2004: 305)

visualize it as burning and purifying their entire body by the performance of the *mahāmudrā* (“The Great Gesture”; *mahāmudrāprayogena nirdagdhām cintayet tanum*, 11.4cd).

Following this, the *sādhaka* is told to intently meditate on the goddess Mālinī and upon the various *tattvas* within his own body. This is followed by the sequential worship of Gaṇeśa, “Lord of Gaṇas,” to remove all obstacles (*vighnaprasāntaye*), propitiation of the preceptors within his lineage (11.8) and recitation using various mantras/*vidyās* (e.g., Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā and other goddesses) [11.9-11]. He then performs *nyāsa* using the mantra of the “Lord of the Circle of All Yoginīs” (*sarvayoginīcakrāṇāmadhipa*, 11.14) and worships the Vīrāṣṭakas, (“The Eight Heroes”) while uttering (*uccāra*) various mantras.⁹⁸⁴ The guru then consecrates (*samprokṣya*) the disciple with water infused with the Power of Rudra (*rudraśakti*), placed in front of the deity, who is in the form of the *maṇḍala* [11.17]. A *śivahasta*-like rite is then described:

Placing his attention on his [the initiate’s] arms, [the guru] should illuminate (*pradīpayet*) them with *rudraśakti* [the energy of Rudra]. By this [power of *rudraśakti*], the initiate will be caused to cast a flower [onto the *maṇḍala*] from his hands, which are smeared with sandal paste (11.18).

[The guru] meditating (*dhyātva*) on the two [arms] as being autonomous (*nirālamba*), should consider them as being moved (*kṛṣṭa*) by *śakti*. Thereafter, [the arms] blindfold his eyes, which are [also] consecrated by *śakti*. Then, that *śakti* established in the hands (of the initiate) will cause him to cast the flower. Wherever that flower falls marks the *kula* (clan of the Mother-Goddess, which he will now belong to).

Having unveiled his face, [the *śakti*] causes him to fall backwards to [the guru’s] feet; then that knower of yoga [the guru] worships the circle [of goddesses] on [the disciple]’s two hands and on his head. The two hands (of the initiate) are impelled (*prerayet*) by that *śakti* to come up to his head. This is called the Rite of Śiva’s Hand, which produces evidence (of its results) immediately.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸⁴ Unclear who the "Eight Heroes" refers to, which is a term commonly used in myths associated with Skanda - however, here it could be the Vijñānakevalas Śiva created who would be: Aghora, Paramaghora, Ghorarūpa, Ghorānana, Bhīma, Bhīṣaṇa, Vamana and Pivana. See Vasudeva (2004: 157) and MVT 1.18c–22b for this list.

⁹⁸⁵ MVT 11.18-22: *bhujau tasya samālokyā rudraśaktiā pradīpayet | tayaivāpy arpayet puṣpaṃ karayor gandhadigdhayoḥ || 11.18 || nirālambau tu tau dhyātvā śaktiākrṣṭau vicintayet | śaktimantritanetreṇa baddhvā netre tu pūrvavat || 11.19 || tataḥ prakṣepayet puṣpaṃ sā śaktis tatkarasthitā | yatra tat patate puṣpaṃ tat-kulaṃ tasya lakṣayet || 11.20 || mukham udghāṭya taṃ paścāt pādayoḥ pratipātayet |*

Here we see a reformulation of the Śiva's Hand (*śivahasta*) rite discussed earlier. In the Saiddhāntika version, there is some implicit understanding that one's hand has been divinized and becomes "like" Śiva's own hand. Here, however, the possession connotations are explicit - the hand of the disciple has in fact become possessed by the Power or Energy of Rudra and acts autonomously (*nirālamba*) with its own agency. This possessed hand then casts the flower and causes the disciple to fall backwards. At this point, the guru is instructed to give the *caru* (consecrated food-substance) to the initiate to consume, whose body is now said to be "supported" or "propped up" by the power of *śakti* (*śaktyālabhām tanuḥ*; 11.23). The guru then examines the intensity of movements by the initiate to see to what degree he has become possessed, which, interestingly enough, is described here as *śaktipāta*, the descent of the *śakti*, rather than *āveśa*. According to the authors of the MVT then, the two phenomena appear to be synonymous. The intensity of the *śaktipāta* is said to be either be "mild", "medium", or "intense" [11.26cd-11.27ab], while the movements can be further subdivided into mild, medium, or intense again.⁹⁸⁶ If the initiate passes the guru's "intensity-of-possession test", then the disciple can continue with the next steps of initiation.

The guru is then ordered to further observe the disciple and visualize the various *tattvas* and *śaktis* coursing throughout his body. The *śakti* at this point is said to burn like a fire throughout the practitioner's body, loosening the bonds of *karmas* afflicting the initiate and the associated *tattvas*. The text then states that while the guru is mentally absorbed in these *tattvas*, he is to perform a *nāḍīsandhāna*, the fusing of channels to activate the *śakti*

tato'sya mastake cakram hastayoś cārcya yogavit || 11.21 || *taddhastau prerayec chaktyā yāvan mūrdhāntam āgatau* | *śivahastavidhiḥ proktaḥ sadyaḥpratyayakāraḥ* || 11.22 ||

⁹⁸⁶ *eteṣāṃ cālanān mantrī śaktipātaṃ parīkṣayet* || 11.26cd *mandatīvrādibhedena mandatīvrādikād budhaḥ* | 11.27ab | As we will see later in this chapter, this classification system may be the basis for Abhinavagupta's classification of the nine degrees of *śaktipāta* as found in the Tantrāloka.

within the initiate and temporarily unite the disciple's soul to the highest level (*tattva*) of Śiva [MVT 11.28-34]. The guru is instructed to “paralyze the fetters” (of *karma* or *mala*) in order to “seize” the disciple’s soul (*pāśastobhapaśugrāhau*) by possessing and entering into his body. After this union, the guru is once again instructed to examine the signs of possession by *śakti* to confirm the initiate’s achievement of the correct religious states:

[The guru] should carefully observe the collection of signs (*cihnas*) beginning with *ānanda* (bliss) etc. These are *ānanda* (bliss), *udbhava* (leaping), *kampa* (trembling), *nidrā* (slumber) and the fifth as *ghūrṇi* (whirling). In such a manner, these differences of mild, intense, etc. due to the entrance/possession by [Rudra's] *śakti* (*āviṣṭayā śaktyā*) [should be observed].⁹⁸⁷

Here, rather than *śaktipāta*, the term *āveśa* (*āviṣṭayā*) is once again used to denote the entrance of the Divine energy and the associated signs to verify the experience. These verifications and proofs seem to be quite important in the MVT, likely due to the inherent danger of possession states, as well as the potential for falsehood, since the possession experience was now a requirement to continue the path laid out by the MVT.

Törzsök and others have noted the similarities of these five signs with an earlier Kaula text known as the *Ūrmikaulārṇava* (ŪKA), the "The Kaula Ocean of Waves", which remains unpublished and only survives in fragments.⁹⁸⁸ According to Wallis, one portion of the text describes a ceremony called the "Transference by Penetration [of Śakti]" (*vedhasaṅkramaṇa*), which is similar to the MVT's *śiva-hasta* rite wherein the initiate's hands move spontaneously, impelled by the deity. In the ŪKA, this spontaneous movement indicates that the *sādhaka* has achieved *āveśa* and that the binding fetters of sin have been

⁹⁸⁷ *lakṣayec cihnaśaṅghātam ānandādikam ādarāt | ānanda udbhavaḥ kampo nidrā ghūrṇiś ca pañcamī || evam āviṣṭayā śaktyā mandatīvrādibhedataḥ | pāśastobhapaśugrāhau prakurvīta yathecchayā ||* MVT 11.35 -11.36 According to Törzsök (2013: 188) the five signs are also listed in the *Ciñciṇīmatasārasamuccaya* (9.42ab).

⁹⁸⁸ Törzsök (2013: 188). I was unable to obtain ŪKA, so am relying on fragments of the Sanskrit text collected and written on by Törzsök (2013), Wallis (2014), and Ferrario (2015). The manuscript is from the National Archives in Nepal (NAK).

removed (*pracalanti mahāpāsā āveśaṃ tasya jāyate*). Having achieved knowledge of reality (*tattvavidvasya*) through this transference of *śakti*, he goes on to experience the same Five States (*pañcāvasthā bhavanti*) as seen in the MVT - bliss, leaping, trembling, slumber, and whirling.⁹⁸⁹ Some verses later, five more signs are given: “Horripilation, paralysis, shaking, devotion ... and movement like a divine being, are known as the five signs of possession by Śāmbhava (Śiva) (*āveśaṃ śāmbhavaṃ*)” [ŪKA 2.236].⁹⁹⁰

Returning to the MVT, the following two lines [MVT 11.37-39] indicate the great importance the tradition held these signs of the possession experience:

But if this *āveśa* experience is not generated in someone, [the guru] should “burn” (the initiands) external and internal bodies simultaneously with the *śakti-mantra*. Being completely burned by that [*śakti*], [the initiand] falls to the ground like a tree whose root has been cut. If [*āveśa*] does not happen for him even after this, the guru should leave him aside, abandoning him like a stone.⁹⁹¹

As we can see, these proofs of possession are now an absolute requirement – if the guru assesses that the *sādhaka* has not had such an experience, he is no longer allowed to follow this path, a sentiment echoed in later Kaula and Trika texts.⁹⁹²

In chapter two of the MVT, we find a fivefold classification of *āveśa* (*bhūta*, *tattva*, *atma*, *mantrēśa* and *śakti*), which are loosely related to the proofs of possession we saw in chapter eleven. The text states:

rudrasaktisamāveśaḥ pañcadhā paripaṭhyate |
bhūtatattvātmamantrēśaśaktibhedād varānane || 2.17

⁹⁸⁹: *pracalanti mahāpāsāveśaṃ tasya jāyate || ānanda udbhavaḥ (em. hṛdbhavaḥ cod.) kampo nidrā ghūrmis tu pañcamī | tattvavidvasya deveśi pañcāvasthā bhavanti hi || Ūrmikaulārṇava (19v5-6) 2.231c-232. Sanskrit from Wallis (2014: 210)*

⁹⁹⁰ *romāñcastobhaviḥsobha...bhaktyamarīgatīḥ | pañcalakṣaṇam āveśaṃ śāmbhavaṃ parikīrtitam || Ūrmikaulārṇava 2.236. Sanskrit from Wallis (2014: 211)*

⁹⁹¹ *athavā kasyacin nāyam āveśaḥ samprajāyate || tad enaṃ yugapac chaktyā sabāhyābhyantare dahet || tayā saṃdahyamāno 'sau cchinnaṃ mūla iva drumah || patate kāśyapīprṣṭhe ākṣepaṃ vā karoty asau | yasya tv evam api syān na taṃ caivopalavat tyajet || MVT 11.37-39*

⁹⁹² For example, Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* (29.210-11b)

Possession by the *śakti* (energy/power) of Rudra is enumerated as fivefold, divided into *bhūta* (elements), *tattva* (principles/levels), *atma* (Self), *mantrēśa* (mantra-lords) and *śakti* (powers), O lovely-faced woman.

pañcadhā bhūtasamjñas tu tathā triṃśatidhā paraḥ |
ātmākhyas trividhaḥ prokto daśadhā mantrasamjñakaḥ || 2.18

That which is known as “*bhūta*” is fivefold (i.e., the five elements) and likewise the other (the “*tattva*”) is thirty-fold. That which is known as *ātma* is said to be of three kinds, while the “*mantra*”-type is enumerated as ten-fold.

dvidvidhaḥ śaktisamjño 'pi jñātavyaḥ paramārthataḥ |
pañcāśadbhedabhinno 'yaṃ samāveśaḥ prakīrtitaḥ || 2.19

That which is called *śakti* is to be known to be of two kinds. In reality, *samāveśa* is known to be divided into [a total of] fifty divisions.⁹⁹³

The text then seems to superimpose another three-fold classification on to these fifty divisions of *samāveśa*, a system quoted later in Abhinavagupta’s TĀ [1.168-1.170]. This threefold typology of possession states (*āveśa*) begins first with *Āṇava-āveśa* (“possession related to the individual soul”), and then in ascending order, *Śakta-āveśa* (“possession related to Śakti’s Power”) and finally the highest, *Śāmbhava-āveśa* (“possession related to Śiva”).

The MVT states:

āṇavo 'yaṃ samākhyātaḥ śākto 'py evaṃvidhaḥ smṛtaḥ |
evaṃ śāmbhavam apy ebhir bhedair bhinnaṃ vilakṣayet || 2.20

One should also distinguish the (fifty) divisions by these (three) divisions: one is called *āṇava* (“the limited/individual Self”), another is known as *śākta* (power, related to Goddess Śakti) and also [the third] which is known as *śāmbhava* (related to Śiva)

uccāraṇādhyānavarṇasthānaprakalpanaiḥ |
yo bhavet sa samāveśaḥ samyag āṇava ucyate || 2.21

That *samāveśa* which arises by means of *uccāra* (mantric utterances and *prāṇayama*), *karāṇa* (i.e., bodily, and ritual actions, including *mudrās*, “gestures”), *dhyāna* (meditation/visualization), *varṇa* (meditation on subtle sound), *sthānaprakalpana* (fixing the mind on a place or external object) is rightly called *āṇava* (“the limited, conditioned individual”).

uccārahitaṃ vastu cetasaiva vicintayan |
yam (sam)āveśam avāpnoti śāktaḥ so 'trābhidhīyate || 2.22

⁹⁹³ Infinite thanks to David White for his assistance with these translations

That *āveśa* which is obtained simply by means of reflection upon the reality of one's mind, without the practice of *uccāra* etc., is called *śakta*.

akimciccintakasyaiva guruṇā pratibodhataḥ |

jāyate yaḥ samāveśaḥ śāmbhavo 'sāv udīritaham || 2.23

The *samāveśa* that is produced from an awakening by the guru, for one who simply reflects upon nothing [i.e., having nonconceptual thought], is called *śāmbhava* (related to Śiva)

sārdham etac chataṃ proktaṃ bhedānām anupūrvaśaḥ |

saṃkṣepād vistarād asya parisamkhyā na vidyate || 2.24

This group of 150 divisions [of *samāveśa*] has been declared in order according to succession. A complete enumeration of these in brief, or in detail, is not known.

It appears the number of 150 *samāveśas* comes from multiplying the original number of fifty, which come from the five *bhūtas*, thirty *tattvas*, three *ātmanas*, ten mantras, and two śakti *āveśas*, by three, since they all also function on the levels *śāmbhava*, *śakta*, or *āṇava*. Sadly, these categories are not elaborated upon, and may have been mere speculation or theory at this point.

Slightly later in this section, another classification scheme is also presented, one which further homologizes *āveśa* with the five states of lucidity (*jāgradādyavasthā*) mentioned previously: 1. *jāgrat* - "waking", 2. *svapna*, "dreaming sleep" 3. *suṣupti*, "dreamless sleep" 4. *turya*, "the fourth state", and 5. *turyātīta*, "the state beyond the fourth".

The text states:

Pay heed! A further classification is now taught in brief. The wise should know that each level of all the forms of possession (*āveśa*) is subdivided differently into five [stages] by the divisions of waking, dreaming, etc.⁹⁹⁴

As previously discussed, the MVT links these five phases to the seven perceivers (*saptapramātr*) and how they all ultimately relate to the one true perceiver and agent, Śiva. In the yogic system of the MVT, the addition of this new three-fold classification system

⁹⁹⁴ *bhedo 'paro 'pi saṃkṣepāt kathyamāno 'vadhāryatām | MVT 2.25cd jāgratsvapnādibhedena sarvāveśakramo budhaiḥ | pañcabhinnaḥ pariññeyaḥ svavyāpārāt pṛthak pṛthak || MVT 2.26*

constitutes a quicker method and experience of immersing oneself into the *tattvas*. If we were to employ these three-fold divisions to the 150 *āveśas*, as the text states, then it means the total number of *āveśa* experiences are potentially 750! It is clear this conception of *āveśa* as mere “spirit possession” has been expanded upon greatly and completely reconceptualized, incorporating a potentially huge variety of spiritual experiences, under the category of “*āveśa*”.⁹⁹⁵

The MVT’s three-fold typology of *āveśa* is in fact an older one, used in early Śaiva Siddhānta sources to classify *mantras*.⁹⁹⁶ After its adaptation in the MVT, it becomes incorporated in the 9th century *Śiva Sūtras* and then in Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, becoming a central feature in all Trika-Kaula schools. Thus, in many senses, the MVT can be considered a bridge text between the dualist Siddhāntin schools and non-dualist Trika-Kaula traditions, as well as adapting and synthesizing the two concepts of *śaktipāta* (Siddhānta) and *āveśa* (Kāpālīka/Kaula). As we’ve seen, in the Saiddhāntika literature it is the concept of *śaktipāta* that is operative, while in many of the *Bhairavatantras* we’ve seen so far, it is *āveśa* or *samāveśa*. However, with the SYM and MVT we begin to see the two concepts becoming inextricably linked and, in some cases, synonymous - *śivaśaktinipātena* (originally seen in *Nayasūtra*) being identical with *rudraśaktisamāveśa* (BYT/MVT/SYM). In both cases, however, it is ultimately the Power (*śakti*) of Śiva which enters the practitioner, bestowing initiation and knowledge.

⁹⁹⁵ See Vasudeva (2004: 203) for rest of verses from MVT 2.25c– 34b; see See TĀ 10.178 for Abhinavagupta's explanation

⁹⁹⁶ Wallis (2014: 178 note 385) basis this on "the lost scripture quoted in Aghoraśiva’s Dīpikā on Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s *vṛtti* on *Mrgendratantra vidyāpāda* 22: *taduktam: . . . āṇavāḥ sām̐bhavāḥ śāktāḥ tathānyā mantrakoṭṭayāḥ.*"

While Abhinavagupta later interprets the MVT as a non-dualist text, it is, as Sanderson clearly shows in his 1992 article “The Doctrine of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra”, dualist in nature.⁹⁹⁷ As Sanderson writes,

The officiant is to assert that he is Siva not because the text subscribes to nondualism but because he is to qualify himself or the ritual by believing fervently in the doctrine that it is not he that is about to liberate the soul of the initiand but Siva residing in his person and working through him.⁹⁹⁸

While in the MVT, possession (*āveśa*) usually means being possessed by the deity, Abhinavagupta and his ilk emphasize the term *samāveśa*, which according to Sanderson, means “not the act of being entered but that of entering (into one’s true nature)”.⁹⁹⁹ This understanding, according to Sanderson, did not directly come from the MVT itself, but was rather a result of other non-dualist streams.¹⁰⁰⁰ We will return to Abhinavagupta’s interpretation later in this chapter. For now, we will continue to look at a few more texts of this period which prominently feature *āveśa*, beginning with the Kaula text known as the *Timirodghāṭana*.

4. THE KŪLAMĀRGA - THE EMERGING CONFLUENCE OF ĀVEŚA, ŚAKTIPĀTA AND KUṆḌALINĪ

THE TIMIRODGHĀṬANA AND THE KAULA STREAM

The *Timirodghāṭana* [TU] (“The Removal of the Darkness [of Ignorance]”), tentatively dated to the 8th century CE, was recently discovered by Diwakar Acharya, and transcribed by Somadeva Vasudeva in 2000, making it potentially the earliest surviving

⁹⁹⁷ See Sanderson (1992)

⁹⁹⁸ Sanderson (1992: 300)

⁹⁹⁹ Sanderson (1986:177 fn. 33)

¹⁰⁰⁰ According to Sanderson (1992: 307 fn. 89), particularly the *Trikasāra*, the *Triśirobhairava* in the Trika, and the *Kālikākrama*, *Kālikulapañśatika*, *Kālikulakramasadbhava*, and *Jayadrathayāmala* in the Krama.

Kaula text.¹⁰⁰¹ This text marks a new phase of the Kaula schools, which developed from the *yoginī* cults associated with texts such as the BYT and the SYM, from which it heavily redacts. Törzsök characterizes this new current as follows:

It [the TU] internalized the whole ritual system as well as the pantheon: the *yoginīs* became the goddesses of the senses in the body (*kula*) of the practitioner, and the rituals, such as *pūjā* or fire rituals, all came to be performed as internal worship in the body, based on yogic practices and meditation. Kaulism also lay much emphasis on possession (*āveśa*), although this phenomenon was already present in the early *yoginī* cults.¹⁰⁰²

Besides the move towards internalization, as Törzsök refers to, a process of “sanitization” and “domestication” of the more transgressive aspects of the cult is evident, as seen in the MVT, and which continues in all subsequent Kaula texts. For example, in its descriptions of Bhairava, rather than wearing a garland of dead bodies (*śavamālā*), as seen in the SYM, the TU describes him as simply wearing a rosary (*akṣamālā*).¹⁰⁰³ Similarly, rather than retaining the fierce four-headed Bhairava of the SYM, the TU settles upon a god with five heads, an obvious attempt by the authors to associate him with the more domesticated five-headed Sadāśiva of the Siddhānta.¹⁰⁰⁴ Furthermore, though the TU retains the visualization of Bhairava from the SYM, this new Kaula current employs it simply as a descriptor, repeatedly stating that Kaula practice has no need for deity visualization or meditation (*dhyāna/dhāraṇā*).¹⁰⁰⁵ This was an effort to place emphasis on gnosis (*jñāna*) over ritual practice (*kriyā*), a feature which comes to characterize all Kaula schools.

¹⁰⁰¹ Törzsök (2012: 1)

¹⁰⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰⁰³ See Judit Törzsök, “The rewriting of a Tantric tradition: from the Siddhayogeśvarīmata to the Timirodghāṭana and beyond,” 2012a, and Törzsök, “The Heads of the Godhead - The Number of Heads/Faces of Yoginīs and Bhairavas in Early Śaiva Tantras”. *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 56, 2, (2013a.): 133-155 for other differences in these descriptions. For more details on the transition from *yoginī* cult to Kaulism, see Sanderson (1998: 679).

¹⁰⁰⁴ See Törzsök (2012a: 5).

¹⁰⁰⁵ *dh[y]eyadhāraṇavarjitaḥ* (TU 8.1b); *dhyānadhāraṇavarjitaṃ* (TU 11.8d).

Like the SYM (and MVT), the TU is also emphatic in its requirement that the *sādhaka* and guru have the experience and proofs of “possession by the Power of Rudra” (*rudraśaktisamāveśa*). Without having this capability, the text claims, the mantras employed will not have power (*mantra-vīrya*) and the *sādhaka* will never succeed in his practice [TU 8.3-4].¹⁰⁰⁶ Like previous texts, this power can be transmitted by the guru [TU 11.18cd-20ab] and penetration by it can lead to the achievement of various *siddhis*:

He, established in *samādhi*, shall see all that has occurred in this world or the world beyond it, anything that has been done by anyone, the whole future, the present, and the past, through the illuminating *śakti* (power) of the Goddess Parā.¹⁰⁰⁷

Chapters four and six are perhaps the most interesting parts of the text for our purposes, portions of which have been recently published in Wallis's dissertation with the aid of Alexis Sanderson and Somadeva Vasudeva.¹⁰⁰⁸ Chapter four opens with the Goddess asking Bhairava how Śakti is manifest in the body, to which Bhairava replies, “She [Śakti] is the All-Pervasive Goddess (*sarvavyāpī*), [found] in the hearts of all embodied beings. By this jewel among wisdom-teachings (the Kaula teachings), that Awakened-Goddess awakens [others]” [TU 4.2]. Bhairava continues, stating that Śiva and Śakti should ultimately be understood as equal due to their quality of pervasion (*vyāpakarūpeṇa*) and that Rudra's Power (*rudraśakti*) is also established in the mouth of a guru who has been “possessed” (*āveśa*) by *śakti* [4.3].¹⁰⁰⁹ He clarifies, however, that the ultimate cause (*paramakāraṇaḥ*) of the experience is Śiva, who's Power (*śakti*) manifests in various forms in the same way *nāda*

¹⁰⁰⁶ *sarvāṇi mantratantrāṇi devatākalpajalpanam | mahato 'pi na sidhyante rudraśaktivivarjitam || hṛdayam sarvavidyānām mantravīryam param smṛtam | rudraśaktisamāveśam yo na vettin na sidhyati* [TU 8.3-4]. Sanskrit from Törzsök (2012a: 7).

¹⁰⁰⁷ Törzsök (2012a: 5) believes this was redacted from SYM 25.93; *lokālokatam sarvam yad vṛttam yena yat kṛtam // yad bhaviṣyam anāgataṁ bhavyam vā yat purātanam / tat samādhisthitāḥ paśye parāśaktiprabhāvataḥ* // TU 8.17cd-18

¹⁰⁰⁸ See Wallis (2014: 198-209)

¹⁰⁰⁹ *rudraśaktir iyam devi āveśagurumukhe sthitam* TU 4.3

("sound/resonance") manifests *bindu* ("the primordial drop") [4.4].¹⁰¹⁰ Like the SYM, the TU states that through the practice of *uccāra* the divine can be established in the body (*divyaṃ tanusthitam*) and the proofs of possession (*pratyaya*) will be produced, resulting in trembling (*kampata*) and paralysis (*stobha*) of the body, and visions of various types of *yoginīs* (*yoginībhedarśanam*) within three months of (4.5-4.6).¹⁰¹¹ The process is then briefly described: When the mantra rises (*uccāra*) through the soft palate (*tāluka*), the heart first trembles (*kampate*), the head spins (*śirañ ca bhramate*), and all the limbs and joints began moving about haphazardly (*bhrāmayed*) [4.8]. Due to the power of the *vidyā* (*mantra*) of the Kaula goddess (*kaulavidyāprabhāvataḥ*), the whole body (*sarvadeha*) starts to shake (*ghūrṇmitā*) [4.9]. The text reassures the reader that these bodily transformations (*vikāra*) are simply the "play" (*krīḍate*) of the Supreme Goddess (*parameśvarī*) and that one should not be afraid (*na bhetyaṃ*) that they've been afflicted by spirits or demons (*bhūtapiśācām*) or by delusion (*mohena*) [4.10-11]. The text is clearly aware that negative forms of possession cause similar symptoms, as we saw in the medical texts, and they are addressing what must have been a fear for the initiates.

Through this possession, the text continues, caused by the Will of Rudra's Power that is innate (*icchāśaktisvarūpena*), the yogin can become a guru. This *Ichchāśakti* is equated with the goddess Parā (as it is in other Trika systems), who takes away the *sādhaka's* sin (*sarvapāpaharim*) and causes ecstasy within the possessed person's body (*ratyānandakarī dehe*) [4.12]. Possession by Rudra's Power, we are further told, may also arise from the glances and words of the guru (*rudraśaktisamāveśaṃ śabdadr̥ṣṭiṣu jāyate* 4.16cd) and causes

¹⁰¹⁰ *tasye[ś]ā nirgatā śakti[r] nādabinduprabhedinī* TU 4.4 | For more on the doctrine of *nāda* and *bindu*, see Padoux (1990).

¹⁰¹¹ *tasyocāritamātreṇa pratyayaś copajāyate kampate dehapiṇḍan tu tasya stobha prajāyate* TU 4.5; compare this to SYM 3.48cd-49ab

supreme bliss and union with the heavenly gods (*rudraśaktisamāveśam...divyadevaiś ca samyogā paramānandakāraṇam*, 4.15), resulting in the dual goals of both enjoyment and liberation (*bhuktimuktiphalapradā* 4.16ab). In this state of yogic possession, described here as being "yoked to the Supreme Consciousness" (*cetanāyukta*), one feels neither hunger nor thirst (*kṣudhātrṣṇaṃ na*) or afflictions by any disease, and one's body spontaneously begins to tremble (*kampa*), sing and dance (*geyanṛtya*), and perform various *mudrās* and *bandhas* (yogic body locks) of various kinds [4.17-19]. The chapter ends reiterating that if the yogic signs (*yogacihnan*), a reference to the proofs of possession, are not seen then the *vidyā* (spell) for possession has failed. [4.21ab].¹⁰¹²

Chapter six continues with more questions by the Goddess asking what this actual power (*śakti*) is, how it is transmitted, and how and what signs are manifested as a result of the body's possession by it.¹⁰¹³ Bhairava answers that this is all due to Sarvavyāpinī, "The All-Pervasive Goddess", whose nature is pervasion, who pervades the whole universe (*yā sāvā vyāpakarūpeṇa brahmāṇḍe sacarācare* 6.4) and who abides in both the gross and subtle bodies of all beings (*sabāhyābhyantare dehe sarvajantuṣu saṁsthitā*, 6.5ab). It states that through the command of a real guru (*sadācāryopadeśena*), the Goddess (as *śakti*) can transfer (*saṁkramet*) from one body into another (*paradehe*).¹⁰¹⁴ When transmission occurs, it is signaled by the movement of the *śakti* in the body, which is described as going "to and fro" and moving "up and down" the subtle channels, which are not named at this point, but implied [6.6].¹⁰¹⁵ Having completely pervaded the body of the guru, the guru is then

¹⁰¹² *yogacihnan na paśyete na vidyā kramitā kvacit* TU 4.12ab

¹⁰¹³ *kā sāvā saṁkrāmate śaktiḥ kāni cihnāni darśayet | saṁstobhādi-vikārāni kurute deha-saṁsthitā* || TU 6.1. Translation based on Wallis (2014: 203, see also note 457)

¹⁰¹⁴ Which, as we saw earlier, can occur through the guru's glance or words [4.16].

¹⁰¹⁵ *sthitigatir adhordhvena dehasaṁkrāntilakṣaṇam* | TU 6.6

instructed to cause the Supreme Energy (*parāśaktiṃ*) to enter (*praveśa*) the body of the disciple (*dehavyāpyam adhordhvena parāśaktiṃ praveśayet*). Because he has these signs, he becomes known as a guru who can grant liberation [6.8].

In this section we are also given some interesting details regarding the visions of the *yoginīs* the *sādhaka* experiences – “By means of this jewel of Kaula teachings, the *sādhaka* will see a divine vision” (*kaulopadeśaratnena yogino divyadarśanam paśyen* 6.10ab). First, one will see a *yoginī* in the form of a shadow (*chāyā*) who manifests in a black form (*kṛṣṇarūpiṇī*) and will have either a fierce or benevolent appearance (*raudrī vā saumyarūpeṇa*, 6.12), depending on the type of practice done, and will be surrounded by many wrathful and fearsome *yogīs* (i.e. *yoginīs*) (*raudrabhairavarūpeṇa bahuyogiparivṛtām* 6.14).¹⁰¹⁶ At the end of twenty-seven years, we are told, the *sādhaka* will accomplish becoming a sky-roamer (*siddhakhecarī*) (6.18).

Chapter eight also gives some remarks on *āveśa*, stating that their teachings on *rudraśakti* are Supreme and contain everything from the Kaula stream and their scriptures on Parā, and can only be transmitted via the mouth of the guru who has experienced possession [8.2]. The following verses then reiterate that none of the Kaula practices will succeed if the mantras are devoid of *rudraśakti* [8.3], which gives them their virility and is described as “the heart of all *vidyās*” (*hṛdayam sarvavidyānām*). Likewise, *sādhakas* who have not experienced possession by Rudra’s Power will not have any success on this path (*rudraśaktisamāveśa yo na vetti na siddhyati* | 8.4).¹⁰¹⁷ This is repeated in chapter nine, where it states even more clearly that all these teachings, practices and mantras can only be

¹⁰¹⁶ See Kiss (2015: 47, n. 53)

¹⁰¹⁷ *kaula sṛṣṭyavatārantu parāgranthārthalakṣaṇam | rudraśaktiyā padeśantu guruvaktreṣu labhyate || sarvāṇi mantratantrāṇi devatā kalpajalpanam | mahatopi na sidhyante rudraśakti vivarjitam || hṛdayam sarvavidyānām mantravīrya parasmṛtaḥ | rudraśakti samāveśa yo na vetti na siddhyati || TU 8.2-4*

known through the experience of possession by *rudraśakti* (*rudraśaktisamāveśa-jñānasamkrāntikārakaṃ*; 9.16ab].

The "Five Jewels" of this Kaula teaching (*pañcaratnāpadeśāni*) are then given. The first is achieving the purified state of Parā, which arises from visualizing the burning of the impurities of the gross and subtle bodies (*jvalitaṃ deha parāvastha*); second, is the worship of the circle of *yoginīs* (*yoginīcakrasaṃmānya*); and third, the transference of *śakti* (*śaktisamkrame*) from one's own body to another's body (*paradeham*). This transference, according to the text, first causes trembling, which then leads to *samādhi* and great power (*mahābalaḥ*). The fourth achievement is the *siddhi* of *bhūcarī* ("earth-roaming"), and finally the fifth, the binding of the *khecarī-mudrā* (sky-roaming i.e., the power of flight) [8.6-9].¹⁰¹⁸ No further information is given regarding these five jewels.

THE JAYADRATHAYĀMALATANTRA

We now briefly return to the 10th century *Jayadrathayāmala Tantra* [JYT], a Kaula text belonging to the *Kālīkula*, which designates a number of closely related sects from Northern India, primarily in Kashmir and Nepal, that center around the great Goddess Kālī. It is from the Kālīkula that the more radical Krama schools also originate. The 24,000 verses of the JYT are divided into four *ṣaṭkas* of about 6,000 verses each, making this the longest of all the Mantramārga texts. Additionally, as discussed earlier, there seems to be some influence or at least assimilation from Kāpālīka groups - this is apparent from the JYT's incorporation

¹⁰¹⁸ *ālekhyam kaulikajñānam guruvaktreṣu samsthitam | karṇe karṇe tu samkrāme dūrastho hi na samkramet || vidyā dhyānasamādhiṇca yoganādāpadeśikam | pañcaratnāpadeśāni granthārthe ca tu lekhatet || prathamam ratne tu samprāpte abhyāse palitanāśanam | ūrdha sa? jvalitaṃ deha parāvastha? sa gacchati || dvitīyaratnaprabhāvena gurusīsyena toṣitam | yoginīcakrasaṃmānya yatra tatra vyavasthitāḥ || tṛtīya paradehantu svadehe śaktisamkrame | kṣobhayanti puraḥ sarvaḥ samādhistho mahābalaḥ || caturtha bhūcarī siddhi vrajivā gacchate punaḥ | pañcame khecarī mudrā baddhā corddhāni gacchati || TU 8.4-9*

of the YSP, which Sanderson has argued may have been an earlier independent Kāpālika text, as well as the use of the designation of "Kāpālika" at times when referring to the *sādhakas* themselves. Besides the YSP, Sanderson believes the first chapter, entitled *Śiraścheda*, may also have originally been an independent text belonging to the *Vāmatantras*, composed prior to 800 CE and parts of which were redacted in the coeval Buddhist *Laghuśamvaratantra*.¹⁰¹⁹ Like the YSP, the *Śiraścheda* is also more archaic in nature, though the least Śakta in orientation when compared to the latter three books, which Serbaeva-Saraogi characterizes as "one of the most 'Śakta' texts in existence" - the invoked deities being almost exclusively female. In some cases, the goal of various rites is not achieving identification or transformation into Bhairava, as in most Mantramārga texts, but rather with the *yoginīs* or goddesses themselves.¹⁰²⁰ The JYT thus represents a synthesis of these early Atimārga (III) and later Mantramārga concepts.

Directly following the chapters of the YSP we already discussed above, two additional *vratas* are described, which are supposed to be performed in cremation grounds. The first is a *kāpālika-vrata*, where one is supposed to announce publicly that they are Kāpālikas, don their attire, and state aloud that they are "desirous to unite with the rays" (*raśmimelāpalolupaḥ* JYT 3.38.163), "the rays" being a reference to the *yoginīs*.¹⁰²¹ The second is the *unmatta-vrata*, which harkens back to the *vratas* of the Pāśupatas, described in the previous chapter. In both cases, the practitioner is instructed to act as if they were insane or possessed - he is told to act spontaneously, in one moment (*kṣaṇa*) laughing, the next

¹⁰¹⁹ Sanderson, "Remarks on the text of the *Kubjikāmatatantra*." *Indo-Iranian Journal* no. 45: (2002): 2.

¹⁰²⁰ Olga Serbaeva-Saraogi, "Varieties of *Melaka* in the *Jayadrathayāmala*: Some Reflections of the Terms *Haṭha* and *Priya*", in *Goddess Traditions in Tantric Hinduism: History, Practice and Doctrine*, ed. Bjarne Wernicke Olesen, (London; New York: Routledge, 2016): 51.

¹⁰²¹ Note again the "ray" terminology employed here, recalling White's work on this (2009: 154-155) and (2012a).

singing, then weeping, scratching oneself, leaping about, dancing, washing oneself, etc. Within a moment their mood should oscillate from being tranquil to heroic, then terrified, then fearsome, and then again afraid. One should move wildly and imitate the actions and sounds of various animals such as jackals, elephants, cats, and birds. The text states one becomes possessed by these various moods and should submit to them (*nānārasasamāviṣṭo nānābhāvasamāsthitaḥ*). He should prattle on and on, repeatedly stating “I am a Kāpālika!”, “I am an outcaste!”, “I am the Lord of Rays!”, “I am mad!”, “I am hungry!” (*kāpāliko'haṃ ca vadeś caṃḍālo'haṃ vadet punaḥ || raśminātho'smi matto'smi kṣudho'smi pralapāmy aham*).¹⁰²² The results of these *vratas*, according to the text, is a vision of the Goddesses (*devīs*) and Mothers (*Mātrīs*) within seven days (*tadā saptāha mātrena devīnām darśanam*). Gradually, within a month of conversing with *yoginīs*, the *sādhaka* is said to transform and become "like Kālī", the Mistress of Bhairava herself.¹⁰²³

Like in earlier Śaiva tantras we've seen, we find a mingling of tantric and yogic concepts and technologies associated with *āveśa* throughout the JYT, particularly the use of *vidyās* (female mantra spells), *uccāra*, and *mudrās* (v.53cd and 54cd), often alongside a trance state known as *yoganidrā* (JYT 3.23cd-28), to engender desired states of consciousness, many of which result in possession-like symptoms and signs. The text states

¹⁰²² JYT.3.38.169–178ab [f. 232v2–233r1]: *kṣaṇaṃ haset kṣaṇaṃ gāyēt kṣaṇaṃ rodaṃ kṣaṇaṃ radet / kṣaṇaṃ plavet kṣaṇaṃ narttet kṣaṇaṃ dhāvet kṣaṇaṃ lalet // kṣaṇaṃ sāntaṃ kṣaṇaṃ vīraṃ kṣaṇaṃ bhītatsavad bhavet / kṣaṇaṃ raudrarasāvastho kṣaṇaṃ eva bhayānakam // kṣaṇaṃ śṛṅgārīṇaṃ devi kṣaṇaṃ hāsyaiikatatparaḥ / kṣaṇaṃ aṅgutasamrūḍho kṣaṇaṃ kāruṇyam āsthitaḥ // nānārasasamāviṣṭo nānābhāvasamāsthitaḥ / nānāvilāsasamyukto nānāgītaravākulaḥ // ... // kṣaṇaṃ kroṣṭukarāvīsyā kṣaṇaṃ cillāravākulaḥ / hayeḥṣaravam api kṣaṇaṃ gajaravaṃ vadet // kṣaṇaṃ mārjārarāvīsyāt kṣaṇaṃ sārasavaṃ nadet / gardabhākhyaṃ kṣaṇaṃ rāvaṃ naden nādaṃ ca kesaraṃ // kṣaṇaṃ maṅgacatuṣkeṇa valvajātyaśvavaṃ naraḥ / kāpāliko[']haṃ ca vadeś caṃḍālo[']haṃ vadet punaḥ // raśminātho[']smi matto[']smi kṣudho[']smi pralapāmy aham / Sanskrit from Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016: 67 fn. 43)*

¹⁰²³ *tadā saptāha mātrena devīnām darśanam bhavet / nānārūpaiḥ kurupaiś ca yuktāyuktaṃ vadaṃti tāḥ // tataḥ paraṃ prayacchaṃti siddhadravayāni yāni ca / ... tadā sa plavate vyomni śaX[mbhu?] Jntaṃ yāvad eva hi // mahābhairavanāthena pūjyate sarvakālikam / yathā sā parameśānī kālīkā bhairaveśvari // tadvad eva bhaved devi sādhako bahunātra kim / evaṃ vratottamaṃ devi duścaraṃ bhairaveṣv api // JYT 3.38.180–185: Sanskrit in Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016: 67 fn. 44)*

clearly that the knowledge/teachings related to the numerous forms of Kālī are achieved predominantly through possession (*mahākālikramākramī samāveśopadeśayuk* JYT 2.13.56ab). Serbaeva notes several instances in which *āveśa* or *samāveśa* are used explicitly, though in other rites it appears more implicitly. Regardless, in most cases the results of the practice show similar proofs of possession that lead to the bestowal of knowledge, *siddhis*, and visions.¹⁰²⁴ In one case, even the remembrance (*anu-smṛ*) of the different *vidyās* of the goddesses is enough to cause possession-like symptoms such as tremors, paralysis, horripilation, etc.¹⁰²⁵ These signs are usually found during initiation, encounters with the *yoginīs* [JYT 3.6.], and when practicing *uccāra*, all of which lead to visions and "nondiscursive states of consciousness" (*dhyānādhyayavinirmuktām cidacit*). According to verses in chapter three, these sorts of signs are proof the goddess has entered the body of the *sādhaka* (*tadā sā devadeveśī āviśed*).¹⁰²⁶

What marks an important development in the JYT, particularly on the discourses and metaphysics surrounding *āveśa*, is its advanced interpretation of *āveśa* using the lens of *kuṇḍalinī*, a concept which was still evolving and developing in this period. In the JYT, the signs of *āveśa* become especially linked with the "piercing of the five knots", the "knots" (*granthi*) representing an early understanding of the *cakras* of the subtle body commonly seen in later tantric and yogic texts. The piercing occurs by the yogi's internal *śakti*, later known as *kuṇḍalinī* ("coiled serpent") since it is believed to resemble a serpent while it rises

¹⁰²⁴ *āveśavaśataḥ sarvvam atītānāgatādikaṃ | kathayen nātra saṃdeho mudrāḥ sarvvāḥ pravarttate || śivarāvaṃ tathā geyaṃ karoti bhr̥ṣamaṃḍasā | kampaṭe dehapiṇḍas tu bhuvāś cotpatate mahat ||* JYT 4.62.13-14; Sanskrit from Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 35)

¹⁰²⁵: *asyānusmaraṇād devi brahmāṇḍaṃ kampaṭe bhuvam / stobharomāñ ca balanaṃ jāyate sādhakasya hi ||* JYT 2.12.21 Sanskrit in Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 29)

¹⁰²⁶ *tadā prakampaṭe dehaṃ samanāṭtaṃ na saṃśayah / [...] // dhyānādhyayavinirmuktām cidacit yada madhyagām / spandamānām paravyomni sarvaśaktikalālayām // [...] // tadā sā devadeveśī āviśed dehapaṃjaram / mahānaṃd[ā] meyo yogī śaktiṃ piṇḍaṃ tadā bhavet //* JYT 3.15.22-28 Sanskrit from Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 31)

and pierces through the various *granthis/cakras*. As we saw already, this interpretation begins earlier in the MVT and continues in to the *Kubjikamātatantra*, where it becomes more developed, as we will see shortly.

In JYT 1.12, Bhairava describes to the Goddess how each of these knots produces a set of psychosomatic signs and affects when penetrated by the *śakti* in the initiate's subtle body.¹⁰²⁷ When the first knot is "entered" (*saṃvīsthā*), the text claims it results in the following signs (*cihna*): staggering, trembling, fainting, and burning sensations (*bhramanaṃ kampanaṃ mūrccā jvalamānaṃ*), which is then followed by a feeling of great orgasmic bliss. With the "Descent of the Devī into the second knot" (*dvitīyāṃ pāṭayed granthiṃ yadā devī* i.e., the piercing by *śakti*), one has the following signs in the body, related to the expansion of the Self - expansion, lust, leaping, paralysis (or automatic movements), and great brilliance (*vikāsaṃ cāmiṣaṃ plāvaṃ stobham atyantaśobhanam*). The results of this piercing lead to a variety of *siddhis*, including various forms of possession (*āveśa* - i.e., *svasthāveśa*, *purāveśa*, etc.), instantly understanding the language of *yoginīs* (*yogi bhāṣāprabhāṣaṇam*), and the ability to tell the past and future (*atītānāgatārthādi kathanam*). The piercing of the "third great knot" (*trītyāṃ mahāgranthiṃ*) provokes leaping like a frog and levitation (*darduravad bhūmiṃ prathamam tyajate bhṛśam*), the *sādhaka* described as

¹⁰²⁷: *yāvat prathama saṃvīsthā tāvac cihnaṃ pravartate / bhramanaṃ kampanaṃ mūrccā jvalamānaṃ śarīratā // paścād ānandam atyuccair vipulaṃ kāmakaḷāvat / dvitīyāṃ pāṭayed granthiṃ yadā devī suduḥsahā // tadā cihnaṃ śarīrasthaṃ tasya samyak pravartate / vikāsaṃ cāmiṣaṃ plāva[m] stobham atyantaśobhanam // āveśaṃ bahudhākāraṃ yogi bhāṣāprabhāṣaṇam / atītānāgatārthādi kathanam vā karotpalam // trītyāṃ vai mahāgranthiṃ yadā pāṭayate balāt / tadā darduravad bhūmiṃ prathamam tyajate bhṛśam // punaś ca cakravat vyomaḥ āste sādhasattamaḥ / mahāvīyāptis tataḥ paścat samudeti sadaivahi // yoganidrā mahānando bhavaty evāśya yoginaḥ / tīvratāpadutātyarthaṃ sarvajñatvādikam sphuṭam // dūrādevādi sarvaṃ syāt sādhasasya mahātmanaḥ / caturthiṃ sā mahāgranthiṃ yadā pāṭayate śivā // tadāśya siddhayaś citrāḥ pravartanti na saṃśayaḥ / kamparomāś ca ākṣepastobhavibhramadr[ṣṭa] yaḥ // ākarṣavedhapātādi purakṣobhanam ulbavnā / ghaṭṭanaṃ rodhacalanam ākṣepāveśam adbhutam // śaḍrasākṛṣṭir atulā śaḍbhūmiśrutir uttamāḥ / śaḍsvabhūḥ prabhutānasyākārāntaḥ kṣatīśas tathā // mahāvīyāptir atighorā cañcalā kṣepasundarā / samudeti na sandeham iti bhairavabhāṣitam // pañcamaṃ granthisaṃyogam atulam ghaṭṭayed yadā | tadā pūrvoktam akhilaṃ samudeti mahākramam || JYT 1.12.428-447, f. 88r3-v7. I would like to deeply thank David G. White for providing me with these Sanskrit passages from the JYT and helping me with its translation.*

being able to sit "like a rotating wheel in space" (*cakravad vyomaḥ āste*), which results in elevated states of lucidity, beginning with "The Great Pervasion" (*mahāvyaṅṅti*), followed by the *yoganidrā* trance state, described as "The Great Bliss of the Yogis" (*mahānando bhavaty evāsya yoginaḥ*).¹⁰²⁸ This is accompanied by various feelings of heat and pain (*tīvratāpadutāti*), which are transformed into powers of omniscience (*sarvajñatvādika*), expansion (*sphuṭa*), and panoptic vision (*dūrādevādi sarvaṃ*). When the fourth knot is pierced by *śakti* (mentioned here as "*śivā*"), one experiences tremors, horripilation, convulsions (*ākṣepa*), paralysis/automatic movements (*stobha*), unsteadiness, and visions (*vibhramadṛṣṭa* - or "unsteady vision" if a compound). The *siddhis* obtained due to these penetrations are similar to the six magical attainments found in other tantras - the powers of attraction (*ākarṣa*), pervasion (*vedha* - either one's own subtle centers or other bodies), destruction etc., though it also adds "powerful possession" (*āveśam adbhutam*), extraction of the six tastes (*śaḍrasākṛṣṭir*), and knowledge of the highest revelations.

Finally, with the piercing of the fifth knot, Bhairava states the previous signs of the four knots will arise once again, but this time simultaneously (*akhilaṃ samudeti mahākramam*). One will then obtain mastery of all the various forms of possession (*āveśa*), illumination, and pervasion of the whole universe (akin to David White's understanding of the expanded body of the yogi)¹⁰²⁹, resulting in visions of the *siddhas* (accomplished masters) and *yoginīs*. Some verses later it concludes that having achieved oneness (*aikātmyasampattyā*) with Śiva and his Power (Śakti) through the yoga of possession,

¹⁰²⁸ As we had also seen in the MVT earlier.

¹⁰²⁹ See White, "On the Magnitude of the Yogic Body," in *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Nāths*, eds. Lorenzen and Muñoz (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012d).

classified as *āṇavāveśa*, *śaktāveśa*, and *sambhavāveśa*, one will achieve "the Supreme Passage" (*tarasattamaḥ*), ultimate liberation from *samsāra*.¹⁰³⁰

The various supernatural powers (*siddhis*) attained are also similar throughout this and earlier texts we've looked at – including the ever-important ability to tell the past, the present and future, but also the ability to perform "piercing" (*vedha*) and "joining" (*yodha*), even from a great distance. From the text, it appears that *sādhakas* can model themselves after the *yoginīs*, possessing others beings in order to extract their vital essences as seen in the *Netra Tantra*.¹⁰³¹ Other *siddhis* listed include the spontaneous knowledge of *mudrās*, the realization of mantras, mastery of the *cakras*, attainment of the eightfold yogic *siddhis*, and the ability to bring the threefold world under one's control.¹⁰³² We should note that the *siddhis* seem to distinguish *āveśa* and *purapraveśam* as two separate attainments.¹⁰³³ In most *siddhi* lists when *āveśa* is used, it generally refers to the ability to possess and control other humans. In this case, *āveśa* may be being used to reference *svasthāveśa*, though it could also refer to the *sādhakas* who possess others to extract their vital essences.

¹⁰³⁰ *evam aikātmyasampattyā śāktaśāmbhavam āṇavam | yogam ākhyātam etad vai guror arthaprakāśakṛt || avāpya ghorāt samsārād uttaret tarasattamaḥ ||* JYT 1.12.428–447; only the fifth knot is given here, v. 447cd: *siddhayogin[ī] cakrāṇām vimānānām ca darśanam ||*. See also v. 458ab: *evam aikātmyasampattyā śāktaśāmbhavam āṇavam /* Sanskrit from Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 38)

¹⁰³¹ Much as we saw in the *Netra Tantra* - see White (2012b). Also see Törzsök (2013: 201) on the vampiric actions of the *yogis/yoginīs* in the JYT. See Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016: 70 fn 67) for following passage and quote: JYT 2.17.599cd-610, [f. 80v2–9, P174rv]: *nocen mahācaruḥ sādhyo helāṃdolā vihāravat // amṛtākṛṣṭiyogena purvoktena tu sādhaḥ / tenāpūrya svakaṃ vaktraṃ punaḥ pātraṃ prapūrayet // taṃ pragṛhya vrajed gauri śmaśānaṃ siddhasevitam / tatra phetkārīṇīm badhvā vidyām samyag ihocaret // saptavārān tato devi svayam devī karaṅkiṇī / samabhyeti pradātavyam carun tasyān nivedayet // taṃ prāśya devadeveśī sādhaḥ svapūram nayet / atha saṃvāram akhilaṃ prabravīmi tavākhilam ||*. She states "The first part of the passage describes a usual *melaka*, ending in the fact that the *sādhaḥ* obtains the ability to fly. From 606cd, it is a transformed *sādhaḥ* who extracts blood in order to go higher in the hierarchy of the *melakas*."

¹⁰³² This is from Serbaeva-Saraogi's assessment – not all the verses are quoted in her article, but here are some of the relevant passages: JYT 1.12.158cd–161: *āveśasto saromāñ ca tatrasthaḥ kurute sadā // līlayā sādhaḥkendro'sau vedhaṃ yodha karoti hi / [...] // atidūrādvēdham ugraṃ mudrāṃ sphaṭaṃ karotyā'sau / [...] / piṇḍasiddhir bhavatyasya...//*, and v. 192: *paradehapraveśādi vṛkṣālabhan apūrvakam / anagnirjvalanaṃ vedhaṃ durālokojña[no]dayah //* See Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 37)

¹⁰³³ JYT.1.12.181cd, f. 78v9: *purapraveśam āveśam samyak siddhim upaiti hi ||*

Olga Serbaeva-Saraogi refers to a few passages related to the idea of *sādhakas* being in a constant or permanent state of possession by the deity.¹⁰³⁴ I unfortunately have not been able to look at these particular passages, but what is interesting, as Serbaeva-Saraogi notes, is that it is not the deity which enters the *sādhaka*, but rather its inversion, "the *sādhaka* entering the body of the goddess" [JYT 3.10.58cd:... *viśet tām aiśvarītanum*].¹⁰³⁵ This is an important point that I have been making about the term *āveśa* as it is understood in South Asia - possession is always a two-way street, particularly when one understands the processes and techniques involved. As evidenced in the *Netratantra*, the *sādhaka* and the *yoginīs* are described as using the same tantric ritual technologies when invoking, possessing, and controlling other beings. During this process, possession involves an interpenetration of both beings - both are possessing and being possessed at the same time. This is why *samāveśa* as a term is best understood as "co-penetration" or "co-possession", a point also made by Frederick Smith throughout his book, *The Self-Possessed*.

In chapter four, in a later section of the JYT known as the *Rāviṇīsāadhanapaṭalaḥ*, we find a passage giving a wide range of *siddhis* that *sādhakas* were able to potentially achieve through its rites. It also includes *svasthāveśa*, which may give more support to the theory that *āveśa* as referenced in JYT.1.12.181cd may have referred to this form:

Empress of the gods, when [the *vidyā* is] repeated one hundred thousand times, she grants the great Siddhi of the subterranean paradises (*mahāpātāla*). O empress of the god of gods, hear what she will achieve [even] if she has not been the object of repeated recitation: the power to animate Vetālas, to summon and command a Great Kiṅkara-spirit (*mahākiṅkarasāadhanam*), to become invisible (*antardhānam*), and the highest practice, [namely] the extracting of the vital essences (*rasākṛṣṭir*), the exceedingly fierce procedure for the mastering of Bhūtas (*bhūtasāadhanam atyugraṃ*), the extraordinary mastering of Kṛtyās (*kṛtyāsāadhanam adbhutam*), obtaining audience (*darśanam*) with the Nāgas, driving off storm-clouds and lightning, the power to

¹⁰³⁴ JYT 3.7.131cd See Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 48)

¹⁰³⁵ see also JYT 2.17.412ab, JYT 2.25.601cd, JYT 3.8.146–147, JYT 4.24.13ab. From Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 210 fn. 49)

travel on foot at supernatural speed (*pādacāram*), [the obtaining of] a sword [of invincibility] (*khaḍgam*), flight-enabling sandals (*pādukā*), a [magical] sacred thread, collyrium and the like, a [magical] staff and waterpot, earrings, deer skin, thread, perfect substances/fluids (*siddhadravyāni*), [power over] the Yakṣa women (*yakṣiṇyāḥ*) mentioned above, [prognostication by means of] a *Prasenā* spirit or through *svasthasādhanam*, (short for *svasthāvesa*, “the “healthy” divine oracular possession of a child), the power to send [spirits against one’s enemies] (*preṣaṇam*), the crushing of the wicked, the destruction of demon and poisons (*viṣabhūtavināśanam*), stopping disease (*vyādhinigraham*), subjecting and attracting (*vaśyākarṣaṇam*), killing (*māraṇa*), driving out/ruining (*uccāttana*) enemies and the like, paralyzing and rendering immobile (*stobhastambhana*), and the breaking or crushing of boats, carts, and protection devices (*yantra*). The terrible (*ghora*) supreme goddess, Haḍḍakaraṅkiṇī, will effortlessly and playfully bring about these and other accomplishments taught in the preceding teachings of this Tantra, and any others that will be stated hereafter.¹⁰³⁶

Again, we see here a wide variety of powers and skills that go beyond the needs of an initiate seeking liberation. The stamp of the earlier spell casting, magical healers, and exorcistic rites from Epic, Atharvanic and *bhūtavidyā* medical texts is also clearly seen. What is also interesting is the mention of prognostication and oracular possession using either a *Prasenā* spirit for mirror divination or a child who becomes ritually possessed by a spirit (*svasthāveśa*). As Smith has detailed in his book, and as I briefly discussed earlier, *svasthāveśa* rites are a pan-Asian phenomenon found in many early Hindu and Buddhist *tantras*, particularly the *Niśvāsaguhya*, the *Tantrasadbhāva*, the *Cakrasaṃvarapiṇḍārtha*, the *Sekoddeśa*, the *Bṛhatkālottara*, and, most importantly, the *Jayadrathayāmala*, which gives one of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of this rite. While little more is mentioned about the *prasenā* spirit for mirror-divination, we do find more information on *svasthāvesa* in chapter three (JYT 3.14.70-76):

If he desires to accomplish the supreme *svasthāveśanam* he should bring a young girl (*kanyā*) who has all the auspicious marks. She should be settled on a seat in a well-hidden temple, wearing a dark red garment and adorned with a garland of red flowers

¹⁰³⁶ From *ṣaṭka* JYT 4.69r5–70r6. Translation based on and adapted from Sanderson 2015 article “Śākta Procedures for Weather Control and other Supernatural Effects through Power over Nāgas - Garuḍika Passages in the Śākta *Jayadrathayāmala*”. For full Sanskrit text see pgs. 11-13.

around her neck. He should seat her on a fine seat and feed her with heaps of meat and wine (*palāli*). He should burn incense continuously and should repeatedly recite the spell (*vidyā*). Then the girl will begin to shake (*kampa*), whirl (*ghūrṇ*), and laugh (*has*) again and again. He should sound his bell (*ghaṇṭā*) there while engrossed in the great mantra-rite. Then the emaciated goddess of the gods (*devadevīkṛśodarī*) will possess (*āviśate*) [her] quickly. She will rise above the ground (*tyaktvābhūmiṃ*, “abandon the earth”) and hover there. Then the man should bow low before the supreme goddess and gratify her with offerings of various *balis*. Then she will tell this most eminent of Sādhakas whatever his mind desires to know - [telling] everything in regard to the three times (*kālatrayam*) - the past (*bhūta*), present (*bhavya*), and future (*bhaviṣya*). She will tell the *sādhaka* anything that is happening anywhere within the sphere of Brahmā (*brahmāṇḍa*).¹⁰³⁷

This aligns with earlier accounts of *svasthāveśa*, a topic which we will now briefly revert to before continuing on to the next texts.

SVASTHĀVEŚA AND THE USE OF CHILD MEDIUMS

As we saw in a previous chapter, oracular possession (*svasthāveśa*) and allied divinatory practices (i.e., mirror divination) have a long history in South and East Asia, with evidence going back to the times of the *Upaniṣads* and earliest Buddhist and Jain literature, such as the *Dīghanikāya* and *Pañhāvāyaraṇa/Praśnavyākaraṇa*. As White has recently detailed, Frederick Smith conflates *svasthāveśa* with mirror divination, though they were originally separate practices which were later synthesized.¹⁰³⁸ When these sorts of practices were adopted by the Śaivas and Buddhists of the Tantric period, it primarily became the domain of various *bhūtanātha*-type deities such as Kumāra, Gaṇapati, Baṭuka Bhairava, Hanuman, Maheśvara, and various Goddesses. Also, as seen in Strickmann’s monumental work *Chinese Magical Medicine*, these types of divinatory rites were adapted by and continued throughout East Asia. Strickmann notes in some of these Chinese tantric texts a

¹⁰³⁷ From JYT 3.14.70-76 – see Sanderson (2015: 13 fn 2) for full Sanskrit passage.

¹⁰³⁸ See Chapter 3 of White (2021).

"minor Tantric Buddhist goddess" who goes by the name of Prasenā, a name which he wrongly believed at the time was related to the warrior child god Skanda/Kumāra, due to his association with the Sanskrit term *senā* ("army"; as in *mahāsenā*, *senāpati* etc.) and oracular possession. Similar or cognate terms were also found in Tantric Buddhist texts such as the *Sekoddeśa*, the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* (CST), the *Subāhupariṣcchā Sūtra*, and the recently published *Catuṣpīṭhatantra*, the latter of which we will look at below in detail. In chapter forty-three of CST, for example, a verse reads, "Having repeated the mantra over a sword, water, one's thumb, a lamp, or a mirror, one will cause the descent of the divinatory image [*prasenā*] by means of the yoga of oneself [as the deity]", a very brief yet concise definition of this mirror divination practice.¹⁰³⁹

In the early literature of the Śaiva Mantramārga, this was also a commonly used designation for a singular or group of spirit beings, or apparatuses, associated with divination, variously known as *prasīnā*, *prasannā*, *pratisenā* or *senikā*. In the earliest surviving Śaiva tantra, the *Niśvāsaguhya*, we find perhaps the earliest description invoking a divination spirit ("*prasīna*", who in this case is Caṇḍī) for mirror divination in the Śaiva literature, when an initiation had failed to yield the desired results:

But, if the *sādhaka* does not see any auspicious or inauspicious sign in his dream, he should invoke a *Prasīnā* by reciting at least ten thousand times *OM CAṆDIKE KRAMA KRAMA SVĀHĀ*. This the mantra of Caṇḍī. After reciting the mantra of Caṇḍī, he should mix oil and lac and [then] smear his thumb while mantrically empowering the oil. After washing the faces of a boy and a girl he should make them look [at the thumb]. Eating sesame and rice they see what the problem is. After [they have seen [it, the *sādhaka*,] hearing [it from them], should master the best of *mantras*.¹⁰⁴⁰

¹⁰³⁹ Smith (2006: 426-427)

¹⁰⁴⁰ *śubhāśubham na dṛṣṭam tu svapne vai sādhakena tu | prasīnān kārayet tatra japtvā ayutam uttamam || OM CAṆDIKE KRAMA 2 iṭhaṭha | caṇḍimantra 'yam | caṇḍimantraṃ tu yo japtvā tailālakṭakasamyutam || aṅguṣṭham mraṅṣayed vāmaṃ tailaṃ caivābhimantrayet | dārikāñ ca kumārañ ca mukhaṃ prakṣālya vīkṣayet || tilataṇḍulabhakṣantau paśyantau yat tu cintitam | tato dṛṣṭvā ca śrutvā ca sādhayen mantrasattamam || Niśvāsaguhya 3.24–27. Sanskrit and translation based on Vasudeva (2014: 6).*

Note that in this very early version of the rite, there is no mention of "*āveśa*" - rather, a *Prasīnā* spirit is invoked, using the *mantra* of the fierce goddess Caṇḍī, and then the child is employed to "read" the oil on their thumb, rather than as a medium as seen in other *svasthāveśa* accounts. Subsequent scholarship shows that *prasīnā* or *prasenā* was a Sanskritization of the MIA term *paṣiṇā*, a feminine version of *paṣiṇa*, which itself is related to the Sanskrit term *praśna* (*lit.* "question" "inquiry") and MIA terms *paṇha/paṇhā* (as in *Paṇhāvāyaraṇa*).¹⁰⁴¹ Evidence shows that in its earliest phase the terms *paṣiṇa/praśna*, before it became associated with *svasthāveśa*, was widely employed to denote various divinatory practices, though the term, as summarized by White,

was subsequently feminized as *paṣiṇā* or *praśnā* and identified as a spirit or minor deity that could be invited into the body of the practitioner, child, or an inanimate object to reveal answers to questions about the past, present and future.¹⁰⁴²

David G. White's most recent book discusses the earlier history of some of these divination practices, which went far beyond the boundaries of South and East Asia. Associated divination practices such as *onychomancy* (finger-nail divination), *lecanomancy* (divination by gazing into a reflective surface), and *catoptromancy* (mirror divination) were widespread practices that have documented histories throughout the Middle East, Africa and Europe.¹⁰⁴³ White has proposed that one of the earliest documents involving all the elements

¹⁰⁴¹ As we saw in our previously brief discussion of the oracular and divinatory practices found in the early Jain *Praśnavyākaraṇa*, the term *paṣiṇa* was used to describe various forms of divination involving a deity's entrance into a linen cloth (*khoma-paṣiṇāim*), a mirror (*addāga-paṣiṇāim*), or a variety of other surfaces. Smith notes that a Prakrit-Hindi dictionary from the 1920's, the *Prākṛtaśabda-mahāraṇavaḥ* glosses *paṣiṇa* as "calling a deity into a mirror, etc.; a special kind of mantric knowledge," citing the Jaina *Āyamaṅgasutta* (*Ācārāṅga Sūtra*), *Ṭhānamgasutta* (*Sthānāṅga Sūtra*), the *Pravacanasārodhāra* and the *Bṛhatkalpa-bhāṣya*. The mid seventh-century Jain text *Niśītha Cūrṇi*, also makes mention of the term *paṣiṇāpaṣiṇā*, which is considered a type of divination in which a question is answered by a *paṣiṇā* spirit who communicates in one's dreams. See Smith (2006: 423-424 and 459).

¹⁰⁴² See White (2021: 73)

¹⁰⁴³ See White (2021: 69-70)

found in *svasthāveśa* - the use of a priest, who invokes a divinity into the body of a child medium - can be found in a set of third century CE antique magical papyri from Egypt. Given the cosmopolitan nature of Egypt in this time period, it comes as no surprise that these magical texts contain material from Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Sumerian sources:

You bring a copper cup; you engrave a figure of Anubis on it; you fill it with settled water...; you fill the top [of the water] with true oil...you make him [the child] look into the oil, while a cloth is stretched over him and while a lighted lamp is in his right hand and a burning censer in his left hand; you put a lobe of Anubis plant on the lamp; you put this incense up [on the censer]; and you recite these writings which are above to the vessel seven times. . . . When you have finished, you should make the youth open his eyes and you should ask him, “Is the god (*nouthē*) coming in?” If he says, “The god has already come in,” you should recite before him. . . . And you should ask him concerning that which you [desire]; when you have finished your inquiry about which you are asking, you should recite to him seven times and you should dismiss [the god] to his home. . .¹⁰⁴⁴

The commonalities with the *svasthāveśa* practices we have seen so far, are unmistakable. However, evidence from the textual and ethnographic record have led White and others to suggest that two different forms of divination had become synthesized into the Indic *svasthāveśa* rite - mirror divination and divination with a spirit and child medium.

White writes:

While there can be no question that *svasthāveśa* was an Indic innovation that was subsequently exported, together with Tantra, into Inner and East Asia, the same cannot be said for mirror divination, which, given the data reviewed above, reached KGB and western India via trade routes from the Mediterranean world that passed through Sasanian Persia. In the end, the original inspiration for the complete practice—Egyptian mirror divination involving children—came to be supplanted in the Hindu world by a Sanskritized Indic variant.¹⁰⁴⁵

¹⁰⁴⁴ See White (2021: 70-71)

¹⁰⁴⁵ See White (2021: 72-74). White further suggests that a bridge text between this and South Asian accounts can be found in a set of rock-cut inscriptions left by Kirdēr, the imperial high priest of the Zoroastrian faith during the early years of the Sasanian Empire.

In the South/East Asian variant of the rite, White suggests that the earliest work to combine these two practices was a Chinese Buddhist text translated by the Indian master Vajrabodhi's (662-732 CE) entitled *The Secret Rites of the Spells of the Divine Emissary, Acala, the Immovable One* (*Pu-ting shih-che t'o-lo-ni pi-mi-fa*, T. 1202) in which a *svasthāveśa* rite is described:

In the front of an icon of the Immovable One, cleanse the ground and burn Parthian incense (gum guggul). Then take a mirror, place it over the heart [presumably, the heart of the painted image], and continue reciting the spell. Have a young boy or girl look into the mirror. When you ask what they see, the child will immediately tell you all you want to know. You should then summon a dragon-spirit; once you have its name in mind, stand the young boy or girl in the purified place, and recite the spell over him or her. The spirit will then enter the child's heart, and when the officiant discusses matters pertaining to past, present, or future, all questions will be answered (T. 1202; 12:24b).¹⁰⁴⁶

Slightly earlier, in the Buddhist *Amogapāśa-sūtra* (*Pu-k'ung chiian-so t'o-lo-ni tzu-tsai-wang chou ching*, T. 1097 - 7th-8th century), which Strickmann believes was part of the "earlier, proto-Tantric tradition" we find mention of *āveśa*, though importantly there is no mirror divination.¹⁰⁴⁷ This was primarily a book of spells dealing with protection, healing, and exorcism as pronounced by Kuan-yin, the Chinese equivalent of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In the text, the priests are instructed to create a *maṇḍala* of cow dung, with various flowers and food offerings upon it. A virgin girl or boy should then be bathed and doused in fragrance and adorned in white garments and ornaments. Various binding and invoking spells and rites are then performed, which result in the child's possession and marked by trembling of their body. Another spell is then recited which allows the child to speak as the medium for the deity, the text stating, "If you ask about good or evil things in

¹⁰⁴⁶ Translation by Strickmann, (2005: 206-207); Another text by Vajrabodhi, the *Yogin's Book of All the Yogas of the Diamond-Pinnacle Pavilion* (*Chin-kang-feng lou-ka i-ch'ieh yii-chih ching*, T. 867) also describes the rite. These were influential on Daoist spirit possession texts and rites as well.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Strickmann (2005: 204)

the past, future, or present, it [the spirit in the child] will be able to answer all your questions."¹⁰⁴⁸

Even earlier than this, we find evidence of a variant form in a secular collection of tales from the Liu Song dynasty (420-479), which mentions a child and mirror divination, but no *āveśa*. This was recently discovered in *Youminglu* ("Records of the Hidden and the Visible Worlds"), attributed to Liu Yiqing (403-444), and recently written about by Iyanaga, who describes the texts as "one of the most important collections of *zhiguai* (accounts of anomalies) in the Six Dynasties period (222-589)."¹⁰⁴⁹ Its mention is found in a story about one of the earliest renowned Buddhist monks in China, Fotucheng (ca. 233-349), infamous for his powerful magic, particularly prophecy and divination. In the story, Fotucheng is asked by his royal patron how to capture one of his enemies and what signs might be auspicious. In response, Fotucheng, according to the text,

...made a child purify himself and fast for seven days. [After that,] he took sesame oil (*mayou*) and smeared it on his hands and rubbed them. He burnt [the incense of] sandalwood and intoned a charm. After some time, he raised his hands and showed them to the child. His palms were shining in a strange way. Cheng asked [the child]: "Do you see anything?"¹⁰⁵⁰

By looking at the oil smeared hands, the child was able to peer into the future and sees the enemy bound, signaling that the King will successfully capture him within the year. This is clearly a form of lecanomancy, though its relation to later *svasthāveśa* rites, also involving children, is evident, even if there is no direct connection or influence between the two. This gives further credence to Strickmann's observation that the Taoists of China had a longstanding tradition surrounding the prophetic powers of divinely inspired children. With

¹⁰⁴⁸ Strickmann (2005: 204-205)

¹⁰⁴⁹ See Nobumi Iyanaga, "An Early Example of *Svasthāveśa* Ritual: A Chinese Hagiography of the Early Fifth Century". *Circulaire De La Societe Franco-Japonaise Des Etudes Orientales*. (42): (2019): 9.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Iyanaga (2019: 10-11)

the arrival of Buddhism, this manifested in a variety of guardian spirits who were classified as "Jade Youths" and "Jade Maidens", whose "usual method of communicating with those they protected was through possession, usually of a boy, a servant, or a woman."¹⁰⁵¹ Such protectors were transported to Japan also and, like Skanda-Kumāra, were depicted as youthful warriors or having military attributes.¹⁰⁵² We will come back to the importance of "divinely inspired children" in the last chapter.

Around the same time in China, we find mention of *Prasenā* (Chinese: Po-ssu-na) in a text translated in 726 CE by Subhakarasiṃha, known as "The Questions of Subāhu" (*Subāhupariṣṭhā*, Ch. *Su-po-hu t'ung-tzu ch'ing-wen ching*, T. 895).¹⁰⁵³ Several methods are given to draw down deities into a variety of receptacles, including images and icons. When icons are successfully enlivened, Strickmann remarks that that there will often be proof of its possession and presence by the deity-

...the face or eyebrows of the image will move... or the statue's ornaments will tremble. There may be a rain of flowers from heaven or a fragrant aroma; one may perceive a trembling of the earth, or a voice...Or one may notice a flame [that no longer has oil] ...suddenly flares up more brightly than before. One may sense the hairs of one's own body standing on end, have a feeling of joy in one's heart, or hear celestial music.¹⁰⁵⁴

Besides icons, other suggested receptacles include reflective and luminous substances of various sort, and, of course, human bodies, which is detailed by the Buddhist deity Vajrayakṣa in a section of the Chinese *Subāhupariṣṭhā* called "Bringing Down the Po-ssu-na". This may be one of the most detailed and complete accounts we have to date of these

¹⁰⁵¹ Strickmann (2005: 225)

¹⁰⁵² In medieval Japan these child-gods were known as *goho* (Chinese *bu-fa*, "protectors of the Law"). See Strickmann (2005: 225)

¹⁰⁵³ Another text translated by Vajrabodhi, *The Medicine Buddha Contemplation Ritual (Yao-shih ju-lai kuan-hsing i-kuei fa*, T. 923), also makes mention of the "the youth Po-ssu-na," or "Po-ssu-na youth," who are invoked in order to carry messages or merit to the Buddhas. Strickmann (2005: 210).

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 211

rites, which includes both mirror divination and *svasthāveśa* practice. I have provided below almost the entire translation published by Strickmann and Faure, which is worth reading in full:

[Mirror Divination portion] - Should the reciter of spells wish to bring down Po-ssu-na, he should summon him according to the standard ritual procedure. He may be invited to abide in a finger, a bronze mirror, clear water, a sword-blade, the flame of a lamp, or a jewel, or in a hollow statue, a child, a pearl, or a piece of flint. Into such a lodging Po-ssu-na will come if one invokes him, and he will at once explain things in the heavens or among men, as well as matters of past, present, and future; all things good and evil throughout all the three ages he will explain in detail. But if there is some error in the ritual... if it is not recited correctly; if you do not have total, wholehearted faith, if you do not make the necessary offerings, or if the place is not pure... or again, if the child's bodily signs are either deficient or in excess - should any of these conditions obtain, the Ssu-na will not descend... Choose the eighth or the fourteenth or the fifteenth day of the white fortnight [i.e., when the moon is waxing, not waning]. Fast on that day and prepare with cow dung a ritual area the size of a stretched-out ox's hide. Bathe the child, dress him in a pure white garment, and seat him in the middle. Make offerings to him with flowers and incense, then you yourself should enter the area and sit on rush-grass, facing east. If you wish the figures to show themselves in a mirror, first rub the mirror clean with ashes from a Homa fire by a chaste brahman, rubbing the mirror seven, eight, or up to ten times. Suspend the mirror above the *maṇḍala* [that is, the ritual area], have the child gaze up at it, and he will see things beyond the world of mortals. To do the same with a sword-blade, proceed as in the case of a mirror. If you want the child to see things good or evil on the surface of his fingers, first rub his fingers clean with purple ore water, then apply fragrant oil, and good or evil things will immediately manifest themselves. If you wish it to descend into a jewel or a pearl and be seen there, first sprinkle the jewel or pearl with pure water, concentrate fully, recite the mantra, and all forms will instantly be manifested therein. Item: If you wish a divine image to be the vehicle, make offerings with flowers and it shall manifest itself at once. The same is true of a lamp-flame. And the spirit will even come to you in your dreams to explain various things...

[*Svasthāveśa* portion] - If you wish it to come down into a child, select ten, eight, five, four, three, or two children. Regarding their bodily signs: Their veins, bones, and joints should not show, they should be full-fleshed, their eyes handsome, with dark and white clearly distinguished. Their fingers must be long and slender, the soles of their feet should be flat. They should be full at all eight points without and within; all the body-marks must be present, and their hair should be dark black, so that peoples' eyes fill with delight when they behold them. Having obtained virgin boys of this sort, on the eighth, the fourteenth, or the fifteenth of the white fortnight, bathe them and dress them in fresh pure garments. Use fragrant flowers, burning lamps, powdered incense [for rubbing in the palms and applying to the lips], and burning

incense and administer to them the Eight Precepts [i.e., injunctions to fasting and abstinence]. Keep them from eating on that day and have them sit before you, within the *maṇḍala*. Then with fragrant flowers, burning lamps, powdered incense, burning incense, and all manner of things to eat and drink, make offerings to the deity, to the great gods who guard the eight directions, to the *asuras* and the host of remaining spirits, to each of them individually. Then scatter wondrous flowers on the boys' bodies and rub their bodies with incense. Next the spell-reciter takes an incense burner in his hand, does obeisance to the deity, and recites the mantras. In front of him he places [i.e., pronounces and visualizes] the seed-syllable Hūṃ; into it he calls the word *gr̥ha* ("take"); then the word *āveśa* ("possession"); next the word *ksipra* ("quickly")- "Take possession quickly!". When the Ssu-na has descended, there are the following signs and manifestations: a look of delight in the children's eyes; ability to gaze at objects without blinking; and no evidence of inhaling or exhaling. From these signs you can tell that the Ssu-na has come down. Thereupon, present consecrated water and burn incense as offerings. In your heart recite the mantra of the Supremely Victorious King of Knowledge. Then you should respectfully inquire, "What manner of god is your reverences?" If you or anyone else have any doubts about this identity, you should question him immediately. Then that spirit will speak of things past, present, and future, of profit and loss, of suffering and joy. Speedily accept and hold in memory all that he tells you- do not be hesitant or suspicious. When he is done answering your questions, send him away again at once. If you follow all these directions, the Ssu-na will quickly descend; if you do not, however, you will achieve no results with the ritual, and people will ridicule you. Now when the Ssu-na has descended, the boys' expressions will be radiant and joyful, their faces will be moist and gleaming. Their eyes will be wide open, and the dark pupil will be lightly ringed with red. In their attitude and deportment, they will act like adults. They will neither breathe in or out nor blink their eyes. Thus, you will know that it is an authentic Ssu-na. If, however, some devil should descend, there are other indications. In that case their eyes are red and rounded, like those of someone glaring in anger. The pupils of their eyes do not move around, and their mouths gape open in fright. In this case, too, they neither breathe in or out nor blink their eyes. Thus, you can tell that some has descended, and you should send him away at once. If he is unwilling to depart, you should at once begin chanting auspicious verses, recite the mantra of the Impure Furious Vajra-Being (Ucchuṣma) or read out the Great Dhāraṇī-Book Collection. If after these readings and recitations he still will not leave, then with the mantra of the Lion Throne use consecrated water on him, or dip 108 *palāśa*-wood sticks (*Buteo frondosa*) in ghee and burn them in a Homa fire, or mix sesame seeds, grains, flowers, ghee, and honey and make a hundred oblations with them in the Homa fire. At the very end, perform Homa with the mantra of Kuṇḍalī seven times or three times- and then the demon will certainly abandon the medium and go away. If the wise practitioner has understood this marvelous ritual and can carry it out in every point according to the instructions, he will attain his end without undue time or effort.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵⁵ Translation by Strickmann (2005: 211-214)

Finally, we should make brief mention of the Chinese text, "*The (Garuḍa) Āveśa Rite Explained by the God Maheśvara Which Swiftly Establishes Its Efficacy*" (Chinese: *Suji liyan Moxishouluo tian shuo [jialouluo] aweishe fa*) which has been attributed to one of the most prodigious translators of the time, Amoghavajra (705-774).¹⁰⁵⁶ This is a fascinating text, discussed by a number of scholars as of late, and has recently been fully translated from Chinese to English by Giebel.¹⁰⁵⁷ It is unique in that this purportedly Buddhist text is almost entirely devoid of any Buddhist elements, save one mention in a visualization of Maheśvara's (Śiva) iconography, which states that there was a Buddha on top of the crown of his head. Beyond that it resembles typical Śaiva and Garuḍa magical texts, complete with rites of subjugation, enmity, the creation of magical ointments, etc. Its existence attests again to the rich religious cross-fertilization commonly seen in *bhūtatantras* such as the *Kriyākālaguṇottara* and the *Mañjuśriyamūlakalpa*, and to its wide export throughout East Asia.

The largest portion of this brief text is dedicated to a *svasthāveśa* rite involving the use of child mediums for the purpose of divination. It opens with a request by Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) to Maheśvara (Śiva) on the summit of Mount Gandhamādana to explain "the *āveśa* rite which swiftly establishes its efficacy". Maheśvara responds by stating:

You should listen attentively as I expound for you the messenger's rite of swift accomplishment. One is able to perform the cessation of calamities (*śāntika*), the increase of benefits (*pauṣṭika*), subjugation (*abhicāra*), and [the gaining of] respect and love (*vaśīkaraṇa*). Again, one can send [the messenger] to and from the realm of Yama and is able to know of future good and evil, fortune and misfortune, success and failure, irregularities in droughts and floods, aggression by neighboring countries, rebellions by wicked persons, and various favorable and unfavorable omens.¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁶ Amoghavajra translated or adapted about 167 Sanskrit texts, many now lost to history.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Partial translations and discussions on the text can be found in Smith (2006) and Strickmann (2005).

¹⁰⁵⁸ Translation adapted from Rolf W. Giebel, "A Śaiva Text in Chinese Garb? An Annotated Translation of the *Suji liyan Moxishouluo tian shuo aweishe fa*", in *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Materials, Texts, Icons*, ed. Andrea Acri. (Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016): 381-388.

Giebel believes the Chinese phrase "swiftly establishes its efficacy" (*suji liyan* 速疾立驗) is a translation of the Sanskrit *sadyahpratyayakāraka*, which we've seen in earlier and contemporaneous Śaiva tantras such as the SYM (2.4) MVT (11.22, 21.20), and will continue to see in *Kubjikāmātatantra* (4.1, 4.3, 5.100), *Kriyākālaguṇottara* (1.3), and the *Gāruḍatantras*, among others.¹⁰⁵⁹ As discussed earlier, these are always in the context of evidence for the possession experience or the manner in which mantras are made effective, both required either for initiation or to successfully complete whatever rites they wish to accomplish. As seen in the previous Chinese passage, it states through the accomplishment of *āveśa*, one can perform several magical functions such as *śantika*, *abhicāraka*, etc.

This is also the case for the *svasthāveśa* rite described next in the text, which in this case, does not involve mirror divination at all.

If you wish to know future events, you should select four or five (virgin) boys or (virgin) girls, seven or eight years of age, their bodies free of scars and moles, and intelligent and astute. First, make them eat plain [vegetarian] food for seven days or alternatively for three days... Bathe [the children], rub unguent all over their bodies, dress them in clean clothes, and have them hold in their mouth's camphor and cardamom.

Following this, various offerings are made, and incense and red flowers are empowered using the *mahāmudrā mantra*, used to fumigate the child's hands who is then instructed to cover her face with. The priest then "binds" the *mahāmudrā* with hand gestures and performs *nyāsa* on his own body - the forehead, right shoulder, left shoulder, heart, throat, and crown of the head. He then installs and seals various *mantras*, accompanied with prescribed visualizations, onto the girl's head, mouth, heart, navel, and legs. The *mantras* used employ tantric and Vedic deities such as Pāśupati, Agni, Vinatā (Garuḍa's mother) and

¹⁰⁵⁹ Slouber (2012: 86).

Garuḍa himself. Bhūtādhipati (Overlord of Ghosts) is then invoked for the armor rites (*kavaca*) for protection of the child. The practitioner then "turns himself into the god Maheśvara", which seems to be a visualization practice, and then empowers and protects the girl one-hundred and eight "life nodes" (*marman*) with *mudrās*. Finally, the practitioner faces the girl and recites the *mantra* of Maheśvara's messenger, which appears to be a Nāga (serpent-being):

ॐ, O servant! Esteemed Nāga! You who are arrogant with venom! You who have homogenous venom! You who have a valiant and playful manner! ॐ, O servant! Tremble, tremble in each vessel! ...! Possess! Possess! (*āviśa*) ॐ, O servant, Rudra commands [you]! All hail!¹⁰⁶⁰

The text continues stating this should be recited seven times, "whereupon the girl will tremble. Know that the Holy One has entered her body."¹⁰⁶¹ Another mantra and *mudrā* is then given to coerce the messenger if the first rite fails. If the practitioner is successful, though, the text states that he may ask the child medium "about future good and evil and all favorable and unfavorable omens."¹⁰⁶² Additionally, the text lists a host of other magical functions the spirit messenger can be employed for by the ritualist. The text closes with a warning to maintain the rites secrecy and to transmit it only to the proper disciples:

This rite is the most excellent among all Garuḍa rites, secret and difficult to obtain. You should select a Dharma-vessel worthy of being initiated and transmit it to him. If you transmit it to someone who is not a [suitable] vessel, then it will harm him and thereafter the rite will not work [for you either]. Therefore, it must be kept most secret and must not be transmitted recklessly.¹⁰⁶³

¹⁰⁶⁰ *[[m] ceṭaka matanāga viśada[r]pana samānagara vikramavilāsagati [[m] ceṭaka pratipātraṃ cala cala cali cali paṇa paṇa paṇi paṇi paṇni paṇni kaṭṭi kaṭṭi āviśa āviśa [[m] ceṭaka rudro 'jñāpayati svāhā* - Giebel (2016: 386)

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶³ Translation by Giebel (2016: 387)

Another early Buddhist text which discusses *svasthāveśa*, this time involving possession by Vajrapāṇi and mirror divination, is found in the Chinese "Dhāraṇī-sūtra of the Protection of the State Master" (*Shouhu guojie zhu tuoluoni jing*) purportedly compiled and translated in 804 CE by the Indian master Prajñā (ca. 734-810 CE). *Āveśa* rites are described in chapter nine, entitled "Merits and Rituals of Dhāraṇī" (*Tuoluoni gongde guiyi pin*), which begins with the following salutations and mantras:

Homage to the Three Jewels! Homage to Violent Vajrapāṇi, great general of the Yakṣas! I shall proclaim this spell. May the spell succeed for me! Oṃ, O immortal one, PHAT! To wit: O Caṇḍī, Caṇḍī, Inḍī, Miṇḍī! Appear, Miṇḍī! Descend (*āviśa*), Gauḍī! Gauḍī! Enter (*praviśa*), Gauḍī, into this thumb pad! May the boys and girls see with divine vision! May human vision go away, and divine vision come forth...¹⁰⁶⁴

After constructing a *maṇḍala* in tantric fashion, covered with flowers and offerings, including alcohol (*madya*), blood (*rakta*), and burning incense (*guggula*), the text continues:

[The practitioner shall have the oracular] visions according to his desire, either in [the blade of] a sword, on a mirror, a wall, on one's finger or one's palm, in a lamp, on a statue of Buddha, in a crystal (*sphaṭika*), on an altar, or on a lapis lazuli (*vaidūrya*). [In order to determine whether] the desired will is good or bad, he must take a young boy or girl whose body has no scars and is pure without sins. He then has the child take a bath to purify the body, wear a new white garment, and recite this mantra in order to sacralize and empower (*adhiṣṭā*) him [or her]. I [Vajrapāṇi] shall come to him [or her] and manifest my own body. I shall speak in detail about things of the Three Times [of past, present, and future] according to what is asked. Following the mind [of the practitioner], I shall settle and eliminate all the doubts.¹⁰⁶⁵

While *prasenā* and *svasthāveśa* rites are found in many of the earlier tantric texts, they do not appear very widely in the Indic literature after the turn of the millennium, though a few rare examples can be found. As we saw in earlier classical Hindu, Buddhist and Jain literature, these types of divination practices were often looked down upon. The famous 9-10th century astrologer, Bhaṭṭotpala, for example, derides *prasenā* magic in his commentary

¹⁰⁶⁴ Translation from Iyanaga (2019: 19).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Iyanaga (2019: 19)

on the *Brhatsaṃhitā*. The original verse of this text states, “One who is instructed through magic [*kuhaka-*], possession [*āveśa-*], or by any concealed being, or from hearing [advice whispered] in the ear should never be consulted; such a person is not an astrologer (*daivavit*).” It is here where Bhaṭṭotpala includes the category of *prasenā* (*prasenādikena*) to the list of forms of sorcery (*indrajāla*) to be avoided.¹⁰⁶⁶ It's likely that Kashmiri Śaiva exegetes such as Abhinavagupta had similar attitudes, since he makes no mention of *praśena* at all in his massive work, the *Tantrāloka*. In fact, one of his disciples, the famous Kashmirian poet Kṣemendra, seemingly mocks this type of magic, again using the derogatory term *indrajāla*, meaning "illusion", to describe it: "The virgin sees a bewildering tumult of people, in a sword, in a thumb, in water, but the thief is not caught, this is the delusion of sorcery."¹⁰⁶⁷

Despite this, the use of women or children as spirit mediums by priests has continued and is still prevalent throughout South and East Asia, in some cases becoming State institutions, such as the State Oracles of Tibet or the famous Kumārī Devi of Nepal. In South India, I witnessed and documented a similar rite twice myself among the Pulluvan community near Thrissur, Kerala. They are designated as low caste but are still in great demand for their sorceristic practices, including healing, exorcism, and divination. They cause women in the village, some virgins, some elderly (post-menopausal), to become possessed by the Nāgas who were then propitiated, given offerings, and then asked numerous questions as oracles by the ritual specialists and members of the community. We will return

¹⁰⁶⁶ Translation by Smith (2006: 424)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Kalāvīlāsa 9.17: *khadḡe 'ṅguṣṭhe salile paśyati vividhaṃ janabhramaṃ kanyā | na prāpyate tu cauro moho 'sāv indrajālasya* || See Vasudeva (2014: 3)

to some examples of contemporary oracles and mediums in South Asia in the following chapter.

MUDRĀS IN THE JYT AND BEYOND

Before moving on to our next text, I wanted to briefly expand upon another important tantric technology associated with possession, seen throughout the JYT and Śaiva tantras of this period: *mudrās*. As we've seen, much of the JYT is overtly concerned with *melakas*, "meetings" or "encounters" with *yoginīs*, which are achieved by employing powerful *mudrās*. We've seen the use of *mudrās* to engender these sorts of experiences in earlier tantras, but as Serbaeva has argued, there was a shift in emphasis and, in my view, a streamlining of these ritual technologies in the JYT, giving more power and control to the *sādhaka*. Contrary to earlier tantras such as the SYM or BYT, Serbaeva argues that with the JYT it is “the *sādhaka* himself who becomes the main orchestrator of *melaka*”, thanks to a

...new, *mudrā*-based practice allowing him to obtain *melaka* in any location (and not in given geographical spots) and at any time (rather than on particular moon-days), and within a very short period of time: days or even minutes – as opposed to a minimum of six months in the earlier texts.¹⁰⁶⁸

In other words, in earlier texts it was primarily the decision of the *yoginīs* themselves, who had to be propitiated and then appeased, whether they would come to the *sādhaka* or not. In the JYT the approach is different - here the *sādhaka*, acting as a *bhūtanātha*, a master of spirits, has control over the *yoginīs* themselves and forces them to appear at will. This was achieved using powerful *mudrās*, employing a synthesis of tantric *mantras*, *vidyās*, and yogic manipulation of the subtle body, which provoked altered states that allowed the *sādhaka* to

¹⁰⁶⁸ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016: 59)

access and gain mastery over the *yoginīs*. Though not unique to the JYT, it is clear that *mudrā* gains growing importance in this time and becomes further developed, as evidenced by the increase in the sheer numbers of *mudrās* - in the NTS there were fewer than 10 *mudrās*, in the SVT about 20, and up to 85 in the BYT. In the JYT this numbers jumps to over 270!¹⁰⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, their usage is involved in every description of *melaka* in the JYT, the two inextricably linked in the minds of the text's authors.

In general, *mudrā* in Tantra and Yoga is a large and complex subject, due to the terms wide semantic range and meanings, and dependent on its context and usage. For detailed studies on the term's great multivalence, please refer to sources provided in my footnotes, as I shall not attempt to explore it in detail here but offer a brief summary.¹⁰⁷⁰ Its primary usage has always been "gestures", but in various Tantric contexts, particularly from the 8th century onwards, it comes to mean gestures specifically used to invoke spirits and divinities (especially *yakṣīs*, *yoginīs*, and *ḍākinīs*) for *melakas*. It also comes to designate sectarian insignias, forms of secret communication (i.e., the six signs/ornaments of the *sādhaka* & *chomma*¹⁰⁷¹), a female consort (both human and non-human), and finally a method or signifier that one has achieved a meditative trance or possession state, which may even be inflicted on others against their will. I will give several examples below from various medieval Śaiva and Buddhist texts.

The root and literal meaning of *mudrā* is a "seal", as in a stamp or distinguishing mark, particularly in the sense of an "imprint" left by a seal and hence a symbol signifying

¹⁰⁶⁹ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2012: 93)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Sanderson (1988); Vasudeva, "Mudrās of the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*." Paper given at All Souls, Oxford, in Professor Alexis Sanderson's Tantric Studies Seminar series, May 5th, 1997; see also Vasudeva (2004), Padoux (1992 & 2011), White (2003), and Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016) and 2012, "Mudrās", in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* Online, Ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. For Buddhist contexts see Gonda (1972) and Gray (2013).

¹⁰⁷¹ See Serbaeva-Saraogi (2010: 70)

some abstract other, in the way a royal seal signifies the authority of a king. While important in Tantra and Yoga, the term *mudrā* as "ritual gesture" is also commonly tied to ancient treaties on Indian dance and drama, in which *hastamudrās* (hand gestures) along with bodily gestures were used to convey emotional sentiments (*rasa*). As Sthaneshwar Timalina states,

In the case of tantric rituals, whether Hindu or Buddhist, the rituals developed require gestural performance that initiates a 'dialogue' between the deity and the worshipper. There are specific gestures for welcoming the deity to the ceremony (*āvāhana mudrā*), for offering her a seat (*āsanamudrā*), for offering pleasing objects like flowers, and for bidding farewell to the deity... These gestures not only make the rituals an actual performance, they also mediate between the natural and the spiritual.¹⁰⁷²

Given the nature of many possession rites, the majority involving the use of dance, it would not be a great speculative leap to say that many ritual gestures were derived from Indian dance and/or vice versa - dance drawing from ritual worship, particularly rites involving divine embodiment. The relationship between the two was well known to Abhinavagupta and is most clearly mapped out in his *Abhinavabhāratī*, the most extensive commentary upon the ancient dance treaties, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata.¹⁰⁷³ *Mudrā*, however, is also an important term in Yoga literature, closely related to the term *āsana*, a yogic position or posture.¹⁰⁷⁴ In this sense, "seal" refers to advanced yogic techniques, such as the yogic sealing of breaths or energies of various types blocks in the channels of the subtle body to manipulate the flow of the vital winds within them, both which are common in tantric and yogic practice.

¹⁰⁷² Sthaneshwar Timalina, "Language of Gestures: Mudrā, Mirror, and Meaning in Śākta Philosophy". *Religions*. 12 (3): (2021: 212-213)

¹⁰⁷³ "To begin with, basic tantric gestures are primarily derived from dance. Even when complex gestures are added in tantras, dance philosophy remains a primary source used to comprehend the system of gestures. Not just that most tantric deities are in one or another dance posture, they are also displaying dance gestures. Mapping these two systems is not farfetched, as the *Abhinavabhāratī*, the most extensive commentary upon the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata (Shastri 1971), provides all the necessary elements." Timalina (2021: 217).

¹⁰⁷⁴ See Smith (2006: 377) for more on this relation.

A general example from the Siddhāntin *Mṛgendrāgama* describes the use of *mudrās* for the invocation and installation of deities, important tantric technologies that overlap with possession rites.

One should invoke the mantra-body [of Śiva] following the sequence of creation, starting from the end of the mantra, creating the ancillary- mantras of "He Who Has the Radiance of the Rising Sun". This is to be done with the *mudrā* of Invocation. Then one should establish Him in a support (*sthāpanam*) made of His powers (*śaktavigraha*) with the *mudrā* of Establishing, and after receiving Him with the gesture of Homage, one should make him stay there with the Blocking *mudrā*.¹⁰⁷⁵

In the same text, we also find *mudrās* used specifically to subjugate demonic beings in a similar fashion, to block these troublesome beings from ruining their rituals. Here the authors semantic analysis of the term emphasizes the sealing or paralyzing (*mudrayanti*) nature of *mudrā* - "Since they paralyze (*mudraṇāt*) the horde of obstacles, these Female Powers belonging to Śiva are called gestures (*mudrā*)".¹⁰⁷⁶

Even earlier, in the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā*, *mudrā* is understood as a link between the mantra of the deity and the body of the practitioner, not only allowing the invocation of a deity but also implying a certain degree of embodiment. The practitioner appears to assume the *sakala* form of a deity by means of *mudrās* – that is, a form with physical shape as opposed to the aspect-less (*niskala*) form of the deity [NTS 3.4.10–23; 5.16.53–56; 17.11–16]. We also saw its mention in the SVT in the context of initiation and *yoganikā* (joining) or *nāḍīsaṃghaṭṭa* (joining of the channels) - the guru displays the *mudrās*, which then immediately provokes various psychosomatic reactions in the disciple.¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁷⁵ *MĀ Kriyāpāda* 3.12cd–14ab: *mūrtāv āvāhanam kuryān mantrāntāt sṛṣṭivartmanā // navārkatejaso' ṅgāni vidhāvāvāhamudrā /sthāpanyā sthāpanam kuryāc chāktavīgrahasamśraye// praṇatyā saṃnidhīkṛtya nirudhyād rodhamudrayā*. Translation based on Törzsök (2007: 462).

¹⁰⁷⁶ *viḥnaughamudraṇān mudrāḥ kathyante haraśaktayah | 5.2ab MĀ Kriyāpāda*. Translation based on Törzsök, "The Search in Śaiva Scriptures for the Meaning in Tantric Ritual", in *Mélanges Tantriques À La Mémoire D'Hélène Brunner*, edited by Goodall, Padoux, and Brunner-Lachaux, (Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie, 2007): 462.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2010: 65–84).

In the BYT, we also made mention of passage explicitly connecting *mudrā* with the invocation of deities and as an advanced method for cultivating possession states:

O fair-faced one, the *Mahāmudrā* of Bhairava draws every *Mudrā* nigh. When it is employed correctly with full subjective immersion (*bhāvātmakavidhānena*) the [deity of the] Mantra immediately becomes manifest. [The *Mudrā*] brings about possession in the *sādhaka* (*sādhakāveśam*) without [the need of] Mantra-repetition or visualization [BYT 87.126c–128b].¹⁰⁷⁸

Here *Mahāmudrā* is at once the gesture used, but also the manifest expression of the *sādhaka's* subjective "immersion" or interpenetration into the deity. The term *Mahāmudrā* is found throughout both Hindu and Buddhist tantric texts, generally signifying either the Goddess/Śakti or a female consort (human or non-human), who may be used in tantric rites as an instantiation for the Goddess. The BYT claims this *mudrā* technology is so efficient that there is no need for mantra recitation or visualization to experience possession by the deity. This is echoed in the SYM as well, which states that *mudrā* alongside *uccāra* will result in the signs of possession in one's own body (*svadehāveśalakṣaṇam*) and fulfill everything one desires (*sarvakāmaphalapradaḥ*) [SY 2.41].¹⁰⁷⁹ A similar correlation is found in MVT 12.15–20b, translated previously.

Serbaeva, also notes that many *mudrās* become common in more violent rites (i.e., *abhicāra*), particularly in *Vidyāpīṭha* texts to obtain necessary materials for their rites and goals. By employing these *mudrās*, both the *yoginīs* and the *sādhakas* could bring other beings under their control or drain their vital essence through possession (e.g. *raktākarsaṇa*; lit. blood extraction), as seen in NT 20 and other *tantras*.¹⁰⁸⁰ As we saw, the *mudrās*

¹⁰⁷⁸ Sanskrit text and translation based on Sanderson (2009: 133–134 n. 311.) *bhairavasya mahāmudrā mudrāsānaidhyakārikā // 127 prayuktā tu yadā mudrā lakṣaṇena varānane / bhāvātmakavidhānena sadyo mantrō vijrmbhati // 128 karoti sādhakāveśam japadhyānavivarjitā / BYT 87.126c–128b*

¹⁰⁷⁹ *uccāre tu kṛte tasyā mantramudrāgaṇo mahān | vidyāgaṇas ca sakalaḥ sarvakāmaphalapradaḥ | sadyas tanmukhatām eti svadehāveśalakṣaṇam || SYM 2.41*

¹⁰⁸⁰ See also JYT 1.17, 2.17 & Ūrmikaulārṇava 2, mentioned earlier in chapter

employed in these rites, were often the same ones used by the guru when performing the "fusing of channels" (*nāḍīsamghaṭṭa*) rites during Śaiva initiations, namely, *karāṅkiṅī* ("skeleton"), *krodhinī*, ("anger") *lelihānā* ("licking"), *khecarī* ("flying") and *bhairavī* ("terrifying") *mudrās*.¹⁰⁸¹ The guru or *sādhaka* uses these *mudrās*, in this case seemingly signifying the *yoginī* spirits employed, in order to possess/enter (*āviṣṭa*) either their disciple or victim. The results, of course, are starkly different - in the case of the initiate, the disciple is possessed by the guru and temporarily unites with and has access to the powers of the deity. In the vampiric practice of possession, on the other hand, the *sādhaka* or *yoginī* aims to control and "seal" (*mudraṇa*) the victim, so that their vital energy can be extracted.

Mallinson has recently done some work on the history of the *khecarīmudrā*, an important *mudrā* and practice that enters Haṭhayoga texts such as the 14th century *Khecarīvidyā* and remains a significant part of various contemporary yoga schools. In the *Khecarīvidyā*, the practice of *khecarīmudrā* enables the yogin to access vast stores of *amṛta* ("the nectar of immortality") within the body by placing the *sādhaka*'s tongue in the hollow above the palate. Here one can apparently "drink" the internal *amṛta*, resulting in the raising of one's *kuṇḍalinī* and achieving higher states of consciousness and supernatural accomplishments, such as freedom from old age, disease, and death.¹⁰⁸²

Mallinson argues that the roots of the *Khecarīvidyā* practices can be found in many of the scriptures of the *yoginī* cults that we have been exploring. He identifies several passages in early Śaiva tantras, beginning with the *mudrāṣaṭka* of the *Jayadrathayāmala*, which he believes is one of the earliest references to the *khecarīmudrā*, described here as "the Queen

¹⁰⁸¹ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2010, 78–83); see discussion on this in previous chapter as well

¹⁰⁸² See Mallinson (2006) for full description and variations on rite.

of all *mudrās*" (*sarvamudreśvareśvari* - JYT 4.2.645c).¹⁰⁸³ Involved in this *khecarīmudrā* practice is breath retention and the upward movement of a prototype of what comes to be known as *kuṇḍalinī*, known in the JYT simply as *cidrupa* ("the form of consciousness") or *śakti*. Having tasted the *amṛta*, the *sādhaka's cidrupa* is said to rise, leading to the conjunction of Śiva and Śakti (*śivaśaktisamāgamaḥ*) at the top of the head and resulting in various accomplishments, including *yoginīmelaka* (encounters with *yoginīs*) and *khecaratva* (identification with *Khecaras* or simply, "the power of flight").¹⁰⁸⁴ Other *mudrās* are also discussed throughout this chapter, including the *lelihānā mudrā*, which, according to JYT 4.2.597d, "always effects possession" (*sarvadāveśakārikā*).

In tantric Śaivism and Buddhism, *khecarīs* were often considered a higher type of *Yoginī*, said to live among the *khecaras*, "sky-dwellers". In the SYM, *khecarīs* essentially becomes a synonym for *Yoginīs*, which again could either be supernatural beings or, according to Sanderson, human females who were "permanently possessed by the mother goddesses".¹⁰⁸⁵ David Gray contends that the term *mudrā* also comes to represent these *khecarīs/yoginīs* and that their usage represented a key step in the development of tantric discourse and practice. It was these female consorts, either human or non-human, which were encountered in the *yoginīmelaka* and subsequently employed for various tantric rituals, including esoteric sexual practices. In such cases, it was inferred that these female consorts were instantiations of the divine Śakti that was so important to *sādhakas*. Through tantric

¹⁰⁸³ *Kularatnoddyota* also calls *khecarīmudrā* "the queen of all *mudrā*-kings" (*sarvamudreśvareśvarī*). See Mallinson (2006: 25) for references.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *tadāsvāditacidrūpam ūrdhvaṃ gacchaty aśaṅkitam | kauñcikoṭpāṭanam hy eṣa śivaśaktisamāgamaḥ* /JYT 160. "That which has the form of consciousness having tasted that [amṛta] assuredly moves upwards. This conjunction of Śiva and Śakti is the uprooting of the Key goddess." Translation by Mallinson (2006: 21)

¹⁰⁸⁵ Sanderson (1987).

practices and rites, one could eventually achieve the status of a Khecara and become a Lord over these sky-faring beings (e.g., SYM 20.90, also seen in MVT 22.26).

Becoming a Khecara and reaching their sky-abode (*khecarapada*) are explicit goals mentioned throughout tantric scriptures.¹⁰⁸⁶ Like *vidyādhara*s or *siddha*s, they were considered either divine beings, or humans who had become divine through yogic practice. The *Kubjikāmatatantra* [KMT], for example, states that *sādhaka*s who have realized their identity with the "sky of consciousness" through tantric practice, implying a non-dual experience of the void, can attain the state of a *Khecara*.¹⁰⁸⁷ In the KMT, *Khecarī*s become elevated as the highest group of feminine deities, above *Devī*s, *Dūtī*s, *Mātṛ*s. The Supreme Goddess of their system, *Kubjikā* ("The Crooked One"), is, in fact, said to be a *Khecarī*. This high status pertains also to her *khecarīmudrā*, which Abhinavagupta considered the most important *mudrā* since it's "essence is a deity."¹⁰⁸⁸ This is confirmed by a number of similar passages found in the MVT, KJN, KMT and *Kularatnoddyota*, all advocating the efficacy of this *mudrā*, which also represents *Khecarī* and which promises immediate possession, gnosis, freedom from disease and death, knowledge of past and future, long-distance hearing and vision, protection from poisons and other attacks, and other similar *siddhis*.¹⁰⁸⁹

An earlier reference is also found in the BYT (38.3), though rather than the term *khecarīmudrā* it discusses the *khecarīcakra* (Circle of *Khecarī*s). Mallinson fails to mention it, though I believe it is relevant and significant due to its context. In this passage, the group of *Khecarī*s is projected onto the left hand of the guru at the time of initiation (*vāmahasta*

¹⁰⁸⁶ According to the KMT 4.74b, *khecaras* have the ability to fly up into the air, as is the case in almost all Tantric descriptions of the *khecaras*.

¹⁰⁸⁷ For examples, KMT 16.101d; 25.63b. See other references in *Tantrābhīdhānakośa II* (2004: 167).

¹⁰⁸⁸ TĀ 32.4ab: *tatra pradhānabhūtā śrīkhecarī devatātmikā*. See Mallinson (2006).

¹⁰⁸⁹ See Mallinson (2016: 17-28) for numerous Sanskrit references on this

tale cakrahēcārīñāntu vinyaset || BYT 38.3). Through this, the guru's hand is said to be empowered and transformed into a "*śaktīhastā*" (*śaktī*-hand), equivalent to the *śiva*-hand (*śivahastā*) rite in Siddhāntin initiations installed on the right hand. Empowered by the *Khecarīs*, this hand is then placed on the initiand's head so that the *yoginīs* can enter his body.¹⁰⁹⁰ Rather than Śiva, it is the circle of *Khecarīs* here who possess and animate the hand of the initiate - its similarity to later concepts of the *khecarīmudrā* can be clearly seen, again bringing possession and hand gestures together and perhaps pointing to its original usage.

Since the roots of the *khecarīmudrā* practice can be traced to these early *yogini*-centered scriptures, Mallinson hypothesizes that the origins of this practice are in rites of possession. He states that:

The tongue's entry into the cavity above the palate has been reported to occur spontaneously as a result of altered mental states which themselves can be precipitated by breathing practices and drugs. In the above passages the yogin is instructed to put his tongue into the cavity; there is no suggestion of spontaneity. Thus, these techniques may be attempts to recreate a state of possession.¹⁰⁹¹

Vasudeva, commenting on these *mudrās*, similarly states that,

...these extreme *Khecarīmudrās* are reflections, imprints, or replications (*pratibimba*) of the dynamism of consciousness (*Khecarī*). The corollary is. . . the direct experience of *Khecarī*, or to use different terminology the possession by the goddess *Khecarī*, manifests itself in the practitioner with these bizarre symptoms.¹⁰⁹²

In later Kashmiri Śaiva traditions, Abhinavagupta and Kśemarāja describe *mudrā* as both an instrument of *āveśa* and a state of possession itself. In the *Parātrīṃsikālaghuvrtti* [PTLV], a commentary on the *Parātrīṃsikā* [PT], Abhinavagupta explains that one's own body can become possessed (*svadehāveśalakṣaṇam*) by *mudrās* and *mantras*

¹⁰⁹⁰ See *Tantrābhīdhānakośa II* (2004: 169).

¹⁰⁹¹ See Mallinson (2006: 180 fn. 93) page for more on this.

¹⁰⁹² Vasudeva (1997: 19) quoted in Mallinson (2006: 26)

(*mantramudrāgaṇa*).¹⁰⁹³ *Mudrās* and *mantras*, he states, are divine forms and should be understood as deities themselves.¹⁰⁹⁴ This is explained further in the PTV, where he says that *mantra* and *mudrā* have forms which are created from the powers of cognition (*jñāna-śakti*) and action (*kriya-śakti*) respectively. That is to say, *mantras* originate from *jñāna-śakti* (which is expressed by speech), while *mudrās* derive from *kriya-śakti*, sensory acts involving one's hands and feet. *Mantra* and *mudrā* are therefore two aspects of a single reality, Śakti, expressed at the level of the individual body by gestures and syllables, but also as inner expressions of this higher reality. *Mudrā* is thus an expression of *kriya-śakti* in the human body and through it the body becomes a receptacle for that power. This is in line with Gavin Flood's argument that *mudrās* act as channel or bridge, allowing one to access higher spiritual realms:

...through *mudrā* - as well as *mantra* - the body becomes an expression of higher shared realities and through *mudrā* (and *mantra*) can resonate with those higher levels, which is to say be homologized with them. To say that *mudrā* is a way of accessing higher layers of the cosmos means, that individual consciousness is absorbed into or possessed (*āveśa*) by *mudrā*, or that the individual body absorbs *mudrā* into itself. The PTLV says that one's own body becomes possessed (*āveśa*) by *mudrā* and *mantra*, which can be read as, becomes a channel for higher cosmic powers which erode the sense of individuality and distinction.¹⁰⁹⁵

Abhinavagupta's disciple, Kṣemarāja furthers this idea in his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*

[PH], associating the *krama-mudrā* with possession (*samāveśa*)

The *sādhaka*, even while gazing outward, remains in a state of co-penetration (*samāveśa*) due to the practice of *kramamudrā*, which is characterized by inwardness. Due to the force of possession (*āveśa*), there takes place in this first an entrance [*praveśa*] (of consciousness) into the internal from the external, then an entrance

¹⁰⁹³ *hṛdayam devadevasya sadyo yogavimokṣadam | asyoccare kṛte samyañ mantramudrāgaṇo mahān // PT.11 sadyas tanmukhatām eti svadehāveśalakṣaṇam | PT.12ab*

¹⁰⁹⁴ PTLV (1947:12) *mantradevatām mudrādevatān va*

¹⁰⁹⁵ Flood (1993: 245) reading of PTLV (1947:11-12); See Smith's (2006: 377) discussion on this also.

[*praveśa*] into the external from the internal. Thus *mudrākrama*, includes both the nature of the external and internal [*sabāhyābhyantara*].¹⁰⁹⁶

According to Kṣemarāja then, *mudrā* is both a reflection and non-dual expression of the interpenetration (*samāveśa*) which occurs between the *sādhakas* subjective and objective realities, due to the force of possession (*āveśavaśāt*). This becomes one of the primary understandings of *mudrā*, in the tantric literature. Timalina nicely summarizes this understanding:

Tantric gestures are not merely corporeal modes in the field of projection: they are emanations of the deities being invoked; they are the embodiment of the divinities while also being signs...This is not therefore a gesture of representing the mental or physical world but rather of revealing what lies beneath as the potential for the emergence of the expressed and expressing, sign and its reference.... Generally speaking, performative rituals rely on a dichotomy between the worshipper and the worshipped. Ritual acts are grounded on differentiation where the agent actively engages with objects and uses them accordingly. This understanding is reversed in the non-dual tantric paradigm, where the ritual act becomes an expression of the fusion of agencies: it is in the act of ritual that the deity being worshipped melds with the subject worshipping her.¹⁰⁹⁷

This sophisticated interpretation of *mudrā* by Kṣemarāja as representing a "fusion of agencies" was an inheritance from the non-dual understanding of *āveśa/samāveśa* as espoused by his teachers, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta. Kṣemarāja likewise elevates the concepts of *samāveśa* and *mudrā*, equating them with transformative states (e.g., *samādhi* or *samāpatti*) and even liberation. In Kṣemarāja's commentary on the Śiva Sūtras, he writes, "An awakened one is constantly characterized (*mudrita*) by *mudrās* arising in the body. He alone is said to be a holder of *Mudrās*, indeed, the rest (of the people) are (only) holders of

¹⁰⁹⁶ Kṣemarāja quotes the now lost *Kramasūtras: kramamudrayā antaḥsvarūpayā bahirmukhaḥ samāviṣṭo bhavati sādhaḥ | tatrādau bāhyāt antaḥpraveśaḥ ābhyantarāt bāhyasvarūpe praveśaḥ āveśavaśāt jāyate iti sabāhyābhyantaro 'yaṃ mudrākramaḥ iti | PH 19*

¹⁰⁹⁷ Timalina, (2021: 2, 8-9 & 17)

bones".¹⁰⁹⁸ That is to say, when one has achieved *samāveśa*, the body will continue to spontaneously produce *mudrās* as an expression of this higher liberated state. We will return to the Kashmiri exegetes' reformulation of these ideas in detail shortly. Regardless, the connection between *mudrā* and possession seems to have become "sealed" at this time.¹⁰⁹⁹

Around the same time, Buddhist Tantras were also beginning to use *mudrās* in connection with their own *āveśa* rites, involving invocation and possession by Buddhist deities. According to David Gray, the famous 8th century Tantric Buddhist scholar, Buddhaguhya, most known for his commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi-tantra*, understood *mudrās*:

...as a cipher, a secret sign or set of signs, known only to the initiated, that link the practitioner to the deity, with different types or classes of *mudrā* referring to different approaches to the divinity...*Mudrā*, along with *mantra* and form (that is, artistically created or visualized deity images) are primary modes of engagement with deities. *Mudrā* thus are an essential element of tantric deity yoga, designed to affect the achievement of union or identification with the deity... For Buddhaguhya, the term *mudrā* signified a sign or symbol for the deity, one which can manifest in various ways, such as sonic utterances, hand gestures, or physical or mental representations. These various forms of *mudrā* together served as important tools in the systems of the deity yoga that played a key role in the various tantric traditions.¹¹⁰⁰

I will be looking at various Buddhist texts shortly and return to the concept and practice of Deity Yoga. To conclude my disquisition on *svasthāveśa* and *mudrās*, I am providing a final passage from the 9th century Buddhist *Sarvavajrodaya*, which explicitly brings many of these concepts we have just discussed together. In this text, the appearance of the *mudrā* signifies that the *svasthāveśa*-type rite described here was successful, acting as a "proof of possession":

¹⁰⁹⁸ *dehotthitābhirmudrābhīryaḥ sadā mudrito budhaḥ | sa tu mudrādharāḥ proktaḥ śeṣā vā asthidhārakāḥ||*
SSV 3.26 (1911: 112)

¹⁰⁹⁹ Pun is intended :)

¹¹⁰⁰ Gray (2013: 428, 430, 433)

Then when the *ācārya* has ascertained that [the candidate] is possessed (*samāviṣṭam*) he should form the *samayamudrā* of Vajrasattva and address him with [the Mantras] HE VAJRASATTVA HE VAJRARATNA HE VAJRADHARMA HE VAJRAKARMA and NṚTYA SATTVA NṚTYA VAJRA (DANCE, O SATTVA; DANCE, O VAJRA). If he is indeed possessed (*āviṣṭah*) he will adopt the *Vajrasattvamudrā*. Then the *ācārya* should show the *Mudrā* of the Vajra Fist. By this means all the deities beginning with Vajrasattva make themselves present [in him]. Then he should ask him something that he wishes [to ascertain], with the following [procedure]. He should visualize a Vajra on the tongue of the possessed (*āviṣṭasya*) and say SPEAK, O VAJRA. [The candidate] then tells him everything [that he wishes to know].¹¹⁰¹

THE KAULAJÑĀNANIRŪYĀ & THE KUBJIKĀMATATANTRA: ĀVEŚĀ, CAKRAS, AND KUṆḌALINĪ

Returning to the Śaiva tantric texts, we now turn to the *Kubjikāmatatantra* [KMT] and associated corpus. It is here where the concepts of *kuṇḍalinī* and the system of *cakras/granthis*, as seen in the BYT, JYT, and MVT, becomes developed into a more coherent system, one that has garnered attention from scholars over the years because of its great influence on later tantric and yoga schools, particularly *Haṭha yoga*.¹¹⁰² As we will see, it is also in these texts where *kuṇḍalinī* and *cakras* becomes inextricably linked with earlier concepts of possession and *āveśa*. The two began to become viewed as one phenomenon, the *āveśa* experience interpreted in terms of the *cakras/granthis* and the movement of the *kuṇḍalinī* within the body. To get a better understanding of developments of the KMT, I will begin by looking at a few other texts first - the earlier *Tantrasadbhāva*, a Trika text which the *Kubjikāmatatantra* [KMT] heavily redacts from, and the roughly contemporaneous

¹¹⁰¹ *tataḥ samāviṣṭam jñātvācāryeṇa HEVAJRASATTVAHE VAJRARATNA HE VAJRADHARMA HE VAJRAKARMA iti vajrasattvasamayamudrām baddhvocāraṇīyam | punar NṚTYA SATTVA NṚTYA VAJRA iti | sa ced āviṣṭah śrīvajrasattvamudrām badhnīyāt | tadācāryeṇa vajramuṣṭimudropadarśanīyāḥ | evaṃ sarve śrīvajrasattvādayaḥ sannidhyaṅ kalpayanti | tato 'bhipretavastu pṛcched anena | jihvāyām tasyāviṣṭasyāviṣṭasya vajraṃ vicintya brūhi vajra iti vaktavyam | tataḥ sarvaṃ vadati. Sarvavajrodaya, f.61v2–3: Sanskrit and translation from Sanderson (2009: 135 fn 317)*

¹¹⁰² See Heilijgers-Seelen 1994 and Mallinson 2006

Kaulajñānanirṇaya [KJN], which, alongside the KMT, is one of the first texts to have a developed system of internalized *cakras*. After these we will look closer at the KMT and the associated *Manthanabhairava Tantra* [MBT], which has been recently critically edited and translated by Mark Dyczkowski and has much to say about *āveśa*.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the KMT was its six *cakra* system, which, as stated, becomes adopted by most Yoga systems later as the standard. As Sanderson has noted, this system was not found in earlier tantric scriptures, which often put forward their own varied systems. Sanderson writes:

Because this set of six became so general in later times it has often been assumed that it is an integral part of Hindu tantric ontology in all its forms. In fact, it is found in none of the early traditions mentioned. Instead, we find there a great variety in the division of the vertical line of the central power (*suṣumna*). There are six 'seasons', five 'knots' (*granthayah*), five voids (*vyomāni*), nine wheels (*cakranī*), eleven wheels, twelve knots, at least three sets of sixteen loci (*adharaḥ*), sixteen knots, twenty-eight vital points (*marmāni*), etc. Nor is it the case that a text or school adheres to only one of these systems. It seems rather that the central line is, as it were, a mirror in the microcosm which can be visualized to reflect whatever macrocosmic structure is being handled in the ritual. Thus, the number of divisions contemplated may change during the ritual when the cosmic structure to be internalized through this mirroring changes.¹¹⁰³

As discussed previously, notions of the subtle body (energy centers, *nāḍīs*, etc.) go back at least to the period of the late Upaniṣads, though its treatment in these very early texts are unsystematic and there is no mention of the term "*cakras*" (literally "wheel" or "circle") as these energy centers within the body.¹¹⁰⁴ *Cakras* of other sorts involving the worship of groups of female entities in circles (e.g. *mātrīcakras* and *vidyācakras*) also existed before the KMT, arising in earlier tantric texts such as the BYT. Chapter twenty-nine of the BYT, for example, features a large *maṇḍala* with numerous *cakras* of deities, starting with Bhairava

¹¹⁰³ Sanderson quoted in Goudriaan (1986: 164).

¹¹⁰⁴ See Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad 2.1.19; Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.6.6.

and Aghoreśī in the root *cakra*, followed by circuits of *cakras* of Devīs, Dūtīs, Mātṛs, Yoginīs and Kiṅkarīs, which were said to flow outward in eight directions, giving a total of sixty-four *cakras*.¹¹⁰⁵ With the emergence of the *tantras* we begin to see these two ideas of *cakras*, as circles of feminine deities and energy points in the subtle body, meld together. This has been argued at length by White in his book, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, who states concisely, “The gradual internalization of these powerful female entities was effected by internalizing their formations into the hierarchized *cakras* of the yogic body.”¹¹⁰⁶

This internalization begins with early tantric conceptualizations of female entities in their divine sonic forms as Alphabet Goddesses, which, as we discussed previously, drew from earlier Vedic concepts of Vac and similar speech goddesses. As we saw in the earliest tantra, the NTS, this becomes most explicit with the figure of the Alphabet Goddess Mātrkā, who is defined as *Vidyā* (female mantra) and correlated with the *tattvas* (levels of reality) and the body of the practitioner, resulting in “early *nyāsa*-styled rites”.¹¹⁰⁷ These ideas continue in the SYM, BYT and MVT, with many of the originally male deities associated with the *tattvas* of the Siddhānta becoming replaced with various *śaktis* and female deities. This is clearly seen in the BYT (31.93cd), for example, which states: “The goddesses are present in each of the *tattvas*, adhering to their [respective] positions of authority.”¹¹⁰⁸ The *Tantrasadbhāva* [TSB] (16.47cd–48), a text which heavily influenced the KMT, also makes this connection clear: “The Yoginīs should be known in the form of the reality levels (*tattva*),

¹¹⁰⁵ This too becomes a common and standard number for *yoginīs* and other feminine entities in later tantric texts. This number was also seen earlier in the *Tantrasadbhāva* - see Hatley (2007: 121) for more on this.

¹¹⁰⁶ White, 2003: 222

¹¹⁰⁷ See Törzsök (2016: 139)

¹¹⁰⁸ *tattve tattve sthitā devyo adhikārapadānugāḥ* | BYT 31.93cd

O fair woman. Carrying out the volition of Śiva, as swift as thought and mighty, they all traverse the worlds of Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Indra.”¹¹⁰⁹

This process of internalizing feminine entities onto the grid of the subtle yogic body continues throughout the *Bhairavatantras*, but also in coeval Tantric Buddhist texts such as the *Caryāgīti* and the *Hevajra Tantra*.¹¹¹⁰ David White has argued that the earliest Hindu source for the KMT *cakra* system may have actually been the 8th century *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* [BP] where six sites (*sthāna*) are listed at the navel (*nābhi*), heart (*hṛt*), breast (*uras*), root of the palate (*svatālumūla*), the place between the eyebrows (*bhruvorantara*), and the cranium (*mūrdha*). The BP likely sourced these ideas in turn from the earlier medical literature, such as the *Caraka Samhita*.¹¹¹¹ White further argues that it is in the KJN and KMT where we also see some of precursors of *kuṇḍalinī* as understood in *haṭha-yoga*.¹¹¹²

As White points out, this must have happened at least before the time of the Bhavabhūti’s eighth century *Mālatīmādhava*, discussed earlier, in which the female Kāpālika, Kapālakuṇḍalā, refers to the six *cakras* in relation to her magical power of flight. This may be the first literary reference to the heart-lotus being within a *cakra*, which she states is activated through her tantric practice (involving mantras and *nyāsa*) giving her the ability to “extract the Five Nectars (*pañcāmṛtākaraṣaṇād*) of living beings”. Although not explicitly stated, this ability is achieved through her power to possess other being’s bodies (*parāveśa*), as seen with vital-fluid sucking *yoginīs* in the *Netra Tantra*. It is this power of

¹¹⁰⁹ *tattvarūpās tu yoginyo jñātavyās’ ca varānane | śivecchānuvidhāyinyo manovegā mahābalāḥ | icaranti samastās ca brahmaviṣṇuvindrabhūmiṣu ||* TSB 16.47cd-48

¹¹¹⁰ White, 2003: 224

¹¹¹¹ See White 2003: 224-225 for more on this

¹¹¹² White, 2003: 231

possession which allows her to access other being's vital fluids, fueling her own power of flight.¹¹¹³

THE KAULAJÑĀNANIRŪYAYA

As White cogently argues, one of the earliest Hindu sources involved in this process of internalization was the *Kaulajñānanirūyaya* [KJN], a Kaula text attributed to Matsyendranath from the 9th-10th century, making it roughly coeval with the KMT.¹¹¹⁴ It is in this text, White suggests, that the application of the term *cakra* to the bodily centers as found in the BP is mentioned:

The various spokes [of the wheels] of divine maidens (*divyakanyāra*) are worshiped by the immortal host in (1) the secret place (genitals), (2) navel, (3) heart, (4) throat, (5) mouth, (6) forehead, and (7) crown of the head. [These maidens] are arrayed along the spine (*prṣṭamadhye*) [up] to the trident (*tridaṇḍakam*) [located at the level of] the fontanel (*muṇḍasandhi*). These cakras are of eleven sorts and comprised of thousands [of maidens?], O Goddess! [They are] five-spoked (*pañcāram*) and eight-leaved (*aṣṭapatram*), [as well as] ten- and twelve-leaved, sixteen- and one hundred-leaved, as well as one hundred thousand-leaved.”¹¹¹⁵

However, the KJN's account throughout the text is not consistent, often presenting in other chapters an eight and eleven-*cakra* system. The eight *cakras* are first mentioned in chapter 3.5-9, each said to have a specific number of lotus petals, though they still are unnamed at this point in the text.¹¹¹⁶ Chapter eight states that worshipping (*pūjā*) and

¹¹¹³ Mālatimādhava Act V, verse 2, translated earlier. We should note that the Netra Tantra does actually list six *cakras* as Padoux has observed, however it does not include the important *svādhīsthāna* or *sahasrāra* which become standard in later sources.

¹¹¹⁴ White 2003: 221-234

¹¹¹⁵ KJN 5.25–27, translated by White 2003: 225

¹¹¹⁶ The highest *cakra*, rather than named, is described as being an immovable lotus (*abjamacalam*), which is all encompassing (*vyāpakam*), self-arisen (*nityoditam*), undivided (*akhaṇḍitam*), fully independent (*svātantram*), all-pervading (*sarvavyāpī*), and stainless (*nirāñjanam*). Through its own will (*icchā*), we are told, it causes creation and destruction. [KJN 3.5]. In chapters five and ten, we find mention of eleven cakras, plus the highest (making a total of twelve), which are correlated with various parts of the body - the genitals (*guhya*), navel (*nābhi*), heart (*hṛdi*), throat (*kaṇṭha*), in the mouth (*vaktra*), forehead (*mūrdhan*), within the crown of the head (*śikhāntara*), from the middle of the junction of the back of one's skull (*muṇḍasandhiprṣṭhamadhye*), and

meditating/visualizing (*dhyāna*) upon the first *cakra* will result in an encounter with the *yoginīs* (*yoginīmelakam*) and attaining the eight *siddhis* beginning with the power of minuteness etc. (*aṇimādiguṇāṣṭakam*) (8.32cd-8.33ab).¹¹¹⁷ The second *cakra* results in the power of all-attraction (*sarvākṛṣṭi*), and the ability to possess and seize victims (*paśugrahaṇamāveśam*) (8.33cd-8.34ab). The third too grants the power to enter into another person's body (*parakāyapraveśa*- likely for the extraction of vital fluids), as well as the ability to see into the past and future (*atītānāgata*) (8.34cd-8.35ab). The other *cakras* give similar sorts of magical powers such as pacification (*śanti*) and release (*mukti*), paralysis (*stobha*), the binding of *mudrās*, causing death, etc. and need concern us here.

It is not till chapter fourteen that we are given the names of some of the *cakras*, as well as the signs and results of "piercing" the sequence of *cakras* correctly. The first is simply known as the root-cakra (*mūlacakra*), and correct visualization of it is said to cause trembling (*kampa*), firstly in the hands, then feet, head, speech and so forth. It also causes the ability to levitate/fly (*bhūmityāga*), grants good fortune, dominion, knowledge of *mantras* and *mudrās*, poetic ability, and knowledge of the past and future. In addition, one remains perpetually youthful and becomes a *Khecara* [14.15-19]. Above the *mūlacakra* is the *Devīcakra* (*devyāścakra*), which again causes trembling (*kampa*), but also paralysis of speech (*stobhabhāṣā*) and leaping about (*utplavana*). It too bestows the state of *Khecara* (i.e.,

finally the Tridaṇḍa (trident) [5.25-26]. In chapter ten they add the corresponding seed-syllables, but also the location of the three final *cakras*, which are said to be in between the eyes (*bhruvormadhya*), at the forehead, and the final *cakra* (*brahmarandhra*), located at the crown of the head. Each *cakra* is associated with specific goddesses and their sacred *pīṭhas*, phonemes, colors, and magical attainments, upon their piercing.

¹¹¹⁷ Chapter eleven also states that, depending on the specific result the *sādhaka* goes for, one should offer flesh, wine and sugar liquor. However, the *sādhaka* is warned that such practices can only be done by one who observes non-duality (*advaita*), otherwise they will incur sin (*pāpakṛt*) and fall into a terrible hell (*avīciraurave*) [KJN 11.21-22]. Nonduality here involves a change in perception – knowing, for example, that the guru and Śiva himself are the same as one's own self and that foul-smelling and good smelling fragrances are ultimately the same, or that there is no difference in bathing in a sacred *tirtha* or having contact with outcastes (*mleccha*).

the power of flight), knowledge of secret *mantras*, *mudrās*, and scriptures, as well as freedom from fever, death, and time (14.21-22). The third *cakra* is known as the *Brahmagranthi* (“The Knot of Brahma”), which generally has the same results. The fourth *cakra* remains unnamed, but is said to revolve above the hairs of the head, in the third eye (*tryambake*) and said to appear similar to a flame or a flash of lightening.¹¹¹⁸ Having meditated (*cintayet*) upon that for seven nights, one achieves all the same signs (trembling, paralysis of speech, etc.) and gains the ability to possess and enter other being's bodies, among other magical acts [14.30cd-14.31ab].¹¹¹⁹ Eventually he too will attain the state of a *Khecara* [14.32ab].

From here the manuscripts seem to run amok, jumping from varied topics, interspersed with mentions of the other *cakras*, but in no certain order. Continued practice, the text states, will eventually lead one to become equal to Śiva, and the entire three worlds with all its inhabitants will appear as if they are in one's own magnificent body.¹¹²⁰ Following this description, the text again jumps to another *cakra* located on the forehead (*lalāṭa*), where one is told to fix “the multitude of letters” (*lalāṭavarṇarāsistham*). This results in trembling of the limbs, stammering of the speech, swiftness, the issuing forth of the primordial sound (*nada*), and the ability to change form at will [14.69-70]. Next the *sādhaka* is told to fix the “multitude of letters” in the center of the crown of the head (*brahmarandhrasya madhyataḥ*) and then the *randhra*, the aperture of the head. Meditation on both of these results in equality with Śiva (*tulyabala*). References are then made to the *māṭṛcakra*, *khecarīcakra*, and even a *sahajacakra* in the next chapter, though there is no

¹¹¹⁸ *ūrdham romāḥ pravartante yasmīsthāne tu tryambake* || *jvalajyotisamākārā kiñcidvidyusamaprabhaḥ* | KJN 14.28cd-14.29ab

¹¹¹⁹ *purapraveśamāveśam vaśyamākarṣaṇādikam* || *atītānāgatañcaiva dūrācca darśanam tathā* | KJN 14.30cd-14.31ab

¹¹²⁰ *paśyate dehamadhyastham trailokyam sacarācaram* | *darśayet svakapiṇḍam satatadhyānādanekadhā* || *sahasraḥkoṭibhirdevi kartā hartā svayam śivaḥ* | KJN 14.65-14.66ab

mention of their location or any of their qualities. These appear rather to be states achieved during non-dual meditations, where one meditates on the self as being neither the void or the non-void (*śūnyaśūnyamaṇaḥ*) and with no thought formations (*niścinta*). Having done this one can attain the *māṭṛcakra* where one is said to have power over the *yoginīs* and other goddesses. Continuing this practice, this state eventually dissolves into the *khecarīcakra* where one attains the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), the supreme fluid gnosis of the Kaulas (14.93-94).

The rambling, incoherent nature of this section either means the cakra system was still in formation at this point, or the text itself was corrupted or redacted incorrectly from other sources. It is also curious that the piercing of cakras generally have the same results – this is different in other major cakra systems where each pierced cakra has its own set of specific results and symptoms and is a gradual ascent into more and more subtle forms of consciousness. None of that seems to apply here. What is important for our purposes, however, is the conjunction of cakras as circles of female entities with the bodily locations, their relation to possession symptoms, and their use in meditation to effect magical results, ideas which become further developed in the *Tantrasadbhāva* and KMT.

THE TANTRASADBHĀVA [TSB]

We now turn briefly to the *Tantrasadbhāva* [TSB], a Trika text heavily influenced by the *Svacchandatantra*, the *Guhyasūtra* of the NTS, and the SYM.¹¹²¹ As stated, the KMT redacts much material from the *Tantrasadbhāva*, including the important mantras (*vidyās*) for the Trika goddesses. Like most *Vidyāpīṭha* texts, it is associated with the cult of *yoginīs*

¹¹²¹ See (Sanderson 2001: 23–32) and Törzsök 2013

and emphasizes the attainment of supernatural powers. In this text, we continue to find the process of internalizing *yoginīs*, rituals, and external sites of worship (*pīṭhas*), as internal sources of power and knowledge. Both the TSB and the KMT affirm that it is these internal centers which are more important than external ones, which are prescribed only to comply with worldly conventions.¹¹²²

The TSB redacts portions of the SYM, particularly sections involving possession by the goddess Parā through her seed-mantra that is said to cause immediate possession of the body and identification with the deity (*sadyas tanmukhatām eti svadehāveśalakṣaṇam* TSB 3.165cd).¹¹²³ This is interspersed with similar resulting *siddhiliṅgas*, the "signs of success" we saw in the SYM, such as eyes rolling up in the head (*ūrdhvadr̥ṣṭiḥ*), hopping like a frog (*darduraplutyā*), etc. Several lines later, the TSB states that through its mantra program, "one becomes eternally established in possession by the Power (*śakti*) of Rudra" (*rudraśakti-samāveśo tatra nityaṃ pratiṣṭhitah*) [3.174].

Chapter nine (TSB 9.327-9.340) also teaches a consecration rite (*abhiṣeka-vidhi*) which describes the effects of *śaktipāta*, a "Descent of Power". After having sacralized water with *mantras*, which the text says transforms it into the divine *soma*, the guru is to perform *uccāra* of the *śaktimantra* which causes the hand of the guru, now empowered, to tremble (*hastam...kampati* TSB 9.330). After pouring the water over the disciple, the guru writes the *śakti-mantra* on the ground, "in its coiled (*kuṭīlākāra rūpiṇīm*) form", which the disciple meditates upon and becomes absorbed by (*bhavitātmā*) and then recites.¹¹²⁴ The degree of the descent of *śakti* is characterized as "intense", "medium", or "low", depending on how many

¹¹²² See Törzsök 2007

¹¹²³ Same as line 2.41 of SYM

¹¹²⁴ TSB 9.335

times the disciple had to recite the mantra before collapsing (*pata*) to the ground – the lower the number, the higher the intensity.¹¹²⁵ The intensity can also be revealed by how the initiate falls to the ground - the most intense "descent" resulting in falling on his face, a medium descent, on one's back, and the lowest form, resulting in falling on one's side.¹¹²⁶ Other signs include agitation (*cala*), trembling (*kampa*), and roaring aloud (*dhuna*). If the disciple fails to show the signs, the text states he should be rejected and not initiated. The results of each type of descent are also given in TSB 9.345 - an intense descent results in the initiate becoming a *Khecara* (sky-walker), a medium descent leads to attainment of a subterranean paradise (*pātālam*), and a low descent results simply in a happy life in this world (*sukhaṃ jīvati*).

As stated previously, it is the *Tantrasadbhāva* where we also find a more developed account of *kuṇḍalinī*, as evidence by this passage from chapter fifteen, translated by Padoux:

This [Kuṇḍalinī] energy is called supreme, subtle, transcending all norm or practice. Enclosing within herself the *bindu* [fluid drop] of the heart, her aspect is that of a snake lying in deep sleep. Sleeping there, O Illustrious Goddess, she is not conscious of anything...she is awakened by the supreme sound whose nature is knowledge, being churned by the *bindu* resting in her womb. This whirling churning goes on moving in the body of Śakti and this cleaving [in herself] results first in very brilliant light-drops (*bindu*). Awakened by this, the subtle force (*kalā*), Kuṇḍalī is aroused. The sovereign bindu [Śiva], who is in the womb of Śakti, is possessed of a fourfold force (*kalā*). By the union of the Churner and of She that is Being Churned, this [Kuṇḍalī] becomes straight. This [Śakti], when she abides between two *bindus*, is called Jyeṣṭhā. Being agitated by the *bindu*, this straightened *amṛtakunḍalī* is then known as Rekhinī, having a *bindu* at each of her two ends. She is also known as Tripathā ("the three-fold path") and is celebrated under the name of Raudrā. She is [also] called Rodhinī because she obstructs the path to liberation. Ambikā, whose shape is that of the crescent moon, is the "half moon" (*ardhacandrikā*). The supreme Sakti, who is one, thus assumes three forms. Through the conjunction and disjunction

¹¹²⁵ TSB 9.327–330 - See Törzsök (2007: 477) for Sanskrit and her translation of this passage.

¹¹²⁶ TSB 9.332–334ab: *bhāvitānām tu cihnedam calate kampate dhunet / pāśacchede tu samjāte patate kāśyapitale // samṃukhaṃ patate yas tu cchinnapāśo na saṃśayah. / uttamo 'sau samuddiṣṭa uttāno madhyamo matah. // tiryakpāto 'dhamaḥ prokto devadevena śambhunā.* "This is the sign of those who have been transformed [by initiation]: they move about, tremble or shake. And when the bonds of the soul are cut, the initiate falls on the ground. He who falls on his face is the best, he who falls on his back is average, and he who falls on his side is taught to be the least good by Śambhu, the god of gods." Translation based on Törzsök (2007: 477)

of these [energies], all nine classes of phonemes are produced...Divided in fifty, she abides in [all] the phonemes from *a* to *kṣa* [TSB 15: 128–30].¹¹²⁷

Here we see various concepts we've been discussing come together – particularly the internalization of fierce feminine entities as sound phenomes and energies within the body, and one of the earliest mentions of *Kuṇḍalī* as a coiled serpent and internal *śakti*. Though the context is more about *śaktipāta* rather than *āveśa* there is certainly some correspondence in terms of its signs, and as we move along in subsequent traditions, we begin to see these two terms become synonymous.

According to Sanderson the earliest mention of *Kuṇḍalinī* potentially comes from the *Siddhāntin Sārdhatrisatikālottara* [STK], which states that the “primordial coil” (*ādyā kuṇḍalinī*) is like the conjoining of the moon and fire (an allusion to the *nāḍīs*), and is situated in the region of the heart (*hṛtpradēse*) in the shape of a sprout (*aṅkura*) and associated with the internal flowing nectar, which is to be visualized by the *sādhaka* (*sravantam cintayettasmin amṛtam sādhakottamaḥ*; STK 12.2cd).¹¹²⁸ As we've seen, White also points to the term *kuṇḍalī*, (literally “she who is ring-shaped”) in the KJN, which similarly evokes various fierce goddesses/Mothers (*mātrikās*) “who are identified with the ‘mass of sound’ (*śabdarāsi*) located in ‘all of the knots’ (*sarvagrāntheṣu*) of the subtle body...”.¹¹²⁹ In successive doctrines, we continue to see this process of internalization of these fierce goddesses and their identification with the five elements, the *tattvas*, sacred pilgrimage centers (*pīṭhas*), the phonemes etc., all of which become “projected upon the grid of the yogic body” and located in “the knots” (*grānṭhi*), the confluence of spirit and

¹¹²⁷ Translated by Padoux (1992: 128-130)

¹¹²⁸ *candrāgniriva saṃyuktā ādyā kuṇḍalinī tu yā | hṛtpradēse tu sā jñeyā aṅkurākāravatsthitā || Sārdhatrisatikālottara 12.1 ||* Sanderson’s references this in *Tantrābhīdhānakośa II* (2004: 110)

¹¹²⁹ White, 2003: 230

matter.¹¹³⁰ It is in the KMT where all of these concepts truly come to the fore in a developed fashion, which we shall now turn to.

THE KUBJIKĀMATATANTRA [KMT] & THE MANTHANABHAIRAVA-TANTRA [MBT]

The eleventh-century *Kubjikāmatatantra* (KMT), the root text of the Paścimāmnāya (Western) branch of Kaula Śaivism, draws upon and synthesizes material from a number of Trika texts, including the SYM, the *Kularatnamālā*, and the *Triśirobhairava* among others, and is commented upon by the late tenth-century disciple of Abhinavagupta, Kṣemarāja.¹¹³¹ As Dyczkowski points out, inclusion of these other sources indicates that the authors of the KMT were likely initiates in those earlier systems, which allowed them access to their *mantras* and related practices. While the Kubjikā texts present themselves as fully Kaula in orientation, Dyczkowski believes they represent more of an intermediary tradition between the earlier *Bhairavatantras* and later Kaula texts exemplified by Abhinavagupta and his ilk.¹¹³² Kubjikā's cult becomes most popular in Nepal, though it also flourished in Kashmir and South India, the latter in association with the cult of the Goddess Tripurasundarī.¹¹³³

In the KMT, Kubjikā, “The Crooked One”, is the Supreme Goddess of the system and equated with the Trika goddesses Parā, Parāpara, and Aparā (in the form of Aghora, Ghora,

¹¹³⁰ White, 2003: 231 and 226.

¹¹³¹ Sanderson (2002: 1). According to Dyczkowski (2000: 26-28) the term *Paścimāmnāya* literally means the “Last (or Final) Tradition” of the earlier Kaula cults, since initiates are “admonished to respect and even worship the ‘previous tradition’ (*pūrvāmnāya*)”. As the system developed after the redaction of the KMT, the name *Paścimāmnāya* remained but the word *paścimā* came to be understood as meaning ‘western’, which is its other common meaning.

¹¹³² Dyczkowski 2000: 26-28

¹¹³³ See Sanderson 2002. The cults origin, according to some, belong either in the Himalayas or in the region of Konkana on the west coast of India, and likely derives from a local tradition as she is also known as the “Goddess of the Potters” (*kulālī*). See Dyczkowski (2000: 20-21); Goudriaan and Schoterman (1988: 7-9) and Heilijgers-Seelen, (1994: 2).

and Ghoratara) and is also identified in various texts as Siddhayogeśvarī, Guhyakālī/Guhyeśvarī, and Bhadrakālī.¹¹³⁴ She is also known as Khecarī, the source of all *khecarīs*.¹¹³⁵ As the Lord of Khecarīs, she shares the unique feature of having six heads, shared with another prominent *bhūtanātha*, Skanda/Kumāra. She is also unique in her explicit identification with the serpent energy known as *kuṇḍalinī*, a point which Dyczkowski notes is not "merely by ascription":

Much of her mythology, iconography and ritual is molded primarily around her personage, metaphysical identity, and activity as Kuṇḍalinī, it is not an extra feature of her nature which has been added on to the others from the outside but is part of the very essence of her very specific iconic form and nature.¹¹³⁶

The KMT presents two systems of *cakras* in its scriptures – one six-fold (*ṣaṭcakra*) and one five-fold (*pañcacakra*). It is the six-fold (+1) system, as mentioned, which becomes popular and standardized in many subsequent tantric and yogic schools.¹¹³⁷ As in the TSB, the six *cakra* system in the KMT becomes homologized with six fierce *yoginīs*, female phonemes, and sacred *pīṭhas*, but also with a host of other concepts, such as the six *adhvas* (paths), six *aṅgas*, six *tattvas*, etc.¹¹³⁸ They are understood to symbolize the cosmic processes of emanation and re-integration, in six levels. By raising the *Kuṇḍalinī*, the inner cosmic *śakti*, from the lowest *cakra* to the *sahasrāra*, the absorption of the created world and identification of the individual soul with the Supreme Goddess can be realized.¹¹³⁹

¹¹³⁴ *ghorā ghoratarāghorā ghorajñānāvalambinī | nityayuktā svacakrasthā śrīkujākhyam namāmyaham ||* (KuKh 5.79) | Homage to the venerable (goddess) called Kuja who, residing in her own Wheel, is perpetually conjoined (with the Supreme Principle), she who is Ghora, Ghoratara and Aghora, and is sustained by the knowledge of Ghora. For the other identifications and references see See Dyczkowski (2000: 25) and (2009: Introduction chapter).

¹¹³⁵ KMT (14-16)

¹¹³⁶ Dyczkowski 2004: 264-265 fn. 126

¹¹³⁷ In chapter eleven, the standard names and loci are given: *mūlādhāra* (anal region), *svādhiṣṭhāna* (genital region), *maṇipura* (navel area), *anahāta* (heart), *viśuddha* (throat) and *ājñā* (between the eyebrows). Additionally, the *sahasrāra* *cakra* is mentioned, a *cakra* that goes beyond the physical body and is located at or above the crown of the head.

¹¹³⁸ Heilijger-Seelens 1994: 135–36.

¹¹³⁹ Heilijger-Seelens 1994: 17

At the same time, the Kubjikā texts provides a detailed account of another five-fold system of *cakras* unique to the KMT, though also found in an undeveloped form in the KJN.¹¹⁴⁰ Here the *cakras* are first and foremost understood as five classes of female deities which are active on both the phenomenal and phonic levels in the body: *devīs*, *dūtīs*, *mātrīs*, *yoginīs*, and finally, the *Khecarīs*. The five cakras are localized in the subtle body and supposed to be visualized in a hierarchical order along the central axis. As in previous texts, at the center of each circle is the primary goddess, while other lower goddesses flow outward in their own circles, representing and symbolizing the different aspects and forces of the Supreme Goddess and the Universe. It is these differentiated aspects and powers, which the *sādhaka* can utilize for their own purposes via tantric practice.¹¹⁴¹ I will describe who these fierce deities are, just to show the unique way the demonological pantheon (consisting of many well-known possession entities) became incorporated within the body with these newly developing ideas.

The five cakras are not only associated with the five groupings of female entities and the internal *cakras*, as mentioned above, but also the external cosmos and specific locales - particularly the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, wind, ether) as well as five sacred goddess and tantric sites (*pīṭhas*): Oḍḍiyāna, Jālandhara, Pūrṇagiri, Kāmarūpa and Mātāṅga.¹¹⁴² The first *cakra*, the *Devīcakra* ("Circle of Goddesses) is associated with the earth element and consists of four primary goddesses (Kṣoṇī, Śabdadevī, Śrotrikā and Vācādevī; KMT 14.38), who are said to each be four-fold, generating sixteen more secondary

¹¹⁴⁰ KJN 14.93, referenced by Heilijger-Seelens 1994: 9

¹¹⁴¹ *ibid.* As Heilijgers-Seelen has pointed out, the correspondences between the two systems are complicated and confusing and won't be dealt with here. In brief, the main difference is that the *ṣatcakra* system involves male deities (which represent the phonemes) and are the connecting links between the six *cakras*, while the *pañcacakra* features primarily female entities. The lowest *cakra* of the *pañcacakra*, the *Devīcakra*, corresponds with the two lower cakras of the *ṣatcakras* (the *mūlādhāra* and *svādhiṣṭhāna*).

¹¹⁴² Heilijgers-Seelen 1994: 24

goddesses. The text locates this *cakra* in the region below the navel and, as stated earlier, corresponds to both the *mūlādhāra* and *svādhiṣṭhāna* cakras of the six-fold system.

The second *cakra*, the *Dutīcakra*, associated with the water element, is composed of *Dutīs* (divine female messengers or consorts), and localized in the body above the region of the navel, in the belly (*udara*).¹¹⁴³ In this *cakra*, the central deity is Ananta, a form of Viṣṇu, who is said to have divided himself into nine male Bhairavas, also called the “Shining Lords” (*bhasvaresvarah*, KMT 14.71b). These other eight are named: Kapāla (“Lord of the Skull”), Caṇḍalokeśa (“Lord of the Worlds of the Fierce Ones”), Yogeśa (Lord of Yoga), Manonmana (“He Who Is Beyond Mind”), Haṭakeśvara (“Lord of Gold”), Kravyāda (“Consumer of Flesh”), Mudreśa (Lord of Mudrās) and Diṅmaheśvara (“Great Lord of the Directions”). Each in turn divides themselves nine more times into female *dutīs*, resulting in a total of eighty-one *dutīs*, each group presided by one of the nine male *bhairavas*.

The *Māṭṛcakra* is the third *cakra* and, as the name implies, consists of *Māṭṛs* (“mothers”) who are localized in the region of the heart and associated with the element of fire (*tejas*). Like the *Dutīcakra*, the central deity, Śiva (also called Parameśvara or Mitra), emanates eight Bhairavas (Saṃvarta, Caṇḍa, Krodha, Unmatta, Asitāṅga, Ruru, Jhaṅṭha, and Kapālīśa), along with their respective consorts, the eight *Māṭṛkās* (Brahmaṇī, Rudrāṇī or Māheśvari, Kaumārī, Vaisṇavī, Vārāhī, Aindrāṇī, Cāmuṇḍā, and Mahālakṣmī). Note that these *Māṭṛs* are closely aligned with the list of *Māṭṛkās* from the MBh and medical traditions associated with their leader Skanda. These set of eight Bhairavas and *Māṭṛkās* are said to

¹¹⁴³ KMT 14.93b

preside over eight *Māhamātr̥s* who each in turn emanate eight more, giving a total of sixty-four secondary *Mātr̥s*.¹¹⁴⁴

The fourth *cakra* is known as the *Yoginīcakra*, located in the region of the throat, and associated with the air/wind element. It consists of six *yoginīs*, mostly animal-headed - *Ḍāmarī*, *Rāmaṇī/Rākṣasī*, *Lambakarṇī/Lambikā*, *Kākinī* or *Kākī*, *Śakinī*, and *Yakṣinī* [KMT 15.48, 52-54 and 61-77]. Being six-fold, they are also considered the "regents" who preside over all six *cakras* (*ṣatcakra*), one of the correspondences between the five and six-fold *cakra* systems in the KMT.¹¹⁴⁵ Each is also associated with the six *dhatus* (bodily constituents), which they consume: *Ḍāmarī* is said to be the "Sovereign of Chyle" (*rasādhipatyā*, 15.63c); *Rāmaṇī/Rākṣasī* "lusts after blood" (*asṛglola*, 15.65d); *Lambakarṇī/Lambikā* is "addicted to eating flesh" (*māṃsāhārā...lampaṭā*; 68d); *Kākinī/Kākī* is "greedy for fat and marrow" (*medavasālubdhā*, 70c); *Śakinī* likes bone fragments (*asthibhaṅgapriyā*; 15.74a); and, finally, *Yakṣinī* "consumes bone marrow and semen" (*majjabījāsinī*; 15.77a). In later tantric texts, this list of the six *yoginīs* of the *yoginīcakra* becomes standardized with slightly different names: *Ḍākinī*, *Rākiṇī*, *Lākinī*, *Kākinī*, *Śakinī*, and *Hakinī*. The first list is likely the older one.¹¹⁴⁶ The central deities presiding over the *Yoginīcakra* is *Kuleśvara*, the Lord of the *Kula* (clan), and *Kubjikā*, categorized here as a *kanyā* (maiden) and a *guhya*, and also identified with the Goddess *Mahāntārikā*.¹¹⁴⁷

¹¹⁴⁴ The *Māhamātr̥s* are listed as *Ātmī*, *Śāsinī*, *Vahni*, *Calanī*, *Bhānumatī*, *Mahimā*, and *Sukṛtālayā* (KMT 15.6-7)

¹¹⁴⁵ *Ḍāmarī* is situated in the *Mulādhāra*, *Rāmaṇī/Rākṣasī* in the *Svādhiṣṭhana*, *Lambakarṇī/Lambikā*'s in the *Maṇipūra*, *Kākinī/Kākī* in the *Anāhata*, *Śakinī* in the *Viśuddhi*, and *Yakṣinī* in the *Ājñā*. See KMT 15.49cd and 15.52-54ab

¹¹⁴⁶ Heiljgers-Seelen (1994: 147) notes there are variations in other *Kubjikā* texts of the *Yoginīcakra*, which includes eight *yoginīs* rather than six: *Ḍākinī*, *Rākiṇī*, *Lākinī*, *Kākinī*, *Śakinī*, *Hakinī*, *Yakinī/Yakṣinī* and *Kusumayudhā/Kusumā* all of which ride atop animal vehicles a cat, an owl, a vulture, a crow, a lion, a tiger, a bear, and an elephant, respectively. Another difference is that the presiding deity is *Samvarta Bhairava*, who's vehicle is said to be a *preta*.

¹¹⁴⁷ KMT 15.46cd. See Heiljgers-Seelen (1994: 121) for multiple references

Mahāntārikā is, according to Dyczkowski, the "Goddess of the Lineage of the Youth" and especially associated with inducing possession and apotropaic/divination rites, particularly the capacity to foretell the future. Her identification as a youth goddess, connects her further with Skanda/Kumāra and the *graha* traditions seen in the MBH/medical texts. In the Kubjikā texts she is said to be six faced, living in cremation grounds, mounted upon a Great Ghost (*māhabhūta*), wearing a garland of severed heads, and should be given offerings of human flesh.¹¹⁴⁸ Dyczkowski states that when one is empowered by her one can, “prognosticate diseases and other troubles or positive conditions in the teacher and his disciples from the shadow of the body and other objects and imaginary forms seen in the sky, sheets of water or elsewhere”.¹¹⁴⁹ In various passages, Mahāntārikā and Kubjikā are identified as the same, while other verses list her as a *yoginī* or simply as a member of Kubjikā’s retinue. She is also identified with the Goddess Mahāmāyā, the source of all magical power, who Dyczkowski believes may have originally been a fierce village goddess or *grāhi* who was elevated and identified as an aspect of Kubjikā. He writes, “The ‘small’ Māyā of the ‘little goddesses’ of villages and countryside that gives and removes disease is transformed by its journey into the Sanskrit Tantras into the Great Māyā that causes and removes bondage.”¹¹⁵⁰ Schoterman, on the other hand, believes that she may have originally been the Buddhist deity Mahattārī, an aspect of Green Tārā found in the *Sādhanāmālā*.¹¹⁵¹ Besides Kubjikā and Mahāmāyā, Mahāntārikā is also identified in the KMT with the possessing Goddess Parā of the Trika. Like Parā, the *mantra* of Mahāntārikā is said to “bring

¹¹⁴⁸ Dyczkowski 2009: Vol 2, Introduction 75-84

¹¹⁴⁹ Dyczkowski 2009: Vol 2, Introduction 80

¹¹⁵⁰ Dyczkowski 2009: Vol 2, Introduction 84

¹¹⁵¹ See Dyczkowski 2009: Vol 2, Introduction 75 for reference

about possession just by being uttered (*uccārāveśinī*).¹¹⁵² She is further said to “penetrate the three worlds” (*āveśantī jagattrayam*), and she, herself, “is penetrated by great bliss” (*mahānandamahāviṣṭā*) [KMT 17.19].

Finally, we arrive at the fifth and highest *cakra* in the system, which is named after the goddesses known as *Khecarīs* (“sky-farers”), a *cakra* associated with the element ether and said to be located at the crown of head. The central part of the *Khecarīcakra*, known as the *adimaṇḍala* (“the primordial *maṇḍala*”), is said to be occupied by Kubjikā, who is accompanied by her consort Navatma-Bhairava, also known as Navatattvesvara, the “Lord of the Nine Tattvas”.¹¹⁵³ However, according to the text, there is a *cakra* which is even higher than the *Khecarīcakra*, in which the Goddess alone resides in her most complete form [KMT 16.86c]. In this form, Kubjikā is the sole Goddess Supreme, depicted as standing on top of Navatma-Bhairava, who lays at her feet as a corpse in his form as Kaṅkāleśvara, the “Lord of Skeletons” [KMT 16.85a].¹¹⁵⁴ A reversal from earlier Śaiva schools, the text claims that it is only through Navatma-Bhairava that the *sādhaka* is granted this secret and most supreme form of the Goddess. Rather than the Goddess granting access to Śiva or Bhairava in previous tantric schools, here it is Navatma-Bhairava who becomes the conduit and grants access to the *sādhaka* so that they may attain union and identification with the Absolute, Supreme *Śakti*. [KMT 16.53b-54cd].

To attain this state, the KMT describes a series of ten meditations involving the ascent of the internal *śakti*, which is described as an “internal fire” (*vaḍavā*; lit. “submarine fire”). Through these meditations, the *sādhaka* eventually achieves full identification with

¹¹⁵² *sā uccārāveśinī parā* // KMT 17.22

¹¹⁵³ KMT 14.45, 59 and 15.31

¹¹⁵⁴ Most probably this figure should be conceived of as a corpse (*preta*) representing Sadaśiva who lies prostrate underneath the Goddess. See Sanderson (1986: 187).

Navatma-Bhairava, becoming the "Lord of the *Maṇḍala*" (*maṇḍalīśa*) and a *bhūtanātha* of the *Khecaras* (*khecarādhipaḥ*) [KMT 16.101c]. Once this is achieved, the *sādhaka* is said to have a vision of the Goddess's body as made up of various *maṇḍalas*, which then leads to a non-dual experience and realization that their own body is made up of these same *maṇḍalas*. [KMT 16.89-93]. The meditation here is called *nirācārayoga* or "Transcendent Yoga", considered the highest form since it transcends conventional practices and leads to a non-dual state that is "beyond all activities" (*nirācārapada*).

Through this meditation, the internal *śakti* is said to ascend and "burn" upwards, piercing the *cakras* and causing the destruction of the individual [KMT 16. 89-109ab]. As Heiligers-Seelen points out, this process is also described in the KJN, though the internal fire is equated with Kālāgnirudra who resides in the nail-tips of the toes (*nakhāgra*) before rising up. When it burns upwards, the KJN states, "destruction takes place".¹¹⁵⁵ The KMT, on the other hand, identifies Kubjikā as this internal fire (*vaḍavānalarupena*, KMT 16.84c), which burns upward through the *Brahmarandhra* (aperture of the head). Having achieved identity with Navatman of the *Khecarīcakra*, the yogin is ordered to meditate upon the body of the Goddess and to identify themselves with the internal fire itself, the internal Sakti, Goddess Kubjikā [KMT 16.102—I03ab]. From here, the *sādhakas* consciousness rises higher still, above the *Brahmarandhra*, where he becomes fully absorbed into the Supreme Goddess. This is most clearly described in the Kubjikā's *Ṣaṭśāhasrasaṃhitā* [ṢSS] 25.157-158, which states: "She who is the Kuṇḍalinī is above the *Brahmarandhra*. That is the *vaḍavīya*-state and there the yogin is absorbed (*līyate*). What is called the womb of Sakti that is the womb of the

¹¹⁵⁵ *yadā prajvalate ūrddham saṃhārantu tadā bhavet* | KJN 2.3ab

vaḍavā fire."¹¹⁵⁶ Having completely identified with the Supreme Goddess Kubjikā, no further actions are necessary as there is no further goal to be achieved.

AVEŚA AND ŚAKTIPĀTA IN THE KMT CORPUS

With this understanding of Kubjikā as the supreme Goddess, equated with the *kuṇḍalinī-śaktī* that resides within the body, we can now discuss how possession/*āveśa* was conceptualized and used throughout the Kubjikā corpus. For this section I will primarily draw from the KMT and the *Manthanabhairavatantra* [MBT].¹¹⁵⁷ Compared to Trika texts, such as the MVT, and later traditions of the Kaula, the term *āveśa* seems to be favored in the KMT over *samāveśa*, denoting a more pronounced and wild sense of "possession". Biernacki states,

Although still presented in the context of yoga, with its consequent implications of conscious control of psychic processes, we do find a greater emphasis on a lack of control, which we associate with the word possession... The person experiencing *āveśa* would appear to others as though perhaps mad. In this text's presentation, glossing *āveśa* as "possession" appears to be appropriate.¹¹⁵⁸

At more base levels, possession by goddesses or other female entities are employed primarily throughout the KMT for attaining various magical and yogic powers. For example, KMT 7.54 describes a *svasthāveśa* rite and states that a virgin girl (*kumārī*) who is possessed (*āveśapūrvikā*) by the Dūtī Kālikā, is capable of telling those who inquire from her everything about the past and future, as well as what is auspicious and what is not, in the

¹¹⁵⁶ Sanskrit and translation based up on Heilijgers-Seelen, *The System of Five Cakras in Kubjikāmatatantra 14-16*, (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1994): 180.

¹¹⁵⁷ The MBT is comprised of three sections, the *Kumārikākhaṇḍa* [KuKh] ("The Section of the Virgin Goddess"), the *Yogakhaṇḍa* [YKh] and the *Siddhakhaṇḍa* (SKh).

¹¹⁵⁸ Loriliai Biernacki, "Possession, Absorption and the Transformation of Samāveśa", in *Expanding and Merging Horizons*, (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2007): 494.

present time.¹¹⁵⁹ On a higher level, however, *āveśa* also comes to be seen as an elevated form of religious experience, equated throughout the texts with the state of *śambhāvāveśa*, "Possession by Śambhāva" (Śiva) and liberation.

As in earlier *Bhairavatantras*, such as the BYT, SYM, and MVT, among others, the Kubjikā texts scriptures state this liberating possession involves penetration by *rudraśakti*, which is at once equated with grace (*anugraha*), but also now explicitly, with *kuṇḍalinī*. The Kubjikā texts mention numerous ways in which the devotee may receive this grace (i.e., *rudraśakti*). In rare cases, grace and possession can take place spontaneously, but the text states it usually involves a gradual progression through many different stages and degrees of *āveśa*. For example, certain possession states may be produced (*āveśakāraṅgaṃ*) simply from recalling (*smaraṇāt*) the Śrīmata or Western Tradition (*paścimāmnāya*) teachings, which is said to be endowed with vibrant energy (*sasphura*) [*Kumārikākhaṇḍa*, KuKh 4.8-13]. Divine possession (*divyāveśa*) can also occur if the initiate recites the *Mālinīstava* ("The Hymn to the Goddess Mālinī) with a one-pointed mind (*ekacitta*) or through the repetition or utterances (*uccāra*) of prescribed *mantras* and seed-syllables [KuKh 8.98; 8.103; 54.10; KMT 18/53ab], both of which lead to "the grace of the command" (*ājñāmanugraha*) and "the perfection of divine speech" (*vācāsiddhi*) [KuKh 4.43-4.44ab]. Similarly, one can experience "a great possession" (*mahāveśa*) from simply listening to Kubjikā scriptures (*āgamaśravaṇāt*) directly from the *guru*'s mouth [KuKh 30.115-116]. In another section, a supreme form of *āveśa* (*āveśamuttamam*) is mentioned, which is said to arise from the

¹¹⁵⁹ *praśnakāle parīkṣeta kumāry āveśapūrvikā | śubhāśubhaṃ vadaty āśu yad bhūtaṃ yad bhaviṣyati || KMT 7.54*

recitation of the *Vidyā* of the goddess while controlling the movement of the breath [KuKh 11.62], though little more is said on this form.

This grace (*anugraha*) also becomes equated with the concept of *śaktipāta* (The Descent of Power) in the KMT. As we've seen, seeds of this idea begin earlier in Śaiva Siddhānta Tantras and continued throughout all the Bhairavatantras we've looked at thus far. Here, *anugraha* becomes fully understood as this Descent, which occurs through various modalities and is either associated with or causes possession states. For example, chapter four of KMT states that the guru can transfer (*sam-kram*) this energy (*śakti*) in five ways via *mantras* in differing locales of the body, in turn causing various signs of possession and *siddhis*:

Transference through touch (*sparśana*), is said to takes place in the Heart (*hr̥di*), the glance (*avalokana*), in the throat (*kaṅṭha*), and through speech (*sambhāṣa*) in the palate (*tālu*). The vision of the inner Self (*ātmadarśana*) takes place in the middle of the Point (*bindumadhyataḥ*, between the eyebrows) and, spontaneous penetration (*svayamāveśanam*) takes place in the Aperture of Kubjikā (*kubjirandhra*). One should know that trembling (*kampana*) takes place in the course of touching, shaking (*dhunana*), in the course of gazing (*avalokana*), paralysis (*stobha*) and spontaneous understanding of the scriptures in the [transmission] through speaking (*sambhāṣa*). By the vision of the inner Self, one attains the eight (yogic) qualities, including the power to make oneself small, etc. When spontaneous penetration (*svayamāviśana*) occurs, O Goddess, one certainly flies upwards [like a Khecara]. Once one knows the way of the mantras, one is assuredly successful [KMT 4.70-4.74]¹¹⁶⁰.

One of the most intense forms of transmission in the Kubjikā scriptures is known as the "Gaze of the Lion" (*siṃhāvalokana*), which involves a glance from either the teacher or the deity, directly. The power from this gaze, the text states, can create, sanctify, and purify

¹¹⁶⁰ *sparśanam cāvalokaṃ ca sambhāṣaṃ cātmadarśanam / svayamāveśanam caiva saṅkrāntiḥ pañcalakṣaṇā // sparśanam hr̥disamsthaṃ tu ālokaṃ kaṅṭhadeśataḥ / tāluthāne tu sambhāṣaṃ darśanam bindumadhyataḥ // svayamāveśanam devi kubjirandhre na saṃśayaḥ / sparśane kampanaṃ jñeyam āloke dhunanaṃ bhavet // sambhāṣe tu bhavet stobhaḥ śāstrārthaṃ caiva manyate / darśanena guṇāvāptir aṇimādiguṇāṣṭakam // svayamāviśane devi utpaten nātra saṃśayaḥ / evaṃ mantragatiṃ jñātvā sidhyate nātra saṃśayaḥ // KMT 4.70-74. Thanks again to David White for his help with my translation.*

spaces necessary to perform various magical rites, as well as to empower protective amulets and scriptures.¹¹⁶¹ The gaze is so powerful that it not only removes the impurities/bonds of the initiates soul, but also gathers together the various energies of the initiate to bring about a condition of "oneness" (*sāmarasya*) through which the Transmission (*krama*) is imparted [KuKh 38.22]. In another section, we are told that the guru can also impart the Kaula teachings to his disciple through his gaze, which causes possession-like experiences of pervasion (*vyāpti*) and shaking in all the limbs of the disciple's body (*sarvāṅgeṣu prakampanam*) [KuKh 33.28]. Pierced by that divine power, the text continues, the disciple falls down unconscious (*viddhaḥ patati niḥ saṃjñō*) [KuKh 33.29ab]. As a result of this piercing, we are told a few verses later that the disciple will also experiences "The Five States" (*pañcāvasthā*), and their associated signs, which include joy (*ānanda*), an upward movement (*udbhava*), shaking (*kampa*), drowsiness (*nidrā*) and whirling (*ghūrmi*). Various supernatural powers also arise (flight, knowledge of *mudrās*, hearing from a great distance etc.) as well as knowledge of the secret "Kaula language" (*kaulabhaṣā*). Madness, the text states, is induced by every *mantra*, causing one to spontaneously break out in song (*gīta*), laughter (*hasita*), dance (*nṛtya*) and rolling about (*valana*) [KuKh 33.47-49].

Another concept related to *śaktipāta* and *āveśa* throughout the Kubjikā texts is the term *ājñā*, which most literally means a verbal "Command" or "Order". Here, however, *ājñā* comes to mean much more than just a command, representing rather the power (*śakti*) of the deity transmitted through the lineage of the clan. It is this "Command" which is the empowering energy and purifying grace transmitted either directly from the deity or the guru

¹¹⁶¹ See KMT 2.117 and KuKh 5.52-53 and 39.158-159ab

and is the ultimate cause of divine possession (*āveśa*). For example, referring to the mantra called the "Twelve Verses", the KMT says:

This group of Twelve Verses is the plane of supreme nectar (*parāmṛta*). When this is recited, the Mothers are always aroused (*kṣubhyante*). Once this is recited, the Piercing of the Command (*ājñāvedha*) etc. is accomplished. Immediate possession (*sadyāveśaḥ*) is produced, and (the one who recites it) becomes a poet.¹¹⁶²

However, according to Dyczkowski, the Command goes beyond just grace - "The Command in its fullest most essential nature is the supreme state itself"¹¹⁶³, the supreme state of Śāmbhava (i.e., *śambhāvāveśa*) which bestows every form of accomplishment (*siddhi*) and worldly benefit (*bhoga*), as well as equality with the Supreme Godhead, and thus liberation. Bhairava tells the Goddess in the KMT: "Both worldly benefit (*bhukti*) and liberation (*mukti*) come from the Command. He who has received the Command in its fullest form is no less than the deity itself... O Kujāmbikā, he who possesses this Command is my equal."¹¹⁶⁴

Just like *āveśa* and *śaktipāta* in previous texts we've looked at, this Command is also transmitted in varying degrees, based upon one's level of impurity (*mala*) [KMT 3.89-90ab]. An intense (*tīvrājñā*) experience of the Command is said to be terribly powerful and brings about realization in an instant. A weak Command (*mandājñā*), in contrast, works gradually, elevating and merging the *jīva* into progressively higher states (*tattvas*) of realization.¹¹⁶⁵ Some of these ideas are found in earlier texts. In the *Tantrasadbhāva*, for example, it states that following the guru's Command is essential because the guru himself possesses his authority and power due to Śiva's own Command, which the guru then transmits to his

¹¹⁶² *parāmṛtapadaṃ hy etat ślokānāṃ daśakaṃ dvikaṃ /etasmin paṭhite devi kṣubhyante mātaraḥ sadā // KMT 18.49 //sadyāveśaḥ prajāyeta kavitaṃ tasya jāyate / ājñāvedhādikā siddhiḥ paṭhite ' smin prajāyate // KMT 18.50 //*

¹¹⁶³ See Dyczkowski (2009: Vol 2, Introduction, 206)

¹¹⁶⁴ KMT 3.105-107. Translation by Dyczkowski (2009: Vol 2, Introduction 205)

¹¹⁶⁵ See Dyczkowski (2009: Vol 2, Introduction 205)

disciples [TS 9.507cd-510.] In the yet unpublished *Ūrmikaulārṇavatantra*, a text of the Kālīkrama, an interesting variation is found in which a young virgin is said to be possessed by the Goddess, who then issues the "Command of the Goddess", which serves as an initiation into the *Yoginīkrama*.¹¹⁶⁶ Earlier still, the NTS explains that all *mantras* are under the teacher's control and carry out his Command.¹¹⁶⁷ We also saw among the Lākulas, as described in the NTS, the concept of *athaśabdanipātena*, which may be the earliest precursor to all of these ideas.

In the KMT *āveśa*, *śaktipāta*, and *ājñā* (the Command) become intertwined together, along with its newly developed concept of *Kuṇḍalinī*. In KuKh 33.14, for example, the goddess explains: "O Great Lord, an intensely powerful Command comes by the grace (*śaktipāta*) of the Command of the Piercing. (But), O God, without knowledge of the Command of the State (of Being) there is no realization." Due to this, the guru is essential in KMT initiation rites, as in other Śaiva traditions we've seen, because it is he who is necessary to impart the Command, equated here with *śaktipāta*. This, again, involves the teacher penetrating the initiate with his own energy (*śakti*), which he himself has received from Rudra/Śiva, and directs into the *brahmarandhra* ("Cavity of Brahma") at the top of the initiate's head. The guru then manipulates the energies of the Goddess here, variously identified as the Transmental (*unmanī*), the Command, or *kuṇḍalinī*, and makes it descend through the *brahmarandhra* to the rest of the *cakras* of the initiate, until it arrives at the lowest *cakra*. At this point, the *Kuṇḍalinī* which has been brought down by the guru, is

¹¹⁶⁶ *athavā bhūvaneśāni kumārī iṣṭadevatā | tanmukhād nirgatā ājñā sā dīkṣā yoginīkrame || ŪKau 2/167*. As seen in Dyczowski 2009 (Vol 1, Introduction: 202)

¹¹⁶⁷ *jñātvā mātṛkasadbhāvaṃ gurur bhavati pāśahā || mantrās tasya vaśyāḥ (vaśāḥ) sarve ājñāṃ kurvanti coditāḥ | NTS 30b*. "Once he knows the essence of the phonemic energies (*mātṛka*), the teacher can destroy the fetters. All his mantras are under (his) control and, impelled (by him), they all carry out his command." Translation from Dyczowski (2009: Vol 1, Introduction: 200).

impelled back up, arousing the same innate energy within the body of the disciple, and causing it to rise upward through the channels (*nāḍīs*) while piercing the various *cakras*. It eventually ascends to the highest point above the head, the sixth *cakra* known as the “Wheel of the Command” (*ājñācakra*), identified as the “nondual plane of Śiva and Śakti” (*śivaśaktipadadvaya*) [KuKh 35.53]. It then descends once again, carrying with it the individual soul, now purified, and transporting it first to the Heart *cakras* and then other centers in the body. In this way, the energy of the Command wanders through the body, illumining and filling it with its energy. KuKh 36.95-96ab states,

Once she reaches the plane of the Place of the Command, she completes (her) work as she wishes. By (her) movement, she moves all things, including gods, demons, and men, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, and Rudra, along with the mountains, forests, and groves.¹¹⁶⁸

Like the practice of *mantra*, various yogic practices in the KMT can also bring about *śaktipāta* and possession (*yogāveśa*), beyond initiation. Liberating possession can be induced by meditating on and visualizing the *cakras* and *kuṇḍalinī* in the body and through breath control, which is used to raise the *kuṇḍalinī* upwards to its final resting place, above the head, which brings about "immediate possession" (*sadyāveśakara*).¹¹⁶⁹ According to the KuKh, the *kuṇḍalinī* should be visualized as a flame within the body, which is like a circle of lightning flashes, brilliant as a thousand million suns, filling up the entire universe with its rays [Kukh 36.29-30]. Having fixed his mind and visualized himself as being in the center of that flame, the text states that the adept quickly attains success (*siddhi*) and will experience possession (*āveśa*), which is signaled by various signs of attainment (*pratyaya*) such as dizziness (*bhramaṇa*), trembling (*kampa*), paralysis (*stobha*), great inebriation (*mahāghūrṇi*) etc.

¹¹⁶⁸ Translation from Dyczkowski (2009: Vol 1, Introduction: 208).

¹¹⁶⁹ KuKh 3.53

[KuKh 36.32]. Through this practice, the *yogi*, the text continues, is said to be in a "permanent state of possession" (*sadāviṣṭaḥ*) and gains the power to encounter the *Yoginīs* (*yoginīnām ca melakam*),¹¹⁷⁰ knowledge of the past and future (*atītānāgata*), possession of another's body (*parapurapraveśa*), making statues animate (*pratimācālana*), causing explosions (*sphoṭa*), and even the ability to paralyze an entire army (*sainyastambha*) [KuKh 36.34]. In another section of the text, *āveśa* is linked with the state of *samādhi* (immersion/contemplation), which is equated with the arising of the bliss of consciousness (*cidānandasamutpattiḥ āveśaḥ*), when one realizes their own true nature (*svarupa*) [KuKh 26.16cd-17ab]. This is an interpretation of *āveśa* that becomes very popular in later Kaula texts and non-dual exegetical traditions of Abhinavagupta and the like, as we will soon see.

The KMT also describes a series of six *āveśas* in its tenth chapter, which correspond with its own superior six-fold path (*ṣaḍadhvan*) that is said to subsume all other Śaiva paths: *bhūtāveśa*, *bhāvāveśa*, *śāktāveśa*, *māntrāveśa*, *raudrāveśa*, and *śāmbhavāveśa*.¹¹⁷¹ These represent not only progressive spiritual states as one ascends towards liberation, but also the various cosmic principles of existence (*tattvas*), which are projected onto and located within the subtle body as *cakras*. This may also be the first time in the surviving scriptural record where *āveśa* (in this case *śāmbhavāveśa*) becomes equated with the highest state of liberation. Each state has its corresponding signs (*cihnas*), which indicate to the guru what level of *āveśa* has been reached. As in previous texts, the KMT also requires that the guru performing such an initiation has himself experienced the *śāmbhava* state of possession, making him a *tattvavit*, a “knower of Reality” [KMT 10.71].¹¹⁷²

¹¹⁷⁰ *sadāviṣṭo bhavet so 'pi yoginīnām ca melakam* || KuKh36.33

¹¹⁷¹ *bhūtaṃ bhāvaṃ tathā śāktaṃ māntraṃ raudraṃ ca śāmbhavam | ājñātaḥ sampravarteta ṣaḍadhvedaṃ kulānvaye* || KMT 10.68

¹¹⁷² See Wallis (2014: 224)

The classifications of these are found in the text from verses 10.76-10.80ab of the KMT.¹¹⁷³ The first, as stated, is *bhūtāveśa*, which is possession, or more aptly, penetration (*āviśanti*) by the five gross elements, beginning with Earth, Water, etc. The second is *bhāvāveśa*, in which possession can occur through the five sensations - sound, touch, appearance, taste and odor, which are said to be all “born from emotion” (*bhāvaja*). The third state is known as *śaktāveśa*, penetration by the *śaktī* (Power) via one of the five sense organs - the ear, skin, eyes, tongue, and nose, which also become empowered through its transmission [10.78ab]. *Māntrāveśa* involves penetration by *mantras* that take place in the five organs of action - speech, hands, feet, anus, and reproductive organs - which, empowered, are said to be born of mantra (*māntraja*) [10.78cd]. Higher still, is *Raudrāveśa*, possession by Raudra ("Wrath" or "Rudra"), which involves penetration of the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*garva*), and the three qualities (*guṇas*) of Nature (*prakṛti*), all of which are said to be “born of Rudra” (*raudraja*) [10.79ab]. Finally, we arrive at the highest level of *āveśa*, *śāmbhavāveśa*, which involves possession by Śiva, beginning at the level of the *Puruṣa-tattva* (personhood-level) and ending at its cessation (*nivṛtti*) in the *unmanā-tattva* (transmental-level) of Parā. The section ends stating that all these levels of *āveśa*, beginning with *bhūtāveśa* are subsumed within the highest level of *śāmbhavāveśa*, called the "Great Lake" (*mahāhrada*) of consciousness [10.79cd-10.80ab].

Next the text describes the evidence (*pratyaya*) and various signs (*cihna*) associated with each form *āveśa*. Here we get much of the same data we’ve seen in previous texts. In

¹¹⁷³ *pṛthivyādīni bhūtāni cāviśanti ca yasya vai || bhūtāveśam tu tad viddhi bhāvāveśam ataḥ śṛṇu | śabdaḥ sparśas tathā rūpaṃ raso gandhaś ca bhāvajam || śrotram tvak cakṣuṣī jihvā ghrāṇaṃ śaktimato viduḥ | vācā pāṇis tathā pādaṃ pāyūpasthaṃ tu māntra-jam || mano buddhis tathā garvaḥ prakṛto guṇa raudrajam | puruṣādi nivṛt[ti]yantam unmanatvaṃ parāntikam || etat te śāmbhavaṃ jñānaṃ bhuvanādyam mahāhradam ||*
KMT 10.76cd-80ab

regard to *bhūtāveśa*, we are told that one experiences tremors (*kampa*), dizziness (*bhrama*), spontaneous weeping (*roda*), spontaneous jumping (*utpata*) and falling down (*nipata*), speaking incoherently (*vadet anibaddha*), and raving like an insane person (*ravonmāda*).¹¹⁷⁴ *Bhāvāveśa* includes the following signs, which are said to arise naturally or spontaneously (*sampadyante svabhāvataḥ*): Whirling about (*ghūrnaṇa*), sweating (*sveda*), horripilation (*romāñca*), spontaneous shedding of tears (*aśru*), falling down (*pāta*), and a feeling of crushing in the limbs (*aṅgamoṭanam*) [10.85ab].¹¹⁷⁵ The signs of "Piercing by the Power" (*śaktivedhopalakṣayet*) in *śāktāveśa*, involves spinning around like a wheel (*bhramate cakravat*), falling down like a piece of wood (*pātaḥ kāṣṭhavat*), agitated eyes (*kṣubhitekṣaṇaḥ*), appearing unsteady (*paśyate vibhramāpannaḥ*), and falling down (*pāta*).¹¹⁷⁶ Those experiencing *mantrāveśa* display the following signs: trembling (*kampa*), dizziness (*bhrama*), murmuring (*jalpa*) and incessant speech (*vadate 'khilam*) [10.87ab]. With the description of the signs of *raudrāveśa* we see a sharp change in the type of signs, which here are called "The Five States" (*pañcāvasthā*) born from Rudra (*raudrajāḥ*): "One who is wise, even though he has not meditated upon the scriptures, will know its words, its meaning, everything in regards to the past and future (*atītānāgataṃ sarvaṃ*), and all the fruits/results (of what is happening) in the present time (*vartamānasya yat phalam*).¹¹⁷⁷ All five of these types of knowledge arise from "Possession by the Power of Rudra" (*raudraśaktisamāveśāt*), signs, which we are told also occur from the piercing by Śāmbhava

¹¹⁷⁴ *kampate bhramate rodec cotpaten nipated vadet | anibaddharavonmādī sasamjñō bhūtavad yathā || KMT 10.83*

¹¹⁷⁵ *yāni cihnāni jāyante bhāvavidhasya bhāvini || ghūrmaṇaṃ svedaromāñcāśrupātāṅgamoṭanam | ārādhyam smarañād evaṃ sampadyante svabhāvataḥ || KMT 10.84cd-85*

¹¹⁷⁶ *bhramate cakravat pātaḥ kāṣṭhavat kṣubhitekṣaṇaḥ | paśyate vibhramāpannaḥ śaktivedhopalakṣayet || KMT 10.86*

¹¹⁷⁷ *raudraṃ caivam ato brūmi pañcāvasthās tu raudrajāḥ | anādhūtāni śāstrāṇi granthataś cārthataḥ sudhīḥ || atītānāgataṃ sarvaṃ vartamānasya yat phalam | KMT 10.88-89ab*

(*śāmbhava-vedha*), explained next.¹¹⁷⁸ Rather than physical signs, as seen in the first three types of *āveśa*, the final two states result in attainments of omniscience in this world.¹¹⁷⁹ Purification is said to be achieved by going through these various levels, leading finally to possession by *Śāmbhava* (*śāmbhavāveśa*), which results in absorbing these omniscient qualities (*guṇas*) of *Śāmbhava*.¹¹⁸⁰ Besides the ones mentioned, he also begins to see all beings as his own self (*ātmaiva so paśyati sarvabhūtān*; 10.94) and the assemblage of arising *tattvas* before him (*paśyate cāgrataḥ sarvaṃ tattvavrātaṃ sadoditam* 10.97ab). Purified, the text states he can traverse the sky with his own body (*dehenānena cotpatet*) [10.95]. In contrast to the other stages, the text delineates that there is no trembling or agitation (*na kampadhunane*) nor whirling about (*ghūrmih pravartate*) or fainting as if one has been poisoned (*viṣonmūrchāgatas*) – rather, he said to be fixed, like a full pot (*tiṣṭhate bhṛtakumbhavat*) [10.96], intoxicated by the wine of eternal bliss, and adorned with the qualities of the All-Knowing One [*sadānandamadonmattaḥ sarvajñaguṇabhūṣitaḥ*; 10.98ab].

If one is still a disciple, the guru is considered absolutely essential in order to make sure these possession rites are properly performed, due to the inherent danger involved with these powerful forces. This is because of the ambiguous nature of the feminine entities involved, such as the *yoginīs*, who as we've seen, are both auspicious and inauspicious. For example, in its discussion of the *Yoginīcakra*, the Kubjikā texts themselves characterize the *yoginīs* in terms of *nigraha* (“inauspiciousness” or more literally “seizure”), related to their quality of destruction (*saṃhāra*), while their creative aspect (*sr̥ṣṭi*) is related to *anugraha*

¹¹⁷⁸ *raudraśaktisamāveśāt sarvaṃ eva prapadyate || yasyedaṃ vartate cihnaṃ raudrāveśaṃ tad ucyate | śāmbhavena tu vedhena sarvāṅy etāni suvrate ||* KMT 10.89cd-10.90

¹¹⁷⁹ *loke 'smin sarvajñatvaṃ prapadyate |* KMT 91cd

¹¹⁸⁰ *śuddhaśāmbhavavedhasya sāmprataṃ nirṇayaṃ śṛṇu | yena viddhasya loke 'smin sarvajñatvaṃ prapadyate || pūrvoktena tu vidhinā śodhitas tu yadā śiśuḥ | tadā sampadyate tasya śāmbhavaṃ guṇa-dāyakam ||* KMT 10.91-92

(“auspiciousness”, “grace” or more literally “release”).¹¹⁸¹ For example, in the KMT the rite of *utkrānti* (KMT 23.97-148) can, on one hand, be a method for the yogin to commit a sort of ritual suicide leading to full and final liberation. On the other hand, the same *yoginīs*, following a similar ritual procedure, can be used for more "black magic" type rites, such as causing destruction to others.¹¹⁸² In contrast, *anugraha* rites involve employing the *yoginīs* for protection, various supernatural powers, and liberating knowledge. Heilijgers-Seelen notes that

In their inauspicious form they [the *yoginīs*] are associated with the bodily substances and particularly involved in acts of black magic. In their auspicious form they are protective deities who may be invoked, for instance, to show the way to final emancipation...¹¹⁸³

The auspicious or inauspicious aspects of these rites seem to depend on the direction of the sequence in which they are worshipped. As Heilijgers-Seelen points out, “When worshipped from *Ḍākinī* to *Yakinī/Hakinī* they are favourable and creative, in the reverse order from *Yakinī/Hakinī* to *Dakinī*, they are unfavourable and destructive.”¹¹⁸⁴ This applies not only to the clockwise and counterclockwise movements of external *maṇḍalas* used in various rites, which have a horizontal orientation, but also internally with the six *chakras* (*ṣaṭchakras*), regarding the up and down movements of the *śaktis*. Thus, in KMT 15.81, it states that the goddesses of the *Yoginīcakra* are destructive when they move along the southern course (*dakṣiṇādhvān*), referring to the movement of the *nigraha* goddesses from *mūlādhāra* upwards to *ājñā*, but bestows the immortal nectar (*āmṛtasambhavam*), which

¹¹⁸¹ Heilijger-Seelens (1994: 139-146). This characterization is found within the KJN as well, as White (2003: 213-18) has pointed out.

¹¹⁸² Other “black magic” rites where *Yoginīs* are employed involve examples such as subjugation of various spirits (*bhūtas*, *vetālas*, *yakṣinīs* etc.) and the raising of the dead (*mṛtakothāpana*; KMT 7.91), all of which are performed in frightening places such as cemeteries (*smasāna*), with frightful Kāpālika inspired ornaments, and the worship of these six *yoginīs*.

¹¹⁸³ Heilijger-Seelens (1994: 139)

¹¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

causes bliss, when they are on the northern course (*uttara*), referring to the movement of the *anugraha* goddesses in the reverse direction.¹¹⁸⁵

It is ultimately the ability of the *guru* to manipulate these bodily energies through various yogic practices since these energies could go astray and become dangerous if the *sādhaka* still has impurities, such as holding on to afflictive emotions. The danger is stated explicitly in KMT 13.66, which declares:

Even if the Command (*ājñā*) has been given along with its power (*sāmarthya*), the guru should enter (*samāviśet*) the disciple via the physical aspect (*bhūtāṃśa*), (otherwise) the one who is proud is consumed by waves of mental and physical pain (*ūrmigrasta*) due to his pride and is utterly destroyed (*vinaśyati*) [KMT 13.66].¹¹⁸⁶

Interestingly enough, the resultant states of *āveśa* also seems to depend upon this. Dyczkowski writes: “The *āveśa* that takes place by the upward movement of energy is spiritual and uplifting. That which takes place by a downward movement of energy is quite the opposite, demonic and degrading.”¹¹⁸⁷ In other words, if the energy is not manipulated in a correct manner, it can lead to demonic states of possession, rather than spiritual, benevolent, or divine forms of possession. This is more clearly stated later by Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrāloka*:

The initiation by piercing (*vedhadīkṣā*) is of many kinds and has been described in various places (in the scriptures). It should be performed by (a guru) who is foremost in Yoga (*abhyāsavat*) by whom the disciple is made to enter to ever higher states (levels/*cakras*). There arise certain proofs (*pratyaya*) of the piercing of the wheels (*cakras*) by virtue of which (he acquires) the powers (*siddhi*) of atomicity and the rest. If instead, as is stated in the Śrī Māla (i.e., *Kularatnamālātantra*), (one) does not attain the highest wheels (*cakras*), that (same so-called initiation) is just possession (*āveśa*) by a demon (*piśāca*). [TA 29.237-239ab].¹¹⁸⁸

¹¹⁸⁵ *dakṣiṇādhvānasamsthās tāḥ kṛntayanti mahāmbikāḥ | uttarasthāḥ prakurvanti śreyam cāmṛtasambhavam ||* KMT 15.81

¹¹⁸⁶ *sāmarthyenāpi dattājñā bhūtāṃśena samāviśet | ūrmigrasto hy ahankārī ahankārād vinaśyati ||* KMT 13.66

¹¹⁸⁷ Dyczkowski (2009: Notes on Text and Translation, Vol 4: 11)

¹¹⁸⁸ *vedhadīkṣā ca bahudhā tatra tatra nirūpitā | sā cābhyāsavatā kāryā yenordhvordhvapraveśataḥ || ||* *śiṣyasya cakrasambhedapratyayo jāyate dhruvaḥ | yenānimādikā siddhiḥ śrīmālāyām ca coditā ||*

Jayaratha, a commentator on this text, adds

O fair faced one, ff those, who are in a low state progress upwards, that is the state of the plane of liberation and the vessel of knowledge. (But) if those whose state is that of the Upper wheels move down, then that is the (the condition of) possession by a demon and is the cause of obstruction.¹¹⁸⁹

This is of interest in that it provides, in a sense, a continuity between what is commonly called demonic versus divine forms of possession. According to this view, both forms of possession are related to the rise of *kuṇḍalini* through the internal *cakras*, the “machinery” which is the basis for all spiritual experiences, including possession. The difference, however, is whether the rise of this powerful energy happens in the correct manner or if the aspirant is trained and purified enough to control it – if not, they seem to argue that demonic rather than divine possession will be the result. As we will see in the following chapter, many contemporary possession traditions throughout South Asia have similar beliefs.

5. THE EXEGETICAL TRADITIONS OF KASHMIR: THE FULL CONFLUENCE OF POSSESSION (ĀVEŚĀ), MYSTICAL IMMERSION (SAMĀVEŚĀ), GRACE (ŚAKTIPĀTA) AND LIBERATION

We now turn briefly to the final group of texts we will examine in this chapter - the Śaiva exegetical scriptures of Kashmir, written towards the end of the early medieval period. This post-scriptural tradition has its beginnings around the 8th century but reached its apex in the 10th to 11th centuries. The Brahmins, who authored these works, essentially sought to explain the vast canon of tantric scripture which had emerged in light of their own non-dual

ūrdhvacakraśālābhe piśācāveśa eva sā || TĀ 29.237-239ab; Translation by Dyczkowski (2009: Notes on Text and Translation, Vol 4: 11)

¹¹⁸⁹ Translation by Dyczkowski (2009: Notes on Text and Translation, Vol 4: 11-12)

interpretations.¹¹⁹⁰ In many respects, these writings represent a culmination and synthesis of much of the material we have been looking at up to now. Here we find sophisticated philosophical discourses and understandings of *āveśa*, developed from earlier scriptural traditions, and adapted to fit the authors' own soteriological agendas. Their writings synthesize many past discourses surrounding and bringing together concepts of possession (*āveśa*), immersion (*samāveśa*), grace (*śaktipāta*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and liberation. Since various scholars have written in depth on some of these topics within these scriptures, I will spend less amount of time here and refer readers to other sources when appropriate.

The exegetical material took on enormous significance among the Trika-Kaula schools, often becoming more central than the scriptural material the authors were commenting upon. This was due to both the increasing popularity and veneration of the gurus who wrote these materials and because their texts were more clearly written, developed, and relevant to seekers when compared to the often ambiguous, obscure, and abstruse scriptures they were commenting on.¹¹⁹¹ Besides the many valuable commentaries on scriptures, they also produced a number of independent works, often synthesizing materials from previous scriptural and ritual traditions of which they were a part.¹¹⁹² Indeed, the title of the most renowned of all such works, by the eleventh-century Trika-Kaula synthesist Abhinavagupta, is known as the *Tantrāloka*, which means “Elucidation of the Tantras.” His shorter work, the *Tantrasāra*, “The Essence of the Tantras” was a condensation of this massive text, and its purpose is clearly read from the treatise’s title.

¹¹⁹⁰ See Sanderson 2007b and John Nemeč, *The Ubiquitous Śiva: Somānanda's Śivadr̥ṣṭi and his Tantric Interlocutors*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹⁹¹ See Wallis (2014: 252) and Sanderson (2007b)

¹¹⁹² For further information see Sanderson (2007b)

The exegetes had a clear agenda in mind, an agenda that in fact suffused all their literature - one that espoused a strict non-dualism and an emphasis on liberation and knowledge rather than much of the earlier scriptures' focus on ritual and *siddhis*. As a result, they also deemphasized the sorts of visionary experiences and transgressive elements seen in earlier Kaula texts. Through their powerful interpretive and “creative exegesis”, they instead promoted teachings which involved non-visionary liberating gnosis (*jñānam*) as the primary means to achieving their goals. Sanderson writes,

A whole culture of visionary experience has been pushed to the margins by the Kashmirian commentators or its accounts translated through creative exegesis into teachings of non-visionary liberating gnosis (*jñānam*); and with it have disappeared from the foreground the exotic ascetic observances (*vidyāvratam*, *puraścaryā*, *caryāvratam*) taught in the scriptures for those seeking to master the Mantras for such ends. This shift of focus arises from the nature of the commentators' social milieu, which is one of Śaiva brahmins eager to consolidate their religion on the level of high culture.¹¹⁹³

As a result of this, Sanderson argues that rites and practices in these texts were “domesticated” and “sanitized” in comparison to earlier and wilder Kāpālika-like cremation rites. However, the language of possession remains and is implicit, though rather than the term *āveśa*, the term *samāveśa* as the more abstract “immersion” rather than “possession” becomes emphasized. This was a purposeful shift, an effort to move away from more unrestrained and wild forms of “possession” to more controlled forms of meditative immersion, which were more in line with their own gnosis-based framework of radical non-dualism.

¹¹⁹³ Sanderson (2007b: 241)

THE REFORMULATION OF ĀVEŚĀ

Having traced and coloured the *maṇḍala*...the guru of the Trika installs and worships in it the deities of the sect. He then blindfolds the initiand and leads him into its presence. When the blindfold is removed the deities of the *maṇḍala* enter the neophyte in an instantaneous possession. His subsequent life of ritual and meditation is designed to transform this initial empowerment...into a state of permanent, controlled identification, to draw it forth as the substance of his conscious mind. Daily recreating the *maṇḍala* in mental worship, he summons from within his consciousness the deities that enthrone the *maṇḍala*, projecting them on to a smooth mirror-like surface to contemplate them there as the reflection of his internal Āgamic identity. He aspires to know himself only as this nexus of deities... Through the internal monologue of his ritual he is to think away the "I" of his identity in the world of mutually exclusive subjects and objects, projecting on to the mirror of the mandala the vision of a superself whose form contains not only this "I" but all "I's" and the world of object and values by which these "I's" believe themselves to be conditioned...The process...is to be understood by the worshipper as the destruction of his public or physical individuality...So doing he opens the way for his identification with the deity through the mantras that follow: his ritual has removed the personality which impedes this "possession".¹¹⁹⁴

In Alexis Sanderson's groundbreaking 1986 article, "Mandala and Agamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir," we are given a succinct summary rooted in Bhairava scriptures, how *āveśa/samāveśa* becomes viewed by the Trika-Kaula exegetes of the 10-11th century.¹¹⁹⁵ The most prolific of these writers and teachers was Abhinavagupta (ca. 970-1020), a Kashmiri Brahmin regarded as the most authoritative exegete, philosopher, and teacher of the Kashmiri Śaiva non-dualist traditions. He also wrote a number of important treatises in poetics, and drama/aesthetics, all of which informed his own philosophical beliefs.¹¹⁹⁶ His most important work is the *Tantrāloka*, a synthesis of various non-dualist Mantramārga scriptures, most

¹¹⁹⁴ Sanderson (1986: 169-170)

¹¹⁹⁵ These authors were principally connected with the Trika lineage-grouping, though many of them were also secretly initiated into the Krama as well. See Wallis (2014: 263)

¹¹⁹⁶ Several scholars have documented the life and works of this polymath, see for example, Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1968); David Lawrence, *Abhinavagupta*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and of course a variety of works by Sanderson (1986, 1987, 2005, 2007b).

prominently featuring the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* [MVT], which comes to define the teachings of the Trika and Kaula at this time.

Like many emerging traditions, Abhinavagupta and his disciples were not only trying to develop their own all-encompassing non-dualist philosophy into a cohesive and coherent system, but also trying to promote the superiority and efficacy of their own school and views. To this end, he and other Kashmiri exegetes wrote and commented on a multitude of texts from a variety of traditions, interpreting them through their own non-dualist lens. In Abhinavagupta's view, the Trika-Kaula concepts were ultimately universal and their path, supreme - all seekers, regardless of affiliation, would eventually make their way to the Śaiva path on their journey to ultimate Truth, whether in this or a subsequent life. For him spiritual phenomena such as *samāveśa* or *śaktipāta* could be found in some form in all spiritual paths, since these phenomena were universal and innate in all beings, not just some sort of cultural construct (*akṛtrima*).¹¹⁹⁷ This was due to the viewpoints of his own particular school within the Trika - the *Pratyabhijñā* or "Recognition" school, which essentially aimed to uncover and "recognize" one's own true nature and identity as the Absolute, equated in the various Śaiva schools as being either Śiva or Śakti (or both).

Key teachers and sources of this tradition begin with the legendary sage Vasugupta (c. 875-925), who was said to have had a dream in which Śiva told him to go a mountain in Kashmir where he found divine verses inscribed upon a rock that become known as the *Śiva Sūtras*.¹¹⁹⁸ Apart from this divine revelation, other teachers included Somānanda (ca. 900-50), the founder of the *Trika-Pratyabhijñā* ("Recognition" school) who wrote the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi*,

¹¹⁹⁷ Wallis (2014: 264)

¹¹⁹⁸ There are some variations to this legend - see introductions in Dyczkowski, *The Aphorisms of Śiva: the Śiva Sūtra with Bhāskara's Commentary*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) and *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakārikā with Four Commentaries*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992a).

the "Vision of Siva", and his disciple Utpaladeva (ca. 925-75), who was the grand-teacher of Abhinavagupta. It was Abhinavagupta and his most famous disciple, Kṣemarāja, who established the dominance of non-dualist Śaivism within Kashmir for the next few centuries. Before turning to Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja, let us first look at some verses from their teachers.

Somānanda's unique viewpoints laid the foundations for the *Pratyabhijñā* and are expressed in his most famous work the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* (ŚD), a text heavily influenced by Kashmiri Śaiva Trika, Krama and Spanda schools, and often considered one of the very first tantric post-scriptural expressions of this new and radical form of philosophical non-dualism.¹¹⁹⁹ In contrast to other non-dualist schools, such as the Advaita Vedanta of Śankara, the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* describes an active and engaged God, who personally and directly enacts the activities of the universe and its inhabitants. Also, in contrast to the Śaiva Siddhāntins, the Trika-Kaulas were absolute monists, maintaining that the Lord, the individual soul, and the Universe/bond were not ontologically distinct, but part of a singular reality and agent whose ultimate nature was "pure consciousness" (expressed either as *samvit* or *cit*). The Universe and its inhabitants were simply emanations or vibrations of this Absolute Consciousness and the soteriological goal of the *sādhaka* was to first recognize and then immerse or merge one's individual consciousness back to its source.¹²⁰⁰ John Nemeč concisely summarizes Somānanda's view based on passages from the ŚD:

¹¹⁹⁹ Among the Trika, particularly the *Vijñānabhairava* (VBh). See Nemeč (2011) for more on these influences on the ŚD

¹²⁰⁰ Constantina Bailly Rhodes, *Shaiva Devotional Songs of Kashmir: A Translation and Study of Utpaladeva's Shivastotravali*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987): 169 nicely summarizes the school's philosophy: "The term *pratyabhijñā* is usually translated as recognition or recollection and has been explained as the "knowledge" (*jñāna*) to which one "turns back" (*prati*), and which in turn "faces toward" (*abhi*) the knower. In this system recognition is the realization of the identity of the *jivātman*, or individual self, with *paramātman*, the universal self. *Pratyabhijñā* is typified by the concept that the one reality is Siva, and that Siva expresses himself through Śakti with infinite *ābhāsas*, or manifestations."

Simply, Śiva is consciousness itself (ŚD 1.39a), which is all-pervasive, and Śiva and the universe are one and the same entity (ŚD 1.48ab, 1.49). The one can no more be separated from the other than a power can be separated from the agent who possesses it, just as an object cannot be separated from the action it performs (ŚD 6.1). As such, Śiva, the individual, and the entities found in the world are all equally Śiva himself. To put it in the language of the Trika...Śiva, his powers, and the individualized forms of consciousness are all one. The universe as it is known through one's every day, sensory experience is therefore absolutely real (ŚD 4.6cd–7ab; cf. ŚD 4.29), this insofar as it is the very form of Śiva's consciousness (see ŚD 5.3cd and 5.12; cf., e.g., ŚD 3.63–68ab) ... Śiva, one must recall, acts only out of his own desire to enjoy, to play (ŚD 1.36a), and not for any particular purpose. He acts as he does only because it is his nature to do so (ŚD 1.11cd–13ab), and the only telos Śiva pursues in engaging action is his own delight. (Indeed, Utpaladeva goes so far as to define play as the vibration of Śiva's consciousness in pursuit of joy). Thus, to engage in the world—that which is “reviled,” says Somānanda, referring to the erroneous perception of the world as being full of impurity (ŚD 1.25a–c)—is simply to indulge one's desires. For, there can be no other reason for action when one understands the agent to be utterly free.¹²⁰¹

This last point is critical and contrasts earlier non-dualist schools of Vedānta which held that the phenomenal world was ultimately an illusion and to be eschewed entirely. The Trika position, like that of many other Tantric schools, was that the phenomenal world was absolutely real, a concrete manifestation of Śiva's consciousness and power, his Śakti, and the means to attain the higher reality of Śiva. As an individuated entity, various limitations cause our individual consciousness to remain bound and ignorant regarding our true nature, identity, and capacities. To overcome this false viewpoint, *Pratyabhijñā* teaches that one must recognize that the bound world of *saṃsāra* is not a separate reality, but itself a manifestation of Śiva. As Constantine Bailey Rhodes writes,

When the individual acquires the recognition that Siva not only enjoys *svatantrya*, or freedom, but exists also in everything that is limited and bound, he immediately recognizes that he, in turn, is identified with that which is unlimited and absolutely free.¹²⁰²

¹²⁰¹ Nemeč (2011: 26-27)

¹²⁰² Rhodes (1987: 169)

There is little mention of *āveśa* or *samāveśa* in the earlier *Śiva Sutra* (ŚS) of Vasugupta, though important commentaries by Bhaskāra, a contemporary of Kṣemarāja, do use the term to interpret these earliest revelations. The meaning in Bhaskāra's commentary reflects an understanding of *āveśa* and *samāveśa* in the sense of penetration or absorption, though usually in relation to the idea that the *sādhaka* penetrates or is penetrated by his own true Self or pure consciousness (e.g., *svātmāveśa* ŚS 1.56; *cidrūpasamāveśa*, ŚS 1.59). In one case, there is mention of being possessed or possessing the "Divine Gesture" (*divyamudrāsamāveśāt*) when a *yogi* achieves awakening (*prabuddha*), by which he is then able to pervade (*vibhu*) the whole world and all of time.¹²⁰³ This is further related to ŚS 2.5 which states, "(The gesture of) Khecarī (one who wanders in the Sky of Consciousness) represents the state of Siva, when the knowledge innately inherent in one's own nature arises".¹²⁰⁴ Bhaskara's comments that this inherent pure knowledge dawns when the *yogi* emerges from the highest stages of contemplation (*samutthana*), and it is this which gives *mudrās* and *mantras* their vitality and power. Bhaskāra further comments that the *khecarīmudrā* is equated with state of Siva's (*śivāvasthā*),

...because it is risen in the sky of Siva and because it (is the power of awareness) which moves (*carāṇa*) in the expanse (*abhoga*) of the firmament of one's own consciousness (*svacit*). It is the dawn of realization (in which the *yogi* perceives) his identity with (Siva), the object of (his) meditation. And so, (this gesture) that possesses the contemplative absorption (*āveśa*) which penetrates into one's own nature, is Siva's state.¹²⁰⁵

We find these interpretations of *samāveśa* as a more abstract state of unity, immersion, or absorption with the Godhead slightly earlier in the writings of Jñānāneta, also known as Śivānanda, the founder of the Krama lineage (c. 850 CE). In his only surviving

¹²⁰³ *divyamudrāsamāveśātprabuddhaḥ sarvadā vibhuḥ* || ŚS 1.70

¹²⁰⁴ *vidyāsamutthāne svabhāvike khecarī śivāvasthā* ŚS 2.5

¹²⁰⁵ Translation of commentary based on Dyczkowski (1992: 76-77)

text, the *Kālikāstotra*, he claims that he had achieved a state of *samāveśa* when he wrote his inspired hymns, and gives a prayer that others may also achieve this:

O Mother, by your grace (*prasādena*), may these three worlds appropriate the nature of the Goddess that rests within the transcendental void, as I experienced it in the great cremation ground (*mahāśmaśāne*). Thus, this eulogy on one's own true nature (*svarupa*) has been expressed by me [Jñānanetra], who is Śiva, due to the power/will (*vaśena*) of the state of complete (*samyak*) possession/immersion (*samāveśa*). O Maṅgalā, may it be auspicious (*śivāya*) to the whole Universe, which is in fact my Self.¹²⁰⁶

This is an interesting verse, in that Jñānanetra explicitly claims the verses he wrote were a result of entering into the non-dual state of *samāveśa*, given to him via the grace of the Goddess. In this state of *samāveśa*, he suggests he channeled (i.e., "automatic writing") this eulogy from Śiva himself, who he declares is his own, and the Universe's, true nature. These ideas become foundational in the writings of Somānanda, Utpaladeva and, of course, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. Their work marks a shift to a new understanding of *āveśa/samāveśa* as being possessed or immersed in one's true nature (Śiva), which bears little resemblance to the wilder forms of possession found in earlier *Bhairavatantras*.

In Somānanda's opening verse of the ŚD, he expresses a similar sentiment to Jñānanetra's earlier hymn: "May Śiva, who has completely possessed our form (*asmadrūpasamāviṣṭaḥ*) by means of his own power (*śakti*) in restraining the self by his own Self, pay homage to His extended Self."¹²⁰⁷ Thanks to Jon Nemeč's recent translation of the *Śivadṛṣṭi* along with Utpaladeva's commentary, we can now get a better understanding of

¹²⁰⁶ *yādṛṅ mahāśmaśāne dṛṣṭam devyāḥ svarūpaṃ akulastham | tādṛg jagattrayam idaṃ bhavatu tavāmba prasādena || itthaṃ svarūpastutir abhyadhāyi samyaksamāveśadaśāvaśena | mayā śivenāstu śivāya samyaṅ mamaiva viśvasya tu maṅgalākhye | Kālikāstotra* vv. 19-20: Sanskrit and translation from Sanderson (2007b: 272).

¹²⁰⁷ *asmadrūpasamāviṣṭaḥ svātmanātmanivāraṇe | śivaḥ karotu nijayā namaḥ śāktyaḥ tatātmane || ŚD1.1*

Somānanda's meaning from his own foremost disciple. This is how Utpaladeva breaks down the meaning of this short verse, according to Nemeč's translation:

I, who pay homage, am Śiva, who has attained unity with my form, for in reality Śiva's form...is that of all the *tattvas* (constituent elements of reality). He makes entities appear to be located outside of himself for the sake of the world of transmigration (*saṃsāra*), by not perceiving (his) unity (with those entities) as a result of the power of *māyā*, as explained in greater detail in my *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* ("The Recognition of the Lord"). After that, wishing further to establish some of those [entities]... as the kind of cognitive agent in worldly activities that has my form, he sees them... as not different from himself, and he penetrates/possesses them (*samāviśat*). This is what [Somānanda] says.

In addition, accomplishment is possible only to the extent to which it is made possible by penetration (*samāveśa*). To start with, the first [*samāveśa*] is the connection with (the powers of) cognition and action conformable to agency, as it is stated in the *Spandaśāstra* - "Indeed, the individual does not function by dispatching the impulse of (his) will, but rather, because of (his) contact with his own power, he becomes equal to it."

It is similarly stated elsewhere that "(all) activity is the Lord's." With this doctrine, he implies the following as well: for the sake of (acquiring) the various kinds of powers, one must also practice *samāveśa* through one's own effort. He also says that both Śiva and (individuals,) Devadatta, etc., are penetrated (*samāviśta*), because they both become unified in the same way...Moreover, because everything is composed of Śiva, the means of action in homage—speech, the mind, etc.—are also nothing but Śiva. For this reason, he says, "by means of his own self."¹²⁰⁸

There is much to unpack in Somānanda's verse and Utpaladeva's commentary.

According to both, Śiva is the sole primary agent of the Universe and of all embodied beings within it - thus there is no difference at all, ultimately speaking, between the nature of Śiva, the Universe (the *tattvas*), and the agents (embodied or not) acting within it. At the time of manifestation, as explained by Utpaladeva, Śiva creates all these different entities, which appear distinct from him. Following this, he possesses or enters (*samāveśa*) into these embodied forms in order to animate and give them the powers to cognize and act (*jñānaśakti* and *kriyāśakti*, as seen in previous texts). This leads to the surprising conclusion that all

¹²⁰⁸ Translation by Nemeč (2011: 100-104).

beings in the Universe are *already* possessed in various degrees by Śiva and his inseparable Śakti at the time of creation - this is the first *samāveśa* Utpaladeva alludes to, the animating force of the Universe.

In Utpaladeva's primary work the *Īśvarapratyabhijñārikā* [ĪPK] and his auto-commentary, the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛti* [ĪPV], Utpaladeva explains worldly manifestation in terms of the polarities of *prakāśa* (light) and *vimarśa* (reflection), expansion and contraction, and the internality and externality of phenomena, the latter of which is caused by the power of illusion (*māyā*), the root cause of our ignorance and impurities.¹²⁰⁹ Though Somānanda makes no reference to *māyā* in his verse, it is key to Utpaladeva's cosmology, which states that *māyā* causes agents and objects of experience to appear distinct and seemingly external to Śiva,¹²¹⁰ acting as a veil obscuring one's recognition of their true identity as Śiva.¹²¹¹ This view was developed, according to Nemec, "...via the innovation of a theory that conceptualized, in a novel manner, the universe as a flow of power (*śakti*) that was controlled by Śiva himself"¹²¹² (i.e. on the level of the Absolute, *māyā* = *śakti*).

Nemec further notes that Utpaladeva describes four levels of possession/penetration (*samāveśa*) in the ĪPK, corresponding to the four levels which Śiva contracts himself in order to become the multitude of entities in the world. The four levels, in descending order, are at the level of the void (*śūnya*), the vital breath (*prāṇa*), the intellect (*buddhi*), and finally, the body (*deha*). In reference to the basest level, the level of the body, Utpaladeva states "...the first level, that of identification with the body, now has the powers to be able to cognize and

¹²⁰⁹ For examples, See ĪPK/ĪPV 3.2.5 for *māyā* as *māla* and ŚS 3.3: *kalādīnām tattvānām aviveko māyā*. "Māyā is ignorance of the *tattvas* beginning with *kalā* etc."

¹²¹⁰ ĪPVṛ 1.4.8; ĪPK 1.8.7

¹²¹¹ ĪPVṛ 1.1.3 and ĪPVṛ 1.1.5

¹²¹² Nemec (2011: 2-3).

act due to animating force of Śiva's possession (*samāveśa*)."¹²¹³ Furthermore, Utpaladeva states that if one wants to increase and obtain more powers, one must continue to cultivate the state *samāveśa*. Torella, who published the first full translation of the ĪP, states, "...he who seeks these powers must increasingly deepen this 'entry' into himself. However, Utpaladeva concludes, we can imagine that both Śiva and man enter and 'are entered', since the movement towards unity is the same in both."¹²¹⁴ In other words, like Śiva, the individual soul too must penetrate and possess one's true nature, which is none other than Śiva - thus a mutual act of penetration/possession must continually occur until one achieves total identification with their own Ultimate nature. Here possession or penetration (*āveśa/samāveśa*) is both an active and passive act - the first *samāveśa* being passive in which Śiva enters into the individual souls of all beings (as described above in Utpaladeva's commentary on the ŚD), while the final and culminating act, leading to powers and liberation, is the individual penetrating or possessing Śiva in return - the possessor and the possessed ultimately being one and the same. By doing this, the limited self of the individual contracts and is effaced, allowing it to expand to their greater Self, the true sole agent of the Cosmos and all its inhabitants, Śiva/Śakti. In the ĪP, Utpaladeva states that this is the true definition of *samāveśa*:

*mukhyatvaṃ karṭṛtāyās tu bodhasya ca cidātmanah |
śūnyādaṭṭadgūṇe jñānaṃ tatsamāveśalakṣaṇam || IP 3.2.12*

When agency and awareness is [known to be] the Self, which is pure consciousness, (*cidātmanah*), and [this notion] becomes predominant while [the limited knower i.e., the individuated self] in the qualities of the void etc. [prāṇa, mind, and body] are subordinated, then that is knowledge characterized by *samāveśa* ("immersion") into that [*cittattva* - "consciousness principle"].

¹²¹³ See ĪPK 3.2.11–12, ĪPV and ĪPVi on 3.2.12, and Torella (1994: xxxii).

¹²¹⁴ See Torella (1994: xxxii).

Utpaladeva comments upon his own verse, emphasizing that this knowledge of the Self is attained when immersed in "that Power" (*tacchaktisamāveśa*), which is also identified in the previous verse as *cittattvam*, the principle of pure consciousness (ĪPK 3.2.11) i.e., Śiva. Thus, one is possessed or immersed by the Śakti of Śiva, recalling the commonly used *rudraśaktisamāveśa* in earlier traditions.¹²¹⁵ However, this seems to be a different conception of "possession" compared to earlier traditions involving *yogins* hoping to be possessed by feminine spirits or by Rudra's power to achieve *siddhis*. Instead, as is clearly seen in Somadeva and Utpaladeva's interpretation, *samāveśa* is understood to be the final goal, equated with the state of liberation. Rather than an external agent entering their body, it is a co-penetration, a mutual possession in which the individual soul penetrates one's true Self, the eternal core of one's being. As one penetrates further and further through the layers of identification with body, mind, *prāṇa*, and void, only then does one experience a permanent possession through recognition of their identity with Śiva, the true Agent all along. In their interpretation then, *samāveśa* is the means to liberation, which is also *Pratyabhijñā*, the "recognition" that Śiva already has "penetrated" you and is your true identity. This understanding is made clear in his closing verses of the ĪPK, where Utpaladeva characterizes liberation as a continuous state of *āveśa*:

Thus, this new and easy path has been explained by me just as the great *guru* [Somānanda] expounded it in the *Śivadṛṣṭi śāstras*. One who places his feet on it, discovering in himself that the agency of all living beings consists of [the same] Divinity, and becoming immersed in it unceasingly (*aniśam āviśan*), is perfected.¹²¹⁶

¹²¹⁵ See Torella (1994: 202-203).

¹²¹⁶ *iti prakāṣito mayā sughaṭa eṣa mārgo navo mahāgurubhir ucyate sma śiva-drṣṭi-śāstre yathā | tad atra nidadhat padaṃ bhuvana-karṭṛtām ātmano vibhāvya śivatāmayīm aniśam āviśan siddhyati || ĪPK 4.16*

Utpaladeva's auto commentary (IPV) clarifies that this permanent state of possession by Śiva (*śivatāveśa*) can be defined as liberation while living, akin to the concept of *jivanmukti* in various traditions.¹²¹⁷

Not all the qualities of the earlier conceptions of *āveśa* are lost, however. Despite the often-abstract philosophical speculations of Utpaladeva, replete with the school's own technical vocabulary, it is actually through his devotional poetry, found in the *Śivastotrāvalī*, that a clearer understanding of his own journey and experience with *āveśa* can be understood. For example, Utpaladeva characterizes the feeling and experience of *samāveśa* as one of intoxication (*kṣīva*), filled with delight and rapture (*praharṣaparipūrīta*).¹²¹⁸ From his songs, it is clear that *āveśa* is not some sterile stoic experience, but one with great emotion, passion, and ecstasy. Below are a few excerpts of Utpaladeva's songs, all which contain the term *āveśa*, and which give the essence (*rasa*) of his own understanding:

"The Sixth Song - Tremblings along the Journey"

1. Separated from you even for an instant, O Lord, I suffer deeply. May you always be the subject of my sight.
2. Even if I am separated from the world of samsara, may I not be separated from you, My beloved.
3. Wherever I go with body, speech, and mind, everything that there is, is you alone. May this highest truth indeed become perfectly realized within me.
4. O Lord! Offering you prayers, may my speech become just as you are: Beyond all distinctions and filled with the highest bliss.
5. From the experience of immersion (*āveśa*) in you, may I wander about desireless, free of every need and desire, filled completely with rapture, seeing all of existence as You alone.¹²¹⁹

"The Eighth Song - Unearthly Strength"

3. Let me, like other people, yearn deeply for the objects of the world,
But allow me to view them as your form, O Lord, without contradiction.

¹²¹⁷ *etat pariśīlanena śivatāveśāj jīvaṇṇ eva mukto bhavati* || IPV 4.16. "By cultivating this [recognition], one becomes liberated in this very life due to immersion into the state of Śiva."

¹²¹⁸ *Śivastotrāvalī* 6.5

¹²¹⁹ Entire translation by Constantine Bailley Rhodes except for Sst_6.5 which has been modified [*bhavadāveśataḥ paśyan bhāvaṃ bhāvaṃ bhavanmayam & vicareyaṃ nirākāṅkṣaḥ praharṣaparipūrītaḥ* // Sst_6.5 //]. Full Sanskrit can be found in appendix of her book.

5. Let the sense faculties, full of delight, be attached to their respective objects. But may there not be, even for an instant, any loss of the joy of your nonduality.
6. As I become immersed (*āveśa*) within you, experiencing your form, cool, clear, soft, and pleasing, may I transcend conventional religious practice, categories, and manuals entirely.
7. May my body blossom into your true nature, the worlds become my limbs. May all this dualistic feeling, be forgotten forever, even after crossing into the realm of memory.¹²²⁰

“*The Sixteenth Song: Breaking out of the Fetters*”

3. Triumphant, they laugh (*hasa*), vanquished, they laugh even more. Those select few are intoxicated (*matta*) from drinking the divine nectar of your devotion (*bhakti*), O Lord.
4. Let me delight in the sweet, sublime bliss of your devotion, leaving behind not only base powers (*siddhis*), but even liberation (*muc*) itself.
6. Truly, I have no other entreaty but this: Let me for all time, O Lord, be perpetually possessed by devotion (*bhakti-āveśa*) [to You].
7. Mad with devotion (*bhaktikṣīvo*), let me be enraged (*kup*) and yet intimate (*ānuśī*) enough toward the world. May I laugh and weep and roar (the name) Siva!
8. Under the spell of devotion (*bhakti*), O Lord, let me be unhappy (*viśamastha*) yet content (*svastha*), weeping (*rudat*) yet laughing (*hasat*), unconscious (*vicitta*) yet deeply aware (*gambhīra*).
10. Though resembling blasphemers, the devotees, as if pierced internally (*āntarāviddhā*) with sharp needles which horripilate the skin (*tīkṣṇaromāñca-sūcibhih*), tremble with joy (*hr̥ṣyanti*) due to the drops of delicious nectar (*amṛta*).

With these few examples from the *Śivastotrāvalī*, we get a very different and, in my view, a more accurate picture of Utpaladeva and his philosophy surrounding *samāveśa*.

While he acknowledges multiple systems and paths, which claim to lead to some type of liberating identification with the Absolute, it is clear he considers the path of devotion to be of the highest order. Rhodes concisely explains the reasoning here, which is related to the Lord's primary activity of grace (*anugraha*):

...*anugraha*, is essential for the process of reintegration. It becomes manifest as the aspirant's devotion (*bhakti*) to the Lord. Thus, in the songs of the *Śivastotrāvalī* devotion and grace are equally important. When the aspirant begins to affect the

¹²²⁰ *laghumasṛṇasitācchaśīṭalaṃ bhavadāveśavaśena bhāvayan / vapur akhilapadārthapaddhater vyavahārān ativartayeya tān // ŚSV 8.6 //*

merging of his identity, he will recognize that the very act of his offering of devotion is but another aspect of the Lord's offering of grace.¹²²¹

ABHINAVAGUPTA AND SAMĀVEŚĀ

We now come to Abhinavagupta. To begin, we will look at his own commentary on his grand teacher Utpaladeva's opening verse in the ĪPK, which itself is a commentary on Somānanda's earlier verse from the ŚD. This is an excerpt from Sanderson's (2005: 80-82) translation:

[The hinderers (*vighnāḥ* to be dispelled] are such as the defect of distraction, that is, all the three kinds of affliction, mental (*ādhyātmika-*), [material (*ādhibhautika-*)], and [supernatural (*ādhidaiivika*)], and the various gods that empower them. [The hindering powers (*vighnāḥ*)] are able to impede a person's will even if he is free of delusion. For [while he remains in the world] the latent impressions of differentiated reality (*māyā*) continue to influence him, with the result that he still projects the sense of self on to his body, vital energy, and [mind]. . . . So initially, [before composing the treatise,] one should suppress identification (*tadrūpatā-tiraskāra*) with the body and the other levels of the individual self—this is the "bowing down" [that characterizes homage] - and so enter the state of immersion (*samāveśa*) in which one realizes the supremacy of the nature of Parameśvara... During this [*samāveśa*] the universe too is one with this true self, being nothing in its ultimate reality but undivided and autonomous consciousness. So [while the state continues] what can impede whom, and where? Thereafter, when one is producing the text, one has to focus on the individual self, since otherwise one would be incapable of composing the treatise, which can be accomplished only if it is brought down to the level of articulate speech. But [then] the hinderers have no power [to impede one], because one's inner force (*nijaujas*), which [now] blazes [more] intensely under the influence of the greater power (*mahaujas*) of the impression of that state of immersion, has inspired one to abandon one's [earlier] faith (*grahatā*) in the state of differentiation.¹²²²

¹²²¹ Rhodes (1987: 171)

¹²²² *ādhyātmikādayo 'navadhānadoṣādayas trividhā upaghātās tadadhiṣṭhātāraś ca devatāviśeṣāḥ | te ca prakṣīnamohasyāpi māyāsaṃskārāvinivṛttaśarīraprāṇaprabhṛtigatapramāṭṛbhāvasya pratyagātmanah prabhavye yur apīchāvighātāya... iti pratyagātmani śarīrādau tadrūpatātiras-kāreṇāvanatirūpeṇa prathamasaṃskāre parameśvarasvarūpotkarṣaparāmarśātmā samāveśaḥ . . . svikāryaḥ | tatra hi sati viśvam api svātmabhūtam abhinnavatantrasaṃvinmātraparamārtham bhavati. iti kaḥ kasya kutra vighnāḥ | anantaram tu granthakarānakāle yady api pratyagātma-prādhānyam eva anusandheyamanyathā vaikhariṇīparyantaprāptinirvāhyaśāstraviracanānupapateḥ tathāpi tatsamāveśasaṃskāramahaujojāyvalyamānanijaujaḥsamujjihāsītābhedagrahatayā na prabhanti vighnāḥ.* Sanskrit edition excerpt and translation based on Sanderson, "A Commentary on the Opening Verses of the Tantrasāra of Abhinavagupta", in *Sāmarasya: Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy, and Interreligious Dialogue*

The "hinderers" (*vighnāh*) Abhinavagupta mentions recall the obstructing and possessing seizers (*grahas*) who cause various mental, physical, or spiritual afflictions from earlier traditions. However, Abhinavagupta abstracts and expands the understanding of these "afflictions" - in his view, the primary affliction obstructers are hindering is the spiritual path an adept is on, by continuing to bind one to differentiated reality (*māyā*) and dualistic thinking. On a more practical level, of course, this is a hinderance if one is composing a spiritual treatise or poetry, as Abhinavagupta points to here. As we saw with Jñānānētra and Somānanda, both authors claim to have been immersed/possessed by Śiva during their composition, giving Him full agency and credit for their scriptural work. They recognized that their compositions were essentially "channeled" texts, and they were merely a conduit for the Supreme Agent, Śiva himself. In the above passage, Abhinavagupta briefly details the method needed to produce a treaty of such nature - first one must "suppress" their individual ego, then temporarily fuse with their expanded Self in order to recognize their true identity as Śiva, allowing "them" to experience *samāveśa* and channel these higher teachings. However, Abhinavagupta makes clear that if one is going to actually sit and write down the teachings, the adept, like Śiva, must once again "contract" their identity to an individuated level of a human so that they can express this experience into articulate speech, implying that during the state of *samāveśa* one is incapable of doing so due to a loss of agency.¹²²³

Besides helping the author write inspired works, Abhinavagupta suggests that these preparatory verses and associated state of *samāveśa* can also be used to dispel malevolent

in *Honour of Bettina Bäumer*, eds. Sadānanda Das and Ernst Furlinger, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005: 80-82 and fn. 7), verses are from ĪPVi (2.1-4; 9-12; 14-16; 18-23)

¹²²³ On this verse, Sanderson (2005: 90) writes "For it expresses our author's immersing himself in his true identity and thereby achieving for a moment the state of enlightenment which alone can inspire and sustain a work that will expound the nature of that state and the means by which it may be realized."

obstructors, include possessing seizers of various sorts.¹²²⁴ Also implied is the idea that this particular form of *samāveśa* is temporary and not complete enlightenment (i.e. "permanent possession") due to the remaining bonds associated with the body - therefore one's enlightenment needs to be reinforced through repeated acts of *samāveśa*, until final liberation is achieved.

In chapter 1 of the TĀ (1.168-170), we find Abhinavagupta's interpretation and definition of the term *āveśa*, which appears in his commentary on the three forms of *āveśa* from MVT 2.21-23, namely the *śāmbhava*, *śākta*, and *āṇava* forms of *āveśa* discussed earlier.

Āveśa is that state which is one's Supreme nature (*paratadrūpatā*), which [comes] from the primordial Śambhu (Śiva), who is undivided from [His] Śakti (Power) and [arises] by submerging (*nimajjanāt*) one's individual self (*svatadrūpa*), which lacks autonomy (*asvatantrasya*), [into it].¹²²⁵

Abhinavagupta clarifies in the next verse that this state can arise spontaneously when the individual subject, who in reality is a reflection in the mirror of the Supreme Subject (*māṭṛdarpaṇabimbitam*), is submerged or subordinated (*adharī-kurvāt*) to that Supreme Agent.¹²²⁶ Furthermore, he states, this cognized reality (*jñeya*) is two-fold in nature: on one hand there is Pure Consciousness (*Cit*), or the true Subject, which is primordial (*ādyā*) and ultimately Real (*satya*), while the second is Insentience or the object (*jaḍa*), which is artificially constructed (*kalpita*). While the second may appear real, in Abhinavagupta's non-

¹²²⁴ Recall the psychological demons that attack initiates and even the Buddha during his own enlightenment process, discussed earlier.

¹²²⁵ *āveśaś cāsvatantrasya svatadrūpanimajjanāt || paratadrūpatā śambhor ādyāc chaktyavibhāginah | TĀ 173cd-174ab*

¹²²⁶ *tenāyam atra vākyaṛtho vijñeyam pronmiṣat svayam || vināpi niścayena drāṇ māṭṛ-darpaṇa-bimbitam || māṭṛam adharīkuryāt svam vibhūtiṃ pradarśayat || TĀ 174cd-175ab*

dualist view it is ultimately not Real.¹²²⁷ Here Abhinavagupta seems to want to distinguish *samāveśa* as "immersion" rather than "possession" for he says,

Samāveśa by something Unaware (*jaḍa*) has the appearance of a reflected image while *samāveśa* by Pure Consciousness (*caitanya*) is indeed none other than identification/union with it.¹²²⁸

Thus, in Abhinavagupta's view, "possession" by any entity that is not one's true subjective nature is ultimately unreal in the same way a reflected image is. Abhinavagupta use of the reflected image or mirror as a metaphor recalls many descriptions of *āveśa* by demonic beings that we saw in earlier medical literature. Whether this was purposeful is not clear, but it was a well-known common cultural trope throughout South Asia that had existed long before Abhinavagupta, one which he was likely aware of. Regardless, he believes that it is only possession by one's Pure Consciousness, their true subjectivity, which is superior and results in identification or union with this highest consciousness, equated, in the following verses, with *śāmbhava-samāveśa*. This immersion into or by Śāmbhava (Śiva), he continues, automatically produces a state of non-duality which is characterized by "non-conceptual consciousness" (*avikalpā-saṃvitti*). It is ultimately this non-dual state which leads to full identification and union with Śiva (*śivatādātmyama*), the Absolute Reality [TĀ 1.178-179].¹²²⁹

These three forms of *āveśa* become a central typology to Abhinavagupta and the Trika-Kaula in general, reformulating them to mean not just a type of religious experience, but as three "means" or "practices" (*upāyas*) to *samāveśa* - *śāmbhavopāya* ("the way of

¹²²⁷ *jñeyam dvidhā ca cinmātram jaḍam cādyam ca kalpitam || itarat tu tathā satyaṃ tad-vibhāgo 'yam īdrśaḥ |* TĀ 176cd-177ab

¹²²⁸ *jaḍena yaḥ samāveśaḥ sapratichandakākṛtiḥ || caitanyena samāveśas tādātmyam nāparam kila |* TĀ 177cd-178ab

¹²²⁹ *tenāvikalpā saṃvittirbhāvanādyanapekṣiṇī || śivatādātmyamāpannā samāveśo 'tra śāmbhavaḥ /* TĀ 178cd-179ab

Śambhu/Śiva"), *śaktopāya* ("the way of Śakti or Power"), and *āṇavopaya* ("the way of the limited individual"). As we saw in MVT 2.21, *āṇava-samāveśa* (corresponding to Abhinavagupta's *āṇavopaya*) is an experience of immersion/possession by one's own individualized essence (*jīva*), which is beyond the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and which is attained through individualized ritual and yogic practices such as *uccāra*, *mudrā*, *dhyāna*, *mantra* practice, and external ritual offerings. *Śākta-āveśam* [MVT 2.22], on the other hand, corresponds to *śaktopāya* and is a purely gnostic exercise involving reflection and contemplation of one's true nature. Finally, *śāmbhava-samāveśa* (MVT 2.23) transcends all discursive thought, including the mind itself, resulting in an intense and immediate non-dualistic awakening experience. Though these three experiences appear different in the MVT, in Abhinavagupta's interpretation it is really the methods alone that are different - all three methods, he believes, will ultimately lead to the same goal, the lower methods eventually getting subsumed by the higher methods. These ideas become central organizing principles throughout the TĀ.¹²³⁰

INITIATION AND SAMĀVEŚA IN THE TĀ

Initiation in the TĀ is closely tied with *samāveśa*, like earlier Śaiva initiations we've seen involving a blindfolded disciple in a *maṇḍala* and possession by the *guru* and/or deity. An interesting paragraph summarizing all the different initiations in the major Śaiva traditions up to this point is found in Jayaratha's commentary (*Tantrāloka*) on

¹²³⁰ See Wallis (2014: 178) for more on this - "This exemplifies Abhinava's vision of the path in terms of the three *upāyas*, whereby *āṇavopāya* (= *kriyopāya* = *yoga*) collapses into *śaktopāya* (= *jñānopāya* = *vikalpa-saṃskāra*), which itself dissolves into *śāmbhavopāya*, the direct means (*icchā/pratibhā*)."

Tantrāloka 13.302. Jayaratha concisely characterizes each of these five primary initiations according to what school they belonged to:

Initiation (*dīkṣā*) is taught to be of five kinds. In the Siddhānta it is [principally] through offerings into the fire. In the Tantras [of Bhairava i.e., Svachchandantra] it is the fusion (*yojanikā*) [of the soul of the candidate with the deity at the end of the fire-ritual that is crucial]. In the Trika [= *Mālinīvijayottara*,] initiation requires [one of the modes of penetration by Rudraśakti known as] *samāveśa*. In the Kula [= *Bhairavakula*] it is a state of automatism (*stobhaḥ*) [in which it is the possessing deity that moves one's limbs]. In the Kaula [= *Vīrāvalī/Siddhavīrāvalī*] it is a state of spontaneous fusion (*sāmarasa*) [with the consciousness of the initiator].¹²³¹

In these brief verses, five initiations from five traditions are given along with the central feature of each initiatory experience (Sanderson includes the primary scriptures as well, based on sources from Abhinavagupta).¹²³² Though *yojanikā* is found in the Siddhāntas as well, it does not predominate as it does in the *Svacchandantra*, where it becomes a key feature, as discussed earlier. As we've also seen, the term *samāveśa* is central in Trika initiations (e.g., in MVT 11). Jayaratha also characterizes the primary initiation/possession state among the Kulas as "*stobha*", which here, according to Sanderson, refers to "paralysis (*stobhaḥ*) of the initiand's physical agency as his body and consciousness are taken over by the Goddess".¹²³³ Thus, it refers to a form of "automatism", which aptly describes the *śiva-* or *śakti-hasta* rites we saw earlier in MVT 11 and the TU, that cause automatic or involuntary movement of the limbs, due to possession by Śiva and/or Śakti. We saw the use of this term even earlier in texts where it simply means "paralysis", often as one of the signs of "proofs" (*pratyaya*) of possession. However, its use in initiation rites puts it closer to Sanderson's

¹²³¹ *hautrī dīkṣā tu siddhānte tantrē yojanikā smṛtā || trike samāveśavatī kule stobhātmikā matā || sāmarasyamayī kaule dīkṣā pañca-vidhoditā ||* commentary by Jayaratha on TĀ 13.302

¹²³² Sanderson (2014: 61 fn. 231)

¹²³³ Sanderson (2014: 61 fn. 231). Jayaratha is said to be quoting the lost *Vīrāvalīkula*, a Kaula Trika scripture, for this characterization.

interpretation of "automatism".¹²³⁴ Finally in the Kaula, a more mature form of the Kula and the tradition Abhinavagupta most explicitly belongs to, he describes the primary state with the more refined term, *sāmarasa*. We saw this employed throughout the Kubjikā scriptures and even earlier in the NTS, where it means "oneness" or "fusion" with the deity.

We find an example of an initiation ceremony in chapter fifteen of the TĀ, which involves the guru once again leading his blindfolded disciple to the *maṇḍala* of the clan deities. Upon seeing the *maṇḍala*, made of colored powders and empowered by the *mantras* of the deities, the text states the disciple becomes “possessed” (*āveśa*) by the enlivened mantras (*māntraprabhāvollāsite*) and “becomes one with them” (*tanmayatvaṃ*).¹²³⁵ This possession is also understood by Abhinavagupta as a consecration by *śaktipāta* ("The Descent of Power), resulting in the divine energy (*śakti*) fusing with the initiate’s sense organs and giving them the ability to “see” the presence of invisible mantras. With this power, Abhinavagupta claims they can see the *mantras* that have been installed (*vinysta*) on a body (*deha*), sacred ground (*sthala*), water pot (*jala*), image (*pratima*), and other items commonly divinized in tantric ritual. The text declares that in this state the disciple can see *mantras* in the same way that someone who has become possessed by malevolent spirits (*bhūtādimudritāḥ*) can see the rays of *mantras* which are installed onto a guru’s body (*nyastamantrāmśu*), causing the possessed being to tremble in fear (*trasyanti*).¹²³⁶ Here again

¹²³⁴ Slouber (2017: 75 and 305 fn.63) notes similar usage in Garuḍa portions of the Śaṅkuka’s *Samhitāsāra* (v. 78) and Bandhuṣeṇa’s commentary to *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* (10.1 & 10.7), where he glosses *stobha* as a form of possession (*āveśa*).

¹²³⁵ TĀ 15.452ab: *tadāveśavaśāc chiśyas tanmayatvaṃ prapadyate*

¹²³⁶ *paśyaty evaṃ śaktipātasamskṛto mantrasannidhim | cakṣurādīndriyānām hi sahakāriṇi tādrśe || saty atyantam adrśte prāg api jāyeta योग्यात | kṛtaprajñā hi vinyastamantraṃ dehaṃ jalaṃ sthalam || pratimādi ca paśyanto viduḥ samnidhyasamnidhī | nyastamantrāmśusubhagāt kiṃcidbhūtādimudritāḥ || trasyantīveti tat tac cid akṣais tat-sahakāribhiḥ | TĀ 15.453-455*

we see the close connection between *āveśa* as possession and *śaktipāta* – terms that have now become virtually synonymous in the Trika-Kaula texts of this period.

As mentioned previously, in Abhinavagupta's non-dualist and universalist view, all religious experiences, particularly *samāveśa* and *śaktipāta*, can be found in some form in all spiritual paths, since these phenomena were innate in all beings. An important question he investigates and clarifies in his work is the various causes and reasons why and when *śaktipāta* occurs - a question that applies equally to the experience of *āveśa*, given the conceptual overlap of these two terms in the Trika-Kaula. Abhinavagupta categorizes all the various understandings of these causes into nine types, alluding to the various religious traditions of that period.¹²³⁷ He writes,

Since a person thinks of himself in a variety of ways, a nine-fold arrangement of *śaktipāta* has been here taught. It could be no other way, for otherwise there would sometimes be attachment or aversion on the part of the Lord. Because the Lord may cause his own constant (*niyata*) Power to Descend anywhere [and anytime], this *śaktipāta* of Mahēśvara is [essentially] uncaused. Thus, that Power is said [by others] to descend: because of the dissolution of desire (the *Sāṅkhya* view), because of an equal opposition of karmas (scriptural Śaiva Siddhānta), because of the weightiness of good works (*Vaidika* or *Paurāṇika*), because of the "ripening of Impurity" (Śaiva Siddhānta exegetes), because of meeting a saint (lit., good-hearted person), because of devotion (*bhakti*), birth (cf. *Yogasūtra* 4.1), or service [to a *sadguru*], because of practice (Yoga), because of breaking through a conditioned pattern (*vāsanā*), because of the maturation of one's *saṃskāras* (Yoga), because of the removal of false knowledge (Vedānta), because of renouncing karma (Jaina?), because of letting go of what is desired (Bauddha?), and because of equanimity of mind (*Gītā*).¹²³⁸

As Abhinavagupta states near the beginning of the verse, he believes there is, in fact, no cause for the Descent of Power (*śaktipāta*) - it is Śiva alone who brings this about due to

¹²³⁷ This typology was adapted from the MVT's categorization of the four recipients of Śiva's grace (*anugraha*) found in MVT 1.48.

¹²³⁸ Translation and interpretation of the various traditions alluded to by Abhinavagupta based on Wallis (2014: 264-265)

his own Will (*icchā*) and through his grace. He thus rejects all the other tradition's positions regarding this larger debate, explaining:

It is only by the pure self-luminous Śiva that this [grace] is caused. And He causes the manifestation of its various degrees entirely by means of His autonomous will alone. For those who do not desire fruits, [in contrast to those striving only for liberation] *śaktipāta*, which is devotion to Śiva, is not dependent upon clan lineage, birth, body, action, age, or religious practice.¹²³⁹

The primary reason for Abhinavagupta's refutation of these other theories is due to his belief that the fundamental characteristic of the highest principle, Śiva, was His "Power of Absolute Freedom" (*svātantryaśakti*). Attributing a cause to the descent would imply that the all-powerful Lord is limited or beholden in some way to *karma* or some other cosmic Law. Instead, Abhinavagupta believes that *śaktipāta* could occur spontaneously to anyone and at any time, and was solely due to Śiva's grace, irrespective of one's caste, age, gender, practice, etc. Thus, even a great sinner could receive Śiva's grace and take up the Śaiva path. However, we should note that Abhinavagupta makes a distinction that this is specifically the case for those "who do not desire fruits" (*aphalārthinām*), but liberation alone, which in his mind is a superior intention resulting in higher forms of *śaktipāta*.¹²⁴⁰ Karma, according to Abhinavagupta, does have some effect, but only to those who strive for *siddhis* or pleasures in various paradises and heavenly realms - for them, he states, *karma* is certainly at play (*yas tu bhogotsukasya sa karmāpekṣaḥ*). For those who seek both enjoyment *and* liberation,

¹²³⁹ *tena śuddhaḥ svaprakāśaḥ śiva evātra kāraṇam || sa ca svācchandyamātreṇa tāratamyaprakāśakaḥ | kulajātivapuṣkarmavayonuṣṭhānasampadaḥ || anapekṣya śive bhaktiḥ śaktipāto 'phalārthinām | TĀ 13.116cd-118ab*

¹²⁴⁰ On this, Abhinavagupta writes: *yā phalārthitayā bhaktiḥ sā karmādyam apekṣate || tato 'tra syāt phale bhedo nāpavarge tv asau tathā | bhogāpavargadvitayābhisandhātur api sphuṭam || prāgbhāge 'pekṣate karma citratvān nōttare punaḥ | TĀ 13.118cd-120ab* "But the devotion one has when desiring some fruit, that depends on karma etc. For this reason, there should be a variety [of actions] with regard to the fruit [one aims for], but not with regard to liberation. As for the one who aims at both enjoyment and liberation, clearly [*śaktipāta*] depends on karma for the former because of the variety [of enjoyments], but not for the latter." Translation based on Ferrario (2015: 194)

however, the *śaktipāta* received, he states, is both dependent and independent - enjoyment is dependent on action (*karma*), while liberation is independent of any action.¹²⁴¹

Abhinavagupta refutes all these other various theories at length throughout both the TĀ, particularly chapter thirteen, and his *Tantrasāra* [TS], particularly chapter fifteen. For example, anticipating the objections of those who believe *śaktipāta*, or any other religious experience for that matter, is a result of worship and other religious activities, Abhinavagupta states:

"But surely", one may object, "those who have attained the state of Mantra-beings etc. do so through worship (*pūjā*), mantra recitation (*japa*), meditation/visualization (*dhyāna*), devotional service to Śaṅkara/Śiva (*śaṅkarāsevanā*) and so forth. How then can they be independent from *karma*?" It is not so. Let us examine *why* in the first place they become engaged in mantra recitation, meditation on Śiva, etc. who is beyond such kinds of things. Karma, the equality of karma, detachment, the ripening of *mala* etc. have been refuted [as causes]. If, [on the other hand], you say that the cause is the will of the Lord (Śiva), then *śaktipāta* is the only [and original] cause/impulse (*hetutā*). Thus, [activities] such as mantra recitation etc. are nothing but [Śiva's] *kriyāśakti* (power of action), they are not (simply) *karma*. For what is known in the world as *karma*, is that which, bestowing lower enjoyment, conceals the true nature of the experiencer. But we do not agree with (or) maintain such terms [like *karma*].¹²⁴²

Thus, it is not *karma*, or the variety of causes proposed by others. Rather *śaktipāta*, Abhinavagupta restates, occurs solely due to the absolute free will of Śiva. Abhinavagupta implies that it is due to this Descent that the seeker even begins to seek in the first place, an idea inherited from earlier Atimārga, Siddhānta, and Trika texts we mentioned previously.¹²⁴³

¹²⁴¹ *bhogamokṣobhayotsukasya bhoge karmāpekṣo mokṣe tu tannirapekṣaḥ iti sāpekṣanirapekṣaḥ* | TS 11.5

¹²⁴² *nanu pūjājapadhyānaśaṅkarāsevanādibhiḥ || te mantrādītvam āpannāḥ katham karmānapekṣiṇaḥ | maivam tathāvidhottirṇaśivadhyānajapādiṣu || pravṛttir eva prathamam eṣāṃ kasmād vivicyatām | karmatatsāmyavairāgyamalapākādi dūṣitam || īṣvarecchā nimittaṃ cec chaktipātaikaheturā | japādikā kriyāśaktir evetthaṃ na tu karma tat || karma tallokarūḍhaṃ hi yad bhogam avaraṃ dadat | tirodhatte bhoktrūpaṃ samjñāyāṃ tu na no bharaḥ ||* TĀ 13.259-263. See Ferrario's (2015: 196 fn. 535) translation, which differs from my own.

¹²⁴³ This is an idea seen in early Atimārga texts (e.g., *Saṃskāra-vidhi* v. 10 & 21), Siddhānta texts e.g., *Mataṅgapārameśvara* verse 4 on the *pāśupatavṛata*, *Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha*, *Mṛgendrāgama*, *Kiraṇatantra*, and *Bhairavatantras* such as BYT 3.213ab and MVT 2.12

A person with great devotion and who is engaged in various religious activities does so because Śiva impels (*hetu*) them, from the very beginning, to do so. These are not considered karmic actions, in the sense of ordinary actions, but rather the Lord's own "Power of Action" (*kriyaśakti*), which ultimately causes *śaktipāta* to occur whenever the Lord decides to reveal his divine nature as the true identity of the seeker. Abhinavagupta continues, laying out his own stance:

By contrast, in our tradition which teaches nonduality (*advaya*) in regard to the Supreme Lord, who is absolutely independent (*svatantra*) goes like this: The Supreme Lord, through His play (*krīdayā*), conceals his true nature (*svarūpācchādana*) as an embodied individual (*pudgalo 'nuḥ*) who is bound (*paśuḥ*), although there is no contradiction to his true nature in regard to the divisions of space and time. In the same way [i.e., His play], by ending the concealment of his true nature, and returning to that true nature coming [either] instantaneously or gradually, He is called an individual soul who is a vessel for *śaktipāta*. He remains the Supreme Śiva, whose essence is autonomy and the One who will cause the Power (*śakti*) to descend. Thus, the Descent of Power is completely independent, and results in the expansion of one's true nature.¹²⁴⁴

According to Abhinavagupta's non-dualism, Śiva and the individual soul are ultimately one and the same - any appearance of difference is based upon ignorance of one's true nature and is, in reality, due to Śiva's "yoga of divine play" (*krīḍāyogād* TA 13.102). As discussed earlier, this "play" involves his concealment (*tirobhāva*), one of his cosmic functions, the opposite of which is his expansion, associated with *anugraha*, His cosmic function of grace. TĀ 13.103-05 describes how Śiva, whose essence is pure consciousness (*cidrūpa*) and light (*prakāśātmā*), binds himself in the world freely, via his yoga of divine play (*krīḍāyoga*) through *karmas* consisting of "artificially fashioned conceptual thinking" (*kalpitākāravikalpātmakakarmabhiḥ*), to become the manifold individual entities (*aṅur*

¹²⁴⁴ *svatantraparameśādvayavāde tu upapadyate etat yathāhi parameśvaraḥ svarūpācchādanakrīdayā paśuḥ pudgalo 'nuḥ sampannaḥ, na ca tasya deśakālasvarūpabhedavirodhaḥ tadvat svarūpasthanaganavinivṛtyā svarūpapratyāpattiḥ jhaṭiti vā krameṇa vā samāśrayan śaktipātapātram anuḥ ucyate, svātantryamātrasāras ca asau paramaśivaḥ śakteḥ pātayitā. iti nirapekṣa eva śaktipāto yaḥ svarūpaprathāphalaḥ* TS 11.4

anekakah) which make up the cosmos. Lord Śiva's greatness, however, according to Abhinavagupta, is tied to his quality of absolute autonomy and his ability, even as an individuated entity, to "touch" (*spr̥ṣati*) His own true nature and make it manifest.¹²⁴⁵ Similar to the yoga of possessing other bodies, detailed by David White in *Sinister Yogis*, we also find a quote from Abhinavagupta which describes this “touch” in terms of “rays” which penetrate or possess it (*samāviśet*):

When the obstructing power [i.e., the *vighnāḥ* or impurities] has ceased, then the individual soul is touched by Śiva’s rays (*śivaraśmibhiḥ*). Thus touched, one certainly penetrates (*samāviśet*) into one’s own [powers of] knowledge and action, blossomed like the sunstone incited by sunrays... This is what is known as *śaktipāta*, as taught in the *śāstras*.¹²⁴⁶

In this non-dualist view then, divine grace is ultimately the act of the Lord gracing himself. This view is used by Abhinavagupta to eliminate the problem of partiality his dualist opponents raise – partiality is not an issue, since no soul is ultimately separate from Śiva. An interesting statement is made also in TĀ 13.103-5, regarding how souls are bound through “artificially-fashioned thought-structures” – seemingly, it is through conceptual thought that the Supreme Soul becomes contracted into an individual soul, an idea we saw earlier in the MVT, and which Abhinavagupta obviously draws upon.

As discussed earlier, for Siddhāntin dualist schools the bond of Impurity (*mala*) is like a material substance which covers the soul. For nondualists like Abhinavagupta, however, it is simply Śiva’s temporary state of contracted consciousness - while in this state one is ignorant of their true nature, considering themselves an individual soul (*aṇutva*). Only

¹²⁴⁵ *sa svayaṃ kalpitākāravikalpātmakakarmabhiḥ badhnāty ātmānam eveha svātantryād iti varṇitam || svātantryamahimaivāyaṃ devasya yad asau punaḥ | svam rūpaṃ pariśuddhaṃ sat spr̥ṣaty apy aṇutāmayaḥ ||* TĀ 13.104-105

¹²⁴⁶ *tasya roddhrī yadā śaktirudāste śivaraśmibhiḥ | tadānuḥ spr̥ṣyate spr̥ṣtaḥ svake jñānakriye sphuṭe || samāviśedayam sūryakānto'rkeṇeva coditaḥ* TĀ 50-51. ab ... *sa eṣa śaktipātākhyah śāstreṣu paribhāṣyate ||* TĀ 52cd

when this contracted perception ends, and an expansion of consciousness begins, does one's innate nature shine forth.¹²⁴⁷ Thus “karmic” actions *per se* are of no use for the goal of achieving liberation, rather it is right knowledge and perspective which destroys the illusory bonds of an individuated self. In this sense then, Śaiva religious practices (worship, mantra recitation, and meditation) are reinterpreted by the exegetes not as mere individual actions, but as expressions of Śiva’s own cosmic Power of Action (*kriyaśakti*), which bestows knowledge to reveal His own nature to Himself. Religious practices, though capable of some fruits, is considered inferior by Abhinavagupta to the superior practice of reflective awareness (*āmarśana*) directed toward one’s own nature. This is the one act, he concedes, for one can say there is a “particular time” (*kāla*) when the soul is ready for *śaktipāta* to descend. It is this state of "readiness" (*yogyatā*) which makes one fit for the yoga of identification with Śiva (*śivatādātmyayoga*).¹²⁴⁸

This “reflective awareness” (*āmarśana*) is thus the pre-condition which allows and draws the *śakti* to the individuated soul in a process of self-revelation, making the individual ready for a state of non-duality and full identification with the Lord. In dualistic traditions, this *śakti* or grace is seen to come from an external source, but here we see a very different conception. As Wallis succinctly puts it, “Insofar as one can speak of Śiva and an individual soul as two aspects of one reality, their underlying unity requires that the individual is as much an agent of this process as God.”¹²⁴⁹ In other words, when the individual soul begins to reflect on one's own nature, it begins the process of expansion, which eventually leads to

¹²⁴⁷ *ajñānarūpatā puṃsi bodhaḥ saṃkocite hr̥di | saṃkoce vinivṛtte tu svasvabhāvaḥ prakāśate || TĀ 13.213*

¹²⁴⁸ TĀ 13 *asyārtha ātmanaḥ kācit kalanāmarśanātmikā | svaṃ rūpaṃ prati yā saiva ko 'pi kāla ihoditaḥ || 204 yogyatā śivatādātmyayogārhatvam ihocyate | 205ab* Abhinavagupta is commenting on MVT (1.42) cited at TA 13.199c-203: *evam asyātmanaḥ kāle kasmimścid yogyatāvaśāt | śaivī sambadhyate śaktiḥ śāntā muktiphalapradā || MVT 1.42* Thus, at a particular time (*kāla*), because of a soul’s readiness [for liberation], it combines with Siva’s auspicious Power (*śāntā śaktiḥ*), which bestows the fruit of liberation.

¹²⁴⁹ Wallis (2014: 288)

insight of their true identification with Śiva, leading ultimately to true liberation.

Abhinavagupta summarizes this by stating:

The Lord of the gods binds and He himself liberates. He himself is the experiencer, He himself is the knower, He perceives things as himself. He himself is enjoyment and liberation, He is the goddess, He is the Lord, He is the [female mantra-deity of a] single syllable, like the heat for the fire.¹²⁵⁰

DEGREES OF ŚAKTIPĀTA AND ĀVEŚA IN THE TĀ

Although Abhinavagupta rejected beliefs on the various causes of *śaktipāta*, he did believe that there were various degrees in regard to the intensity of *śaktipāta*, each causing its own sort of spiritual experience. As mentioned previously, he asserts there are a total of nine kinds of *śaktipāta* and goes into great detail to explain them [TĀ 13.129-254] – the three larger categories are known as “intense” (*tīvra*), “moderate” (*madhya*) and “mild” (*manda*) *śaktipāta*, while each category has three more degree variants, known as “superior” (*utkarṣa*), “medium” (*mādhyasthya*), and “lower” (*nikarṣa*).¹²⁵¹ Generally speaking, the intense forms of *śaktipāta* seem to be primarily received by those who go on to become gurus/*ācāryas*, while the “moderate” and “mild” forms of *śaktipāta* result in various kinds of ordinary Śaiva initiates who constitute the vast majority of practitioners - those who attain liberation only after death, with or without also attaining supernatural powers or enjoyments. *Utkrṣṭa-tīvrāt* (“superior-intense”), for example results in immediate death of the body, while simultaneously leading to the attainment of the state of the Supreme Lord and liberation.¹²⁵² For those whose desire for enjoyment predominates, the text states, *śaktipāta* is “mild”,

¹²⁵⁰ Quoting the Trikaśāra, 511 a non-dualist scriptural source,

¹²⁵¹ *sa cāyaṃ śaktipāto navadhā -- tīvramadhyamandasya utkarṣamādhyasthyanikarṣaiḥ punas traividhyāt*

¹²⁵²: *tīvratīvraḥ śaktipāto dehapātavaśāt svayam || mokṣapradas tadaivānyakāle vā tāratamyataḥ | TĀ 13.130cd-131ab*

eventually resulting in liberation, but in some future life.¹²⁵³ Abhinavagupta spends most of his time on the category of *madhya-tīvra* (medium-intense) *śaktipāta*, the second highest form, which does not destroy the body, but rather destroys ignorance as it results in a spontaneous arising of intuitive insight (*svapratyayasya prātibhajñānodayah*) without the need for *gurus*, scriptures, or initiations. For Abhinavagupta these exceptional recipients become, in essence, self-revealed gurus (*prātibhaguru*) who are "spontaneously-perfected" (*sāmsiddhika*) and "consecrated and initiated directly by the goddesses of his own consciousness," (*abhṣiktaḥ svasaṃvittidevībhir dīkṣitaś ca saḥ*).

While this idea of varying degrees of *śaktipāta* and its results can be found earlier in the SYM (2.6-8), in connection with the powers of *gurus* who have been "possessed by the Śakti of Rudra" (*rudraśaktisamāveśa*), and in the MVT's (11.17-27) description of the *śivahasta* rite, which results in "automation", Abhinavagupta's system is much more

¹²⁵³ The different degrees he describes in TĀ 13.129-254 are summarized as 1. *Utkrṣṭa-tīvrāt* ("superior-intense") The superior-intense type of *śaktipāta* results immediately in the falling away of the body (*dehapāta*) (i.e., death) and bestowing liberation automatically. 2. *madhya-tīvra* (medium-intense): Does not destroy the body, but rather destroys ignorance. Results in a spontaneous arising of intuitive insight (*svapratyayasya prātibhajñānodayah*) without the need for gurus, scriptures, or initiations. These rare individuals are self-revealed guru (*prātibha-guru*), spontaneously perfected (*sāmsiddhika*), and have been "consecrated and initiated directly by the goddesses of his own consciousness," (*abhṣiktaḥ svasaṃvittidevībhir dīkṣitaś ca saḥ*) within. 3. *manda-tīvra* (lower-intense): This form causes the recipient, "impelled by the will of Śiva" (*śivecchāvaśayogena*), to seek a *sadguru* (true guru) equal to Lord Śiva, who can grant liberating initiation. The seeker will eventually attain liberation within this lifetime (*jīvanmukti*) TĀ 13.218-222ab. 4. *utkrṣṭa-madhyāt* (superior-moderate): The recipient of this form will seek liberative initiation (*nirvānadīkṣā*), but will only achieve identification with Śiva (i.e., liberation) at the time of death (*dehānte tu śivo bhavet*). 5. *madhya-madhyā* (medium-moderate): This type of *śaktipāta* is received by those who have a slight desire for enjoyment (*bhoga*) over liberation (*mokṣa*). He will seek initiation for this type of knowledge and achieve enjoyment in this life through the practice of yoga and through the instructions of the guru, followed by liberation at the time of death. 6. *nikrṣṭa-madhyā* (lower-moderate): This recipient will not experience *bhoga* in this life but will in their next life, where they will also eventually achieve liberation. 7. *tīvra-manda* (superior-mild): Abhinavagupta considers these forms inferior and devotes very little writing to them. These recipients are known as *bubhukṣus* (enjoyment-seekers) - their desire for enjoyment (*bhoga*) far outweighs their desire for liberation. Abhinavagupta states only that they will automatically achieve liberation in some future life due to this *śaktipāta*. 8. *madhya-manda* (moderate-mild): Similarly, these *bubhukṣus* will also eventually achieve liberation, but they will need to undergo initiation once again in some future lifetime. 9. *manda-manda* (lower-mild): For these *bubhukṣus*, their desire for enjoyment is even stronger, and thus will have to pass a longer number of stages and lives before being reinitiated and eventually attain oneness with Śiva.

expanded and inclusive. When comparing these passages with the earlier ones, we also see a gradual move away from focus on magical powers to more esoteric and gnostic interpretations – a general trend in the exegetical literature. This was not only to universalize these experiences, but also may have served as a way to hierarchically categorize Śaiva *gurus* in terms of their spiritual realization and powers.¹²⁵⁴

Throughout Abhinavagupta's discussion on the nine grades of *śaktipāta*, an important element he continually describes is the nature of *pratibhā* or divine intuition (TĀ 13.146-98), which essentially becomes another synonym for “the Power” (*śakti*) of Śiva or His “grace” (*anugraha*). When one is united with *pratibhā*, it is this *śakti* which possesses or penetrates (*āveśa*) the recipient, leading to liberation:

[When] the soul is united/conjoined with divine intuition (*pratibhāyuktaḥ*), it is said to be (united with) the *śaktitattvaṃ* (the reality-level of *śakti*). Penetrated (*āveśataḥ*) by its Descent (*pāta*), one becomes Śiva, he who is liberated from the ocean of worldly existence.¹²⁵⁵

Here we find an explicit overlap between the two terms *āveśa* and *śaktipāta* – the two being essentially one and the same for Abhinavagupta. As Wallis puts it, “to have received a strong *śaktipāta* is to be *samāviṣṭa*”.¹²⁵⁶ This is confirmed once again in Abhinavagupta's commentary on MVT 1.43ab:

Regarding that [penetration of *śakti*], due to gradations etc. of [the Lord's] will, the fall of the body may occur quickly or after a while, or he may [enter a state] becoming like a block of wood, etc. His mind turns away from all worldly activity. Possessed (*samāviṣṭa*) by the great Power (*mahāśakti*) of the intense-intense variety, he attains the goal.¹²⁵⁷

¹²⁵⁴ See Ferrario (2015: 202)

¹²⁵⁵ *sa eva pratibhāyuktaḥ śaktitattvaṃ nigadyate || tatpātāveśato muktaḥ śiva eva bhavārṇavat |* TĀ 186cd-187ab

¹²⁵⁶ Wallis (2014: 289)

¹²⁵⁷ *tatrāpi tāratamyādivaśācchīghracirādītaḥ | dehapāto bhavedasya yadvā kāṣṭhādītulyatā || samastavyavahāreṣu parācīnitacetanaḥ | tīvratīvramahāśaktisamāviṣṭaḥ sa sidhyati ||* TĀ 13.210-211

Here we see *śaktipāta* as something that fully penetrates or possesses a person, at least in its more intense varieties. As we can see, both phenomena are types of religious experience which exhibit clear signs, and both seem to be linked, at least in these sources, with initiation (*śaktipāta* with Śaiva Siddhānta and *samāveśa* with the Kaulas). As mentioned earlier, this was in line with Abhinavagupta's agenda in writing the TĀ and TS, which was to try and unite and synthesize the various Śaiva schools. Thus, he uses both terms freely, seeing the obvious overlap between them.¹²⁵⁸

For Abhinavagupta these two concepts are also inherently tied in with devotion and grace, as it was for Somānanda, and this is most clearly seen in the final chapter of the *Tantrāloka*, where he provides some insight into his own personal spiritual experiences.

(Abhinavagupta) had entered into the depths of words [grammar/sound] (*śabdagahane*) by his father, his mind purified and cleansed by the drops of the waves from the ocean of logic. He [then] devoted himself to enjoying the intense *rasa* of poetry and was seized (*grhītaḥ*) by a spontaneous (*svayamgrahaṇa*) and intoxicating (*durmada*) devotion to Maheśvara.¹²⁵⁹

Here we see that Abhinavagupta himself was spontaneously "seized" or "possessed" by the intense emotions of poetry, which in turn caused him to be seized by intoxication and devotion to Śiva. The use of the verbal root *grh*, to seize, is one we've seen many times before in the context of possession, and his use here seems to be purposeful. We can imply that he saw this as his own early *śaktipāta* experience, where he became possessed by the Power (*śakti*) of Śiva, leading him to the Śaiva path. It was likely that this personal

¹²⁵⁸ Kṣemarāja, Abhinavagupta's disciple, also continues these ideas, as seen in his *Pratyabhijñāhrdayam*: "In this world, there are some devoted people, who are undeveloped in reflection and have not taken pains in studying difficult works like Logic and Dialectics, but who nevertheless aspire after Samāveśa with the highest Lord which blossoms forth with the descent of Sakti. For their sake, the truth of the teaching of *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* is being explained briefly." Translation by Jaideva Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhrdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition: Sanskrit text with English Translation, Notes, and Introduction*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980): 46.

¹²⁵⁹ *pitṛā sa śabdagahane kṛtasampraveśas tarkārṇavormipṛṣatāmālapūtacittaḥ | sāhityasāndrarasabhogaparo maheśabhaktyā svayamgrahaṇadurmadayā grhītaḥ* || TĀ 37.58

experience is also what led him to comment upon the most popular devotional text of the time, the *Bhagavadgītā* [BG]. This is seen in his works, the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* and the *Gītārthasaṅgraha*, which may have been a way for him to better explain and interpret his own newfound devotion. Although a Vaiṣṇava text, Abhinavagupta interprets it using his own Śaiva non-dualist lens, "seizing" upon the use of the term *āveśa* in the *Bhagavadgītā* as proof of its universality and alignment with Śaiva doctrine. In the second verse of the twelfth chapter, for example, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna:

mayy āveśya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate | śraddhayā parayopetās te me yuktatamā matāḥ || 12.2

Those who immerse (*āveśya*) their minds in me, forever engaged in my worship and possessed (*upetāḥ*) with supreme faith are considered by me the most fit (i.e., more literally "most connected" - *yukta*).

teṣām ahaṃ samuddhartā mṛtyusaṃsārasāgarāt | bhavāmi na cirāt pārtha mayy āveśitacetāsām || 12.7

Having immersed (*āveśita*) their minds in me, O Pārtha, I swiftly uproot them from the ocean of transmigration and death.

athāveśayitum cittam na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram | abhyāsayogena tato mām icchāptum dhanamjaya || 12.9 ||

But if you are not able to firmly immerse your mind (*āveśayitum*) in me, then seek to attain me by persistent practice (*abhyāsa*), Dhanamjaya.

In the *Gītārthasaṅgraha*, Abhinavagupta's comments on verse two, glossing *āveśa*, which in its original context implies focus and devotion, as *samāveśa*, stating that "the most fit are those immersed (*samāveśaḥ*) in the natural spontaneous state of unity/identity which [actually] has Māheśvara (Śiva) as it's object."¹²⁶⁰ For Abhinavagupta, this was the true

¹²⁶⁰*māheśvaryaviśayo yeṣām samāveśaḥ akṛtrimas tanmayībhāvaḥ te yuktatamā mama matāḥ ityanena pratijñā kriyate: Gītārthasaṅgraha ad. BhG 12.2*

meaning of Lord Kṛṣṇa's teaching.¹²⁶¹ He continues, commenting upon the *Bhagavadgītā*'s statement regarding the importance of practice:

Immersion (*āveśa*) [in the Lord] is difficult to attain without a very intense *śaktipāta* (Descent of Power) from the Lord and the grace (*anugraha*) of the feet of the Guru who has been propitiated for a long time. Therefore [the *Bhagavadgītā* prescribes] “persistent practice” (*abhyāsa*).¹²⁶²

As we saw earlier in Abhinavagupta's typology on the varying degrees of *śaktipāta*, it is only rare individuals who achieve an intense and permanent *śaktipāta*, considered the supreme state of *samāveśa*. Thus, for the majority of practitioners, Abhinavagupta agrees with Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the BG that constant practice is required to maintain an established state of (*sam*)*āveśa*.

A final example of Abhinavagupta's reinterpretation of the BG's teaching on devotion as equivalent to Śaiva teachings on *samāveśa*, comes from his comments on BG 14.26, which states: "One who serves me with the unwavering yoga of devotion (*bhaktiyogena*), having transcended the *guṇas*, succeeds to the level of Brahman."¹²⁶³

On this verse, Abhinavagupta writes:

However, the person who does not desire any fruit, even when asked “Why do you keep practicing this false [observance]?”, gives an answer by silence alone, with his bodily hair [erect] (*romavān*), his body shaking, a flow of tears rolling from his wide-open eyes, [all this] because of having his soul/heart (*antaḥkaraṇa*) dissolved by the piercing (*vedha*) of uninterrupted devotion to the Lord. It should be understood that this person alone, not anyone else, is purified by unwavering devotion, the supreme power of the Lord, i.e., of Maheśvara.¹²⁶⁴

¹²⁶¹ Abhinavagupta glosses devotion (*bhakti*) again as *samāveśa* in BhG 12.19 as well *yathāprāptahevākitayā sukhadukhādīkam upabhuj jānaḥ parameśvaraviśayasamāveśītahrda- yaḥ sukheṇaiva prāpnoti paramakaivalyam iti śivam* || *Gītārthasaṅgraha* on BhG 12.19

¹²⁶² *tīvratābhagavacchaktipātaṃ cirataraprasādita gurucaraṇānugrahaṃ ca vinā durlabha āveśa ity abhyāsaḥ* || *Gītārthasaṅgraha* ad. BhG 12.9:

¹²⁶³ *māṃ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate | sa guṇān samatīyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate* || BhG 14.26

¹²⁶⁴ *yas tu phalaṃ kiṃcid apy anibhilaṣyan “kim etad alīkam anutiṣṭasi” iti paryanuyujyamāno ‘pi, | nirantarabhagavadbhaktivedhavidrutāntaḥ-karaṇatayā kaṅṭakitaromavān vepamānatanur visphāritanayanayugalaparivartamānasalilasampātaḥ tūṣṇīmbhāvenaivottaraṃ prayacchati | sa*

It becomes clear here that for Abhinavagupta "unwavering devotion" is akin to a *śaktipāta/āveśa* experience, even including the tell-tale physical signs usually associated with such spiritual experiences. Additionally, we are told that all this occurs because the heart or consciousness of the devotee has dissolved due to "piercing" (*vedha*) by devotion, which for him is really the piercing by the *śakti* (power) of Śiva, the ultimate cause of the experience. As a result of this immersion into devotion, these devotees experience similar symptoms to those possessed.

THE SIGNS OF SAMĀVEŚA AND ŚAKTIPĀTA

Although many of the wild aspects of possession are gone in Abhinavagupta's understanding of possession, we still see many of the same experiential signs of possession as listed in previous texts (i.e., *pratyayas*, *siddhilingāni*, *cihnas*, *lakṣaṇas*), which equally describe *śaktipāta*, according to his own analysis and synthesis. This particularly seen in his discussion on "The Five States" (*pañcāvasthā*),¹²⁶⁵ which he redacts and paraphrases from MVT 11.29-34:

Due to the disciple's *śaktipāta* in one of its classificatory divisions such as "intense" etc. (*tīvrādi*), the *śakti* of Rudra enters (*āviśantī rudraśaktiḥ*) and purifies sequentially their external body, inner body, breath, void/space (*vyoma*), and in their consciousness (*cit*) resulting in these - Bliss (*ānanda*), Rising/Ascension (*udbhava*), Trembling (*kampa*), Yogic Sleep (*nidrā*) and Whirling/Rolling (*ghūrṇi*). in the body.¹²⁶⁶

evāvyabhicāriṇyā bhagavato maheśvarasyāgrāśaktiyā bhaktyā pavitrīkṛto nānya iti jñeyam || *Gūārthasaṅgraha* ad. BhG 14.26, translation by Ferrario (2015: 38).

¹²⁶⁵ Abhinavagupta discusses them primarily in three places: TS chapter 5, TĀ chapter 5 and 29.

¹²⁶⁶ *anayā śodhyamānasya śiśos tīvrādibhedataḥ | śaktipātāc citivyomaprāṇanāntar-bahistanūḥ || āviśantī rudraśaktiḥ kramāt sūte phalaṃ tv idam | ānandam udbhavam kampaṃ nidrāṃ ghūrṇiṃ ca dehaḡam* || TĀ 29.207-208

As we saw, these signs are of primary importance in the Trika and Kaula traditions, indicators of a disciple's or *guru's* attainments and, in some cases, prerequisites to receive further religious instruction. Here we are given an explicit order of events according to Abhinavagupta's interpretation - depending on what degree of *śaktipāta* one receives, one then experiences possession by Rudra's *śakti* which enters and purifies the various layers of the self (body, breath, space, consciousness etc.) and its corresponding symptom. It is these signs, as an expression of *āveśa*, which qualify one for higher initiations.

In chapter five of Abhinavagupta's TS, we see more of his own synthesis, extending and explaining in more detail the homologies between the Five States, the Five Phases of Lucidity and the Five Cakras, in a manner similar to the MVT discussed earlier:¹²⁶⁷

There are Five States [corresponding] to each of the states of cessation [in the five *prāṇas* i.e., *prāṇa* (outgoing breath), *apāna* (ingoing breath), *samāna* (equal breath), *udāna* (rising breath) and *vyāna* (omnipenetrating breath)], due to varying degrees of penetration (*praveśa*) [by *śakti*]. Of these, the first is Bliss (*ānanda*), which occurs due to the "touch" from a portion of Fullness (*pūrṇatāṃśasparśāt* i.e., *śakti*).¹²⁶⁸ Next is Ascent (*udbhava*), due to a temporary (experience) of rising out of the body. Then, Trembling (*kampa*), due to the decrease of identification with the body (*dehatādātmya*) and the spreading out of one's own internal power (*svabala* i.e., *śakti*). Then Yogic Sleep (*nidrā*), due to the dissolution of external awareness (*bahirmukhatva*). Through this one becomes absorbed in the Self rather than in that which is not-Self and dissolves the existence of what is not-Self in the Self, because the one true Self consists of all things (*svātmanaḥ sarvamayatvāt*). From this [experience] arises the [state of] the Great Pervasion (*mahāvvyāpti*) [characterized] by Whirling (*ghūrṇi*). These [Five States] are [further associated with] the levels [of lucidity] from the "Waking State" etc. (*jāgradādi*) to the final "Beyond the Fourth" (*curyātītāntāḥ*) and these levels are [experienced] when one penetrates (*praveśa*) the *cakras* called the Triangle (*trikoṇa*; genital region), the Bulb (*kanda*; below the

¹²⁶⁷ Five-fold typologies are prevalent throughout various Tantric schools and Abhinavagupta homologizes many of them together in his unitary vision. For example, he synthesizes and makes correspondences between the Five States just mentioned with the the five elements, the five *cakras* of the Trika, the five phases of Lucidity (*jāgrad* etc. as seen in the MVT), the five divine acts and faces of the Lord (*śṛṣṭyā* etc.), the *Pratyabhijñā's* five layers of selfhood (*deha* etc.), the five *prāṇa-vāyus*. These also become homologized with the four epistemological categories (*prameyādi*), the three primary channels of the subtle body, and the six levels of bliss (*nijānandādi*) as discussed in the TĀ and TS.

¹²⁶⁸ In TĀ 1.108ab it states that the nature of the Supreme Śiva (*paramaḥ śiva*) is fullness (*pūrṇa*), a sentiment echoed in the earlier *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* VBT 14-16 and also identified as the "Highest Goddess (*parā devī*, VBT 17). Thus the "touch" is none other than the touch of *śakti* herself.

navel), the Heart (*hṛt*), the Palate (*tālu*), and the Upward Kuṇḍalinī (*urdhvakūṇḍalinī*).¹²⁶⁹

As in the MVT, the *āveśa* experience in the TĀ became a requirement for initiates into the Kaula lineage. However, while the MVT did not require the experience prior to initiation, Abhinavagupta held that *āveśa* was both a prerequisite before and during the initiation ceremony. If we recall in MVT, an extra ceremony is described at 11.37c- 39, which offers the initiate an alternative method to achieve *āveśa* if they failed the first time. If the initiand does not "fall to the ground like a tree", according to the text, his initiation is to be abandoned and he can longer proceed on the Kaula path.¹²⁷⁰ Abhinavagupta, however, gives even one more final method for the failed disciple, which he states is even more powerful and was given to him by his *guru* Śambhunātha.¹²⁷¹ It involves the use of powerful *mantras* and ascension through the *tattvas* to the highest level, resulting in "*śaktyāveśa* in the body" (213cd) and the experiential sign of *stobha* (automatism), "in the blink of an eye."¹²⁷²

As seen in Abhinavagupta's philosophical speculations, his concept and understanding of possession is very abstract compared to normative possession rites seen in earlier texts or those seen even today on the ground throughout South Asia. This makes sense given his non-dual interpretation of what is inherently a dualistic act, the entrance of the deity into one's body. However, Abhinavagupta brilliantly and cogently argues his non-dual

¹²⁶⁹ *viśrāntiṣu pratyekaṃ pañcāvasthā bhavanti praveśatāratamyāt | tatra prāg ānandaḥ pūrṇatāmśasparśāt tata udbhavaḥ kṣaṇaṃ niḥsarīratāyāṃ rūdheḥ, tataḥ kampaḥ svabalākrāntau dehatādātmyaśaithilyāt tato nidrā bahirmukhatvavilayāt | ittham anātmani ātmabhāve līne svātmanaḥ sarvamayatvāt ātmani anātmabhāvo vilīyate iti ato ghūrṇiḥ mahāvyaṅgyudayāt | tā etā jāgradādibhūmayāḥ turyātītāntāḥ | etās ca bhūmayāḥ trikoṇakandahṛttālurdhvakūṇḍalinīcakra-praveśe bhavanti || TS 5*

¹²⁷⁰ MVT 11.37c- 39: "But if this *āveśa* experience is not generated in someone, [the guru] should 'burn' (the initiands) external and internal bodies simultaneously with the *śakti-mantra*. Being completely burned by that [śakti], [the initiand] falls (*patate*) to the ground like a tree whose root has been cut. If the (sign/*āveśa*) does not happen for him even after this, the guru should leave him aside, abandoning him like a stone."

¹²⁷¹ On the basis of the TS 211c-18.

¹²⁷² TĀ 29.210-218

philosophy, understanding possession as a completely internal phenomena in which one becomes possessed by one's own true nature. It is this concept which becomes normative and operative in the Kaula traditions, post-Abhinavagupta. This is clearly seen, for example, with one of his most famous disciples, Kṣemarāja who understands *samāveśa* as synonymous with the experience of *samādhi* or *samāpatti* and central towards liberation in this lifetime (*jīvanmukti*).¹²⁷³ In verse twenty of his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, he states:

Then, due to immersion (*āveśa*) into the full expansion (*pūrṇāhanta*) [i.e., total egoity; complete I-ness], which consists of the power/virility (*vīrya*) of the great mantras and is in essence Bliss and Light (*prakāśānandasāra*), one attains the state of Lord of the Circle of the goddesses (*devatācakreśvara*), the innate consciousness which is always engaged in expansion and retraction [i.e., creation and dissolution] of everything. All this is Śiva.¹²⁷⁴

With this last quote, we now briefly change course before concluding, and examine similar concepts surrounding *āveśa* and *samāveśa* in the scriptures of Tantric Buddhism, followed by a brief mention of Jain Tantra.

C. ĀVEŚĀ AND POSSESSION IN TANTRIC BUDDHISM

Tantric Buddhism, known traditionally as Vajrayāna ("The Vajra Path"), arose from about the fifth to the ninth century CE, and within it we find many similar underlying concepts, frameworks, and discourses around possession and *āveśa* which developed alongside the Śaiva/Śakta traditions. The term *āveśa*, which was extremely rare in earlier Buddhist literature, becomes more common in the Tantric Buddhist literature. As possession concepts evolve and become adapted by various Vajrayāna schools, it quickly makes its way

¹²⁷³ See PH 16 & 19

¹²⁷⁴ *tadā prakāśānandasāramahāmantravīryātmapūrṇāhantāveśāt sadā sarvasargasamhārakārinijasamviddevatācakreśvaratāpṛaptir bhavati śivam* || PH 20

to the center of the tradition, becoming, I will argue throughout this section, a hallmark of Buddhist Tantric practice in the form of Deity Yoga.

In some cases, these parallels were a result of direct assimilation of early Śaiva sources (e.g., BY, the JYT, and SYM), as Sanderson has cogently argued in recent publications - one of which details how extensive passages from the Śaiva traditions were redacted by the authors of the Buddhist *Samvaratantras*.¹²⁷⁵ However, this is not to say that Tantric Buddhism or its subsequent practices and possession concepts arose solely from the Śaivas. As we've seen in previous chapters, spirit possession has long been acknowledged within the Buddhist tradition. In the same way many Hindu traditions evolved, adapted, and assimilated the local traditions which it found itself in, so too did Tantric Buddhism. Both traditions, draw heavily from the shared demonological substratum in which they were born, including Vedic, extra-Vedic (e.g., Atharvaveda/ Pāśupatas/medical texts), and non-Vedic traditions (e.g., *śramanic*, "folk/tribal", foreign traditions etc.), which mutually influenced and were often closely intertwined with each other.¹²⁷⁶

While Sanderson has shown some redaction in Buddhist *tantras* on Śaiva sources, the direction of borrowing has never been one-sided and has always been multidirectional. Scholars such as Buhemann, for example, have done important work on the incorporation of Buddhist *sadhana*s, deities and mantras in Hindu texts.¹²⁷⁷ A variety of Buddhist philosophical concepts and practices clearly pervade and were incorporated into many Śaiva tantric texts, particularly from Northern India. This is seen, in fact, in one of the earliest

¹²⁷⁵ See Sanderson (1994, 2001 and 2009)

¹²⁷⁶ For foreign elements see White (2021)

¹²⁷⁷ For more on the ongoing interaction and influences of the Śaiva and Buddhist Tantric traditions see Sanderson (1994, 2001, 2009), Davidson (2002), Gray (2007, 7–11), Ruegg 2008), and Sferra, "Some Considerations on the Relationship Between Hindu and Buddhist Tantras" in *Buddhist Asia 1: Papers from the First Conference of Buddhist Studies*, eds. Verardi and Silvio, (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2003).

Śaiva tantras, the BYT, which Hatley has recently argued may have redacted portions of an earlier Buddhist *Kriyātantra*.¹²⁷⁸ His research focuses particularly on the “Chapter on the Practices for Mastering Female Dryads” (*yakṣiṇīsādhanapaṭalaḥ*) of the BYT, which he suggests is closest to the earlier *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* and *Amoghapāśakalparāja* tantras, leading to him hypothesize that the BYT pulled from a similar, but unidentified, *Kriyātantra*. Another Śaiva text on sorcery, the *Uḍḍāmareśvaratantra*, also shows Buddhist influence in its section on conjuring divine maidens (*surasundarī*), which explicitly instructs the practitioner of the rite to perform it within a temple of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi.¹²⁷⁹ Closely associated with this text is the *Bhūtaḍamaratantra*, another tantra on magic that exists in both Buddhist and Śaiva form. Though still debated, most scholars have shown that the Buddhist manuscript may be the older of the two.¹²⁸⁰

As discussed earlier, the roots of the earliest Buddhist Tantras begin in the magical and protective spell texts (*rakṣas/dhāraṇīs*), which were either independent, to some degree, or found in various Mahāyāna *sūtras*. These were used, as we saw, primarily for worldly ends, such as warding off evil or misfortune (e.g., spirits/demons, robbers, poisonous creatures, enemies, etc.), and usually involving recitation of spells (*mantras* and *vidyās*) and visualization. It was this focus on spells that lead to the earliest Buddhist Tantric traditions being known as the *Mantrayāna* ("The Path of Mantras"), much like the classification of *Mantramārga* among the Śaivas. These were shared techniques among the Śaivas, Jains, Buddhists, and other religious and local traditions *en vogue* in this early time. Much of the

¹²⁷⁸ Hatley (2016a: 62-65)

¹²⁷⁹ Hatley (2016a: 63)

¹²⁸⁰ See Ullrey's (2016: 547-567) discussion of the scholars who've worked on this such as Bhattacharya and Bühnemann, among others. They show that much of the Buddhist material still remains in the Śaiva version, invoking Buddhist figures such as Vajradhara, Vajrapāṇi, Aparājita, and their mantras.

pantheon of these early demonological systems, and their *bhūtanātha* leaders, was equally shared between these traditions, attesting to the early incorporation, adaptation, and assimilation of non-Buddhist traditions that had been taking place since the origins of Buddhism.¹²⁸¹

These early magical and ritual texts and grimoires gradually became more developed and sophisticated, leading ultimately to the composition of the first Buddhist Tantras. However, rather than many of the local gods, goddesses and other supernatural beings incorporated in the Śaiva tantras, followers of the Mahāyāna movement began to also seek assistance from celestial Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas, who were understood to be more powerful and compassionate than worldly deities and spirits. In some cases, these Bodhisattvas/Buddhas may have originally been cult deities from non-Buddhist traditions who were converted to protectors of Buddhism.¹²⁸² As Tantric Buddhist systems began to develop, it was understood that one could gain the power and qualities of their powerful protector deities, or Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, through possession rites. Vesna Wallace remarks generally upon this, in the context of Deity Yoga, writing that these practitioners:

...sought their protection and empowerment not merely through prayer and devotion but also through possession by them and identification with them. Cultivating a nondual relationship with deities, they pursued the goal of self-empowerment, which they viewed as a more reliable and expedient means of protection than other forms of empowerment.¹²⁸³

From the 8th century onward Buddhist Tantric traditions, practices, and scriptures flowered, the texts later classified as *Yoga-*, *Mahāyoga-*, and *Yoginī-tantras*, much of which

¹²⁸¹ See Sanderson (2009); DeCaroli (2004); White (2003; 2021); Ullrey (2016); Davidson (2017) for numerous examples

¹²⁸² This is particularly true in Tibet and Nepal.

¹²⁸³ Vesna A. Wallace, "A Generation of Power Through Ritual Protection and Transformation of Identity in Indian Tantric Buddhism", *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 19, (2005): 126.

was paralleled in the Śaiva traditions. Again, as Sanderson has shown in his massive work “The Śaiva Age”, some of the newer practices seen in these texts may have been assimilated directly from the Śaivas, which included the use of tantric *mantras* and tantric deities, *nyāsa*, initiation before a *maṇḍala*, and self-identification or possession by the deities of these *maṇḍalas* (*devatāhaṃkāraḥ/ devatāgarvaḥ*). All of these were justified by the Buddhists as being expedient means and presented as a new and more powerful means not only of attaining Buddhahood in one's lifetime, but also supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and magical acts, which were becoming important in the Buddhist world, especially for royal clients and patrons, including averting dangers (*śānti*), harming enemies (*abhicāra*), controlling weather (e.g. *varṣāpaṇam*), exorcism, etc.¹²⁸⁴ However, as we saw in previous chapters, many of these powers and magical acts did not necessarily originate with the Śaivas, but were part of shared substratum that existed before the Śaivas and included Buddhists, Jains, Brahmins, practitioners of *bhūtavidyā*, and magical actors of all sorts.¹²⁸⁵

1. THE MAHĀVAIROCANĀBHISAṂBODHITANTRA [MVS], THE CONSECRATION SUTRA AND THE EMERGENCE OF DEITY YOGA

Tantric Buddhism begin to truly come into its own in the mid 7th century with the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhitantra* [MVS], “The Manifest Enlightenment of Vairocana Tantra”. Though later classified as the principal work of the *Caryātantra* class, the MVS was historically important because it was one of the first texts to declare itself as a new and fully-fledged path, the *Mantrayāna*, albeit still within the Mahāyāna at this time. The Chinese pilgrim Wu-xing (c. 680 CE), who reportedly collected and brought this text back to China,

¹²⁸⁴ Sanderson (2009:124). See also Sanderson (2015).

¹²⁸⁵ See Davidson (2017) and Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

stated that a new "teaching about *mantra*" (真言教法), had emerged at this time.¹²⁸⁶ The primary deity of this scripture was none other than the *bhūtanātha* Vajrapāṇi, Lord of Yakṣas, discussed in an earlier chapter. As Sanderson notes, the scripture itself was aware of its own assimilation and adaptation of non-Buddhist practices into its fold, and primed the readers against such accusations:

O [Vajrapāṇi,] Lord of the Yakṣas, in time to come there will arise people of inferior understanding and no faith who will not believe this teaching. They will dissent and have many doubts. They will hear it, but they will not take it to heart, and they will refuse to put it into practice. Being themselves unworthy they will bring others too to ruin. [For] they will say that this is not the teaching of the Buddhas but belongs to the outsiders.¹²⁸⁷

We also find in the MVS the earliest use of the term "Deity Yoga" (*devatāyoga*)¹²⁸⁸ the Buddhist practice of uniting oneself with an enlightened deity, which as I said becomes one of the hallmarks and highest practices of Buddhist Tantra. While aspects of Deity yoga-like practices may be found in earlier texts, this is the first to use this specific term. For example, a passage in chapter twenty-three states:

A Bodhisattva practicing the Bodhisattva deeds by way of Secret Mantra should generate his body as a [divine] physical body in the following way... The Tathāgatas completely and perfectly realize that one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind and so forth are included in the four great elements and that even those [elements] are empty of their own entity-ness...similar and akin to space...arisen from causes and actions...whatever is dependently produced arises like a reflection. Thus, because of being interdependently arisen, that which the deity is, I am; that which I am, the deity is. This is how you should physically generate your physical form as a divine body.¹²⁸⁹

¹²⁸⁶ Gray (2016: 14-15).

¹²⁸⁷ Translation from Sanderson (2009: 128 fn. 299 for Tibetan).

¹²⁸⁸ Tibetan *lha'i rnal 'byor*

¹²⁸⁹ Translation by Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga: in Action and Performance Tantra*, (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1987): 190. See Tibetan in Weinberger, *The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the Compendium of Principles (Tattvasamgraha Tantra) within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2003): 182-183 fn. 547).

Here we find an explicit reference to identifying with the deity by first meditating on the emptiness of the self and body and then generating a new, divine body out of this emptiness. It is this idea which laid the foundation for the more developed deity yoga practices seen in later Buddhist Tantras.

We must note, however, that the earliest reference to deity yoga may actually be in a Chinese text, known as the *Consecration Sūtra* (*Kuan-ting ching*), briefly discussed earlier. This fascinating text is a collection of twelve manuscripts, a syncretic product which contains both Indian and Daoist elements and which is believed to have been produced in the 5th century. While it has been ascribed to great Indian guru Śrimitra, Strickmann and others believe it was written by a Chinese scholar.¹²⁹⁰ It is primarily a spell book, in the tradition of proto-tantric *rakṣa/dhāraṇī* texts, focused on protective and sorceristic rites, healing from diseases and poisons, divination, and exorcism. The twelfth-chapter, for example, contains the earliest surviving Chinese version of the highly influential *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra* "The Medicine Buddha Sūtra", replete with its own local Chinese demons.¹²⁹¹ In it, devotees are told to recite the text and the Medicine Buddha's name (Bhaiṣajyaguru), who will then invoke his twelve great *yakṣa*-commanders, *bhūtanātha*-like figures who each have their own army of seven thousand *yakṣas* that promise to protect the reciter from all sorts of harm and demonic attacks. The text is unique also in that it contains the first-known Buddhist oracle-text (called "*The Oracle of Brahma*"), which was used for divination and practices for acquiring merit on behalf of dead ancestors (*pretas*), both which become characteristic features of East Asian Buddhist temple life. Additionally, this may be one of the first Buddhist scriptures to represent itself as a hidden "treasure-text", found in cave a thousand

¹²⁹⁰ Strickmann (2002: 132).

¹²⁹¹ The Chinese version, as expected, includes various Chinese demons in place of Indian demons.

years after the death of the Buddha, a notion that becomes extremely popular in the Tibetan Buddhist Terma (*gter-rna*) tradition of.

It is in the seventh text of the *Consecration Sūtra*, which Faure translates to "the Devil-Subduing Seals and Great Spirit-Spells of Consecration as Spoken by the Buddha" where the brief description of Deity Yoga can be found. As can be inferred from the title, this work was used in the context of rites to exorcise evil spirits. In it the Buddha states the following to Śakra, who was inquiring about some *mudrā* rites:

If among the four classes of the Buddha's disciples any malignant wraiths (*hsieh*) or evil demons should cause disturbance, fear, or horripilation, one should first visualize his own body as my image, with the thirty- two primary and eighty secondary marks, the color of purple gold. The body should be sixteen feet tall, with a solar radiance at the back of the neck. Having visualized my body, you are next to visualize the 1,250 disciples: next, the bodhisattva-monks. When you have completed these three visualizations, visualize the great spirits of the five directions ... Each of these gods of the five quarters has his own retinue; each spirit-king is accompanied by seventy-thousand spirits...all of whom come to aid the person suffering from illness, to assist him in escaping from danger and passing through difficulties. These spirit-kings protect human beings and keep malignant wraiths from carrying out their projects at will...

If hereafter, in the last age of the world, there is a day when the four classes of disciples are in danger, they should write the names of the spirit-kings and their retinues on a round piece of wood. This is called the *mudrā* rite ... All (visualizations) should be seen with extreme clarity as if they were present before your eyes, as when someone appears in a mirror and all sides are visible. If you succeed in realizing this without distractions but rather concentrating all your thoughts in singleness of purpose, those suffering from illness will be cured...Malignant wraiths and evil demons will all be driven off.

If a member of one the four classes of Buddha's disciples wish to employ this spirit-seal, he should first bathe his body and put on a pure and fragrant garment. He should then do reverence to the entirely perfect and truly enlightened numberless Buddhas of the ten directions.... (The seal) should be grasped in the right hand, while in the left you hold a seven-foot-long oxtail devil-dispelling staff. On your head you should wear a red Dharmācārya spirit-cap. Stand seven paces from the patient. Seal off your breath for the space of seven respirations and accomplish the visualizations. When they have been completed, raise your right foot in front of you and advance toward the patient. Holding the spirit-seal, bring it to the patient's body and press it down upon his chest... Visualize the five great spirits: The spirit of the blue vapor exhaling blue vapors that enter the thumb of the patient's left hand, the spirit of the red vapor exhaling red vapors that enter the big toe of the patient's left foot, the spirit

of the white vapor exhaling white vapors that enter the thumb of the patient's right hand, the spirit of the black vapor exhaling black vapors that enter the big toe of the patient's right foot, and the spirit of the yellow vapor exhaling yellow vapors that enter the patient's mouth. When these spirits of the five vapors exhale their proper vapors and they enter the patient's body, the wraiths and evil vapors therein entirely disperse at the same moment. They go out from the patient's navel in a burst of smoke, as when a great wind breaks up the clouds and rain. If you able to control the awesome power of the spirit-seal in this manner, sickness and suffering will be cured and demon-vapors will be destroyed.¹²⁹²

As Strickmann has shown in detail, this fascinating rite is an adaption of Taoist exorcist rites of the same period – replete with visualizations of giant spirit-beings, the use of the vital breath, colored vapors, the pressing the seal on the patient's body, etc.¹²⁹³ While this early Buddhist version does not involve any instruction to first meditate on emptiness, as becomes common in later Tantras, it is one of the first texts that instructs the ritualist to visualize oneself as the Buddha, a distinctly Tantric Buddhist feature that does not show up in the Indian material for at least another two centuries. Strickmann also provides a genealogy of the use of seals in apotropaic rites that go back another thousand years before the composition of the *Consecration Sūtra*, suggesting Taoists may have introduced its use to the Buddhists. Strickmann writes,

Although the ultimate origins of the seal may be obscure, we can nevertheless speculate on who was the first to adopt ensigillation as a therapeutic technique. This honor seems to go to the Taoists, yet it must be noted that our earliest full set of instructions for performing ensigillation comes from a Buddhist source, the mid-fifth-century Book of Consecration. This is not an unusual case; many traits and practices associated in our minds with Taoism are in fact first documented in Buddhist scriptures—namely, in the so-called apocryphal *sūtras* written in China, directly in Chinese.¹²⁹⁴

¹²⁹² Translation from Strickmann (2002: 132-135)

¹²⁹³ Strickmann (2002, 126-131 and 137-140) compares the Buddhist rite with a coeval Taoist text known as "Essentials of the Practice of Perfection" (*Cheng-i fa-wen hsiu-chen chih-yao*, HY 1260).

¹²⁹⁴ Strickmann (2002: 142)

Regardless of the origins, the fact that the earliest Buddhist account of “Deity Yoga” occurs in this milieu of sorceristic and exorcistic rites, is, I believe, of great significance, pointing again to the many roots of “deity possession” or “Deity Yoga” practices within Asia's demonological traditions. All across South and East Asia, the ethnographic record, some of which we will discuss in the next chapter, shows that the propitiation of, identification with, and possession by *bhūtanātha*-like deities or spirits was a commonly used technique among ritualists to expel and exorcise demons, regardless of whether the tradition is Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist etc. While in most cases it involved invoking and worshipping a *bhūtanātha* to control other spirits, we also find ritual specialists who transformed themselves into *bhūtanāthas* - becoming a master of spirits themselves – either through possession or other techniques. While this is often implicit in much of the Śaiva material, in the Buddhist material, I would argue, it becomes much more explicit.

Jacob Dalton has recently shown in his work, *Taming the Demons*, the importance and role of Deity Yoga in a number of early Dunhuang Buddhist manuals focused on sorceristic rites such as exorcism. To perform these types of rites he claims that one had to be an expert in cultivating non-dual, nonconceptual mental states within which union with the deity and other rites may be performed.¹²⁹⁵ We've seen the importance of these non-dual states in similar rites among the Śaivas. Dalton also notes, how these rites were sanitized forms of earlier more gruesome and transgressive rites from the cremation ground culture of the Kāpālikas and similar groups, as Sanderson did previously in regard to the Śaiva material. Like the evolution of *āveśa* among the Kashmiri Śaivas exegetes, a shift towards more gnostic oriented practices also occurred among the Buddhists. Dalton writes,

¹²⁹⁵ Dalton (2011: 81)

...by shifting the ritual focus from the victim's blood to his consciousness, they cleansed the offering of its more overtly sacrificial appearance, to focus instead on the more ethical rhetoric of compassionate violence that reemphasized the victim's metempsychotic welfare over the simple gratification of the gods.¹²⁹⁶

The difference between the later conceptualizations of *samāveśa* among the Śaivas and the development of Deity Yoga (*devatāyoga*) among the Buddhists, was that these early sorceristic/exorcistic practices were almost exclusively for practical and worldly purposes – healing, protection, dispelling demons/exorcism, attaining supernatural powers etc. *Samāveśa* and Deity Yoga, on the other hand, had an explicit goal – liberation - and it was these earlier possession technologies which they had adapted in order to achieve their own particular soteriological goals.

Another very early Buddhist Tantra, one we've briefly discussed a number of times, is the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* [MK], which, like other magical tantras was rooted in the diverse demonological traditions of South Asia, but also explicitly assimilated various Śaiva practices into its large repertoire. In the text, the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī claims that *all* Tantras, including Śaiva, but also Garuḍa and Vaiṣṇava scriptures had originally been taught by him, and thus the use of seemingly non-Buddhist mantras and tantric rites could justifiably be used by Buddhist practitioners:

I have taught this Mantra [of Śiva] which together with the trident Mudrā destroys all demons, out of my desire to benefit living beings. Those living on the earth will say that its ancient Kalpa, that I taught in former times, was taught by Śiva. [But] the various excellent extensive [Kalpas] in the Śaiva Tantras are in fact my [Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī] teachings... It was I that first taught, in this vast Kalpa, everything that the inhabitants of earth without exception refer to as the teaching of Śiva. It was only later that others taught in the various texts [considered to be taught by him] the Kalpa mantras of the wise Śiva Tumburu the Trader.¹²⁹⁷

¹²⁹⁶ Dalton (2011: 93)

¹²⁹⁷ See Sanderson (2009: 130 and footnotes) for Sanskrit and translation.

The last line in the above passage clearly gives away the origins of at least one of the contemporaneous cults the MK drew from – the early cult of Tumburu (Bhairava/Śiva) and his Four Sisters (*Caturbhaginīs*), also known as The Left Current (*Vāmasrotaḥ*) in Śaivism. The cult of Tumburu was closely associated with *graha* and *yakṣa* cults of the type seen with Skanda in the Epics, his retinue consisting of four sisters (Jayā, Vijayā, Jayantī, Aparājitā) who are repeatedly referred to as *yakṣiṇīs*. References to Tumburu in the only surviving *Vāmasrotaḥ* text, the *Vīṇāśikhātantra*, mention him as an attendant of Śiva/Rudra, while other Purāṇic and Epic texts associate Tumburu with the Yakṣa king Kubera. In the 11th century Tantric digest known as *Śāradātilaka*, Tumburu is worshipped as a protector deity donning Kāpālika accoutrements, which was said to be especially effective against disease, sorcery, and demonic possession. Like other *grahas* we've discussed, he was also worshipped as a fertility god for protection of children and the granting of progeny.¹²⁹⁸

With this justification from the MK by Mañjuśrī, the mantras and rites of all other Tantras were now potentially available to the Buddhist practitioner, since they were all said to ultimately originate from the omniscient Buddha. Due to this, Sanderson states, “The strict division between the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist has dissolved within a higher Buddhist

¹²⁹⁸ Other Purāṇic/Epic traditions also mention Tumburu as the courtier of Indra and the Yakṣa king Kubera - see, for example, Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Dictionary with Special Reference to the Epic and Puranic Literature*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975): 798–9 & 859. In South India he is often depicted with a horse-head - see Daniel Jeyaraj, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005): 162–3. Still other texts, such as the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (6-11th century), pair Tumburu with Bhairava and is said to be surrounded by eight ferocious Mother Goddesses, while the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* has him carrying a skull, mounted upon a bull, and surrounded by four fierce Mothers (*Mātṛs*) with the same names as the *Bhaginīs* mentioned above. In the *Agnipurāṇa*, he is also known as Śūlin, the "Bearer of the Lance", a common name for Skanda and Śiva, and is associated with the fierce Vīrabhadra who is also surrounded by four Mothers, though unnamed. In the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, the *Tantrasārasaṃgraha* and *Yogaratanāvalī*, he is also known as protective deity who protects against disease, poison and possessing demons used for. His cult was also popular in parts of Southeast Asia, particularly Cambodia and Indonesia, as early as the 8-9th centuries. See Goudriaan, *The Vīṇāśikhātantra: a Śaiva Tantra of the Left Current*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): 195 and Sanderson (2004) for numerous references to Tumburu in Hindu and Buddhist texts.

intertextual unity.”¹²⁹⁹ With the floodgates now open for the use of knowledge and technologies from other traditions, Buddhist Tantras begin to creatively assimilate and adapt from their primary rivals at the time – the Śākta and Śaiva traditions.

2. THE SARVATATHĀGATATTVAŚAṂGRAHA [STTS]

One of the most important Buddhist tantras, the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṅgraha* (STTS), "The Compendium of Principles of All Tathagatas", considered to be the foundational text of the *Yogatantra* class, also shows this process of assimilation of Saiva-Śākta terminology, practice and iconography, a process that continued into the later Highest Yoga Tantras.¹³⁰⁰ Its own foundational myth involves the infamous subjugation, killing, resurrection, and conversion of the Kāpālika garbed Maheśvara (Śiva) to Buddhism by the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Yakṣas. This is a well-known story which has been discussed at great length by various scholars and will not be retold here.¹³⁰¹ What is important about this myth, however, is that not only did the conversion of Maheśvara proclaim for the Buddhists their superiority over the Śaivas, but it gave them further justification for their adaptation of Śaiva practices and command over various beings within the Śaiva pantheon. Because Śiva himself is a *bhūtanātha*, his entire retinue of wild and ferocious spirit beings – *devīs*, *devatas*, *yakṣas*, *vetālas*, *ḍākinīs*, *yoginīs*, *herukas*, etc. - were also incorporated into the Buddhist fold and commanded by his Buddhist *bhūtanātha* counterpart, Vajrapāṇi, Lord of Yakṣas. All become initiated into Vajrapāṇi's great *maṅḍala*

¹²⁹⁹ Sanderson (2009: 131)

¹³⁰⁰ Various scholars contend the STTS was produced in South India - see Weinberger (2003: 32-34)

¹³⁰¹ See Weinberger (2003), Robert Mayer, "The Figure of Maheśvara/Rudra in the rñiṅ-ma-pa Tantric Tradition", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, (1998: 271-310) and Giacomella Orofino, "The Myth of Rudra's Subjugation According to the *bsGrags pa gling grags*: Some Observations on the Beginning of a Historiographical Tradition", *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* (2001).

with some keeping their original names, prefaced only with the designation “*vajra*” (e.g., Vajrayoginī, Vajrakumāra, Vajrabhairava). The figure of Śiva/Maheśvara/Rudra too becomes an important Buddhist deity in various tantric schools, for example within the Yoginī-tantric traditions of the Cakrasaṃvara and the Mahāyoga tradition of the Nyingmas, the oldest Buddhist tantric school of Tibet.¹³⁰²

Echoing stories of Skanda and the Mothers in MBH and the possessing *yoginīs* from the *Netra Tantra*, we find in chapter six of the SSTS a group of ferocious *ḍākinīs* supplicating Vajrapāṇi after he utters the *Sarvaḍākinyādiduṣṭagrahākaraṣaṇa-hṛdayam mantra*, “The Heart Mantra for Drawing Down All Ḍākinīs and other Possessing Spirits (*grahas*).” The converted *ḍākinīs*, now controlled and lead by Vajrapāṇi, ask him how they will satiate their appetite for flesh, given that they are now Buddhist protectors, stating, “We consume flesh; command [us] how [this matter] should be understood.”¹³⁰³ Out of compassion for them, the Buddha Vajrasattva gives the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi another mantra as their means to survive - “the Heart Mantra of the Mudrā for Knowledge of (the time of) Death of All Living Beings” (*sarvasattvamaraṇanimitta-jñānamudrāhṛdayam*). With this *mantra/mudrā*, Vajrapāṇi tells the possessing spirits they will know someone is about to die, and only then can they seize and extract the hearts of those living beings, as long as it is within a fortnight, providing them with the fresh vital fluids necessary. Satiated, the *ḍākinīs* made clamorous “hulu-hulu” sounds and returned home.¹³⁰⁴

Weinberger contends that the STTS is arguably the single most important development of Buddhist tantra, representing its first expression as a mature institution and

¹³⁰² See Mayer (1998)

¹³⁰³ *vayaṃ bhagavan māmsāsīnas tadājñāpayasva katham pratipattavyam iti* | STTS 6

¹³⁰⁴ See Hatley (2016a: 12-13) for full description of this myth

the moment at which it emerges as a distinct and self-conscious tradition. In it we find all the elements we consider tantric - consecration rites, the use of *mantras*, *mudrās*, *maṇḍalas*, and, most importantly, a detailed and developed practice of Deity Yoga. We also find the kernels of what becomes characteristic of later Higher Yoga Tantras (*anuttarayogatantra*) and *yoginītantras* – the incorporation and emphasis on goddesses¹³⁰⁵, the use of sexual yoga, and the use of violence and other afflictive emotions in tantric practice.¹³⁰⁶ As a side note, the revivification of Maheśvara’s corpse after his subjugation may also be the earliest instance in Indian tantric Buddhist literature of the practice of summoning the consciousness of the deceased, which may have served as a foundational source for later mortuary rites and practices in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra (e.g. the “Tibetan Book of the Dead” practices, including the transference of consciousness, Tib: *'pho ba*).¹³⁰⁷

Besides a developed Deity Yoga practice, which we will be detailed below, this is also the first Buddhist text to add the requirement that practitioners experience a state of possession (*āveśah*) at the time of their initiation into their *maṇḍala* – a clear incorporation of one of the hallmarks of early Śaiva/Śakta and Trika-Kaula tantrikas, as we’ve seen.¹³⁰⁸ Very little is different in terms of the rites form/structure: the guru (*vajrācārya*) puts the candidate into a state of possession (*āveśa*), whereupon he casts a flower on to the *maṇḍala* in order to determine which Mantra-deity he will propitiate and become empowered by. The possession is described as follows:

As soon as he becomes possessed (*āviṣṭa*) supernatural/divine knowledge (*divyaṃ jñānam*) arises [in him]. Through this knowledge he understands the thoughts of others (*paracittāni*); he knows all matters past, future, and present (*sarvakāryāṇi*)

¹³⁰⁵ See STTS Chapter 2 section on the *Vajraguhyaṃḍala*, in which the five Tathāgatas are replaced by goddesses

¹³⁰⁶ Weinberger (2003: 197-201)

¹³⁰⁷ Weinberger (2003: 195-196)

¹³⁰⁸ STTS, I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section

cātītānāgatavartamānāni); his heart becomes firm in the teachings of the Tathāgatas; all his sufferings cease; he is free from all dangers; no being can kill him; all the Tathāgatas enter-and-empower him (*adhitiṣṭhanti*); all Siddhis approach him; unprecedented joys arise [in him], causing spontaneous delight, pleasure, and happiness. In some these joys give rise to meditation-states (*samādhayaḥ*), in some to [the mastery of] Dhāraṇīs, in some to the fulfilment of every hope, and in some to the state of identity with all the Tathāgatas.¹³⁰⁹

If there was no mention of Tathāgatas or *Dhāraṇīs* to give away its Buddhist context, one could easily mistake this for one of the many Śaiva tantras we've looked at, including a list of various signs or marks of the possession state. After removing the blindfold and seeing the *maṇḍala*, the text continues:

As soon as he sees the Great Maṇḍala he is entered-and-empowered (*adhiṣṭhyate*) by all the Tathāgatas and Vajrasattva dwells in his heart. He sees various visions of orbs of light and miraculous transformations. Because he has been entered and empowered by all the Tathāgatas, sometimes the Lord Vajradhara or the Buddha appears to him in his true form. From that time forth he attains all his goals, every desire of his mind, all Siddhis, up to the state of Vajradhara or the Tathāgatas.¹³¹⁰

Upon achieving this, the initiate is consecrated with water from a Mantra-empowered vase and given a Vajra in his hand along with his initiation-name (*vajranāma*), thus initiating him, as all those spirit-beings were by Vajrapāṇi, into the "Great Maṇḍala". Like the Śaiva Trika-Kaulas, the text states that if possession is not achieved through the various prescribed rites, then the initiate is not authorized to proceed any further and should be abandoned.¹³¹¹

¹³⁰⁹ *āviṣṭamātrasya divyaṃ jñānam utpadyate | tena jñānena paracittāny avabudhyati sarvakāryāṇi cātītānāgatavartamānāni jñānāti hṛdayaṃ cāsya dṛḍhībhavati sarvatathāgataśāsane sarvaduḥkhāni cāsya praṇāśyanti sarvabhayavigatas' ca bhavaty avadhyāḥ sarvasattveṣu sarvatathāgataś cādhiṣṭhanti sarvasiddhayaś cāsyaābhimukhībhavanti apūrvāṇi cāsyaākāraṇaḥsararatiprīṭīkarāṇi sukhāny utpadyante | taiḥ sukhaiḥ keṣāṃ cit samādhayo niṣpadyante keṣāṃ cid dhāraṇyaḥ keṣāṃ cit sarvāsāparipūrayoyāvātkeṣāṃ cit sarvatathāgatatvam api niṣpadyata iti.* STTS, I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section. Translation by Sanderson (2009: 134).

¹³¹⁰ *mahāmaṇḍale ca dṛṣṭamātre sarvatathāgatair adhiṣṭhyate vajrasattvas' cāsya hṛdaye tiṣṭhati | nānādyāni ca raśmimaṇḍaladarśanādīni prātihāryavikurvītāni paśyati | sarvatathāgataādhiṣṭhitatvāt kadā cid bhagavān mahāvajradharaḥ svarūpeṇa darśanaṃ dadāti tathāgato veti | tataḥ prabhṛtisarvārthāḥ sarvamanobhirucitakāryāṇi sarvasiddhīr yāvadvajradharatvam api tathāgatatvam veti.* STTS, I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section. Translation by Sanderson (2009: 135)

¹³¹¹ As stated by Ānandagarbha in the *Sarvavajrodaya*; "If possession does not occur, because [the candidate] has committed [too] many sins, he should proceed to destroy those sins by repeatedly making the Sin-Destruction Mudrā... [The candidate] will definitely become possessed. If possession does not occur even so,

In Ānandagarbha's *Sarvavajrodaya*, a ritual manual detailing initiation into this *maṇḍala* of the STTS, we also find that in this state the ritual teacher (*vajrācārya*) can use the initiate as an oracle, echoing the *svasthāveśa* rites we discussed earlier:

Then when the *ācārya* has ascertained that [the candidate] is possessed (*samāviṣṭam*) he should form the *samayamudrā* of Vajrasattva and address him with [the *mantras*] *HE VAJRASATTVA HE VAJRARATNA HE VAJRADHARMA HE VAJRAKARMA* and *NR̥TYA SATTVA NR̥TYA VAJRA* (DANCE, O SATTVA; DANCE, O VAJRA). If he is indeed possessed (*āviṣṭa*) he will adopt the *Vajrasattvamudrā*. Then the *ācārya* should show the *Mudrā* of the Vajra Fist. By this means all the deities beginning with Vajrasattva make themselves present [in him]. Then he should ask him something that he wishes [to ascertain], with the following [procedure]. He should visualize a Vajra on the tongue of the possessed (*āviṣṭa*) (and say SPEAK, O VAJRA. [The candidate] then tells him everything [that he wishes to know].¹³¹²

Here we see the clear usage of the term *āveśa* to refer to overt possession rather than some abstract state as seen in some Śaiva texts. The signs in this case involve the spontaneous adoption of the *Vajrasattvamudrā* and the entrance of the deities into the oracle. However, we do also find the term used throughout the text in its more abstract sense, denoting a spiritual state of identification with divine beings, similar to the "immersion" associated with *samāveśa* among the Trika-Kaulas. In these cases, the term *vajrāveśaḥ* ("Vajra-possession") is typically employed and refers to a kind of non-dual trance state, which gives the practitioner enhanced powers to accomplish various sorceristic rites and achieve various *siddhis*.¹³¹³ In a section entitled *Vajraṛddhisiddhi*, "The Attainment of Supernatural Vajra-powers", it states:

then he must not give him the consecration." See Sanderson (2009: 135 fn. 315) for full Sanskrit passage and translation.

¹³¹² *tataḥ samāviṣṭam jñātvācāryeṇa HE VAJRASATTVA HE VAJRARATNA HE VAJRADHARMA HE VAJRAKARMA iti vajrasattvasamayamudrām baddhvoccāraṇīyam | punar NR̥TYA SATTVA NR̥TYA VAJRA iti | sa ced āviṣṭaḥ śrīvajrasattvamudrām badhnīyāt | tadā cāryeṇa vajramuṣṭimudropadarśanīyā | evaṃ sarve śrī vajrasattvādayaḥ sānnidhyaṃ kalpayanti | tato 'bhipretavastu prcched anena | jihvāyām tasyāviṣṭasya vajraṃ vicintya brūhi vajra iti vaktavyam | tataḥ sarvaṃ vadati. Sarvavajrodaya, f.61v2–3: Sanskrit edition and translation by Sanderson 2009 (136: fn. 317)*

¹³¹³ See Sanderson (2009: 139) for numerous references in the STTS

When the state of the vajra-possession (*vajrāveśa*) arises, one should visualize the water as reflecting an image of a *vajra*. If one accomplishes this quickly, one can walk on the surface of water. When one enters the state of possession (*āveśa*) in like manner, whatever form one visualizes as oneself, that form oneself becomes, even the form of the Buddha. When one has entered the state of possession (*āviṣṭa*) in like manner, one should visualize oneself as being equal to space. As long as one wishes, one can enter a state of invisibility. While being in a state of the vajra-possession (*vajrāveśa*), one should visualize oneself as a vajra [Vajrasattva]. As long as one is established to that ascended [position], one can fly in space.¹³¹⁴

Note the parallel idea of reflection (*bimba*) found throughout the Śaiva literature.

Through this state of possession, it appears that one can accomplish a variety of *siddhis* such as walking on water, flying through the air, and even take on the form of the Buddha.

However, *āveśa* is not limited to these supernatural attainments, but also seen as a method to achieve enlightenment quickly: “For by means of possession by [Vajra]sattva (*sattvāveśayogād*) enlightenment will quickly be attained.”¹³¹⁵ This becomes more explicit in the STTS's discussion of Deity Yoga.

We should briefly note the mention of Vajrasattva ("The Adamantine Being") here, who figures prominently in many Buddhist Tantras, including the STTS, and is closely linked with three other deities - Vajrapāṇi, Akṣobhya, and Vajradhara. He is of course also associated with the *vajra*, a multivalent symbol that most prominently expresses the indestructible essence of the Universe and one's nature, synonymous with the Buddhist understanding of *sūnyatā* (emptiness or boundlessness). Linrothe, who has written on

¹³¹⁴ *vajrāveśe samutpanne vajrabimbamayaṃ jalam | bhāvaya[n̄chīghraṃ si]ddhastu jalasyopari caṃkramet || 1 || tathaiṅveśamutpadya yad rūpaṃ svayamātmanah | bhāvayaṃ bhavate tattu buddharūpamapi svayam || 2 || tathaiṅviṣṭamātmānamākāśo 'hamiti svayam | bhāvayan yāvadiccheta tāvadadr̥śyatām brajet || 3 || vajrāviṣṭaḥ svayaṃ bhatvā vajro 'hamiti bhāvayan / yāvādāruhate sthānantāvadākāśago bhaved iti || 4 || STTS I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section. Do-Kyun Kwon, *Sarvatathagatatattvasaṃgraha, Compendium of All the Tathagatas: A Study of its Origin, Structure and Teachings*, (PhD Dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2002): 83 notes that according to the commentator, in terms of the *mudrās*, this rite is regarded as the *mahāmudrā*. In this context, the vajra-possession means one who meditates on the subtle-vajra and makes it steadfast, while the statement, “one should visualise oneself as a vajra”, indicates Vajrasattva (he references *Kosalālamkāra*, Vol. 70, No. 3326, p. 237-3-8 and 237-4-7-8).*

¹³¹⁵ *yatsattvāveśayogāddhi kṣipraṃ bodhiravāpyate iti || STTS I.1.30 Vajradhupa section.*

Vajrasattva, describes how the term has often been abstracted in various ways throughout Buddhist texts. The first set of references deal with Vajrasattva as a Bodhisattva, as seen in the STTS, while in slightly later Tantras Vajrasattva becomes promoted to a Buddha and Tathāgata. In some cases, he is considered the one and Absolute Buddha, a fusion of the other five prominent Tathāgatas in this period.¹³¹⁶ The third set of associations cluster around ideas of Vajrasattva as a state of being, often equated with one's Buddha-nature enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*), or Buddhahood itself.¹³¹⁷ These associations also relate to the concept of Vajrasattva as the ultimate teacher, who the *ācārya* is supposed to fuse and identify with. The *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhitāntra*, for example, states that “after having made salutations to the Bhagavat Vairocana, the Master transforms himself into Vajrasattva.”¹³¹⁸ This is seen to this day among Newari Buddhist teachers known as *Vajrācāryas* who, according to David Gellner, say “that they take the form of guru Vajrasattva’s ‘created body’ (*nirmāṇakāya*).”¹³¹⁹ Another example is seen in the initiation rites of the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra* [SDP], which states that it is Vajrasattva himself who opens the initiates eyes when seeing the *maṇḍala* and who establishes himself in the initiates heart.¹³²⁰ As part of the consecration, the initiate is also instructed to say, “Let all

¹³¹⁶ See Robert N. Linrothe, "Mirror Image: Deity and Donor as Vajrasattva", *History of Religions*, 54 (1): (2014): 13-16 and Gray (2007: 109 and 172) for textual references.

¹³¹⁷ Linrothe (2014: 14 fns. 19-22) for references

¹³¹⁸ Linrothe (2014: 18) citing David Gray, states "Indrabhūti's commentary (ca. 10th century) on the first nine lines of the third chapter of the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra, 'The Procedure of Consecration and Fee [Payment],' associates Vajrasattva unambiguously with consecration. 'The adept who has the three vows should remain before the vajra master, the very embodiment of Vajrasattva, the sixth [buddha].'"

¹³¹⁹ David N. Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its Hierarchy of Ritual*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 262.

¹³²⁰ *Oṃ vajrasattvaḥ svayaṃ te 'dya cakṣūghāṇanataṭparaḥ // udghāṭayati sarvākṣo vajracakṣur anuttaram iti /* SDP 20a in Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra: Elimination of All Evil Destinies: Sanskrit and Tibetan texts with introduction, English translation, and notes*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 151. "Oṃ Vajrasattva, today he himself opens your eyes, He opens every eye, the Supreme Vajra-eye", *vajrasattvaḥ svayaṃ te 'dya hrdaye samavasthitah* - "Today Vajrasattva himself has entered into your heart." SDP 102b in Skorupski (1983: 290).

the Tathāgatas consecrate (*ādhiṣṭhantaṃ*) me and let Vajrasattva descend upon/possess (*āviśatu*) me.”¹³²¹ The use of *āviś*, of course, implies possession by Vajrasattva who enters the body of the initiate during the rite. All these concepts make it clear why Vajrasattva becomes most consistently found in rites involving consecration, empowerment, initiation and, of course, Deity Yoga.

Like the Hindu tradition of *prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, the Tantric Buddhists also believed objects (e.g., amulets, images, dhāraṇīs etc.) could be divinized and empowered through consecration rites. These Tantric Buddhist consecration rites very much resemble Deity Yoga practices, and it is clear the two are conceptually related. On this Charles Orzech writes,

The aim of both rites is first to make the image or the person a fit abode for a deity by creating its attributes, properly “mantrifying” the recipient through *nyāsa* and *mudrā*, and then to induce the “entry” of the deity into the image or the person.¹³²²

Yael Bentor, who did a study on various Tibetan Buddhist tantric consecration manuals, lays out the core components of the consecration ritual common to almost all of them. They include: 1. A meditation on emptiness involving visually dissolving the receptacle object away 2. From that emptiness, re-generating the receptacle as the *samayasattva* of one's *yidam* (tutelary deity); 3. Invitation of the *jñānasattva* (wisdom-being) into the receptacle and its absorption (in Tibetan *bstim*, future of *stim pa* meaning “to enter, penetrate, pervade, to be absorbed in”) into the *samayasattva*; 4. Requesting the *jñānasattva* to remain in the receptacle as long as *saṃsāra* lasts. According to Bentor, in almost every Tibetan Buddhist consecration, the entrance of the *jñānasattva* is accompanied by the following recitation from the Tibetan *Consecration Tantra*, “As all the buddhas, from [their]

¹³²¹ *brūhi sarvatathāgatas cādhiṣṭhantaṃ vajrasattvo me āviśatu* SDP 103a in Skorupski (1983: 292).

¹³²² Charles D. Orzech, "On the Subject of Abhiṣeka", in *Pacific World*, 3rd series, No 13, (2011): 117.

abodes in Tuṣita heaven, entered the womb of Queen Māyā, likewise may you enter this reflected image (*gzugs brnyan*).”¹³²³

As we will continue to see, these consecration rites precisely parallel the rites of Deity Yoga and is likely based up on them.¹³²⁴ Let us now look at the STTS's treatment of Deity Yoga in closer detail.

DEITY YOGA IN THE STTS

After the brief and undeveloped references found in both the Consecration Sutra and the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhitāntra*, it is the STTS that provides the first fully detailed account of Deity Yoga in Buddhist Tantra, which it considers the *sine qua non* practice for attaining enlightenment and which becomes foundational in Tantric Buddhism. The importance of Deity Yoga is recognized by Orzech, who remarks, “The ultimate soteriological element of Esoteric [Buddhist] ritual is ‘identification’ or the generation of the adept in the body of the divinity for the purpose of insight into emptiness.”¹³²⁵ Bulcsu Siklós, a scholar on the Vajrabhairava traditions, further recognizes the overlap between Deity Yoga and deity possession, stating, “Deity yoga is a type of formalized possession involving conscious direction of the evolution of a form body of an enlightened being which resides in a formalized purified universe (the *maṇḍala*).”¹³²⁶

¹³²³ *Rab tu gnas pa mdor bsdus pa'i rgyud*. Tibetan text and translation by Bendor (1996: 293-294).

¹³²⁴ However, it is unclear to me without further research, which may have influenced which first. Bendor (1996: 58-59) states *The Consecration Tantra* derives its scriptural authority from the *Samvarodaya* (ch. 22), *Hevajra* (ch. II, i), *Dākārṇava* (ch. 25), *Caturyoginī* (ch. 5), and *Abhidhānottara* (ch. 48) Tantras

¹³²⁵ Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The Scripture for "Humane Kings" in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998): 152.

¹³²⁶ See Bulcsu Siklós, *The Vajrabhairava Tantras: Tibetan & Mongolian Texts with Introduction, Translation and Notes*, (Doctoral Dissertation, University of London, 1990): 36.

In this practice, adepts first deconstruct and then reconstruct themselves as enlightened Buddhas through a series of contemplations, visualizations, and the use of *mantras*, *mudrās*, and *nyāsa*, etc., tools we've also seen in *āveśa* rites among the Śaivas/Śaktas. The practices arise out of the narrative at the beginning of the STTS, which details the Bodhisattva Sarvārthasiddhi's path through the five manifest enlightenments (*pañcābhisambodhi*), resulting in his Buddhahood. In the following paragraph, I will briefly summarize Sarvārthasiddhi's spiritual journey as expounded by the STTS in its first chapter on the *Vajradhātu Mahamaṇḍala*:

The Tathāgatas, all speaking in unison, instruct Sarvārthasiddhi to examine and meditate on his own mind and to repeat the mantra *OM CITTAPRATIVEDHAM KAROMĪ* ("I PENETRATE THE MIND!"). The Bodhisattva responds that he has achieved the resultant realization of emptiness and has a vision of a lunar-disc positioned at his heart. This, the Tathāgatas tell him, is a representation of his mind, which is all-luminous and which commentators identify as (1.) "Mirror-Like wisdom" and "The Knowledge of the Sameness of all the Tathāgatas (*sarvatathāgatasamatājñān-ābhisambuddhaḥ*), the first of the five manifest enlightenments. They tell him "O noble son, this mind is luminous by nature. When it is acted upon, so it becomes, just as a white garment stained with dye," implying the mind takes the form of whatever object it focuses upon as we saw in the passage on *vajrāveśa* previously.¹³²⁷ When focused upon itself, we are told, the mind reveals itself as the nature of light. Thus, through this type of cultivation one can transform the mind. They then instruct Sarvārthasiddhi to generate the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) with the *mantra*: *OM BODHI-CITTAM UTPADAYAMI* ("I generate the thought of enlightenment."). This results in

¹³²⁷ A commonplace of Indic thought, already documented in the Yoga Sūtras.

the second *abhisambodhi*, which is identified with (2.) "The Wisdom of Equality" or "The Entrance of the Secret Pledge of the Knowledge-Mudrā of the Vajra-Sameness of all the Tathagatas" (*sarvatathāgatavajrasamatājñānamudrāguhyasamayapraviṣṭaḥ*) also known as Equality-Wisdom, and manifests with a vision of a second lunar disc. All the Tathāgatas then say, ‘The essence of all the Tathāgatas has become manifested in you as the Samantabhadra thought of enlightenment.’ In order to stabilize this state, they further instruct him to visualize a *vajra*-form on the lunar disc inside the heart with the following *mantras*: *OM TIṢṬHA VAJRA* (Abide Vajra!) and *OM VAJRĀTMAKO 'HAM* (I am of the Vajra-Essence). Then all the *vajra*-elements, the body, speech, and mind, of all the Tathāgatas abiding throughout the whole of space, are said to penetrate (*praviṣṭāḥ*) and empower him with the power of all the Tathāgatas. This is the third state, (3.) The Purifying Knowledge of the Sameness of the Dharma of all the Tathāgatas (*sarvatathāgatadharmasamatājñānādhiḡamasvabhāvaśuddhaḥ*) or more simply, "Discriminating-Wisdom". The Tathāgatas then consecrate Sarvarthasiddhi with his new *vajra*-name Vajradhātu. Vajradhātu proceeds to tell all of them, “O Lord Tathagatas, I see myself as the Body of all the Tathāgatas (*sarvatathāgatakāyam*),” proclaiming he has achieved the fourth state, (4.) "The Naturally Luminous Knowledge of the Complete Sameness of all the Tathāgatas" (*sarvatathāgatasarvasamatāprakṛtiprabhāsvarajñāna*), also known as "Active-Wisdom". In the fifth and final manifest enlightenment, all the Tathāgatas instruct Vajradhātu to visualize himself as that *vajra*-being (*sattvavajra*), as the Buddha-form endowed with all the most excellent forms while reciting, "OM YATHA SARVATATHĀGATAS TATHAHAM" (“I am that which all the Tathagatas are”). With this, Vajradhātu achieves perfect enlightenment. He supplicates all the Tathāgatas and asks

them for a blessing in order to make this state of enlightenment firm. Again, all the Tathāgatas become infused (*praviṣṭā*) into the *vajra*-being of Vajradhātu (aka Sarvārthasiddhi), sealing his status as (5.) a perfectly enlightened Buddha (*samyakṣambuddhaḥ*).¹³²⁸

While *āveśa* is not explicitly mentioned in these particular passages, we do see the use of the related term *praviṣṭā* throughout to denote when the energies of the Tathagatas enter and fuse with Sarvārthasiddhi and when the *bodhisattva* penetrates the secret pledge (*guhyaśamaya*) during the second *abhisambodhi*, a topic we will discuss next. Conceptually, the use of *praviṣṭā* in these passages become synonymous with *āveśa/samāveśa* of the Śaiva/Śakta traditions. It is this final self-identification with the Tathāgatas which transforms the identity of Sarvārthasiddhi into the Buddha Vajradhātu. This narrative, as stated previously, becomes the seed for all subsequent Deity Yoga practices in this and all subsequent Buddhist Tantras.

The mention of the "Penetration the Secret Pledge of the Knowledge-Mudrā (*jñānamudrāguhyaśamayapraviṣṭa*) should be noted, since subsequent Deity Yoga practices expand upon this concept and, in many regards, this is where the intersection with deity possession is most explicit. Within the STTS itself, we are given a description of a *mahāmudrā* called “The *Mahāmudrā*-Bond of Evoking Vajrasattva” (*vajrasattvasādhanamahāmudrābandha*) in a section of the text entitled *Vajrāveśa* (STTS I.1.37):

Having generated (in samadhi) the state of *vajra*-possession (*vajrāveśa*) and having bound the *mahāmudrā* as entailed by the rite, one should generate (*prabhāvayet*) the *mahasattva* (great-being) in front of oneself. Having seen this as the *Jñanasattva* (knowledge-being), one should then generate it in one's own body. Having attracted

¹³²⁸ These homologies are based on the commentarial tradition – see Kwon (2002: 52) and Weinberger (2003: 57-59) for more on this.

(*ākṛṣya*), penetrated (*praveśya*), bound (*badhvā*) and subjugated (*vaśīkṛtvā*) it (through mantras), one can be successful.¹³²⁹

Here we can see clear parallels with other magical rites that use invocation, binding, and subjugation etc. to summon, manipulate, and control various deities or spirits, though in this case the being invoked is generically termed a *jñānasattva* (knowledge-being). It is this entity, who paradoxically represents the emptiness of all things (*dharmas*) and who is generated and visualized in one's own body. The following section describes how the practitioner then actually leads this being into his own body:

Having proclaimed “*SAMAYAS TVAM*” (You are the pledge) one should enter (*āviśet*) the lunar disc (which has been realized in one's mind) from behind and one should visualize (*bhāvayet*) oneself as the (Vajra)-sattva, while saying: “*SAMAYAS TVAM AHAM*” (“You are the pledge, I [am you]”). One should then visualize oneself as the *mudrā* of that being (*sattva*), and perfect it through *vajra*-recitation.¹³³⁰

The text goes on to state that by reciting the mantra "JAḤ HŪḤ VAḤ HOḤ" one can then cause all the Buddhas to enter one's own body (*bruvan kāye sarvabuddhān praveśayet*). According to Śākyamitra's commentary on the STTS, the *Kosalālamkāra*, this rite is the definition of Deity Yoga by which the practitioner attains complete union with the wisdom-being (*jñānasattva*).¹³³¹

Although some aspects of the rite are obscure from this early description, we can get a clearer understanding by looking at descriptions in later Buddhist Tantras. Later texts break down the stages of Deity Yoga into two - the (1) "Generation Stage" (*utpattikrama*) and the (2) "Completion Stage" (*utpannakrama*) - both of which generally aim to transform the

¹³²⁹ *tatrāyaṃ mahāmudrāsādhanavidhivistarō bhavati | vajrāveśaṃ samutpādya mahāmudrāṃ yathāvidhi | badhvā tu paratastaṃ tu mahāsattvaṃ prabhāvayet || 1 || taṃ dṛṣtvā jñānasattvaṃ tu svaśarīre prabhāvayet / ākṛṣya praveśya badhvā vaśīkṛtvā ca sādhayet || 2 ||* STTS I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section. Translation adapted from Kwon (2002: 88).

¹³³⁰ *samayastvam iti prokte pṛṣṭhataścandramāviśet | tatrātmā bhāvayetsatvaṃ "samayastvam" ahaṃ brūvan || 1 || yasya sattvasya yā mudrā tāmātmānantu bhāvayet | sādhayedvajrajāpena sarvamudrāprasādhanam || 2 ||* STTS I.1.37 Vajrāveśa section. Translation adapted from Kwon (2002: 88).

¹³³¹ See Kwon (2002: 88) for references.

mind-body of the practitioner into the mind-body of an awakened Buddha. In the generation stage, the practitioner first meditates upon the nature of mind and the physical world, both of which are deconstructed and dissolved into their essential and inherent qualities - emptiness and natural luminosity. From this “realm” of emptiness and luminosity the practitioner is instructed to generate or visualize an ideal form of themselves as the deity, a constructed "ritual body" related to their initiation and vows and identified as the *samayasattva* ("Symbolic Being" or "Pledge-Being").¹³³²

Besides the body, one is equally supposed to cultivate the mind in order to develop “Divine Pride” (*deva-mana* or *vajra-garva*), a transformative process of extreme one-pointed focus that one's own identity is actually the identity of the visualized deity. As one’s skill in visualization rises, the mind becomes entirely absorbed in this imaginary divine *maṇḍala*, which has, at the center, his own self simultaneously identified as the deity. In the Buddhist Tantric view, this visualized reality is considered closer to absolute reality than the ordinary phenomenal and relative world we usually experience. Through this process one dissolves any notion of an “ordinary-I” and instead becomes established in "Divine Pride", which is understood as an antidote to the usually afflictive emotion of pride. Through these intense visualizations and meditations, one begins to naturally assume the divine "I" of the deity. Once the construction of this "receptacle body" (*samayasattva*) has been completed and deemed fit, one then begins the second stage, the completion stage. In this final stage, the actual deity, the *jñānasattva* (the “Knowledge/Wisdom Being”), which is usually some

¹³³² See Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) for his understanding of *samayasattva* as "Pledge" or "Vow" Being, though *samaya* just designates a novice, or initiand. See his many excellent accounts on Deity Yoga in his book as well.

celestial *Bodhisattva* or *Buddha*, is summoned and made to unite with the practitioner's body and mind.¹³³³

As this is considered an advanced practice in Tantric Buddhism, the whole process is said to be difficult and arduous, and each of the various schools and branches of have their own interpretations, methods and techniques (e.g. yoga of single-mindedness, breath-control, manipulation of the winds and channels, meditations, sexual yoga, etc.) to complete both stages.¹³³⁴ For example, an early Yogatantra, the *Kriyasamgraha* ("The Compendium of Rituals") and a Yogīni Tantra, the *Vajrabhairava Tantra*, use light metaphors when discussing this process of uniting the practitioner with the deity, echoing the ray (*raśmi*) terminology David White discussed earlier.¹³³⁵ In these texts the *jñānasattva* is summoned by dispersing rays of light from the deity's seed syllable (*bīja*), which is visualized as being in one's heart. These rays pervade the universe and cause the *jñānasattva*, to descend into one's own body vessel, the *samayasattva*. Once summoned the *jñānasattva* is worshiped and made to fully merge with the *samayasattva*, the practitioner's symbolic body, into one indistinguishable union. Stephen Beyer quotes the great 14th century Tibetan teacher Tsongkhapa in regard to this union, who states, "If one makes the knowledge being enter in, his eyes and so on are mixed inseparable with the eyes and so on of the symbolic being,

¹³³³ Siklós, based upon his study of various Buddhist Tantras, argues that meditating on emptiness is only the first step in Deity Yoga resulting in the creation of the practitioners *dharmakāya*, a "dharma body" of the Buddhas. This "form", however, is insufficient for Mahayana and Vajrayana practitioners who have vowed to stay in *samsāra* in order to enlighten all beings. Instead, like the Buddha himself, one also needed a "form body" (*rūpakāya*) in order to perform enlightened functions while in *samsāra*. This *rūpakāya* takes two forms - the "enjoyment body" (*sambhogakāya*), which functions in the realm of the Buddhas, and the "emanation or transformation body" (*nirmāṇakāya*), which functions in the realm of sentient beings. It is meditation and identification with this enlightened *nirmāṇakāya* of a Buddha, along with their associated *maṇḍala* and retinue, which is known as Deity Yoga. See Siklós (1990: 35) for more on this.

¹³³⁴ See Daniel Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra: An Introduction to the Esoteric Buddhism of Tibet*, (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005) for descriptions of a variety of methods

¹³³⁵ See earlier chapter for White's discussion on this.

down to their very atoms: one should visualize their total equality."¹³³⁶ This merged deity is believed to be endowed with certain powers and attributes, which are then bestowed upon the practitioner. In this state, the adept is empowered to interact with the deities of the *maṇḍala* as their equal or as their Lord.

3. DEITY YOGA AND ĀVEŚA

In many of the scriptural accounts of Deity Yoga, we find some usage of *āveśa*, *vajrāveśa*, and related terms when describing the descent of the wisdom being (*jñānasattva*) into the adept's body. In my view, as with some other scholars, this signifies a close relationship between deity possession as seen in the Śaiva literature and Deity Yoga in Buddhist texts.¹³³⁷ Stephen Beyer, for example, makes reference to a *Cakrasaṃvara* rite involving Deity Yoga, though in this case it is not union with one deity, but both the central deity and his consort, a common feature in Buddhist *Yoginītantras*. The text states: "Entering into union in the sky before me, they [The Father and Mother] all melt into Great Bliss and enter through my mouth; descending the central channel...".¹³³⁸ This entrance through the mouth is similar, as we've seen, to descriptions of Śaiva possession rites involving Bhairava and the Mothers in early texts such as the BYT and TU.¹³³⁹

The connection between these two phenomena is further exemplified by passages in various Buddhist Tantras on the signs and proofs that manifest during this descent, and which

¹³³⁶ Beyer (1973: 101) who quotes Tsong-kha-pa, Sngags-rim chen-po (The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra), P. 6210, vol. 161, 199.1.4-5, in *Collected Works WA 142a*.

¹³³⁷ See Beyer (1973), Siklós (1990), Smith (2006), Sanderson (2009), and Samuels, *Civilized Shamans*, (Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), "Possession and Self-Possession: Spirit Healing, Tantric Meditation and *Āveśa*." *Diskus 9* (2008), and (2013).

¹³³⁸ Beyer (1973: 113)

¹³³⁹ For example, BYT 21.102-121 & 47.39-46 and TU 4.3 - passages found earlier in this chapter.

parallel many of the same signs seen in the Śaiva scriptures on *āveśa* and *śaktipāta*, and even earlier in the medical literature. A fascinating example can be found in the description of a *Vajrabhairava* consecration rite (*abhiṣeka*) compiled by the seventh Dalai Lama and which is said to be based on Indian sources. In it, the Dalai Lama quotes the famous commentator of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, Ācārya Nāgabodhi:

Expunge [obstructors] with (the *mantras*): *Oṃ hrīm śrīm vikṛtānana hūṃ phaṭ*. Purify into emptiness with: *Oṃ svabhāvaśuddhaḥ sarvadharman svabhāvaśuddho 'ham*. Think the following: From emptiness I myself become the syllable *Hūṃ*; I myself, the syllable, become a vajra marked with *Hūṃ*; I myself, the *vajra*, become the great Vajrabhairava; my body is dark blue with one face and two arms holding in my hands a goad and skull bow... Chant: *Oṃ hrīm śrīm vikṛtānana hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ phaṭ/ āveśaya sthambhaya / ra ra ra ra / cālaya cālaya / hūṃ hūṃ jhaim jhaim phaṭ!* As a result of saying this many times, the wisdom [beings] enter...

Visualize that the light-rays of the fire in one's body spread out to the ten directions and invite all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the form of Mañjuśrī Yamāri; like rain falling, they melt into one...

As a result of the Wisdom beings entering in that way, the minds of the deities—i.e., the non-dual wisdom that has the nature of the first *bodhisattvabhūmi* and so on—actually enter the mind stream of the disciple, or else one visualizes and believes that it has done so. Thereby, the wisdom blessing has entered the disciple; this is called the “Shared [blessing]” [Tib. *skal mnyam*; Skt. *sabhāgan*]. Concerning the signs that [the wisdom beings] have entered, the root Tantra of *Guhyasamāja* says, “. . . shaking and tremors . . .” Ācārya Nāgabodhi comments, “One should know that the signs of entrance are shaking, elation, fainting, dancing, collapsing, or leaping upward.”¹³⁴⁰

The *Śiṣyānugrahaśāstra*, an anonymous manual used in rites devoted to the Buddhist deity Cakrasaṃvara, has recently been transliterated by Péter-Dániel Szántó and gives more interesting data regarding this descent/possession by the *jñānāsattva*:

Thus, for those with well-composed minds, the signs of accomplishment (*siddhilakṣaṇam*) will appear. When the disciple is possessed by the *jñānāsattva* (*jñānāviṣṭah*), his hair stands on end, his tears flow, he ejaculates, experiences hot and cold [at the same time], shakes and trembles. [The master] should [then recite the mantra] *Tiṣṭha Vajra*. When [the disciple] has resumed his normal state, [the master]

¹³⁴⁰ As seen in Smith (2006: 391) who used a translation from the Tibetan by John Dunne - see Smith for full reference.

should teach him the visualizing meditation, the worship and mantras of the goddesses, and the truth which is *sahaja* (innate).¹³⁴¹

In the 10th-11th century visualization manual *Sādhanamālā*, a huge collection of *sādhanas* for various Tantric deities, we also find possession-like symptoms described. When visualizing the deity Lokanāthā (aka Avalokiteśvara), we are told that the body of the possessed *yogi* will tremble and shake (*paradehe dhunanakampanāveśanam*) and that they will roar like an elephant and act as if intoxicated by alcohol (*sa yogī dviradavat garjati madirāmatta iva*).¹³⁴²

Like the Śaivas, the Buddhists would also evoke specific deities depending on what their particular goal was, which was primarily for worldly ends, often involving *abhicāra* type rites, or for purposes of enlightenment. For example, in the STTS overtly fierce deities such as Vajrakrodha were used for wrathful rites, such as destruction of evil obstructors or purification. The rites often follow the same basic structure, with variations only in the names of the deities and their associated *mantras*, *mudrās*, and offerings used. An interesting example of this sort is seen in a Vajrakrodha rite described in the *Trilokavijaya Mahāmaṇḍala* in chapter six of the STTS. Here the *vajra-master* (*vajrācārya*) is said to have bound the fierce deity Vajrakrodha with a *mudrā* and instructs the *vajra-pupil* (*vajrasīṣyā*) to recite the following mantras "OM GR̥HṆA VAJRA SAMAYA HŪṂ VAM" ("Seize the Vajra-pledge!"), followed by "OM VAJRA SAMAYAṂ PRAVIŚĀM" ("I enter into the Vajra-pledge"). Here the roles are reversed in a way, the guru and pupil seizing and possessing the

¹³⁴¹ *evaṃ sūthiracittasya jāyate siddhilakṣaṇam | jñānāviṣṭo bhavet chiṣyo romāñcam jāyate tadā || aśrupātaś cyutiś caiva himagharmagataṃ punaḥ | prakam-panam cālanaṃ ca tiṣṭha vajra tadā bhavet || svarūpāvasthitasyāśya bhāvanām kathayet tataḥ | pūjām mantram ca devīnām tattvaṃ ca saḥajātmikam || Śiṣyānugrahavidhi (A18v, B3r) as seen in Péter-Dániel Szántó, *Selected Chapters from the Catuspīṭhantra, Vol 1 and 2*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Oxford, 2013): 387 fn. 277. I have slightly modified his translation.*

¹³⁴² *Sādhanamālā* 36 in Bhattacharya (1968: 83)

samayasattva, which appears to be Vajrakrodha. The disciple is then told to generate (*utpādayed*) the state of *vajra*-possession (*vajrāveśa*) with the *samaya-mudrā* and the mantra "VAJRĀVEŚA AḤ"¹³⁴³ followed by the mantra "OM VAJRAPĀṆI VAJRA-KARMA-KARO BHAVA" ("Vajrapāṇi, become the vajra-action-performer!"), implying that now it is the disciple who is "possessed" and becomes identified with Vajrapāṇi, the true agent. The text goes on to state that possession (*samāviśati*) will take place, which will result in empowerment by all the Tathāgatas (*tenāveśena sarvatathāgatāir adhiṣṭhyate*), knowledge about everything past, present, and future (*sarvaṃ cātītānāgatapratyutpannan*) and invincibility (*jānāti avadhyaś ca bhavati sarvasattvebhyaḥ adhr̥ṣyaḥ*). Additionally, by pronouncing the HŪṀ sound, the text says the possessed disciple can summon, draw in, bind, subjugate, and rule all deities, including Mahādeva.¹³⁴⁴ The inclusion of Mahādeva (Śiva) at the end signifies, I believe, once again the Buddhists superiority and command over the Śaivas their practices, some of which were assimilated as seen earlier in the MVS.

4. GAṆACAKRAS, YOGATANTRAS & YOGINĪTANTRAS

In what Sanderson calls "the next phase" of Tantric Buddhism, beginning with the eighth century *Guhyasamāja Tantra* [GST],¹³⁴⁵ we find further fusion of Śaiva and Buddhist iconography, resulting in Buddhist deities being depicted and visualized as multi-headed, multi-limbed beings, usually copulating with their respective consorts. Additionally, we find a new emphasis on "non-dualistic practices" (*advaitācārah*) and the use of transgressive

¹³⁴³ *tataḥ praveśya vajrāveśasamayamudrayāsyāveśam utpādayed anena hṛdayena VAJRĀVEŚA AḤ* | in Chapter VI, *Trilokavijaya Mahāmaṇḍala*, STTS

¹³⁴⁴ *mahādevādisarvadevākarṣaṇapraveśanabandhanavaśīkaraṇapātanaśamo* in Chapter VI, *Trilokavijaya Mahāmaṇḍala*, STTS

¹³⁴⁵ GST is considered either a Yoga, Yogottara, or Mahāyoga Tantras according to various traditions.

offerings, known as "practices free-of-inhibition" (*niḥśaṅkācārah*), including the ritual consumption of impure substances such as urine, feces, semen, and blood.

The GST is followed closely by the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālaśaṃvara* [SDJ], also classified as *Yogatantra* text, which exhibits further “*śaktization*” a process that begin in the STTS, as we've seen.¹³⁴⁶ This process continues unabated, into the final phase of Tantric Buddhism's development, leading to the *Yoginītantras*, which parallel the Śaiva *Vidyāpīṭha* traditions we've already looked at. In the same way elements from cult of *yoginīs* gain prominence in the Śaiva *Vidyāpīṭha* scriptures, in many *Yogatantras*, and almost all *Yoginītantras*, their *maṇḍala* programs exhibit increasing emphasis on goddesses, *yoginīs*, and/or *ḍākinīs*. Additionally, their iconography is frequently Kāpālīka and cremation-ground in orientation, including an emphasis on the consorts of the Buddhas, secret erotic practices, and the further incorporation of possession (*āveśa*) in their rites. In both the Śaiva *Vidyāpīṭha* and Buddhist *Yoginītantras*, the traditions represented themselves as containing the highest practices and most esoteric revelations in their respective canons.

With the SDJ we see the rise of the cult of Heruka, a fierce figure who parallels Bhairava of the Śaivas, likewise surrounded by his retinue of *Yoginīs* and dons Kāpālīka accoutrements. Like Bhairava, Heruka's roots also lie in the *Yoginī* cults of the cremation-ground dwelling ascetics. Heruka, in fact, is described as wearing the freshly flayed skin of Bhairava, signaling his superiority and envelopment of the Bhairava cult and its practices.¹³⁴⁷ This includes for the first time in Buddhist literature, the practice of the infamous tantric "feasts" known as the *gaṇamaṇḍalam*, involving transgressive orgiastic sexual worship by both male and female adepts in an assembly, all of whom personify, or become possessed by,

¹³⁴⁶ See Sanderson (2009: 135) for more details of this incorporation and the section above

¹³⁴⁷ See Davidson (2002: 211-14)

the deities of the cult. As White points out in *Kiss of the Yogini* it is in these sorts of gatherings in Śaiva sources where:

...disembodied beings spontaneously sport with one another in the bodies of human Kaula practitioners, male and female. (TĀ 29.43) That is, the human partners in these sexual rituals are in fact inhabited, possessed by the semidivine Siddhas and Yoginīs themselves."¹³⁴⁸

Even in the STTS, we see that sexual rites almost always first involve the transformation of the practitioner into a Bodhisattva or a Buddha - the agent of the erotic activities being the supernatural beings invoked rather than the practitioner themselves. The STTS states, for example,

If after generating a firm intention to attain enlightenment he meditates on himself as the Buddha and worships himself [as the Buddha] with the pleasure of sexual intercourse he will obtain the joys of the Buddha himself.¹³⁴⁹

A fascinating early description of an autumnal "Bhairava Feast" has recently been documented by Judit Törzsök in the early *Skandapurāṇa*. Though not necessarily "Tantric", it is certainly carnivalesque and contains some interesting transgressive elements which are characteristic of the Atimārga and local/tribal cults of the time, perhaps suggesting the origins of such gatherings:

Wherever Bhairava goes, everybody starts behaving madly or like drunkards. Just as gods enter the twice-born, so too Bhairava shall enter the people. They shall wear various ornaments, but shall also be smeared with ashes, urine, feces etc... People shall behave without any restraint, singing, dancing, without shame; and they shall abuse each other, ride on dogs, wear clothes of the untouchable castes and the like. At the end of the festival, people shall declare Bhairava to be dead and throw his straw effigy into a pond or a river...Everybody shall be purified of all sins.¹³⁵⁰

¹³⁴⁸ White references Abhinavagupta's TĀ 29.43. See White (2003: 113 and fn. 105).

¹³⁴⁹ *bodhicittadṛḥhotpādād buddho 'ham iti cintayan | ratyā tu pūjayann ātmā labhed buddhasukhāny api*; in Chapter 4 of the STTS. Translation by Sanderson (2009: 140-141).

¹³⁵⁰ Translation in Törzsök (2004: 33-34).

One of the earliest examples of full-blown tantric feasts is found in the fourth *ṣaṭka* of the *Jayadrathayāmala*, though here it is known as a *vīramelāpaḥ*, “a gathering of Vīras”. I would refer readers to Sanderson’s full translation of this passage, as only a portion will be provided here:

With various [offerings] such as these he should gratify the five circles. Then at midday he should gratify them again until they are overflowing with joy. Then he should please the five circles with guest water, songs, and diverse music of the lute and flute to delight their ears. At this the rays [of their awareness] shine forth with great intensity, vibrant, blissful, flooded by so many delights. They dance, laugh out loud, and leap about eager to revel. They collapse, run, vomit, tremble, become weary, and faint. Some voice Mantras, others the secret [teachings], and other words that contain the core teachings [of the Krama] ...Some assume series of Mudrās. Some begin to dance with playful gestures [and] postures taught in the Kaula scriptures. Others, who are warriors, commence the [wild] *Tāṇḍava* dance [of Śiva] ...others focus their minds in meditation on Bhairava, others give voice to poetry, some hold their arms above their heads in various postures and sway them from side to side, some abandon themselves there to loud weeping... Some suddenly suspend their bodies...Some, personifying Aghora, eat vomit, and other's faeces (*atyutkaṣam*). Some will engage in copulation and drink its product when replete. O you whose feet are worshipped by the foremost of Vīras, when in this way it has expanded to the utmost the fused mass of the rays [of its consciousness] the supreme Vīramelāpa comes into being. I have taught you this wild dance of the Vīras (*vīrataṇḍavaḥ*), by celebrating which a Sādhaka quickly becomes able to accomplish any *siddhiḥ* and supremely adept in the gnosis of the Krama.¹³⁵¹

These sorts of gatherings are found throughout the more esoteric Hindu and Buddhist Tantras traditions, though a variety of terms have been used historically to describe them, including *gaṇacakra/gaṇamaṇḍala* (Circle of *Gaṇas*), *yoginīmelakaḥ* (*Assembly of Yoginīs*), *cakrayāgaḥ* (*Sacrifice to the Circle*), *cakramelakaḥ* (Circle Gathering), *cakrākṛīḍā* (‘Circle

¹³⁵¹ Sanderson (2007b: 280–288). See also TĀ (28.6–111; 28.372c–385b; 29.66; 29.78–79) for more on *melakas*.

Revelry'), *vīramelakaḥ* (Gathering of heroes) and *yoginīcakramelāpaḥ* (Meeting of the Circle of Yoginīs, in the KMT).¹³⁵²

One of the earliest examples in Buddhist Tantra is found in the *Catuspīṭhatantra* (CPT), which describes a similar gathering known as the *yogayoginīmaṇḍala*, "The Circle of Yogins and Yoginiś".¹³⁵³ Among the *Yoginītantras*, the *Catuspīṭhatantra* is considered to be one of the earliest of its class.¹³⁵⁴ At the center of its *maṇḍala* program is the Goddess *Jñānaḍākinī* ("Wisdom Ḍākinī"), who is surrounded by a pantheon of thirteen fierce goddesses. Once initiated into the *maṇḍala*, the practitioners can undertake a wide variety of procedures, typical of many tantras, ranging from sorceristic practices, to rainmaking, divination, Deity Yoga, and even sexual practices.¹³⁵⁵

The CPT accounts are briefly embedded in chapter 2.3, which the commentator Bhavabhaṭṭa states is a chapter on Deity Yoga (*devatābhāvanā*). It describes meditations on emptiness and non-duality, and a vajra/yoga-purification (*vajrasuddhāḥ/yogaśuddhāḥ*) in which one purifies the self and body through "non-dual knowledge" (*advayañāna*) and by visualizing oneself as the Goddess *Jñānaḍākinī*.¹³⁵⁶ As the Goddess she then generates around her eight more *ḍākinīs* (*Vajraḍākinī*, *Ghoraḍākinī*, *Vettālī*, *Caṇḍālī*, *Siṃhī*, *Vyāghrī*,

¹³⁵² See Sanderson (2007b), White (2003) and Hatley (2007 and 2016), Serbaeva-Saraogi (2016) and Szántó, "Minor Vajrayāna Texts V: The Gaṇacakraśānti attributed to Ratnākaraśānti" *Beiträge zur Kultur und Geistesgeschichte Asiens | Tantric Communities in Context*, Nr. 99, (2019) for varying terms and rites.

¹³⁵³ See Szántó (2019).

¹³⁵⁴ Principal among the numerous Tantras of this class is the *Laghuśaṃvara* also called *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Herukābhīdhāna*, the *Hevajratantra*, the *Catuspīṭha*, the *Vajrāmṛta*, the *Buddhakapāla*, the *Mahāmāyā*, the *Rigyārali*, the *Vajrārali*, the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa*, and the *Kālacakra*.

¹³⁵⁵ According to Szántó (2013), the text was especially popular in Nepal, and is thought to have originated from Bengal. It also proved to be very influential on the Śaṃvara cycle of Buddhist Tantras, which redacted much of its material in varying amounts depending on the scripture.

¹³⁵⁶ CPT 2.3.6-2.3.10 and 2.3.12cd-13ab.

Jambukī, Ulūkī followed by their four chief goddesses, Raudrī, Dīpinī, Cūṣiṇī and Kāmbojī), many of which again have parallels in Śaiva Tantras.¹³⁵⁷

The *gaṇacakra* is mentioned briefly towards the end of this long section [2.3.135] and only gives basic elements and details. Like the JYT account, the *gaṇacakra* is also described as a tantric feast, performed in liminal or sacred spaces (e.g., cremation grounds, temples), and involving the offering and ingestion of liquor and taboo substances (*pañcāmṛta* - "the five nectars" i.e., semen, feces, urine, menstrual blood, and phlegm) in a skull bowl or oyster shell. These offerings are identified in the text as the "nectar of gnosis" (*jñānāmṛta*) since, "In reality everything is pure for yogins" [2.3.139]. These are to be consumed by all the yogis and *yoginīs*, followed by propitiating the *yoginīs* with an offering of "The Five Elephant Goads" (*pañcāṅkuśa*), a code word for the five meats - elephant, cow, dog, horse, and human - which should be offered while in a nondual state "devoid of conceptualization and non-conceptualization (*kalpākalpavivarjitam*)" [2.3.161]. This is followed by the warning that, "One should not be attached to these pleasures, nor should he be overcome by [their] enjoyment. He should perform the rite of worship and so forth [regarding] all and everything as pure (*svacchā sarvasarveṇa*)." [2.3.164cd- 165ab].¹³⁵⁸ This is commonly found in other descriptions of *gaṇacakra* worship, due to the rite's great potential for individual or egoistic desires taking over and undermining the rites efficacy. Throughout the rite, the group is said to engage in wild dancing, singing, and sexual yogic rites with human consorts, who we are to assume are inhabited by *yoginīs*. Later tantric texts, both Hindu and Buddhist, have sanitized such rites, interpreting, for example, the sexual rites as being a purely visual exercise, but earlier versions are quite explicit and parallel the tantric feasts of the Śaivas. At

¹³⁵⁷ CPT 2.3.20-52

¹³⁵⁸ CPT 2.3.164cd- 165ab. Translation adapted from (Szántó 2013).

the end of the rites the various *maṇḍala*-deities (i.e., the *yoginīs*) and "outer" deities are dismissed. The outer deities go back to their respective external abodes, while the *maṇḍala*-deities are said to be absorbed back into the body of the yogin:

He should clench two *vajra*-fists and place the left [fist] on his heart. [Then] he should stretch out his right-hand place it on the ground [thus] dismissing [the *yoginīs*]. [He should recite:] *Oṃ ātmani tiṣṭha* (abide in [my] body) *hūṃ svāhā*.. Then he should [visualize that the deities] are dissolved (*līyate*) [back] into his body through his breath. [Then] he should worship himself visualizing [the deities as abiding in his own body] in an instant. [2.3.172-174] ¹³⁵⁹

ĀVEŚA IN THE CATUṢPĪṬHATANTRA [CPT]

Although, the term *āveśa* does not figure explicitly in this particular account, it is implicit with its use of various forms of *adhi+ṣṭhā* (e.g., *tiṣṭha* in 2.3.173), meaning "established" or "empowered" and even "possessed". This is evidenced further on in chapter three, which focuses prominently on various initiation and associated possession rites. The chapter begins with Vajrapāṇi asking the Goddess, an inversion characteristic of Goddess-oriented texts, a question: "Your highness, I am curious to hear: how is the sequence for empowerment (*adhiṣṭhānakrama*), by which, when displayed (*darśita*), beings become possessed (*adhiṣṭhā*) through the power of yoga?" [CPT 3.3.1]. The Buddhist commentator Bhavabhaṭṭa makes clear that *adhiṣṭhā* is synonymous with *āveśa* here, stating that this chapter is specifically a "Chapter on Possession" (*āveśādikapaṭalam*) and "Possession Rites" (*āveśavidhiḥ*), and that the yoga described here should be considered a "Yoga of Possession" (*āveśayoga*).¹³⁶⁰

¹³⁵⁹ *vajramuṣṭi dṛḍhaṃ baddhvā vāme hrdayasthāpanam | savyahasta prasāryaṃ tu bhūmau sthāpya visarjayet || Oṃ ātmani tiṣṭha hūṃ svāhā || paścād ātmaśvāsena ātmadehaṃ tu līyate | jhaṭitākārayogena pūjayed ātmabhāvatā ||* CPT 2.3.172-174. Translation adapted from Szántó 2013.

¹³⁶⁰ See Szántó (2013: Vol. 2, 162) for full Sanskrit commentary.

The goddess replies to Vajrapāṇi: “Hear, O Vajra[pāṇi], according to the truth, [that which] duly liberates from transmigration. One should display this method, possession (*adhiṣṭhādharma*), [as] a remedy for deluded beings." [CPT 3.3.2]. Bhavabhaṭṭa comments here, adding that once possession is manifested, those witnessing or experiencing it will gain faith (*āveśāc chraddhotpādyate*). She then describes a ritual which involves a complex visualization – first one visualizes a moon disk on the heart with the seed-syllable HŪṀ in its middle, which is said to emit rays of divine light in all directions and sets ablaze all the worlds, dissolving the Universe to emptiness, its true essence. After a series of other visualizations, and further contemplations on emptiness, the *guru* is then instructed to generate and visualize their own body as the Goddess Jñānaḍākinī, holding a skull-staff and skull-bowl, adorned with all kinds of ornaments, beautiful and of red color, her diadem adorned by the five Buddhas, and her body emitting numerous blazing rays (*raśmijvālām*) [CPT 3.3.3-3.3.10]. Again, Bhavabhaṭṭa clarifies here that she is not to be visualized as if in front of the *guru*, but that he is to be actually possessed (*āveśaḥ*) by her.¹³⁶¹ The text is unclear from here, but it seems the *guru*, now identified with Jñānaḍākinī, gives the initiate an enchanted pellet consisting of the five nectars (*pañcāmṛta*), which the text states will cause "immediate possession" (*āviṣṭa tatkṣaṇād*). Then the possessed *guru*, will sing a “vajra-song” (*vajragītam*), which causes the initiate to spontaneously dance, sing, and enter a meditative state. [CPT 3.3.13].¹³⁶² After the initiate has been brought out of possession with the appropriate mantra, the *guru* removes the initiate's blindfold and shows him all the

¹³⁶¹ *Jñānaḍākinībhāvanāpūrvakam āveśaḥ kartavya iti darśayann āha* | commentary to CPT 3.3.8 as seen in Szántó (2013: Vol. 2, 165)

¹³⁶² *pañcāmṛtasya yuktasya śatam aṣṭam tu jāpitam | dāpaye vidhinā yuktam āviṣṭa tatkṣaṇād api | āviṣṭasya tu yoginām vajragītam tu kārayet* ||CPT 3.3.13|| The Sanskrit is a bit ambivalent who sings and who is dancing, but the commentator Durjayacandra believes it is the officiant who sings, which causes the initiate to dance. (See Szántó, 2013: Vol. 2, 386)

yoginīs and then reveals the teachings to him.¹³⁶³ However, what teaching the initiate receives is dependent on the degree of possession that took place as discerned by the guru - "weak"(*hīna*), "medium" (*madhyama*), or "excessive" (*uccakaiḥ*) - equivalent, of course, to what we saw in various Trika/Kaula initiations. According to the commentator, Durjayacandra, if the disciple did not become possessed, he receives the inferior (*hīna*) teachings; if there was some possession, even if minor, he receives the intermediate (*madhyama*) teachings; and finally, if the possession was perfect and complete (*samyagāveśa*), he may receive the highest teachings since he is considered of superior (*uttama*) quality [3.3.17].¹³⁶⁴

The text continues, stating that an accomplished guru is also able to induce possession in the initiate simply by reciting a particular mantra (*Oṃ yogāveśaḥ*;) along with some simple rites [3.3.18-20]. An additional method to induce possession is also given, in which the initiate can get possessed through the guru's glance (*dr̥ṣṭyāveśa*), if accompanied by one-lakh recitation of another *mantra*.¹³⁶⁵ Through this power the officiant is able to make anyone they glance at become possessed and dance (*dr̥ṣṭiveśābhi nacyate*) [3.3.22].¹³⁶⁶

Chapter three also gives a series of *mantras* which can be used to “possess” (*āveśa/adhiṣṭhā/adhiṣṭhāna*) all sorts of other beings and, even, non-beings. For example, there are *mantras* to possess elements such as water, clods of earth, rocks, and even trees (3.1 and 3.12-13); to possess other people with one's gaze (*dr̥ṣṭyāveśa*; 3.4-5) or through hearing (*śrutyāveśa*; 3.6-7) and make them dance spontaneously; to possess others over a long

¹³⁶³ The mantra is *Oṃ tiṣṭha yoga mahākrodha hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ svāhā* [CPT 3.3.16]

¹³⁶⁴ See passage and commentaries from Bhavabhāṭṭa & Durjayacandra in Szántó (2013: 386-388) and Vol 2 for Sanskrit on 168-169.

¹³⁶⁵ *Oṃ maṇa ghuru ghuru dr̥ṣṭi cili dr̥ṣṭi cili hūṃ hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ* [CPT 3.3.21]

¹³⁶⁶ Bhavabhāṭṭa glosses *dr̥ṣṭiveśam* as *dr̥ṣṭyāveśaḥ* - Szántó (2013: Vol 2, 170)

distance (*dūrāveśa*; 3.8-9); to possess supernatural beings such as *nāgas*, ghosts, *yakṣas*, and even all the gods (3.10-11); and finally mantras for the guru to possess one's disciple during initiation (3.14-21). This is followed by procedures to possess people if the previous methods don't work, including rites using fumigation, bdellium, and the use of a *Datura*-based potion alongside *mantra* recitation (3.22-28). There is even a mantra (*Oṃ Vajrāveśa*), which if recited three-lakh times can cause possession and control over the Buddhas (3.2-3).

VAJRAKĪLA AND VAJRABHAIRAVA

In another early collection of Buddhist Tantras, belonging to the fierce deity Vajrakīla, we also find a prevalence of possession-oriented rites. While the tradition originated in India, it seems to have been abandoned there around the 8th century, before establishing itself in Tibet, becoming especially significant for the Nyingma tradition. According to tradition, these were among the many teachings transmitted to the Tibetans in the 8th century by the renowned Indian Buddhist *siddha*, Padmasambhava. Of the many legends surrounding Padmasambhava, he is best known in Tibet as the supreme master of spirits (i.e., a *bhūtanātha*), who tamed and converted its local demons, spirits, and gods into protectors of the Buddhist Dharma, so that it could be established and spread throughout the land. He was able to do this, according to tradition, due to his mastery of sorcery, particularly of exorcistic and subjugation rites found within the Vajrakīla corpus. According to early manuscripts from Dunhuang, Padmasambhava is said to have accomplished this at Asura ("Demon") Cave at Yang le shod, located near modern-day Pharping on the edge of Kathmandu Valley in Nepal.

Ācārya [Padma]Sambhava then performed the rites of attainment in the Asura cave... And thus, he performed the rites, impelling the four *Bṣe* goddesses, whose embodied

forms had not passed away. He named them Great Sorceress of Outer Splendor, Miraculous Nourisher, Great Witch Bestowing Glory, and Life-Granting Conjuror. Having performed the great attainment for seven days, he manifestly beheld the visage of Vajrakumāra [i.e., Vajrakīla].¹³⁶⁷

Having accomplished the Vajrakīla rites, thanks to the four invoked goddesses, Padmasambhava goes on to subjugate the demons of the land and establish Buddhism in Tibet. More accounts of the demon tamers' exploits are found in the 9-10th century *The Testament of Ba* (Tib. *dBa' bzhed*), fragments of which were also found in Dunhuang, including a description of the establishment of the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery at Samye.¹³⁶⁸ According to this text:

That day the mKhan po (Padmasambhava) performed a mirror divination (*pra phab*) ...and pronounced the name of all the gods and spirits (*lha klu*) which had caused the flood of 'Phang thang, the fire of the lHa sa castle, the epidemics among people and cattle, and the famines. Then he summoned all wicked gods and spirits to his presence by calling their names and their clans. Padmasambhava made them descend into human beings (*mi la phab*) and severely threatened them. With the help of a translator (*lo tsa ba*), Ācārya Bodhisattva (Śāntarakṣita) taught them in Tibetan the doctrine of cause and effect and made the truth evident. Afterwards mKhan po Padmasambhava told [the Tibetan king]: "Henceforth, practice the holy doctrine as you like in the country of Tibet! The gods and the spirits have been bound by oath, but such a ritual for giving orders to gods and spirits and binding them by oath must be performed twice more." [*dBa' bzhed* folio 12 a,b].¹³⁶⁹

This fascinating account, of course, resembles the mirror divination and *svasthāveśa* rites discussed previously, though the latter does not indicate the use of children for possession. By having the troublesome spirits descend into human bodies, Guru

¹³⁶⁷ From manuscript PT44, as seen in Dalton (2004: 62) who quotes Matthew Kapstein's, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002):158 translation.

¹³⁶⁸ According to van Schaik and Iwao, "Fragments of the Testament of Ba from Dunhuang", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 128.3 (2008: 477–487) these fragments are believed to be the earliest account of this text.

¹³⁶⁹ Text and translation in Hildegard Diemberger, "Padmasambhava's Unfinished Job: The Subjugation of Local Deities as Described in the *dBa' bzhed* in Light of Contemporary Practices of Spirit Possession," in *Pramāṇakīrtiḥ*, eds. Steinkellner and Kellner, (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2007): 86-87.

Padmasambhava could communicate with them and physically have them listen to his teachings. Rather than the later fantastical accounts of Padmasambhava's feats in other texts, we see here a description which is quite realistic. These sorts of practices are found throughout the tantras and exist in contemporary spirit cult traditions all over South Asia.

Unsurprisingly, Vajrakīla, the primary deity of the Vajrakīlāya scriptures, and Padmasambhava's chosen *yidam*, is also known in these early manuscripts as Vajrakumāra ("Adamantine Youth"), suggesting a potential connection with earlier Skanda-Kumāra *graha* cults. The use and deification of the *kīla* in Vajrakīlāya rites also suggest these practices arose from such apotropaic-oriented traditions, as it has long been a tool in protective rites to drive out malignant spirits since the time of the Vedas. The Sanskrit word *kīla* literally means "nail", "spike" or "stake" and has a long history going back to the Ṛg Veda, used even then by the god Indra to slay the serpent-demon Vṛtra. In the apotropaic rites of the Atharvaveda, the *kīla* was also used as a common tool to hammer down or create protective boundaries (*rakṣācakra*) to drive out demons and other harmful spirits.¹³⁷⁰ Early Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* show similar usage of the *kīla* as a magical protective implement, before the turn of the Common Era.¹³⁷¹ This was extensively developed within subsequent *Kriya*- and *Yogatantras* of the later periods, and became an essential tool used in sorceristic rites, particularly in controlling and subjugating spirits, animating corpses (*vetālavidhi*), and controlling the weather.¹³⁷²

¹³⁷⁰ See G. U. Thite, *Medicine: Its Magico-religious Aspects According to the Vedic and Later Literature*, (Poona: Continental Prakashan, 1982): 148.

¹³⁷¹ According to Martin J. Boord, *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla: According to the Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition of Tibet (Byang-gter phur-ba)*, (Tring, U.K.: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993): 55, a set ancient of *kīlas* discovered by Aurel Stein near Dunhuang have been dated to the first century BC, though this ancient date is not conclusive.

¹³⁷² Boord (1993: 57)

The deification of this powerful ritual implement did not occur, however, until the tantric period. The mantra of Vajrakīla is actually found in STTS, though the *kīla's* full deification as a god took place only in the later Highest Yoga Tantras (*Anuttarayogatantra*). By this time, the usually destructive magical spike (usually made of bone, acacia wood or iron) also became seen as a symbol of absolute stability and power (Vajrakīla = Adamantine Spike), which could also potentially bestow liberation. This paradox is aptly explained by Boord in his thesis on the Vajrakīla cult:

As a symbol of absolute stability, the paradoxical nature of the magic spike is expressed in the religious myth and ritual of the deity which everywhere depicts chaos as the natural condition of *samsāra*. The *maṇḍala* of the deified spike is a bloody charnel ground in the centre of which dwells the god in a palace of skulls, astride a throne of demonic corpses. His sanguinary sport (*līla*) is the archetype of violent behaviour, leading to a distinct antinomian trend in the religious ideals of his worshippers.

The cremation ground *maṇḍala* Boord describes, further suggests the influence from earlier Kāpālīka-like cults, whose rites may have been adopted and adapted by Vajrakīla practitioners. This idea is enforced by scriptural and iconic depictions of Guru Padmasambhava, which represent him as wearing conventional Buddhist robes, but with long hair and bone ornaments of a Kāpālīka yogin.¹³⁷³ Depictions of the deity Vajrakīla are also based upon a basic form of Rudra, who was said to have three faces, each having a third eye, six arms and four legs. As in the STTS and elsewhere, Rudra too is said to have been slain by Vajrakīla, who then takes on this same form, including cloaks of human and elephant skin, a skirt of tiger skin, bone ornaments, a crown of skulls, a necklace of fifty severed heads, a belt

¹³⁷³ It is believed that due to committing murder, Padmasambhava undertook the *mahāvratā* penance of a Kāpālīka - see Boord (1993: 115).

of splintered bones, and so on - standard garb for cremation ground/Kāpālika oriented deities, as we've seen.¹³⁷⁴

The mythical origins of the transmission of the Vajrakīla doctrines also hint towards this. Some Tibetan chronicles state the teachings began with the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, who then transmitted them to Vajrasattva, who passed on to Vajrapāṇi, then to the Ḍākinī Queen Karmendrāṇī, who finally taught them to the human realm via Padmasambhava in India. Other chronicles state the teachings first came to the human realm via Vajrapāṇi who gave them first to King Indrabhuti, the adopted father of Padmasambhava, and others, including an unnamed Kāpālika Brahmin. Some early chronicles identify this Kāpālika Brahmin as *Mi-thod-pa-can* and consider him one of the originators of this teaching, even going so far to say that it was he who gave the teachings to the Ḍākinī Karmendrāṇī. As Boord points out, "Such statements appear tacitly to admit the non-Buddhist origin of many of the *kīla* doctrines."¹³⁷⁵

Boord argues that the *kīla*'s deification may have arisen as a synthesis between concepts related to the apotropaic *kīla* and another Buddhist protector deity known as Amṛtakunḍalin, who Boord considers one of the direct precursors to Vajrakīla.¹³⁷⁶ In the *Susiddhi-tantra*, a *Kriyātantra*, Amṛtakunḍalin is a fierce guardian deity and leader of all Yakṣas, entrusted with the role of protecting boundaries.¹³⁷⁷ In the performance of his duty, Amṛtakunḍalin manifests as Kilikīla and the tantra teaches protective rites associated with the *kīlamudrā*. Iyanaga has recently written about a number of *āveśa* rites associated with

¹³⁷⁴ See Boord (1993: 79). Though this is the case in this text, earlier depictions of Vajrakumāra do not show him in Kāpālika attire and instead are much closer to and has associations with Vajrapāṇi. See Mayer (2007: 15) for more on this.

¹³⁷⁵ Boord (1993: 7;15; 102)

¹³⁷⁶ See Chapter 2 of Boord's (1993) for this argument.

¹³⁷⁷ Boord (1993: 48)

Amṛtakunḍalin in the Chinese Buddhist *Tuoluoni ji jing* ("Collection of Coded Instructions" - *Skt. Dhāraṇīsamgraha-sūtra*) by Atikūṭa which is thought to have been produced in the mid 7th century and translated around the end of the 8th century. It includes rites to expel demons, make images of Amṛtakunḍalin animate, and a *svasthāveśa* rite where children are used as mediums.¹³⁷⁸ Its sixteenth chapter, titled "Methods of Kuṇḍalin for Seeing Things" is entirely devoted to this ritual. Iyanaga has published the reconstructed Sanskrit and English translation, provided by Rolf Giebel:

Homage to the Three Jewels! Homage to Violent Vajrapāṇi, great general of the Yakṣas! I shall proclaim this spell. May the spell succeed for me! Oṃ, O immortal one, phaṭ! To wit: O Caṇḍī, Caṇḍī, Inḍī, Miṇḍī! Appear, Miṇḍī! Enter, Gauḍī! Descend, Gauḍī! Enter, Gauḍī, into this thumb pad! May the boys and girls see with divine vision! May human vision go away, and divine vision come forth! [In the case of a missing article,] make them see everything—by whom it was taken, for whom it was taken, and where it is kept. All hail!¹³⁷⁹

In order to practice the many sorts of magical rites found in the Vajrakīla scriptures, the practitioner in most cases must first transform himself into the deity Vajrakīla through Deity Yoga, which is described in chapter six. Before this can happen however, the initiate must be empowered by the guru. For this rite, the guru creates a protective *maṇḍala* in an auspicious and isolated location. In the center of the *maṇḍala*, a drawing of the demon Rudra on a piece of cloth taken from a corpse in the cemetery is placed. After performing various salutations, mantras and visualizations, the killing of Rudra is ritually enacted by summoning Rudra's consciousness, establishing it within the drawing, and stabbing it with the *kīla*, which the initiate is told represents Vajrakīla himself.¹³⁸⁰

¹³⁷⁸ Iyanaga (2019: 28)

¹³⁷⁹ Reconstructed Sanskrit based on Chinese translation as seen in Iyanaga (2019: 29): *namo ratnatrayāya namaś caṇḍavajrapāṇāye mahāyakṣasenā pataye imāṃ vidyāṃ pravakṣāmi sā me sā me vidyā [samṛdhya]tu oṃ amṛte phaṭ tad yathā caṇḍī caṇḍī inḍī miṇḍī samkrāma miṇḍī āviśa gauḍī niviśa gauḍī praviśa gauḍī asmin aṅguṣṭhamaṇḍale paśyantū dāraḍārikā divyena cakṣuṣā apetu mānuṣaṃ cakṣu divyaṃ cakṣu pravartatu yena hrtaṃ yasyahrtaṃ yatra sthāpitaṃ taṃ sarvaṃ darśaya svāhā*

¹³⁸⁰ More details on this rite can be seen in Boord (1993: 145-146)

Other fierce *maṇḍala*-deities are then invoked by the guru and offered various substances out of a skull cup and a vase "entwined with intestines", who are then requested to bestow blessings and empowerment to the disciple. The deities, if satisfied, are then said to combine together and melt into the vase receptacle, entering into the body of the disciple after the guru pours water from it onto his head. Before they can fully enter the disciple's body, however, the guru must perform various rites to purify the body, speech, and mind of the disciple. After this, the guru blindfolds the disciple and brings him inside the *maṇḍala*, placing a bit of the water from the vase (identified as *amṛta*, "nectar") on to his tongue. With this act, we are told the *maṇḍala* deities descend into the heart of the disciple, the guru stating "Oh, son of good family. Due to this absorption of the *jñānasattva* within your heart, you will at all times remain in the state of unshakeable *samādhi*." After a number of other rites, including the temporary extraction of the disciple's consciousness into the guru's body, all sorts of clan deities from the Vajrakīla lineage are called upon to bestow empowerments to the disciple, while he meditates on his own Self as being Vajrakīla. Finally, the guru raises his own empowered *kīla*, and invokes the various deities of the directions to enter into the body of the disciple, reciting the following mantra: "OM VAJRAKRODHA HŪṂKARA HŪṂ GARJA GARJA PHAT! OM ĀḤ HŪṂ SVĀHĀ VAJRAHŪṂKĀRA A Ā ĀVEŚAYA (POSSESS)!" The guru then touches specific points of the disciple's body with his *kīla*, which the gods are said to then enter into.¹³⁸¹ After completing this, the guru bestows upon the disciple consecrated ritual objects and cult articles, which the disciple is now empowered

¹³⁸¹ According to Boord (1993: 153 fn. 558) the manuscripts stat that "The gods from the zenith enter via the crown of the head, those from the east enter the heart (center of chest), those from the southeast via the right breast, south through the upper right arm, southwest the right shoulder blade, west between the shoulder blades, northwest the left shoulder blade, north the upper left arm, northeast the left breast and those from the nadir enter the disciple's body via the base of his spine."

to use and perform in Vajrakīla rites by himself. Interestingly enough, there are even signs of success when the ritual *kīla* is empowered, some of them matching signs of possession we've seen in other traditions. In this case it is actually the *kīla* which gets possessed by the deity and is evidenced by signs such as the *kīla* trembling, jumping up and down, making dance like movements, flying around in the air, or if it begins to glow with brilliant light. In another Vajrakīla text, describing various events from the legend of Padmasambhava, it is said that Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Śilamañju once performed the rite of Vajrakīla and, "One of their *kīlas* exhibited the supreme sign of flying through space. One *kīla* showed the middling sign of leaping and dancing above the *maṇḍala* and a third *kīla* showed the inferior sign of laughing and smiling."¹³⁸² The use of the supreme, middling, and inferior signs is a clear echo of the possession signs hierarchy we saw in other Śaiva Tantras.

Empowered in this way, the disciple must then master the practice of Deity Yoga, which is essentially the same rite we saw in the STTS and thus will not be gone over in detail. Having arranged the proper ritual offerings in an isolated and desolate place, the text states the yogin should clearly visualize himself in the form of Vajrakīla. In his heart he should imagine the *jñānasattva*, depicted as a simplified form of Vajrakīla, and meditate upon it as being the size of his thumb tip. When the yogin has perfected this visualization, he should then imagine rays of light spreading out from the visualized mantra, pervading the whole cosmos, and filling it with light. By that light, the text continues, all malignant beings of the three realms are subdued. The *mantra* itself should be recited thirty million times in a state of clarity and emptiness, until the signs of success have arisen. Then, from the OM ĀH and HUM located on his forehead, throat, and heart as the visualized form of Vajrakīla, rays

¹³⁸² See Boord 1993: (78; 131; and 109) the latter quote cited from the *Byang gter phur pa'i dbang gi lo rgyus legs par bshad pa nor bu'i do shal*, written by 'Phrin-las bdud-'joms

of light radiate out to summon the *jñānasattvas*. The disciple is told again to contemplate that his ordinary body, speech, and mind have truly become the body, speech, and mind of Vajrakīla. It is these rays of light which are understood to be the medium through which the empowerment and possession take place.¹³⁸³

In many Buddhist Tantras, it is these rays which become the primary transference medium of the divine energy used to control and manipulate the various supernatural beings employed in these magical rites. We saw this in some cases in the Śaiva material, though *śakti* and *prāṇa* seem to be more commonly used for the same processes. In the Vajrakīla texts, for example, most *abhicāra* rites involve the casting of spirits to kill or subjugate an enemy's consciousness, are all done via the medium of light rays. In these rites, which even Padmasambhava is said to have employed himself, the yogin first transforms himself into the *bhūtanātha* Vajrakīla. The empowered *yogin* performs the rite in a cremation ground, constructing a *maṇḍala* with an effigy of a rag doll that is garbed in clothing from the one to be attacked. The yogin then draws an image of the enemy, along with seed mantras that correspond to the *cakras*/vital points of the head, tongue, and heart of the victim on a corpse's shroud, taken from the cremation ground, with chalk made of human flesh, poison, blood, and ash. The yogin then meditates upon the drawn *mantras*, which radiate rays of light and empower his ritual weapons. The yogin then visualizes the enemy's consciousness being absorbed into the rag doll, which is then imprisoned and sealed in a triangular pit with an eight-spoked *cakra* weapon. The *maṇḍala* deities are then visualized, summoned, and given

¹³⁸³ According to Boord (1993: 165), "In the *Che mchog gi 'phrin las* (B11 & C4), a parallel text from the cycle of *Mahottarakīla*, blessings and empowerments are received in the form of light rays originating from the foreheads, throats, and hearts of all the *maṇḍala* deities. As these rays enter the yogin's body, speech and mind he imagines that all the vows of the three *kāyas* are fulfilled and his sins are purified."

appropriate offerings. This is done by adding the mantra of summoning and slaying to the secret mantra of the deity:

OM VAJRAKĪLI KĪLAYA, So-and-so must be dragged forth JAḤ HŪM VAṀ HOḤ
MĀRAYA (KILL!) VAŚAṀ (CONTROL!) KURU HAPARAYA HATANAYA
(ACCOMPLISH DESTRUCTION!) HŪM PHAṬ- ĀVEŚAYA ĀVEŚAYA
(POSSESS! POSSESS!) HŪM PHAṬ ŚIKRIN ANAYA ŚIKRIN ANAYA HŪM
PHAṬ JALAPAYA JALAPAYA HŪM PHAṬ OṀ VAJRAKĪLI KĪLAYA ACITTA
APARACITTA MAMA VAŚAṀ TRAG MATAṀ MYAG KARA IMĀN JAYE
VIJAYE KURU KARA INAN KAṬAṆKATE YA YETA KARA IMĀN DHADDHI
MAMA KARMA ŚRĪKRAMA KAṆKA KĀRAYE
MĀRA SENAPRAMARDANĪYE *the enemy called So-and-so must be dragged forth*
JAḤ HŪM VAṀ HOḤ MĀRAYA CITTA NAN NṚ JAḤ JAḤ TADYATHĀ
TADYATHĀ HŪM PHAṬ¹³⁸⁴

With this mantra and associated rites, the various fierce spirits of the *maṇḍala* are cast out to perform their various duties: some drag and transfer the consciousness of the victim into the effigy, while others possess the body of the actual victim and attack the *cakras*, sever the *nāḍīs* and cause the vital force (*prāṇa*) of the victim to cease. In some texts, the spirits are visualized as actual *kīlas*, which fly around and attack the victim.¹³⁸⁵ The text states the first group of spirits split open the victim's head and "churns" the *brahmācakra*, causing bewilderment or stupefaction; the second group attacks and chops up the throat *cakra*, causing the victim to go insane and vomit blood; the third group severs and slices up the four arteries in the heart; and a final group then comes to devour the life force. The rite ends with the invoking of the three *Kīlas*, identified with the "The Three Supreme Sons", Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Amṛtakūṇḍalin, who enter and possess the victim, bringing about their total annihilation.¹³⁸⁶

¹³⁸⁴ Sanskrit from Boord, (1993: 189)

¹³⁸⁵ See Boord (1993: 193) for examples.

¹³⁸⁶ "Oh Lords! You who wear the armour of blessings, strike from on high with the hand that holds the hammer! Hurl your sharp pointed arrows from above! Yamāntaka, hurl yourself against the enemy's crown! Purify the place of the body and hack at the vein of Brahma! Hayagrīva, attack the throat! Purify the place of speech and sever the arteries of blood! Amṛtakūṇḍalin, descend upon the heart! Purify the place of the mind and slice through the vein of life!" Translation by Boord (1993: 192).

The yogin is then told that he can appropriate the remaining lifespan, vital force, and power of the conquered enemy for himself, as in the case of the "subtle yoga," (i.e., *parakāyapraveśa*, "possession of another's body"), etc. of Śaiva tantras, but that the victim's "essence" should be released into the bliss of the *dharmadhātu*, making this, ultimately, a compassionate act of "liberation" according to the Tantric Buddhist view, rather than just a violent act of killing. The text further states that any impure sediments of flesh and blood are to be enjoyed by the *maṇḍala* deities and their army of *bhūtas*. In my view, the Vajrakīla texts and practices explicitly exhibit the *bhūtanātha* model, becoming a master of spirits as their primary mode of operation for the tradition's practitioners.

THE KĀLACAKRATANTRA [KT]

I will end this chapter with one of the latest and well-known Buddhist Tantras, the 11th century *Kālacakra Tantra* [KT], which also features possession in some of its rites. Vesna Wallace and Frederick Smith have both briefly written on a fascinating consecration rite (*abhiṣekapaṭala*) found in chapter three of the KT, which describes how a disciple goes through an intense possession even before entering the initiation *maṇḍala*.¹³⁸⁷ According to the text, the *vajra*-master has to perform his own rites of protection (*rakṣā*), purification and empowerment (*adhiṣṭhana*) when creating the *maṇḍala*, prior to initiation. This includes a *nyāsa* rite to protect against malignant spirits of all sorts, involving the installation of seed syllables on the six *cakras* of the body, which are subsequently visualized as transforming into *vajras* and then placed over the rest of the body. In this way the *ācārya's* ordinary body is transformed into a divine *vajra*-body, which acts as protective adamantine armor. With this

¹³⁸⁷ See Smith (2006: 392-398) and Wallace (2005).

new form and identity, the *vajra*-master visualizes himself incinerating the entire army of evil beings (*māras*), who may obstruct the rites, with imaginary flames of different colors issuing forth from his body. In order to further protect his disciple and the *maṇḍala*, the guru is told to visualize and take on the identity of the deity Vajravega, called "The Lord of Wrathful Deities" (*krodharājas*), and to create a circle of protection (*raksācakra*) consisting of ferocious deities who are invoked and given various offerings. In another portion of the rite, the *ācārya* takes on the identity of the premiere *bhūtanātha* Gaṇeśa, the Lord of Obstacle-makers/expellers, for further protection. Lessing and Wayman describe this protective identification and possession act in terms of the Vajra-master "seizing" the egotism (*ahaṃkāra*) of the wrathful deity - again pointing to the dual nature of tantric possession, where it is both the yogin possessing the deity and the deity mutually possessing the yogin.¹³⁸⁸

The disciple is then brought to the edge of the *maṇḍala* and ordered to recite the *mūlamantra* (root-mantra) of Vajrāveśa ten million times in preparation for *krodhāveśa* ("Possession by the Wrathful deities").¹³⁸⁹ This mantra is: *OM A RA RA RA LA LA LA VAJRĀVEŚĀYA HŪM*. Incense is also lit, which according to the text, helps engender possession (*dhūpam āveśanārtham*). According to Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka, one of the most important commentators on the KT, it is by meditation on the name of Vajrāveśa that causes possession by the Wrathful deities (*smaraṇamātreṇa krodhāveśaṃ karoti*). The following verse describes how the disciple, now possessed, will begin to spontaneously perform a

¹³⁸⁸ See Lessing and Wayman, *Introduction to Buddhist Tantric Systems: translated from Mkhas Grub Rje's Rgyud sde spyihi rnam par g'zag rgyas par brjod with original text and annotation*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978): 283.

¹³⁸⁹ See Mario E. Carelli, *Sekoddeśatikā of Naḍapāda (Nāropa)*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1941): 29-31 for his summary of the *Krodhāveśa*

vajra-dance (*vajranṛtyam*), and sing divine and incomprehensible *vajra*-songs. He will then laugh and shouts supernatural sounds, while threatening all the armies of demons with his forefinger, causing them to all fall on the ground unconscious. Empowered in this way, the text declares that the deified disciple is now able to kill and subjugate all beings in the Universe.¹³⁹⁰

The next several verses of the KT, along with Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka's comments, discusses the possession (*āveśa*) in greater detail:

[Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka:] Now, with respect to establishing [within oneself] the body, etc. [e.g., speech, mind, knowledge], of a wrathful deity (*krodharāja*) or bodhisattva, it is said: [KT:] The yogin, due to possession of his body (*kāyāveśena*), comes under the influence of its fundamental qualities (*prakṛtiguṇavaśāt*) [which according to Kalkin is ferocity, (*raudra*)] and [the disciple's] body does and acts accordingly. Due to possession by [the deity's] speech (*vāgāveśena*), the yogin becomes [the deity's] spokesperson (*vādin*) and becomes victorious over *gods*, *nāgas*, and *asuras*. Due to possession by the [deity's] mind [*cittāveśena*], the past, present, future [and] that which is in everyone's heart, becomes known. Due to possession by [the deity's] knowledge [*jñānāveśena*], the yogin becomes a Buddha, a Guru of Gurus, an accomplished sorcerer (*ṛddhimān*), and the One Commander (*ekasāstā*) [KT 88].¹³⁹¹

Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka adds that, like the wrathful deities and *bodhisattvas* who possess the disciple, he too will gain various supernatural accomplishments such as entering subterranean worlds, flying, and invisibility. However, the next verse of the KT makes clear that it is not just the body, speech and mind of the deity which possesses the disciple, but also

¹³⁹⁰ *āviṣṭaḥ krodharājāḥ praharaṇasvakarais tarjayan māravrṇdam iti | iha śisye krodarāha āviṣṭaḥ san praharaṇasobhitakaraiḥ sthāvaram jaṅgamaṃ yaṃ hanti tam śataścaṇḍaṃ karoti | yaṃ tarjayati tarjanyā māravrṇdam dharmaviheṭhakaṃ taṃ bhūmyām pātayati niśceṣṭitatām nayati | tathā pratyāliḍhādipadair bahuvīdhakaraṇair nṛtyate vajranṛtyam iti | iha yaḥ śisyah prakkiñcin nātyalakṣaṇam na jñānāti sa eva krodham viṣṭaḥ san vajranṛtyam karotīti antarīkṣe bahuvīdhakaraṇair iti nṛtyaye 'tha hāsyam karoti tadā hūṃkārmīśraṃ bhayadam api ripor māsamūhasyeti | tathā pūrvam aṅṅo yaḥ śiṣaḥ sa krodhāviṣṭo manusvādīnām agamya dhvaninā gītām karoti | anekatantrāntareṣu yad uktam iti | ataḥ krodharājāviṣṭo nirlajjo nirviśaṅko bhavati guṇavaśāt krodhasvabhāvāt || KT 88 Sanskrit from Carelli (1941: 15).*

¹³⁹¹ *idānīm krodharājasya bodhisattvasya vā kāyādyadhiṣṭhānam ucyate - kāyāveśena yogī prakṛtiguṇavaśāt kāyakṛtyam karoti vāgāveśena vādī bhavati ca vijayī devanāgāsuraṇām | cittāveśena sarvaṃ parahṛdayagataṃ jñāyate bhūtabhavyaṃ jñānāveśena buddho bhavati guruguruṣ ca ṛddhimān ekasāstā || KT 89. See Smith (2006: 396) for his translation of this passage, which differs slightly from my own.*

the five elements (*pañcamahābhūtāni* - "Five Great Elements") that compose the form of the deity, which produce their own set of results:

Due to possession by [the deity's] earth element (*bhūmyāveśena*), the yogin becomes sturdy as a mountain and by its water element, [the yogin] becomes cool. Due to possession by its fire (*vahnyāveśena*), [the yogin] acquires [the deity's] fiery nature, and by wind (*marutā*), [he] acquires its [power of] desiccation (*śoṣa*). Due to possession by [the deity's] voidness (*śunyāveśair*), he [the yogin] becomes invisible and like a Khecara on the surface of the earth. In this way, the entire form etc. proceeding under the influence of [the deity's] fundamental qualities, is to be understood.¹³⁹²

Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka again adds more detail regarding the supernatural powers which result in possession by the elements of the deity. Possession by the earth element results in the yogin being so powerful that he cannot be moved even by hundreds of men. Possessed by the water element, the yogin is able to ward off fever, while fire gives him the ability to burn anything he touches. With possession by the wind element, the yogin can blow away anything, even if many leagues away, and finally, with the element of emptiness or voidness (*śunya*) he and anything he touches can become invisible. Although the KT does not mention possession by the deity's senses in this section, Kalkin does comment on this and similarly gives its results. He states, when possessed by the deity's divine vision, the yogin can see invisible and divine forms, while possession by divine hearing enables one to hear divine and unheard sounds of all beings. Possession by the deity's divine mind (*divyamanas*) enables one to gain the knowledge of another's thoughts (*paracittajñānam*). Similarly, one achieves divine senses of touch, taste, and smell as a result of the deity's possession. The following verse continues its discussion of divine possession (*divyāveśa*):

¹³⁹² *bhūmyāveśena yogī bhavati girisamo 'mbhoś ca śītaṃ prayāti vahnyāveśena dāhaṃ vrajati ca marutā śoṣam evaṃ prayāti | śunyāveśair adṛśyo bhavati bhuvitale khecaratvaṃ prayāti evaṃ rūpādisarvaṃ prakṛtiguṇavaśād vedītavyaṃ krameṇa ||* KT 90. My translation adapted from Smith (2006: 396), with some modifications.

[Kalkin Śrīpuṇḍarīka:] Now the signs (*lakṣaṇa*) which arise [as a result] of divine possession (*divyāveśānām*) will be explained. [KT:] O King, for the Mantrin (mantra-specialist), possession [*āveśa*] is certainly through meditation/visualization [*bhāvanā*] but also sometimes through the power of different kinds of devotional service [*sevā*], or through various kinds of prescribed practice, such as mantra-repetition, and so on.
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Strangely, there does not seem to be any of the standard signs given, though Kalkin suggests that is what this verse is about. Finally, the last verse discusses the end of one's state of possession (*tyaktvāveśa*). If the disciple easily transitions out of the *āveśa* state, the guru simply purifies him with the usual ceremonies. However, if the possession state lasts too long, the guru asks the possessing deity if he wants anything further. After this the guru invokes the liberated beings (*jinās*) of his own Buddha clan for protection (*rakṣām*) by touching the top of the disciple's head, along with his forehead, throat, heart, navel, and anus with his own triple-pronged *vajra* (*svatrivajraiḥ*), seemingly because the experience of possession has left the disciple vulnerable to further supernatural attacks. To this end, Kalkin provides a number of mantras and *nyāsa* rites for the guru to safely “quell” the possession (*āveśopaśamana*) of the disciple.¹³⁹⁴

Only after the disciple's possession has ceased, does the *vajra*-master bring the disciple, now blindfolded, into the mandala (*maṇḍalapraveśa*), and the standard tantric initiation begins with the throwing of the flower. As in similar rites we've already seen, whatever section of the *maṇḍala* the flower falls upon, becomes the deity of the disciple's spiritual lineage. Empowered by the initiations and deities, the disciple is then authorized to

¹³⁹³ *idānīm divyāveśānām utpādalakṣaṇam ucyate — āveśo mantriṇām vai bhavati narapate bhāvanāyā balena sevābhedaīḥ kadācid bahuvīdhasanayair mantrajapādibhiś ca | buddhair āsvādyamānāiḥ kvacid amṛtavaśān maṇḍale bhavyasunor na svādhiṣṭhānahīnā bahuvīdhabhavair mantriṇām siddhir asti |* KT 91 My translation adapted from Smith (2006: 396-397), with some modifications.

¹³⁹⁴ *idānīm āveśopaśamanādikam ucyate— tyaktvāveśasya paścāc chirasi ca hṛdaye mūrdhni nābhau ca kaṅṭhe guhye rakṣām jinaiś ca svakulabhuvigataiḥ kārayet svatrivajraiḥ |* KT 92ab - see Carelli (1941: 29-31) for his description.

engage in the highest esoteric practices of Deity Yoga, through which he will gradually and fully transform his ordinary identity into the divine identity of the presiding deity in the mandala, who, as Vesna Wallace writes, "represents the all-pervasive, unitary reality... the transcendent and universal enlightened awareness [which] is seen as the complete spiritual realization" and the "realization of the ultimate nonduality" of the cosmos and all its beings.

Wallace continues:

Becoming nondual from all sentient beings through this spiritual realization, one is not subject to the harmfulness of other beings or to fear of them. One no longer needs to become possessed and empowered by other deities to subdue malevolent entities, since one is now the source of all power and the ultimate possessor of all living beings.¹³⁹⁵

D. JAIN TANTRA

Before concluding, I wanted to briefly mention Jain Tantra and its adoption of tantric techniques for both worldly and liberative purposes. As Qvarnstrom has pointed out "Tantra was regarded neither as an essential part of Jain theory nor as the principal means for attaining liberation", and thus it does not have as large or philosophically developed corpus as Śaivas or the Buddhists. However, tantric techniques did enter into ascetic divinatory, yogic and meditative practices, promising not just mundane results, but also soteriological results such as the destruction of karma and even liberation.

As in normative Hinduism and Buddhism, possession and associated magical and divinization practices were generally marginalized in Jain classical literature. Again, I quote Gombrich and Obeyesekere who give the underlying reasoning for this in the more orthodox branches of the three religions:

¹³⁹⁵ Wallace (2005: 125).

The great classical religions of India - Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism - inculcated self-control and discipline... Possession is of course the very converse of self-control and is normally accompanied by the display of violent emotion. One could say that the Indian classical religions precisely censored out possession and opposed emotionalism.¹³⁹⁶

While normative Jainism generally eschewed positive forms of possession (*āveśa*) in terms of doctrine and soteriology, interaction with spirits and deities and allied practices such as sorcery, divination, and exorcism have always been a part of the Jain tradition. For example, the tradition of linking a Jina with local gods, goddesses, and possessing spirits (especially *yakṣas* or *nāgas*) as divine attendants and guardian deities can be traced back to the time of the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha (e.g., Dharmendra and the Goddess Padmāvati). Various ethnographies, for example, have discussed Jain pilgrimage sites where the Jain laity of all classes go for healing and exorcism by Jain deities if they become possessed by malign spirits.¹³⁹⁷ For worldly matters, the Jains have always turned to a variety of tutelary and intermediary deities (*vyantara-devatas*) for their pragmatic needs since Jain doctrine holds that the Tīrthaṅkaras have no salvific power in this world due to having completely transcended *saṃsāra* at the time of final liberation (i.e., death).

We also saw in previous chapters early Jain narratives involving various possessing entities (e.g., 1st-2nd century BCE Antagaḍa-Dasāo), some of which were either exorcised or converted into Jain deities by Jain monks.¹³⁹⁸ Thus, Jains have always recognized the real power of these ancient *yakṣas*, *nāgas* and other cult deities and spirits who populate the South Asian landscape, though they also recognized the very real dangers of invoking these

¹³⁹⁶ Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1990: 457)

¹³⁹⁷ Caroline, Humphrey and James Laidlaw. *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994): 230.

¹³⁹⁸ See Aukland, Knut, *The Cult of Nākoḍā Bhairava: Deity Worship and Possession in Jainism*, (PhD Dissertation, University of Oslo, 2010): 116 for more references.

sort of ambiguous beings, as seen in the story of Arjuna and the *yakṣa* Mudgarapāṇi. As discussed previously, the primary moral of the story was that this danger was ultimately superseded by the superior power of the Jain tradition and its vows.

Similarly, the employment of supernatural powers, naturally attained through Jain practice, was also generally disparaged since it was seen as a distraction to their ultimate goal of *mokṣa*. Again, however, as we saw in previous chapters the Jains also had their own early tradition revolving around Jain Siddhas (“Accomplished Ones”) and Vidyādharas (Spell-Holders), praised for their miraculous powers and mastery of spells.

This ambiguity is clearly seen within the early Jain canon itself. On one hand we have, for example, the *Sūtrakṛtaṅga*, the second *Aṅga* (“limb”) of the 12-fold Śvetāmbara canon, which wholesale rejects all sorts of divination and sorceristic arts, including the controlling of spirits, as “evil tricks”, stating that,

These unworthy and perplexed people, when they approach the time of death, will be reborn in some regions [of the nether world inhabited by] demons and rogues. After they are released from these regions, they will be born again as deaf and dumb or as completely blind.¹³⁹⁹

At the same time, however, texts such as the *Āvaśyakaniryukti* (and commentaries) give references to the use of “seers” (*ikṣaṇikās*) using spirits (*yakṣas*) for divination, while the entire 10th limb of the Śvetāmbara canon, known as the *Praśnavyākaraṇa* (discussed earlier), was fully dedicated to divination, often involving spirits. In fact, Jain monks were so

¹³⁹⁹ *Sūtrakṛtaṅga* 2.2.25-27- See P. Balcerowicz, *Early Asceticism in India: Ājīvikism and Jainism*, (London: Routledge, 2016): 62-64 for full list and Umakant P. Shah, “Iconography of the Sixteen Jaina Mahāvidyās”, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 15: (1947): 114-115 for a number of other similar references in early Jain literature.

adept at divination that Buddhist monks in China in the medieval period were often known to employ their services, describing them as "skilled soothsayers" (*shan-zhan ni-qian*).¹⁴⁰⁰

These divination practices continued well into the late medieval period, as seen in the Jain monk Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra*, a text I discussed earlier in regard to its highly developed practice of *paraśarīrāveśa* (entrance into other bodies). However, numerous other forms of divination are found as well, including "the observation of changes in the body (*aṅgavidyā*), palmistry (*sāmudra*), interpretation of dreams (*svapnaśāstra*), animal portents (*śakuna*), oracular voices (*upaśruti*), and interrogation with the help of astrology (*praśna*).¹⁴⁰¹" We also find in the YŚ reference to a mirror divination rite - though in this example, it does not seem *svasthāveśa*. In chapter five, Hemacandra briefly describes one such rite used to predict the time of one's death.

Upon being queried, a deity (*devatā*), who has been made to descend (*avatāritā*) into a mirror, a thumb, a wall, or a sword through a rite involving mantra repetition, announces her verdict regarding time of death. The mantra to be recited is "Om Naravīre Svāhā" and is perfected after 10,008 repetitions of it during a solar or lunar eclipse. After that, whenever such a question is asked, the ritualist need repeat it only 1,008 times at that moment. The deity then becomes absorbed in the mirror, etc., following which a young girl (*kanyā*) announces the verdict. In this way, the deity, attracted by the virtues of a good *sādhaka*, herself speaks decisively on topics regarding the past, present, and future (*trikālavīṣayam*) [YŚ 5.173-76].¹⁴⁰²

Another contemporaneous example of this is seen in the Jain narrative, the *Kumārapālpratibodha*, written by Somaprabhasūri (1195 C.E.). This tale on the workings of *karma*, involves the righteous Prince Amarasīha ("Lion of the Gods"), considered a model

¹⁴⁰⁰ See Haiyan Hu-vo Hinuber, "The Divination performed by the Jain Monk Vajhara and Xuanzang's Decision to Return to China: What really happened in Nalanda in the year 643?", *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, 25: (2021): 120.

¹⁴⁰¹ Olle Qvarnström, "Jain Tantra: Divinatory and Meditative Practices in the Twelfth-Century Yogaśāstra of Hemacandra", in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David G. White, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000): 599.

¹⁴⁰² Qvarnström (2002: 128)

of Jain virtue but also highly skilled in magic. At the time, the King Bhānu and his kingdom were experiencing a pandemic, so they asked the prince for help:

King Bhānu said, ‘Good man, what will put an end to this plague?’ The prince Amarasīha replied, ‘Lord of men! The power of my magic spell will make a god descend into a suitable receptacle; the god will then tell us clearly how to stop the plague. There is no need for me to say anymore.’ The king then had a young virgin girl brought there and the prince positioned her inside a magic circle. After she was worshipped with various flowers and sandalwood, she pronounced these words: ‘This will stop the plague: the water that was used to wash the feet of a person, in whose mind their dwells compassion for all living beings, as the royal swan dwells in a lotus pond].¹⁴⁰³

Like the Śaivas and Buddhists, Jains also created a genre of magical-oriented Tantras, though these were not texts for liberative purposes, but strictly for worldly matters and attaining supernatural accomplishments (*siddhis*). Generally, they were not employed by Jain ascetics, but rather by Jain ritualists generally known as “*mantrins*” (Mantra specialists) who occupied a status above the laity, but below the mendicants and served a variety of clients besides Jains.¹⁴⁰⁴ Ullrey has discussed, for example, the *Jvālāmālinīkalpa* and *Bhairavapadmāvatīkalpa* which, like their Śaiva and Buddhist counterparts, contained the six magical acts (*ṣaṭkarman*) – spells for calming disease and inimical spirits, controlling others, immobilization, sowing dissent in enemies, causing delusion/bewilderment, and killing. While the first five were generally of no issue, Jain adepts did not engage in ritual murder as it directly violated their vow of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). Thus, Ullrey argues, its use in Jainism was primarily rhetorical or the ritual results were softened in Jain Tantras - victims of these rites shifted from men to immaterial beings such as malignant possessing demons

¹⁴⁰³ Translation from Granoff, *The Forest of Thieves and the Magic Garden: An Anthology of Medieval Jain Stories*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998): 81.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ullrey (2016: 385-401) mentions other classes of practitioners who various scholars have assigned similar roles, such as the Yatis, Śrīpūjyas, Bhaṭṭarakas, Yapanīyas, Bhojas, and more generically, Ācāryas.

and ghosts, while murder itself was de-escalated to either beating, burning, or choking, etc.¹⁴⁰⁵

An altogether different form of oracular possession, however, is also found in Jainism as documented in Aukland's ethnographic thesis at a Jain Pārśvanātha temple in a Western Rajasthan. Here it is not the primary Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha who possesses, but rather his guardian attendant, the domesticated Tantric deity Nākoḍā Bhairava. Bhairava was said to have been installed by Jain ascetics as a protector deity to the temple in 1455 C.E. Lay people from all castes and creeds come to the shrine of Nākoḍā Bhairava to pray and fulfill their worldly needs (e.g., healing, progeny, marriage, occupation, family relations, exorcism etc.). Rites involving Bhairava are not performed by Jain monks, but by a special class of non-Jain priest's (*pūjārīs*), though both Jains and non-Jains do get possessed by the god. Jain ascetics, however, never get possessed by deities. While many lay Jains recognize that possession is real, they are also well aware of its dangers and that it has little to do with their path towards liberation.

The type of possession at the shrine of Nākoḍā Bhairava is voluntary but not ritualized or formalized in anyway - and thus not really tantric, despite it being an originally tantric deity. Rather, in this context, it is seen as a spontaneous, temporary, and devotional form of possession. When possessed, it is understood that one is receiving the favor and grace of the deity, and often the possessed will serve as an oracle and give blessings to other devotees in audience - though, of course, this is a temporary role. In short, Bhairava's adoption, institution, and possession within this Jain community and temple is sanctioned and

¹⁴⁰⁵ See Ullrey (2016: 362)

authorized, though his inclusion is often controversial and various tensions exist, as detailed by Aukland.¹⁴⁰⁶

Generally speaking, Tantra had its most influence on Jain ritual, though the more violent and sexual practices of left-handed tantric rites were at odds with Jain ethics and so these elements were readily disposed. This resulted in Jainism's similarity to more orthodox right-handed schools, such as the Śaiva Siddhāntins, who also shared a dualist philosophy with the Jains and a similar soteriology aimed at destroying the fetters which bind the soul, resulting in liberation. Like the Siddhāntins, *mantra* and divinization practices (*mudrā*, *n̄yasa*, and *maṅḍalas*) became the primary vehicles to accomplish their goals. Though Jain Tantra was geared primarily for worldly accomplishments, it was also adopted, to a lesser degree, for practices toward liberation.

In the Jain view, the use of certain mantra deities was justified since these entities were spiritually realized to a degree, but more importantly they were efficacious in the destruction of past karmas (*nirjarā*), one of the primary goal of Jainism. Tantric *mantras* were sometimes adopted, though Jains also created their own set of mantras derived from ancient Prakrit *maṅḍalas*, the primary one being the *pañcanamaskāra* (“Five-fold Homages”), which honors the Five Supreme Beings of the Jain cosmos: the enlightened souls (*arhat*), liberated souls (*siddha*), mendicant leaders (*ācārya*), mendicant teachers (*upādhyāya*), and ordinary mendicants (*sādhu*). As Gough has detailed, by the medieval period Jain texts begin to call these *maṅḍalas* mantras and encouraged its recitation, often affixed with combinations of seed syllables (*bīja-mantra*), in an impressive variety of rites that could cure diseases, protect against and defeat enemies, purify initiands, exorcise spirits,

¹⁴⁰⁶ See Aukland (2010).

and so on. Because of these roots in early Jain *maṅgalas*, this type of mantric practice and recitation was included as one of the six kinds of internal *tapas* to destroy various types of karma - respecting mendicants (*vinaya*).¹⁴⁰⁷

Though possession (*āveśa*) terminology was rare, Jain Tantra did adopt divinization practices from the Śaivas, with the goal of divinizing the body and transforming one's identity to that of a deity, Jina, or even a Tīrthānkara. This generally involved the use of tantric *sakalīkaraṇa* and *nyāsa* rites. While the Siddhāntins installed the five mantras of Sadaśiva (i.e., Īśāna, Tatpurusā, Aghora, Vāma, and Sadyojāta) onto one's body at the head, mouth, heart, naval, and feet to transform the practitioner into "a second Śiva", the Jains, in contrast, would install the *pañcanamaskāra*, onto their bodies at the same locations. Gough mentions two examples of these divinization rites written by 10th century Digambara monks. In the *Bhāvasaṅgraha*, written by Devasena, the divinization rites transform the meditator into an Indra, a King of the Gods, who is considered by Jains to be the ideal worshiper of a Jina, due to their high level of realization and attainments.¹⁴⁰⁸ By becoming an Indra, the practitioner's devotional and ascetic practices become magnified immensely.

The second example is from the *Tattvānuśāsana* by Rāmasena and is in many ways more aligned with Kashmiri tantric views of *samāveśa* and Deity Yoga practices in Buddhist Tantras. In this case, the ascetic was to meditate "upon the self as the *arhat*", and the associated *nyāsa* rites would actually transform the worshiper into an "enlightened soul". Rāmasena adopts more of a non-dualist view, removing any distinction between meditator

¹⁴⁰⁷ Ellen Gough, *Making a Mantra: Tantric Ritual and Renunciation on the Jain Path to Liberation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021): 23.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Gough (2021: 123 and 128)

and object of meditation, stating that practitioners “come into contact with the *arhat* within [one’s] very self.” This is best exemplified in verse 190, which Gough translates:

The yogin becomes identical with that inner state into which his soul is transformed. And thus, immersed entirely in meditation on the enlightened one (*arhat*), he becomes himself the meditated enlightened one... Deploying the mighty hand gesture (*mudrā*), the mighty *mantra* and the mighty *maṇḍala*, the yogin, in becoming Lord Parśva, is in possession of a body made fully integrated.¹⁴⁰⁹

While "becoming the Lord" can be taken more literally in Śaiva and Buddhist contexts, Gough points out that Rāmasena does not argue that these practices will physically transform a worshiper’s body into Lord Parśvanatha, despite his mention here. Rather, the mantras are used to remind the worshiper that one is ultimately identical to an enlightened being, that one's soul (*jīva*) since beginningless time is innately liberated and has the qualities of infinite bliss, infinite knowledge, infinite vigor, and infinite perception.

I will end this brief overview with one last quote from Gough, which concisely summarizes the Jain form of tantrism:

Jains seamlessly integrated the tantric use of mantras and maṇḍalas into their ascetic path to liberation because components of tantric traditions were part of the ascetic Jain tradition from an early period: the use of utterances to destroy karma and progress toward liberation; the fostering of superhuman powers (*siddhis*) and divination, the formation of a non-Vedic lineage of gurus/disciples, the creation of a hierarchical representation of the tradition in the form a maṇḍala-like ritual diagram, and the recognition of the identical nature of a worshiper’s soul and the object of worship, the enlightened Jina. Ascetic and tantric practices are not, then, in opposition to each other. Instead, in many ways, the mantra-based path to liberation emerged out of an ascetic model in which one must separate oneself from the material world, reject societal norms, and connect oneself to a non-Vedic lineage in order to achieve liberation.¹⁴¹⁰

¹⁴⁰⁹ Gough (2021: 128)

¹⁴¹⁰ Gough (2021: 18)

E. CONCLUSION

With this long and detailed examination of numerous Śaiva, Buddhist and Jain Tantras we finally come to an end of this section. Of course, much has been left out due to the sheer number of Tantric texts that exist, but I believe there is a lot of interesting data from the sources I drew from. I wanted to conclude simply by giving a short summary and offerings some main points and connections I was able to make - some of which we will discuss further in the final chapter.

Through my examination of the Śaiva material literature, I was able to trace a number of conceptual threads starting with the Atimārga [I, II, and III] texts into later Mantramārga traditions of the Mantrapīṭha and Vidyāpīṭha traditions (including Kulamārga). The Atimārga [I, II, and III] itself was rooted in a variety of traditions, including *śramanic* renunciant groups, early magical and demonological traditions (i.e., *bhūtavidyā*, *Atharvaveda/Ayurvedic texts*), as well as early local cults associated with a variety of *grahas*, *yakṣas*, *bhūtas*, *piśācas*, etc. who were adopted in their respective pantheons. These characteristics continue into all subsequent Mantramārga texts.

The NTS of the Siddhānta, considered the earliest surviving Tantric text, was key in this transition and development, since it contains both Atimārga (I & II) and Mantramārga concepts within it and has large portions dedicated to sorceristic and protective rites (much like the Buddhist demonological sections of the related *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*), laying the philosophical and ritual foundations for much of what is to come in later Śaiva (and Buddhist) traditions. As in all subsequent Śaiva tantras, initiation is a defining feature of the NTS, an idea inherited from the Pāsupatas, the direct ancestors of Atimārga II & III groups, the Lākulas and the so called Kāpālikas or Somasiddhāntins. As described in the previous

chapter, the goal of the Pāśupatas, was *rudra-sāyujya* - absorption, communion, or identification with the *bhūtanātha* Rudra. Through Atimārga I's practice of Pāśupata yoga, the *sādhaka* was said to partake in the attributes of the Rudra/Śiva until complete union and liberation was achieved at the time of death. This was done through a variety of *vratas* which aimed to deconstruct and ultimately destroy one's normal sense of identity through self-mortification and emulating the behaviors and qualities of various cremation ground dwelling *bhūtas* and *grahas*, culminating in union with Rudra himself as the *mahāgaṇapati*, the “Great Lord of the Gaṇas”. All Atimārga groups were characterized by these transformative *vratas*, such as the *unmattavrata* ("vow of madness") of Atimārga I and II, and the more radical *kapālavrata* ("vow of the skull") by II and III. As we saw, similar *vratas*, such as the nine *vidyāvratas*, the *bhairavavrata* and the *cāmuṇḍāvrata* continue into the BYT, YSP, and SYM - in this case all *vratas* result in explicit possession by Bhairava or the Goddesses.

In the NTS possession terminology is marginal and rare, though early ideas of divinization (i.e., *nyāsa*) and the entrance of the deity's energy into the body are seen in its initiatory rites, such as 1. the *śaktimantra* empowered *śivahasta* ("Hand of Śiva") rite, 2. *tattvajaya* ("Conquest of the Levels of Reality"), and 3. early ideas *śaktipāta* ("The Descent of Power") which was said to occur through Śiva's grace (*anugraha*) - all of these were directly inherited and adapted from Atimārga I and II. As discussed, these corresponded with Lākula initiations involving being "touched" (*ālabdhaḥ*) by the five *brahmantras* of the Pāśupatas, purification of the *adhvas* (levels) and the "Descent of the Word" (*śabdanipātena*), respectively. We also saw the idea that initiation involved being involuntarily "impelled" (*pracoditaḥ*) by Śiva and that one could become purified through the "fall of Śiva's glance" (*śivadṛṣṭinipāta*). As seen in subsequent texts, all of these ideas

become closely associated or even conflated with *āveśa* (possession) - particularly "the proofs" or signs of *āveśa* and *śaktipāta* which often overlap or parallel each other.

Though the NTS is dualist in orientation, inklings of non-dualist thought characteristic of the Vidyāpīṭha are found throughout the text, such as the yogic and meditative cultivation of *śaktisamarasa* - perceiving everything in the cosmos as being of the pervasive nature of *śakti* - along with the final aim of achieving equality (*samarasa*) and identification (*tanmayatva*) with Sadāśiva. In Śaiva Siddhānta this was understood as "being like Śiva" or a "second Śiva", while other non-dualist Mantramārga schools believed in complete union, in some cases meaning possession by Śiva (or his Śakti). We also find in the NTS the growing importance of the feminine principle, seen in their early incorporation and worship of several fierce goddesses, some who become equated with the *tattvas* (levels of reality) - a trend, as we saw, which continues into the *Svacchandatantra* and further into the texts of the Vidyāpīṭha.

The *Svacchandatantra* itself is another "bridge text" between the more right-handed schools of the Śaiva Siddhānta and the left-handed schools of the Vidyāpīṭha. It is within this "mildly Kāpālika" text that the wrathful Bhairava is worshipped over the tranquil Sadāśiva, and we see further incorporation of fierce possession entities, more radical transgressive rites, including a *yoginīmelāpa*, and further hints of non-dualism, even though this was classified as dualist text. As we saw, the Kashmiri exegete's such as Kṣemarāja seized upon these hints in their own commentaries, viewing the SVT as a non-dualist text and interpreting all of its practices to be associated with *āveśa/samāveśa*. It is also in the SVT where the important initiatory rite of *nāḍīsandhāna* (fusing of the channels) comes to the fore, in which the guru uses *parakāyapraveśavidyā* to enter into the bodies of their disciples, an idea also adapted

and inherited from the Pāśupatas and other early yogic schools. The yogic/mantric practice of *uccāra*, a precursor to the later concept of *kuṇḍalinī*, also begins to gain importance in this text.

It is around this time that I believe possession as a technique truly comes to the center of tantric practice when it was realized that *āveśa* could be used as a method towards liberation rather than just worldly aims. This becomes explicit in Vidyāpīṭha texts starting with the BYT, YSP, SYM and the MVT, all of which have a strong Atimārga influence. Beginning with the BYT, we see the full-blown incorporation of fierce cremation ground-oriented deities and spirits (*yoginīs*, *bhūtas*, *grahas* etc.) into their *maṇḍala* system. The text is overtly oriented towards the feminine principle, the use of transgressive substances (e.g., blood sacrifice, consecrated liquor, sexual fluids, etc.), self-mortification, and sorceristic rites in cremation ground settings. The goal of becoming a *bhūtanātha* is explicit, and we see the yogic practice of *parakāyapraveśavidyā* employed to extract vital fluids from victims in order to gain supernatural powers. Other practices include divinization of the body, transformations in identity, and an expansion of Atimārga-like *vratas* with the explicit aim of getting possessed by deities. In the BYT, for example, we see *sādhakas* adopting a variety of identities and emulate the behavior and appearance of cremation ground entities such as the *guhyaḥkās*, *yoginīs*, *piśācas*, and Bhairava, culminating in possession.

In some of these texts, possession begins to become both a prerequisite for the guru and a requirement for neophytes during initiation. The former, for example, becomes especially important in the SYM - we are told that Śaiva gurus must have experienced possession by *rudraśakti* (The Power of Rudra) in order for them to be true teachers and for their *mantras* to be efficacious. By this time the concept of *śaktipāta* and *āveśa* have also

began to overlap along with the "proofs" or "signs" which mark these higher spiritual states and become of utmost importance. This becomes especially developed within the MVT, where possession/*āveśa* becomes further psychologized and identified with a variety of religious states and interpreted using ontological frameworks prevalent at that time - including the four immersions, the five states of lucidity, and the doctrine of the seven experients or observers. In this way, *āveśa* starts to be understood as an internal phenomena, related to one's "sub-selves" and a variety of psychological states.

This internalization process continues and is further developed in Kaula/Trika streams (e.g., *yoginīs* as the sense organs of the body, fire ritual performed internally, etc.) and new more powerful and streamlined techniques began to be developed in the JYT (particularly with *mudrās*) and KMT. In these texts, *āveśa* becomes further interpreted as a subtle body phenomenon alongside its developing system of *cakras* and the concept of *kuṇḍalinī*. I would argue that it is here (in the MVT, JYT and KMT) where a shift occurs with the prevalence of the more abstract term *samāveśa* in the literature - rather than an external phenomenon, *āveśa* now begins to be understood as a purely internal phenomena, which could also lead one to liberation.

This is further developed among the Kashmiri exegetes, who begin to interpret previous Śaiva Tantras in light of their non-dualist Pratyabhijña philosophy. *Samāveśa* now becomes the preferred term over *āveśa*, denoting immersion into one's true nature and a state of liberation. *Āveśa* is also now wholly synonymous with *śaktipāta*, the Descent of Śakti, which is also understood as the internal movement of *kuṇḍalinī* (identified as one's *śakti*). Practices become more gnostic and yogic in orientation in this literature, while the earlier transgressive cremation ground rites are domesticated and sanitized. Though *samāveśa* is

rooted in possession, it has now been completely abstracted and domesticated - nevertheless though, the signs of possession remain the same through all these texts.

The path from *āveśa* to *samāveśa* is generally paralleled historically among the Tantric Buddhists with the emergence of Deity Yoga, considered the hallmark of Vajrayāna practice. Though the structure of these Śaiva and Buddhist rites are generally similar, the Buddhists employed their own interpretations of the *āveśa* phenomenon which was more aligned with their particular ontological and soteriological perspectives. The Jains also adopt some of the transformative and liberative divinization techniques developed by the Śaivas and Buddhists, though they generally remove any transgressive elements and any references or resemblances to *āveśa* as possession.

Before proceeding to the final chapter, I wanted to briefly conclude with short summary of key features of Tantric deity possession from the data I've collected thus far, some of which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

1. The "*Bhūtanātha* Model"

Given the great variety of possession forms and practitioners within South Asia, I wanted to try and distinguish between some of the forms we've seen. Within the literary tradition, I would argue that Tantric deity possession is characterized first and foremost by the adoption of what I have been calling the "*bhūtanātha* model", in contrast to "oracular" or "devotional" models of possession. Although a few early examples exist of the "*bhūtanātha* model" in pre-tantric texts (e.g., the possession of Keśin and Aśvatthāman), most possession forms we saw were primarily oracular in orientation, which is still the case throughout South Asia. I characterize the oracular model as being generally functional in nature - aimed

towards worldly purposes and often both devotional and dualist in orientation. In these forms, one simply acts as a vessel or medium for an external possessing deity who is considered the primary agent in the possession experience. As we will see in the next chapter, the possession form I witnessed among the Irula tribes of Kerala would be an example of this model.

Between the oracular and *bhūtanātha* models I would also distinguish a second category that I call the "intermediate *bhūtanātha*" which involves shamanic-like ritual specialists who practice sorcery (*abhicāra*) and/or healing practices (i.e., exorcism) involving the control and casting of spirits. However, rather than getting possessed themselves, these ritualists possess other beings (human or supernatural) or cause others to be possessed, as in the case of *svasthāveśa*. Here, the "intermediate *bhūtanātha*" ritualist desires to "be like" a *bhūtanātha* in order to gain the divinity's powers but is neither concerned with liberation (*mokṣa*) nor desires (or is unable) to fully become a *bhūtanātha* through possession. In contemporary times, this model most aligns with Tantric institution of the Kumāri Devī in Nepal and the serpent ritualists of Kerala known as the Pulluvans, both who practice variant forms of *svasthāveśa* and who will be discussed in the following chapter.

I contrast both of these categories with the full blown *bhūtanātha* model, which, as I've shown, arises with the Atimārga (i.e., Pāsupatas, Lākulas, etc.) and is further developed in the Mantramārga, particularly among non-dualist schools, when it is realized that possession states and associated techniques could be used for liberation. In contrast to the "oracular model", both the intermediate and full *bhūtanātha* models involve the practitioner being the ultimate agent who is in control of the divinity and the possession experience. However, in contrast to the intermediate *bhūtanātha*, the full *bhūtanātha* aims for both

worldly powers (*siddhis*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) through the practice of *āveśa/samāveśa*. It is this form which characterizes the deity possession forms seen in Vidyāpīṭha text such as the BYT, SYM, YSP etc., and the Deity Yoga of Tantric Buddhism. Outside of any surviving Tantric traditions in South (and East Asia), this is probably the most uncommon form found today in South Asia.

Though I did not discuss it much in this dissertation, we could also add *bhakti āveśa* or devotional possession, related to various *bhakti* schools of Hinduism, as its own category. In these forms, one fully devotes and immerses themselves into their personal deity, the primary purpose being some sort of union or liberation rather than any worldly or oracular function. This is a unique category since it can be found in dualist, non-dualist, and even dualist-nondualist (*dvaitādvaita*) schools, such as Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, which also happens to be influenced by the tantric traditions.¹⁴¹¹ However, it is often difficult to completely distinguish *bhakti*-oriented forms of possession from the other three models, since devotionalism is generally seen in all three (e.g., as seen in the devotional poetry of Utpaladeva).

Indeed, in South Asia all of these categories are fluid and not mutually exclusive - the reality on the ground shows that most traditions blend these categories together in certain degrees, with oracular and devotional forms remaining the most prevalent throughout South Asia today. A typical example of blended form of possession can be seen in Kerala and its tradition of Teyyam, which I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter. Though Teyyam practitioners would not call themselves "Tantric", they have adopted some tantric

¹⁴¹¹ More commonly known as *bhedābheda* ("difference and non-difference"). See Barbara Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*, (London: Routledge, 2017) for more on Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Chapter 9 in Smith (2006).

techniques, particularly to invoke and embody the deities. In this sense, they resemble intermediate *bhūtanāthas*, though they do get possessed themselves by the deity. However, possession in Teyyam is not for liberative purposes - its main function is oracular and to provide healing and blessings to members of their community. Additionally, as we will see from various interviews I conducted, devotionism is considered a key factor for engendering possession.

As seen with the example of Teyyam, these categories are imperfect and are offered here only as a way to begin teasing out the various elements we see in the great variety of possession forms today. I hope to refine these further in the future.

2. "Non-dual" Embodiment

A distinguishing feature of Tantric deity possession is the cultivation of non-dual mental states, which involves an explicit deconstruction of one's nominal identity and subsequent reconstitution into the identity of the divinity (or enlightened being). This is done through the use of tantric technologies (*nyāsa/japa/uccāra/maṇḍala/mudrā /kuṇḍalinī/homa* etc.) in liminal and sometimes frightening spaces (e.g. cremation ground, abandoned temples, forests, etc.), and often employing self-mortifying acts, the use of intoxicants, breathing exercises, extreme emotions, mimicry, and transgressive offerings (i.e., one's own blood, a corpse, etc.) - all aimed at inducing altered states or what Serbaeva calls "artificial psychological trauma" and "prearranged hallucinations", with the primary goal being a complete transformation in perception and identity.¹⁴¹² In the next chapter, I will discuss these as acts of "ritual marginalization", which aim to open one's *chidras* ("cracks") in one's

¹⁴¹² Serbaeva Saraogi (2013: 200)

mind-body complex, allowing one to experience transformations in identity and possession. As we saw, there is also mention throughout various texts of the inherent danger of *āveśa*, not only due to its involvement with dangerous supernatural beings or its transgressive nature, but also because of its potential to change from a "divine" (positive) form of possession to a "demonic" form if the rites were not performed properly, resulting in physical and/or mental illness.¹⁴¹³

3. The Proofs of Possession

Another important feature of *āveśa* are the "signs" or "proofs" of possession, the objective psychosomatic markers which accompany the subjective experience of possession. Given the long history of possession in South Asia, these markers are relatively (and remarkably) stable over time. Additionally, these are not only consistent when comparing the textual and ethnographic accounts, but also across cultures when observing possession symptoms from a purely phenomenological perspective. Markers of possession, whether negative or positive, include - shaking, trembling, vibrating, leaping, or flailing about, waving or violent shaking of head, shortage of breath, convulsions, dancing, falling over, oscillation between various emotions, rolling or bulging or unblinking eyes, feelings of "electric" energy flowing through body, speaking in tongues, voice modulation, horripilation of the hair, loss of motor control, etc. These same symptoms overlap with a variety of other religious states in the texts we've looked at, most closely with *śaktipāta* and the movement of the *kuṇḍalinī*. Due to these similarities, these experiences were often conflated within these

¹⁴¹³ For examples see KMT 13.66 and TA 29.237-239ab alongside Jayaratha's commentary mentioned above.

texts, in the same way that later exegetes viewed the various causes of *āveśa* to be the same as *śaktipāta*.

Thus, by the end of the medieval period, the notion of *āveśa* had become greatly expanded - not only can one get possessed by a variety of beings, emotions, elements, or one's "higher Self", but one can also possess these other beings and objects through tantric techniques. Additionally, a huge array of spiritual experiences become subsumed under the various classifications of *āveśa*, as seen in classification schemes in the MVT, KMT, and exegetical literature. However, it is important to note that these symptoms are not just religious in nature and overlap with a variety of anomalous experiences, psychological states, and even medical conditions, as seen in earlier Indian medical texts. I will look at some recent scientific research discussing possession signs in the following chapter.

V. CHAPTER 5: Contemporary Tantric Possession Rites in Kerala and Integrated Methods for Studying Possession (aka "Embodied Consciousness")

A. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The earlier chapters laid out a sort of genealogy of *āveśa* and possession-related concepts and beings in the early Indic literature, and how these ideas became adopted and adapted to fit the various soteriological needs of the tantric traditions of the medieval period. As the concept of *āveśa* evolved during this period, it gained a much wider semantic field with respect to meaning, function, and form than is usually recognized with its common English translation of possession. *Āveśa* comes to signify not just possession by a host of supernatural entities (or humans possessing other beings), but also elements/substances, and even emotions. It also becomes reconceptualized as being an internal psychological phenomenon and associated with a whole range of spiritual states and religious experiences, including liberation. Frederick Smith, thus rightly states that no single English term seems adequate when classifying the multivalent nature of *āveśa*:

...as an indigenous category in ancient and classical India, possession is not a single, simple, reducible category that describes a single, simple, reducible experience or practice, but is distinguished by extreme multivocality, involving fundamental issues of emotion, aesthetics, language, and personal identity.¹⁴¹⁴

In this final chapter, I will briefly examine two areas of inquiry that will constitute areas for further research I would like to conduct. The first section looks at contemporary possession rites I witnessed during my fieldwork in Kerala, South India. As seen in South Asia's ethnographic record, a variety of contemporary possession cults seem to have adopted and adapted many of the *āveśa* techniques developed in the medieval Tantric literature. As

¹⁴¹⁴ Smith (2006): 34

argued in previous chapters, most of the discourses and practices of various possession forms were likely adopted by Tantric authors from demonological, ascetic, and non-elite traditions (local/folk/tribal cults). However, for this chapter I will detail how some of these same possession concepts and technologies, after being further developed in the Tantric literature, were once again filtered down to and adopted by non-elite traditions - in this case, various contemporary possession traditions in Kerala. The primary example I will discuss is the institution of the oracles (*veḷiccappāṭu*) and folk possession rites such as Teyyam. These are traditions which clearly draw on tantric technologies and concepts, though most of the groups do not identify themselves as "Tantric". By examining these, we will be better able to characterize the nature of Tantric possession vs. non-Tantric possession and also show how these compare with the data I gathered from the variety of texts I drew from in previous chapters. My goal will be to make some connections between the textual traditions and contemporary Tantric practices, in order to gain a broader understanding of how these traditions are related.

The final portion of this chapter will bring some of the insights from this data and attempt to bring it into conversation with the more expansive field of "possession studies" in the humanities/social sciences, on one hand, and the natural sciences on the other. By doing this, I hope to provide valuable data from the South Asian traditions to add to this growing body of research. Finally, I will end with a series of questions that emerge from this data for future research.

B. PART 1: THE BROKEN WORLD OF TANTRA

In South Asia, possession remains a living thriving tradition and a vast ethnographic record has been compiled by numerous anthropologists and religious studies scholars over

the last half century. As we saw, however, possession in the historical literature was a relatively marginal phenomena, relegated to the realm of *bhūtavidyā*, medical, magical, and divinatory traditions and strongly associated with more shamanic-oriented folk cults rather than the "classical" traditions. It was only brought into the center of praxis among certain tantric groups during the medieval period, where it was reconceptualized and interpreted in new ways as a "liberative possession", resulting in novel methods and understandings of the *āveśa* phenomena. This sort of mutual interaction and influence between local and more elite traditions was not new, of course, and we saw signs of such interactions going back to the time of the Vedas, particularly with texts such as the *Atharvaveda*.

As pointed out by White and Samuels, tantric texts and associated practices were generally comprised of two interrelated sources - the "shamanic" ritual technologies of nonelite religious specialists and the more philosophical and domesticated productions of state-sponsored religious elites. The documentation of possession phenomena in the tantric texts during the medieval period was representative of the new status tantric traditions had achieved among royal polities, resulting in the publication of these Tantras. On this, David White states,

The history of Tantra is the history of the interaction between these two strands of practice and practitioners, whose clienteles, comprising commoners and political elites, have nearly always overlapped. There can be no doubt that the relationships among Indian kings and the Tantric specialists they chose over other alternatives (generally Vedic) are key to understanding the origins and history of this interaction.
¹⁴¹⁵

After the 13th century, however, we began to see a decline in the production of Tantras in the Indian subcontinent, primarily due to the loss of state and institutional patronage, which had been so key to its rise earlier. As White has argued, during periods

¹⁴¹⁵ Which Samuel (1993) terms "clerical"

when Tantra was state-sponsored, the King as "the Tantric ruler" and "Tantric actor *par excellence*" was at the center of the cosmological tantric *maṇḍala* and "constituted the vital link between elite and nonelite forms of Tantric practice", absorbing and emanating power from and to the *maṇḍala*'s (i.e. kingdom's) margins.¹⁴¹⁶ However, after Tantra's decline and the tantric King (or State) removed from the center, these non-elite tantric "power brokers" became decentralized and delegated back to the peripheries from which they had come.¹⁴¹⁷

On one hand the tantric elite, characterized by their transcendent and "quietistic" approach, turned their focus towards philosophizing elaborate Tantric theories and abstracting Tantric practice, particularly its transgressive elements, through processes of internalization, sanitization, and domestication, as seen in much of the Kashmiri exegetical literature. White states, "Even when the language of such forms of Tantra remains antinomian, this is a purely ritual or philosophical antinomianism cut off from the outside world."¹⁴¹⁸ In some cases, Tantric practitioners also adopted the strategy of dissimulation, hiding their "true" Tantric identity behind a facade of conventional behavior in the public sphere or closeted in monasteries. In this context, Samuel has argued that elite Tantra had

moved towards the doctrinally orthodox and politically unobjectionable... The magical and shamanic powers have lost their importance, the 'disreputable' sexual practices are avoided, and Tantric ritual has become little more than a supplement to the ordinary Brahmanic cult...¹⁴¹⁹

On the other hand, nonelite Tantric specialists from lower levels of society continued in their original functions when no longer state-sponsored, serving the worldly needs of their local communities and clientele as shamans, diviners, ritual healers, exorcists, spirit-

¹⁴¹⁶ See White (2000: 34-36) and (2003: 262-263)

¹⁴¹⁷ White (2000: 27)

¹⁴¹⁸ White (2000: 35-36)

¹⁴¹⁹ Samuel (1993: 432) as seen in White (2000: 36).

mediums, and clairvoyants. It is in this context that possession persisted after the decline of state sponsored Tantra - back to the domain of pragmatism from which it came, rather than as a method used for liberative purposes as seen in the Tantras.¹⁴²⁰ However, the new developments and techniques of *āveśa* that arose in the medieval period did not entirely disappear and were often incorporated and reassimilated by non-elite practitioners. This occurred in a variety of contemporary possession cults, particularly the ones I witnessed during multiple visits to Kerala over the years, which I will be discussing shortly. Although most of these Keralan possession cults claim to be "non-Tantric", it is clear that some of the traditions had incorporated elite Tantric technologies (e.g., *mantra*, *mudrā*, *nyāsa* etc.) and concepts to some degree in their ritual repertoire.

To summarize, possession concepts and technologies which were originally adopted from non-elite traditions were reconceptualized, refined, and further developed by the elite traditions, which then filtered back down to the mainstream populace after the decline of state sponsored Tantra - a continuous interactive loop of influence that characterizes much of South Asian religion. The intermingling of folk and tantric possession is evident in many recent contemporary South Asian ethnographies that clearly show the survival of modern-day *bhūtavidyā* traditions throughout South Asia.¹⁴²¹ As in earlier times, positive and oracular forms of possession are still closely intertwined with exorcistic and protective religious systems which aim to heal negative forms of possession. Unlike the liberative possession rites found in medieval Tantras, however, these contemporary practices are strictly for

¹⁴²⁰ As White (2000: 33) points out, "The dark counterpart to these practices is ritual sorcery or black magic, the manipulation of the same low-level deities or demons to strike down enemies with the same afflictions as those they are called upon to placate or eliminate."

¹⁴²¹ See, for example, Sax (2009); Dwyer (2003); Rozario & Samuel (2002), and Ferrari, *Health and Religious Rituals in South Asia: Disease, Possession, and Healing*, (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Matthew Martin, *Tantra, Ritual Performance, and Politics in Nepal and Kerala: Embodying the Goddess-clan*, (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

worldly needs. In these sorts of healing traditions, we still tend to see an emphasis on the *bhūtanātha* model, where the healer will either invoke a *bhūtanātha* spirit, or in some cases even become possessed by one in order to heal their clients.¹⁴²²

Though I am unable to discuss these at length at this time, there are also some contemporary "tantric" possession institutions which survive to this day, though they were likely much more common during the heyday of state sponsored Tantra. For example, Tantric kingdoms still existed until relatively recently in both Tibet and Nepal, and both continue to have institutions employing state sanctioned oracles and mediums. For example, in Dharamshala, where the Tibetan Government-in-Exile is now located, they still have the institution of the State Oracles, the most prominent being the Nechung Oracle, who I had the honor of meeting and speaking with. Currently there are four primary State Oracles, one female and three males, who regularly become possessed by Buddhist protector deities and act as supernatural consultants to the Dalai Lama.¹⁴²³

In Nepal also we continue to find the institution of *kumārī* worship, employing virgin girls to become embodiments of some local or royal cult goddess. According to Allen, this has been a practice throughout Nepal since at least the 6th century CE, though the most famous of these today, the Royal Kumārī Devī, is an institution which began in the 17th century.¹⁴²⁴ The office of the Kumārī Devī is occupied by pre-pubescent Newari girls chosen by ritual specialists who, according to tradition, look for specific physical and mental

¹⁴²² See for example Diemberger (2005), Sax (2009), Smith, "Possession, Embodiment, and Ritual in Mental Health Care in India". *Journal of Ritual Studies*. 24.2: (2010): 21-35.

¹⁴²³ See Christopher Paul Bell, *The Dalai Lama and the Nechung Oracle*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); J. F. Avedon, *In Exile from the Land of Snows*, (New York: Knopf, 1984), and Réne de Nebesky-Wojtkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1996) for more on the State Oracles

¹⁴²⁴ See Michael R. Allen, *The Cult of Kumari: Virgin Worship in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, 1986) for more on this.

characteristics to determine if they are suitable candidates. Once one is found, various rites are performed to transform the young girl into the Tantric royal Goddess Taleju Bhavāni. One of the functions of the Royal Kumārī is to become regularly possessed by the goddess through rituals performed by Newari priests and acting as an oracle for them and the larger community. The young girl holds this office until she menstruates, after which the goddess is said to vacate her body. In some ways, the rituals involving Kumārī Devī parallel *svasthāveśa* rites described in earlier Tantric texts we looked at previously.

1. POST TANTRA AGE - ITINERANT YOGIS AS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN FOLK AND ELITE

Recent work by J. R. Freeman, Matthew Martin, and others have traced the historical connections and social dynamics that led to the "Tantricization" - the incorporation of medieval tantric literature and technologies - into various Keralan folk traditions in South India.¹⁴²⁵ In Kerala, folk traditions were highly localized but also a part of the larger Dravidian cultural heritage found throughout Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.¹⁴²⁶ These folk traditions were characterized by fertility cults centered in sacred groves (*kavus*) involving the worship of a variety of goddesses, ancestors and other valorized dead, as well as more accessible nature deities (*yakṣas*, *bhūtas*, etc.) and, particularly, in

¹⁴²⁵ This is in contrast to "Sanskritization" or "Brahmanization" often discussed in ethnographies - see J.R. Freeman, "Untouchable Bodies of Knowledge in the Spirit Possession of Malabar", *Paragrana*, 18 (1): (2009): 135-164 and "Śāktism, Polity and Society in Medieval Malabar", in *Goddess Traditions in Tantric Hinduism: History, Practice and Doctrine*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2016) for more on this in regard to Kerala. See Martin (2021) for more on the "Tantricization" of both Keralan and Nepalese folk traditions.

¹⁴²⁶ Dravidian refers to classical cultural and religious traditions of South India - including Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, while I use "folk" to refer to highly localized or indigenous worldviews.

Kerala, snake deities (*nāgas*).¹⁴²⁷ Divinities from these traditions were often absorbed by larger trans-local Hindu groups, particularly Śaiva-Śākta, while simultaneously absorbing higher Hindu divinities into their own pantheons - essentially creating new clan lineages that blended trans-local gods and goddesses with Kerala's ancestral deities and spirits.

Freeman and Martin's work focuses specifically on the deity possession tradition of Kerala known as Teyyam, which I too had the opportunity to witness and will discuss further below. Freeman, in particular, has shown in a series of articles how these tantric ideas from North India, as exemplified by the texts we examined in the previous chapter, were brought into Kerala in the South through the movements of iconoclastic itinerant and householder ascetics (i.e., the Nāth, Siddhas, Nāth-Siddhas, Yogi/Jogis etc.) who belonged to all caste-groups and who navigated the subcontinent's pilgrimage sites in the late medieval period. On these Nāth-Siddhas and other itinerant *yogis*, White writes,

The Nāth Siddhas' persistent popular success, coupled with their generally humble social backgrounds, the relative accessibility of their path, and the this-worldly focus of their practices and goals, has long made them the object of scorn and censure on the part of India's social, cultural, and religious elites - the upper castes, urban intelligentsia, and cosmopolitan literati whose religious proclivities have tended more towards refined and cosmeticized orthodoxy or cerebralized tantrism. Indeed, the Nāth Siddhas have long been accused of being charlatans or mere conjurers - an accusation that India's street magicians have long used to their advantage, posing as *yogins* or *tāntrikas* in their performances.¹⁴²⁸

Equipped with their Tantric literature and techniques, these itinerant yogis arrived in Northern Kerala and influenced popular folk performances such as Teyyam, acting as intermediaries between the broader populace, the royal polity, and the more elite Brahmanical traditions. Many of these groups were Śaiva and Śākta, some tracing their

¹⁴²⁷ P. K. Yasser Arafath, "Saints, Serpents, and Terrifying Goddesses: Fertility Culture on the Malabar Coast (c. 1500–1800)", in *Histories of Medicine and Healing in the Indian Ocean World*; ed. Anna Winterbottom, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 99-124.

¹⁴²⁸ White (1996: 8)

lineages back to Gorakhnāth or even earlier to Maystendranāth, the purported author of the KJÑ discussed in the last chapter. Other groups, such as the "Eighty-Four Siddhas", also belonged to various Tantric Buddhist groups and were equally important in the dissemination of Tantra throughout the subcontinent.¹⁴²⁹

In short, these groups of itinerant householder ascetics were the primary surviving heirs to the medieval Tantric legacy that evolved from earlier Atimārga/Mantramārga, Buddhist, and Jain tantric groups and played an important role in transporting tantric divinities, philosophies, and rituals throughout South Asia and beyond. This is seen, for example, in Sontheimer's work on the Kānphaṭā Gosāvīs of Maharashtra who spread the cult of Bhairava throughout the region, leading to the "Hinduization", or more precisely, the "Tantricization" of various tribal groups.¹⁴³⁰ Among these groups, oracular possession and healing/exorcistic rites continue to be a central component of their religion.¹⁴³¹ This is also seen and detailed in William Sax's work on deity possession rites among the low-caste Harijans of Garhwal in Uttarakhand. Here the possessing agent is usually the fierce Kachiya-Bhairava, a form of Kāla-Bhairava, who oral tradition holds appeared to the Harijan community in the form of either a Kānphaṭa ("Split-eared) Nāth Yogi or as an Aghori renunciant who resided in cremation grounds. Sax believes it was itinerant yogis associated specifically with the tradition of the Eighty-Four Siddhas who came into Uttarkhand via

¹⁴²⁹ Such groupings of Siddhas belonged also to the Hindu and Jain Tantric traditions. See White (1996) chapter 4 for numerous lists. See Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahamudra: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-four Buddhist Siddhas*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985) for examples of Buddhist *Siddha* songs and religiosity.

¹⁴³⁰ Sontheimer (1989b: 95-99)

¹⁴³¹ For example, the institution of *devr̥ṣīs* among the Dhangan community discussed in Sontheimer (1989b: 138-150)

Tibet.¹⁴³² Martin shows a parallel history in Nepal as well with the Navadurgā Dancer-Mediums of Bhaktapur.¹⁴³³

Alexis Sanderson theorized earlier that Tantric concepts and texts that Kashmiri exegetes wrote about from the 9th-13th centuries CE were widely represented throughout India, stating,

...it is highly probable that each community inherited these traditions independently by participating in a more widespread system, which may have included even the Tamil-speaking regions of the far south of the subcontinent.¹⁴³⁴

In this connection, Freeman and Dyczkowski mention Varadarāja from Kerala, who wrote a famous Malayali commentary on the Kashmiri *Spandakārikā* ("The Stanzas on Vibration") and the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*. Tradition claims he was a disciple and the youngest son of Madhurāja, an ascetic from Madurai, who studied with both Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja.¹⁴³⁵ Freeman argues that this evidence of early Trika texts written in Malayali strongly suggests the presence and activity of this lineage in Kerala during this early period.¹⁴³⁶

Freeman also presents evidence that Nāth ideology and practices were appropriated by royal Tantric temples in Kerala in the late medieval period, and from there influenced the folk possession rites of Teyyam. For example, in Teyyam songs (*tōrram*) performed during possession rites for the deity Bhairava, references are found of Nāth Siddhas engaging with royal religion. Martin summarizes Freeman's findings:

Bhairavan's tale recounts how Nāth virtuosi settled in Northern Kerala through conjugal relationships with local Nāyar women, which in turn instituted the formation of a new caste group in the region's social system, the Cōyi ('house-holder yogīs').

¹⁴³² Sax (2009: 37)

¹⁴³³ Martin (2021: 170-171)

¹⁴³⁴ Sanderson (1998: 663)

¹⁴³⁵ See Freeman (2009: 160) and Dyczkowski (1992a: 31 and fn. 76-77)

¹⁴³⁶ Freeman (2009: 160-161)

Overall, some five hundred Cōyi families were dispersed in the districts of Kannur and Kasaragod, many of whom are connected to the Teyyam groves as members of their administrative committees.¹⁴³⁷

Although Freeman believes these particular Nāth mendicants came from Mangalore, Karnataka before settling in Kerala, this was just one node connecting to larger web of decentralized Nāth-Siddha networks spread throughout South Asia. These groups often practiced various Tantric rites for local populations during pilgrimage cycles, particularly exorcism, healing, and *mantravāda* (sorcery). In this way Nāths engaged with a variety of populations, particularly in Śākta temples, that, according to Martin "extended to the Kathmandu Valley via pilgrimage sites like Śrīsailam from as far as Malabar's coast."¹⁴³⁸ Through this network, Tantric yogis of various sorts settled in Kerala through the auspices of royal polity and subsequently influenced local traditions.

These interrelations were solidified in Northern Kerala around the 14th Century CE under the Kōlattiri dynasty, which arose after the disintegration of the Cōla, Cēra, and Pandya kingdoms from the 8th–11th century CE and united the smaller kingdoms which arose soon after. The territories of northern Kerala became known as Kōlattanādu. At this time, the Kōlattiri kings adopted Nāth-influenced tantrism as well as more local folk rites such as Teyyam as the religion of their royal courts, resulting in a synthesis of Tantric and folk traditions (often enshrined in the Purāṇas) which became popularized across the kingdom by the 12th century as the dominant state religion. On this Martin writes:

The influx of Tantric ideas into Kerala had inevitable repercussions on the region's temple customs: the political shift from macro-kingdom to poligar polities integrated Tantra with folk phenomena, like Teyyāṭṭam, which bolstered these systems' authoritative legitimacy as royally aligned religion. Also, pre-Śākta fertility

¹⁴³⁷ See Martin (2021: 170) and Freeman (2016: 195)

¹⁴³⁸ Martin (2021: 171)

cults...were being absorbed into royal religion: many sacred groves were built near *nāga* shrines (*pambinkōṭṭa*) to ensure fertile rainfalls.¹⁴³⁹

Through this process, Tantra moved from a private and esoteric body of practice, as exemplified by the elite Kashmiri traditions, to a public religion, which still pervades the daily temple life of Kerala. Martin divides Keralan Tantra into two separate systems: (1) a more right-handed Śaiva Siddhānta dualist form utilized by Nambūtiri Brahmins, which disavowed animal and blood sacrifice, and (2) a Kashmiri mode of Tantric nondualism that characterized the religiosity of Teyyam groves and royal temples associated with the dominant Goddess throughout Kerala, Bhadrakālī. The temples of Nambūtiri Brahmins were primarily restricted to members of the Brahmin and higher castes they served, while royal Goddess temples, which employed alcohol and the sacrifice of chickens as offerings to appease fierce and ancestral deities, served a broader swathe of non-Brahmin devotees. In some cases, royal Goddess temples were also superintended by Brahmin priests in an effort to expand religious authority, but more commonly they were managed by traditional non-Brahman ritualist castes such as the Pidārar and Śāntikārar.¹⁴⁴⁰

The third primary site of worship in Kerala were the Teyyam *kāvus* (sacred groves), which housed shrines to indigenous ancestors and goddesses, deceased clan heroes, *yakṣa/nāga* spirits and Śākta-Śaiva deities absorbed from larger translocal traditions. These *kāvus* were usually supervised by local non-Brahman priests known as *kōmarams*, some of whom also become possessed by Teyyam deities. Martin notes that it was during annual public festivals in Kerala where many of these different Brahmin and non-Brahmin groups and agents interacted with each other:

¹⁴³⁹ Martin *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴⁰ Freeman (2016: 148). As the name implies, Śāntikārars were specialists in *śanti* rites of pacification clearly, again placing these systems within the larger demonological traditions of South Asia.

Teyyam groves and Tantric temple culture overlapped on a regular basis, particularly during temple festivals (*perumkaliyāṭṭam*), which blurred this divide. These festivals were opportunities where priests could communicate in circumstances that were otherwise constrained. In Nileśvaram and Payyanur districts, Teyyam priests established a strong rapport with Tantric specialists, most notably Pidārar priests, who made extensive blood and alcohol libations under the auspices of Nambūtiri Brahmans...this relationship was accentuated at temple festivals, during which Pidārar and *kōmamram* [Teyyam priests] collaborated at the festival's sacrificial rites.¹⁴⁴¹

Often there were harmonious interactions between these various networks, but historically these alliances, particularly with the royalty and the Nambūtiri Brahmans, would go awry. Brahmins were known to revolt against sovereign jurisdiction, especially in relation to the regulation and taxation of their temple land. According to Martin, it was during such revolts in the medieval period when "...Teyyam *kāvus* became reservoirs of religious power for the state. All Teyyam groves were patronized by a regal lineage (11th Century CE), which was relayed via the installation of the king's patron goddess (*tampurāṭṭi*) at each *kāvu*."¹⁴⁴²

As Sanderson has shown, parallel developments occurred with the Paippaladin Atharvavedins of Orissa, whose priestly formation adopted and adapted a Trika and Kālīkula-inspired goddess cult into their ritual repertoire in order to attract royal patronage.¹⁴⁴³ In regard to the Kālīkula influence found in Paippaladin ritual manuals, Sanderson notes the predominance of Bhadrakālī who, as mentioned, was and remains the dominant goddess throughout Kerala. In this connection Sanderson writes:

In the early medieval period it is, to my knowledge, only in the *Māṭṛtantra* tradition of the unpublished and hitherto unstudied Brahmayāmala texts of southern India that Bhadrakālī comes to the fore as the principal focus of a properly Tantric Śākta cult.¹⁴⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴¹ Martin (2021: 174)

¹⁴⁴² Martin (2021: 166)

¹⁴⁴³ Sanderson (2007b: 236)

¹⁴⁴⁴ Sanderson (2007b: 277–278, fn. 141)

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Northern *Brahmayāmala* texts explicitly mention deity possession as a goal and form of practice. Unfortunately, I have not been able to examine these southern manuscripts at this point, though it would not be far-fetched to assume that similar rites are incorporated in the southern recension, since the Northern BYT may be the ultimate source for Bhadrakālī's cult in this region and due to the prevalence of institutionalized tantric forms of deity possession throughout Kerala. It is this Southern *Brahmayāmala* corpus which becomes incorporated into the most popular Tantric texts of the region - the *Tantrasamuccaya*, and the subsequently condensed *Śesasamuccaya*, both of which, according to Freeman, inform the entire royal cult complex of Kerala's Śakta worship.¹⁴⁴⁵

The version of Bhadrakālī we find in Kerala is highly localized, though some resemblances are found in various Purāṇic texts.¹⁴⁴⁶ In Kerala, rather than the slayer of the demon Ruru in the Purāṇic accounts, Bhadrakālī here is the slayer of Daruka, which harkens back to the royal Cera tutelary in the Śakta temple of Kodungallur, considered the Goddesses most ancient temple. In Keralan tantric texts, Bhadrakālī is said to be a *yoginī* and a *kāpālinī* (female skull-bearer) who is most associated with the forests and its inhabitants. She is further explicitly praised as the Goddesses Kubjikā, Śrīvidyā, and Tripurasundarī.¹⁴⁴⁷

When these royal tantric cults intersected with folk Teyyam, we thus see two different modes of practice and worship, which Freeman summarizes as:

...an inner temple-cult of Śakta, Sanskritic rites, and an outer cult of possessed folk-worship coordinating the martial and lower castes all under royal patronage, and

¹⁴⁴⁵ Freeman (2016: 143-144)

¹⁴⁴⁶ See Caldwell, "Whose Goddess? Kali as Cultural Champion in Kerala Oral Narratives", in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia: Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*, eds. Bronkhorst & Deshpande, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2012): 93 for list of Purāṇic texts. She states the closest resemblance is found in the *Linga-purāṇa*.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Freeman (2016: 152)

framed in local, historical versions of Kerala-wide Puranic charters of conquest and divinely sanctioned rule. This was the way Tantrism and Śaktism functioned socio-politically in medieval Kerala...¹⁴⁴⁸

With this historical context, let us now look more closely at the role and manifestation of possession in Kerala.

2. POSSESSION IN KERALA

I had the great fortune of seeing and documenting several possession forms and rites during my travels to Kerala in both 1998 and again in 2016. I will be presenting several photographs I took of these rites throughout this dissertation and am including some of the interviews I conducted in the appendices. Anyone who has spent extended time in Kerala knows that possession is ubiquitous throughout the region, a primordial and fundamental aspect of its religiosity. Many possession rites have indigenous and Dravidian roots, which itself was a bricolage of folk and classical religions and includes cultural traditions from the regions of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. As seen in my previous discussion of the popular Dravidian deity Murugaṅ, oracular possession was a common feature in early Tamil literature, often involving the possession of cult priests and priestesses (*veḷaṅ*) through rapturous and frenzied dance (*veṛiyātal*). Clothey's translation from the early Tamil Saṅgam literature will suffice, again, to describe this sort of oracular possession and healing rite:

...a priestess (*kaṭṭuvicci*) is asked for a diagnosis of a maiden's languor. The diviner, be it priest or priestess, is believed to be possessed of the god and thus have access to the god's will ... the site is spread with sand and decorated with red *kāntal* flowers...the dance is accompanied by musical instruments and songs. The priest elevates a puppet designed to take the illness from the maiden; a ram is sacrificed, and its blood offered to Murugaṅ... The priestess...is given paddy, which she throws into the air. She perspires, shivers, smells her palms, and starts her rapturous singing in praise of Murugaṅ. The paddy is counted by fours. If one, two or three paddy

¹⁴⁴⁸ Freeman (2016: 155)

grains are left over, Murukaṅ is believed to be the cause of the malaise; if the count is even, something else is that cause.¹⁴⁴⁹

Thus, long before the arrival of Tantra, possession had been a primary mode of worship in this region. Freeman discusses these roots of possession practices in Kerala:

These practices and their officials are cognate with a whole range of similar "folk" traditions throughout south India, and I am convinced that *teyyāṭṭam* is thus part of a relatively coherent "Dravidian" paradigm of worship. The paradigm is predicated on possession, is strongly implicated in a cult of the dead, and has historical roots which we can clearly trace back to the classical Tamil literature of the early centuries C.E. The ancient Tamils worshipped apotheosized ancestors and fallen martial heroes whose spirits they installed into stone monuments (*naṭukal*). These spirits were then periodically invoked into costumed dancer-mediums who spoke as oracular embodiments of the deity and received the same offerings of liquor and blood before similarly described altars that one finds in teyyam worship today... The principal title of the ancient oracle, Vēlan, even survives as the caste-name of one of those communities who perform teyyams today in Kerala, as does the caste of Pāṇar exorcist-musicians, whose title was anciently used of Caṅkam bards.¹⁴⁵⁰

Local and village oracles of all sorts are still found throughout South Asia as seen in the voluminous summary of India's ethnographic record in Frederick Smith's work, *The Self-Possessed*.¹⁴⁵¹ Its ubiquity has led scholars such as Gavin Flood to claim that, "It would be possible to read the history of religion in South Asia in terms of possession as the central paradigm of a person being entered by a deity which becomes reinterpreted at more 'refined' cultural levels".¹⁴⁵² Flood suggests, however, that more fundamental than possession is "divinization of the body" in the history of South Asian religions.¹⁴⁵³ As we've seen, this is certainly the case in terms of the Tantric traditions we discussed in the previous chapter, but it would be hard to make such a case for folk forms of possession. From the ethnographic

¹⁴⁴⁹ See Clothey's translation (1978: 28) which is quoted from various Tamil sources (e.g., *Tirumuru* and *Ciriyatirumardēl*).

¹⁴⁵⁰ Freeman, "Possession Rites and the Tantric Temple: A Case-Study from Northern Kerala", *Diskus Online Journal of International Religious Studies* 2 (1994)

¹⁴⁵¹ See especially Chapter 2 of Smith (2006) which references many other sources

¹⁴⁵² Flood (2006: 87)

¹⁴⁵³ Flood (2006: 88)

record, what seems most central is the incorporation of divine energy into one's own being - an idea found in both Tantric and non-Tantric systems. For example, most local healers and oracles in South Asia do not try to "divinize" their body, rather they believe they have been "chosen" by the gods to perform specific duties (prophecy, healing, divination, etc.) - thus there is no need to "divinize" their body. The village oracles chosen-ness is often understood to be a result of their intertwined karma with the deity and they themselves recognize that they have little agency in the matter - they are simply vessels for divine forces to work through them.¹⁴⁵⁴

This split, I would argue, reflects an important distinction among practitioners of possession in Kerala. Divinization of the body (via *nyāsa*, *mantra*, etc.) becomes the key practice *par excellence* among Tantric adepts (and to a degree in tantric-influenced possession cults), who tend to model themselves after the divine *bhūtanātha* (a "Master of Spirits"), far more than the local village oracle who acts solely as a physical support for the discarnate entity. In other words, a spirit or deity may possess the tantric adept (*sādhaka*), but ultimately, as we've seen in texts from the previous chapter, it is the tantric practitioner who is in control and the intentional agent, with their own particular goals in mind. In contrast, many non-tantric oracles claim they are simply conduits for the deity, and ultimately it is the deity or spirit who is the primary agent and in control. These non-elite mediums act only to do what the deities and spirits want - to serve the needs of the deity and their respective community/clients. Although I make this distinction from an academic standpoint, the reality on the ground is much more blurred due to the long-standing mutual influence between folk

¹⁴⁵⁴ See for example Diemberger (2005); Sophia Elizabeth Day, *Embodying Spirits: Village Oracles and Possession Ritual in Ladakh, North India*. (PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1989): 314-318; and Katarina Turpeinen, "The Soteriological Context of a Tibetan Oracle." *Himalaya* 39.1 (2019).

possession cults and tantric sects, particularly in Kerala as we shall see. Thus, in Kerala we tend to see less of the *bhūtanātha* model at work in public possession rites, though it likely exists among practitioners of *mantravāda* (sorcery).¹⁴⁵⁵



Oracle from Irula Tribe - Attapadi, Kerala

I briefly witnessed a "non-Tantric" form of oracular possession in 1998 among the Irula tribe of Attappadi in Pallakad district of Kerala. In this case, our group randomly came across a possession rite that occurred in a small Irular hamlet known as Palloor. We had heard drums from across the forest and followed it to a small Bhadrakālī shrine where a ceremony was taking place. We were told that the night before someone had placed a cloth over one of the idols in the temple and that this possession

ceremony was being held in order to find out why and who had done it. The ceremony started with purifying the village idols by washing them with water, milk, ghee, and then smearing them with sandalwood paste. After some food offerings were made, local drummers began to play rapid rhythms on their traditional drums, while one man continuously rang a bell. A male oracle from a neighboring village was employed for this rite, and when the drums began, he immediately entered into a trance state and began chanting prayers in his local dialect. A special sap burnt on top of hot coals was waved around the shrine idols and the oracle by other members of the tribe. Following this, the

¹⁴⁵⁵ See my discussion on Kutṭicāttan below

village oracle began to tremble violently, jump around, and dance ferociously, yelling words which sounded like gibberish. A branch of leaves was placed around his neck to "cool" him which he held throughout the rite. The audience around him had to constantly check his mannerisms in case he began to lose "control" of his possession state. We were told that if he got "too hot" he would lose control and could be a danger to himself or others. However, if he became "too cool", then he would come out of the possession state and the rite would fail. The drummers would therefore play varying rhythms to heat him up or cool him down - thus, the rite continually oscillated between these two states until temporary periods of equilibrium were achieved, allowing the deity to be able to speak through the oracle. During these periods he was able to stammer some intelligible words, though it seemed he did not receive



Oracle from Irula Tribe - Attapadi, Kerala

a final answer regarding the identity of the person or the reason why the idol was covered in the temple. All that was stated was that whoever the transgressor was, they were from the next hamlet over to the East and that the deity possessing

the man would somehow take care of it and "cure" him.

After this point, some of the women from the tribe began prostrating before the oracle and touching his feet. He randomly began to speak to one of the women in attendance, telling her that he (as the deity) was aware she had a son who was planning to go on a pilgrimage to Sabarimala. Having received an affirmation from her that this was indeed the

case, the oracle then stated she should not let her son go on the pilgrimage as there would be some misfortune due to a very recent death in her family. She again affirmed that a recent death had taken place and thanked the oracle for his advice. Other members of the tribe began to ask him questions as well. After answering them, the chief (*muppan*) of the tribe broke open a coconut and gave it to the possessed man, who was still trembling, but no longer thrashing about. They then poured a vase of water with leaves over the man's head, which brought the oracle out of his possessed state and everyone shortly dispersed.

I mention this rite only to contrast it with what Freeman calls "formalized possession" rites in Kerala, such as Teyyam, which are usually associated with public festivals and have been influenced by Tantra to some degree. We will return to these possession forms shortly in more detail. Though a detailed study of this particular Irula oracular rite was not possible, there was clearly no formal or cognate use of tantric technologies such *mantra*, *mudrā*, or divinization (*nyāsa*) as seen in the Tantric literature.

SARPAM THUḶḶAL

Before discussing more "Tantrified" forms of possession in Kerala, I wanted to briefly note another folk possession rite I witnessed during my fieldwork that has some connection with the pan-Asian phenomena of *svasthāveśa*, discussed in previous chapters, involving rites that make young girls and/or boys possessed by spirits for oracular purposes. The ritual I saw is known as *sarpam thuḶḶal* (or *pāmbin thuḶḶal*), a fertility and protective rite involving the worship of serpent-spirits (*nāgas*), performed by the low-caste Pulluvan (or Pulluvar) communities of Kerala.

Snake worship is an ancient practice in Kerala, and most traditional homes outside of its bustling cities have dedicated snake groves (*sarpa-kāvus*) for these *nāga* spirits. Though one of its functions is land fertility and human progeny, it is also performed to prevent or appease serpent curses (*nāga-dośa*) or negative forms of possession by *nāgas*, which can be incurred by the destruction, violation, or neglect of the family's sacred serpent grove. Acts such as cutting down trees, damaging stones, neglecting or allowing menstruating women enter into *nāga* shrines, are said to incur the anger of these local serpent deities, resulting in curses which can affect the entire family - such as childlessness or infant death, failed crops, lack of marriage proposals or job opportunities, and even leprosy or other skin diseases.¹⁴⁵⁷ Serpent rites are performed at other times as well, primarily to receive blessings from the serpent deities, for example, when starting on a new journey or venture. In all cases, the Pulluvans have been ascribed by lineage rights to handle these affairs dealing with these powerful *nāga* beings. The Pulluvans have been variously described by early anthropologists as astrologers, medicine-men, priests, exorcists, magicians, and village minstrels.¹⁴⁵⁸

I was fortunate to meet a Pulluvan family while I was in Trissur, Kerala, who allowed me to attend *sarpam thullals* they performed in both 1997 and in 2016. The female ritualist's name was Ambujukshi, who was accompanied by her son Sudhir and her brother, who we only knew as "Uncle". Uncle informed us that the Pulluvans were of relatively high status in ancient times, however, with the arrival and hegemonic dominance of the Brahmins, their status was reduced to a low caste, below the

¹⁴⁵⁷ Deborah L. Neff, "Aesthetics and Power in Pāmbin Tullal: A Possession Ritual of rural Kerala". *Ethnology*, 26:(1987): 63-71

¹⁴⁵⁸ See Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975): 226 as well as Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, "*Sarpam thullal*: A Ritualistic Performance of Kerala", in *Performers and Their Arts Folk, Popular and Classical Genres in a Changing India*, eds. Charsley and Kadekar, (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006).

Ambalavāsis (temple servants) and Nayar families whom they normally serve. In our interview with Uncle, he gave a very bare-bones summary of the rite as follows:

First, we will decorate nearby places with tender coconut leaves. Then we will draw *kaḷams* with five colors and sing *Pulluvan Paṭṭu*. In all the performances there will be women, usually virgins, who become possessed. This possession is known as *thuḷḷal*. They will get possessed and chant something like "I am happy" or "I am not" if the rituals have been performed incorrectly. The ritual is done as an offering to snakes.

With this as our basic outline, let us now briefly look at the various stages of the rite as I witnessed them. The first stage involved the creation and purification of the ritual space within the serpent grove (*kāvu*). This was done by demarcating the ritual area with consecrated water and decorations made of tender coconut leaves. Sudhir created several cloth snakes, which were said to represent the snakes of the sacred grove, which were filled



Ritual items prepared for sarpam thuḷḷal - Trissur, 1997

with locally sourced flowers, rice grains, and turmeric. Banana leaves stacked with offerings harvested from the land such as rice, turmeric, betel nut, bananas, jaggery, milk, incense, coconuts, *tulsi* leaves, and various flowers were also placed near the cloth

snakes at this time. The next step involved the "drawing of the *kaḷam*" (*Kaḷamezhuthu*), geometric *maṇḍala*-like drawings made out of natural colored powders, which are said to have magical and protective qualities as well as delineate where the divine power of the *nāgas* will manifest.¹⁴⁶⁰ We were told these were pictorial representations of the deities and

¹⁴⁶⁰ The *kaḷam* is similar and derives from the Tamil *kōlam*, powdered drawings drawn on floor of homes, or in front of homes, and believed to have magical and protective significance. See B. Beck, "The Symbolic Merger of Body, Space, and Cosmos in Hindu Tamil Nadu." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 10: (1976): 213-43 and

each *kaḷam* has their own particular qualities depending on which *nāga* is invoked and what their function is - differences primarily involved the number of knots/coils of the serpents and the colors used. The more beautiful and elaborate the images, they told us, the more it would attract the deity to come reside there. Uncle told us that he knew over two hundred different *kaḷam* patterns comprising all the various *nāgas* and functions needed. He likened the art to a mathematical language, the patterns creating mental effects upon those who meditate on them. He believed the practice of *kaḷams* was very ancient in Kerala and later developed into *yantras* used in tantric worship.



Drawing outline of the kaḷam - 1997



One elaborate and large nāga-kaḷam used in 2016

The *sarpam thullal* I witnessed in 2016 involved one giant *kaḷam*, while the rite I saw in 1997 involved four different *kaḷams* for the four serpent deities invoked. In both rites I saw, it was the male Pulluvans who created the outlines, though it was the females who filled them with the powdered colors. Deborah Neff notes that this is a crucial part of the rite since it is believed it is the Pulluvan woman who "invests the *kaḷam* with the specific quality of

Satyapāl, *Kalamezhuth: Ritual Art Practice of Kerala*, (Thrissur: Kerala Lalithakala Akademi, 2011) for more on this art form.

power or *śakti* of the woman."¹⁴⁶² After the drawings were completed, the banana leaf offerings were placed upon or next to the *kaḷams*, signifying that the sacred and ritual space within the serpent grove was now complete.



Uncle playing *nāga-veena* during *pūjā*, 1997



Cymbals and *kudam*, 1997

Following this, the eldest son of the family who sponsored the rite entered the ritual arena and performed various *pūjās*, guided by the Pulluvans, to a variety of deities (e.g., Śiva, Gaṇapati, Garuḍa, Bhagavatī), and ancestral, *yakṣa*, and *nāga* spirits (e.g., Nāgayakṣi, Nāgarāja, Bhūtayakṣī, Bhūtaraja). The Pulluvans then sang their sacred songs (*Pulluvan Paṭṭu*), while playing on traditional instruments specific to their caste, including the *nāga-vīna*, a one-stringed violin made from the wood of teak, jack fruit and a coconut shell, and the *kudam*, which is essentially an animal skin covered pot that has a string attached to it, which is plucked using a small piece of wood. By pulling and plucking the string, different rhythms and strange tones are created. The only other instrument used were the cymbals. The songs themselves include invocation, praise songs, and mythological narratives of the *nāga* deities, which they told us came primarily from the Mahabharata, the Purāṇas, and local lore.

¹⁴⁶² Neff (1987: 65). It is unclear whether this interpretation is an indigenous notion or influence from tantric temple rites.

Neff translated a portion of these invocation songs in the rite she documented in her own fieldwork, which echo rites and verses we examined in the Atharvaveda:

You take away this fear of snake poison and any misfortune. Don't punish us but save us. You bring goodness and remove all sorrows. Because of you we get children...You come and eat this and dance, so that the family who feeds you may have more children and prosper and that the snake curse will be removed. Stop your austerities and come and dance.¹⁴⁶³

Uncle and Sudhir stressed to us that the Pulluvans had their own particular system of music, which they stated was similar but different from the *rāga* system of South Indian classical music. We were told that the various structures of the music, and the different rhythms and tones they created, were specifically used to construct a ritual atmosphere that would cause trance and allow possession to place. For them this was the primary vehicle to engender possession - and after hearing the trance-inducing music myself, I can see how this would be possible.¹⁴⁶⁴



The four women who were supposed to become possessed, 1997



The two women who were supposed to become possessed, 2016

While the music continued, the women who were supposed to become possessed by

¹⁴⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶⁴ See Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) for the connection between trance states, possession, and music.

the *nāgas* were brought into the grove and sat either on top or in front of the *kaḷaṃ(s)*. Prior to their entrance, Sudhir told me the women were supposed to fast, to not eat meat, and to bathe early every morning for fourteen days. Inside the ritual arena, the women sat cross-legged and were told to meditate upon the *kaḷaṃs* and the deities they represented. At this point, the rhythm of the music had begun to gain energy, and another invocation song was sung by the Pulluvans. Here is a portion of that song translated by Neff:

The girl who would dance is beautiful
She has come with happiness after taking a bath...
She has come dressing as a *nāgakanyā* (serpent-maiden)
and she made a salute at the *kaḷaṃ*.
You shake, shake, shake, my *nāga*,
You shake your hair and dance.
The girl is sitting, wearing a beautiful dress
She is holding a cluster of flowers of the coconut tree.
Then why can't you come, my *nāga*,
Is there not a virgin?
Is there not a serpent grove?
We have both a virgin and a grove
So, you come, my Nāgarāja (King of Nāgas), you dance my Nāgarājavu.¹⁴⁶⁶

As the songs and music continued, we noticed that the women in the *kaḷaṃ* began to tremble lightly, signifying that they were gradually entering into a trance state. As the rhythms began to quicken, the trembling became more vigorous and their bodies would start to shake violently, some waving their limbs around wildly, while others banged their heads up and down. Eventually, some of the women begin to thrash upon the ground itself, making odd sounds and exhibiting serpentine-like movements with their arms and legs.

In the 1997 rite I witnessed, two of the women were unable to become possessed - instead, a young boy from the audience was spontaneously possessed and entered into the

¹⁴⁶⁶ Neff (1987: 66)

ritual area. When this happened the Pulluvans stopped the music and Ambujukshi and Uncle consulted the three possessed persons, asking them (as the *nāgas*) if they were satisfied by the rituals. It was clear, however, that something had gone wrong since only three of the four invoked gods were present. The Pulluvans discussed among themselves and then began to play their instruments once again. After a few minutes another young girl from the audience spontaneously became possessed and entered into the *kāvu*. All four mediums were now shaking violently, their eyes rolling, and heads thrashing to and fro. Some of them began to pass out on the ground from exhaustion, while spectators would come to help the trembling bodies by cooling them down and rubbing their faces with water. One of the women who passed out came to and begin to scream aloud, then moaned, and then started to weep. At this point the Pulluvans again stopped the music and tried to speak to the possessed in order to calm them but also to ask them questions about the future and why any problems were happening to the sponsor family. They begin to relax, and the music started once again, causing them to thrash about on the ground and destroying the *kaḷams* with their bodies. Neff notes that the destruction of the *kaḷam* signified the destruction of any *nāga*-curses the family may have been facing.¹⁴⁶⁷

At this point, the Pulluvans brought out a large bowl full of turmeric, lime, and water as an offering to the serpent deities, a vegetarian blood substitute used throughout Kerala known as *guruti*. This offering reinvigorated the possessed mediums, who began to thrash their arms in the orange liquid, splashing it all over their bodies and the surrounding *kāvu*.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Neff (1987: 68)



Toward the end of possession

This continued for some time until the music again stopped, which caused the mediums to become calm once again. Out of exhaustion each one began to pass out and lose consciousness, covered head to toe in *guruti*. The pot (*kalaśa*) was completely emptied, and the sacred space and *kaḷams* that had taken so

long to create, completely destroyed. While unconscious, the trembling bodies of the women were picked up by family members and taken near the family shrine, where some of them begin to regain consciousness. One lady, however, remained possessed, though she could not communicate with Pulluvans and instead made strange humming sounds. To make the *nāga* spirit depart, Uncle had to whisper some special incantations into her ear, while waving a burning wick around in a peculiar manner. The woman clapped her hands at the flame, trying to grab it or put it out. Eventually, she too became unconscious, and the rite was finally over. Later those who became possessed regained consciousness, but none had any memory of the events which took place.

Again, we see here a fascinating possession form - similar in many ways to *svasthāveśa*, though not explicitly tantric in anyway. Rather than any form of divinization, here the possession was engendered by the constructed ritual environment. According to my informants, it was the fasting of the women, their meditations on the possessing deities, and the supernatural atmosphere (created by the songs, the rhythm of the music, the lighting and

incense, and ritual offerings from the grove itself), which attracted the deities and caused the women to enter into trance states. Sudhir explained it as such when I visited him in 2016:

At that time, we are presenting the music and rhythms, and then the serpent gods will come. Then the two ladies will come and sit on the *kaḷam*, their mind will be fully fixed and concentrated on the *kaḷams*, the serpent gods. Then a small vibration will come from the lady's toe. At that time the music, rhythm and dancing are going on and the serpent will pass through their toe. Then their hair will come out and they will dance. A *veḷiccappātu* (temple oracle) is different - they get the *saṃkalpa* (thought-forms/will) of the Devī, but here it is the two ladies who receive the mind of the serpent gods. It is always ladies, usually young ladies. Another time it has been older ladies, but they don't have the body capacity, they are too weak. That is why here the two young ladies are prepared as *kōmarams* (oracles).

Interestingly enough, Sudhir's mention of the possession as a vibration starting by the energy of the goddess entering into the small toe has some parallels in other traditions we looked at, such as the Chinese Buddhist Deity Yoga text "the Devil-Subduing Seals and Great Spirit-Spells of Consecration as Spoken by the Buddha", and in Kṣemarāja's commentary on the practice of subtle (*sūkṣma*) yoga where he states one of points of entrance for possession is the *pādaśākhā*, the big toe.¹⁴⁶⁸ *Nāga* possession occurring via the toe makes sense, since serpents creep upon the ground and were embodied in the powdered *kaḷam* drawings at the women's feet.¹⁴⁶⁹ Whether the ideas are related, or in which direction they flowed from, is unclear.

Sudhir's reference to the differences between *sarpam thuḷḷal* and the Kerala institution of *veḷiccappātus* (temple oracles), who we will turn to in the next section, is also of interest. Rather than the Pulluvans themselves being the mediums, they make others incorporate the

¹⁴⁶⁸ See previous chapter for these references

¹⁴⁶⁹ See Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, "Seepage of Divinised Power through Social, Spiritual and Bodily Boundaries: Some Aspects of Possession in Kerala," in *La Possession en Asie du Sud: Parole, Corps, Territoire*, (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1999).

"thought-forms" (*saṃkalpa*)¹⁴⁷⁰ of the deities into their bodies. I received a similar response regarding the differences in these possession forms from another informant of mine, Sreenivas Kunnambath, an administrator at the Paramekkavu Bhadrakālī Temple I visited in Trissur in 2016. He stated:

It (*sarpam thullal*) is a totally different system - the chanting of the vibration, the sounds of the words - it is a style of the Pulluvans. You know we can hear the *rāgas* and we will start crying? Why? We don't know anything about *rāgas*! But we cry. The vibration of the waves, of the earth - it will enter into the body, the acceptable bodies. Not everybody. There is no problem with the waves, it is the same always. It is the bodies which are the problem. Each person's energy is different - it depends on what kind of food they eat, the climate they are in, the lifestyle, etc. In the chanting time, the frequency of the waves will put some bodies into trance. Why? The frequency will be synced, effecting their body. Otherwise, it will not happen - because there are a lot of people of sitting around, but they don't all get possessed. Sometimes it will happen to those not even involved in the ritual, and sometimes it won't happen at all, because there is an accepting capacity of the body - each person is different, each has different energy. We can see how people who have the same genes, how they can be completely different from each other even though they are sisters or brothers. It is the *prāṇa*, which is different. But you see in all these other cultures and countries, this is also happening. Even here the different communities are so different from each other. Woman and men are also completely different - they have different capacities, different minds, different bodies. The capacity of women is the "absorbing" capacity, and the capacity of the man is the "discharging" capacity. That is the main difference. The woman they can absorb these waves faster - it is a simple translation. It is the energy, the *śakti* that is absorbing - they can absorb the good energy and are able to attract things. In the Teyyam it is the same, they use the masks and the chanting and most important the drums, which are like *rāgas*. It is the complete atmosphere they make - if there is not good atmosphere, they cannot get the trance.

We will return to some of these ideas below, but for our purposes now it is clear that possession, according to Sreenivasan, is primarily understood in Kerala as the absorption of divine energy, as *śakti*, into the body. From both my informants' responses, we can see that *śakti* is understood in terms of vibrations, waves, or frequencies, and that this divine energy could come from a number of sources besides the deity - particularly from the ritual

¹⁴⁷⁰ *Samkalpa* is more commonly employed as a "vow", "intention" or "determination" to perform a given ritual - e.g., it is a *sai*'s *saṃkalpa* that precedes her act of self-immolation.

atmosphere (i.e., music, drum rhythms, songs, incense, etc.) and from the landscape itself (e.g., the sacred grove, the *kaḷam* made of natural materials, offerings gathered from the land, spirits of the land, etc.).¹⁴⁷¹ This is corroborated in the ethnographic work of Caroline and Fillipo Osella in Kerala, who explore the interconnections between land, houses, and their residents, which include humans, animals, and a variety of spirits. They detail how residents move onto new land and become part of the landscape, and vice versa, by partaking and exchanging substances with the land itself in a variety of ways. For Keralans, they conclude, land and landscape are alive and understood as "the territory of *śakti*".¹⁴⁷²

In Kerala, persons, spirits, and environments are almost always mutually permeable, in fluid inter-relationship and subject to each other's influence, despite the prevalence of elite values which promote closure as superior. Bodily orifices act as 'gateways' linking self to environment and cosmos...[and] different types of divine power.¹⁴⁷³

Their point is important in understanding the various South Indian concepts of the self which are operative here - particularly the divide between the permeable self and open exchange system of the Dravidians (also in Tantra) versus the "closed-system" of the Brahmins, who, in Kerala, do not become possessed. This will be a point we will return to in part two of this chapter. For now, let us turn to the institution of the *veḷiccappāṭu*, the temple oracles of Kerala, which seems to synthesize many of the ideas we've discussed so far in their own form of "domesticated possession".

¹⁴⁷¹ Osella & Osella, "Vital Exchanges: Land and Persons in Kerala", in *Territory, Soil and Society in South Asia*, ed. by Daniela Berti & Giles Tarabout, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2009): 220 also notes that in Kerala, unlike prevalent traditions in the North, the deceased bodies of family are often buried or cremated around or in the compound itself. See Rouget (1985), again, for the connection between trance states, possession, and music.

¹⁴⁷² See Osella & Osella (2009) and (1999)

¹⁴⁷³ Osella & Osella (1999: 183-210)

THE INSTITUTION OF THE VEḶICCAPPĀṬU, THE "TEMPLE ORACLE"

The centrality of possession in Kerala is most clearly seen with its unique institutionalization of the stationary temple oracle, known as the *veḷiccappāṭu* ("The Illuminated One") or the *kōmaram*, found in virtually all Goddess temples.¹⁴⁷⁴ Sarah Caldwell summarizes the *veḷiccappāṭus* place and role in Kerala:

The idea of deity entering a human body is an essential part of all worship of the goddess. Temples dedicated to Bhagavatī require the permanent presence of a *veḷiccappāṭu* or oracle, who dramatically represents the goddess to her devotees as a part of regular worship. The unique Kerala institution of the *veḷiccappāṭu* reflects the shamanic heritage of ancient south Indian religion, in which enacted, felt bodily presence of deity is the essential form of contact with the divine. The *veḷiccappāṭu* is in a special relationship to the goddess, sharing her substance when possessed by her, and functioning as her vehicle and oracle. He can both understand and control her. Although only Brahman priests may conduct *pūjā* or worship of the goddess's enlivened image within the shrine, the oracle is always a male of non-Brahman (ordinarily Nāyar) caste. Chosen by the temple authorities, the *veḷiccappāṭu* draws the goddess's power into his own body, and through this mediumship, enables devotees to interact intimately with the goddess outside the protected inner sanctum of the traditional Kerala Hindu temple.¹⁴⁷⁵

As seen from Caldwell's description, these non-Brahmin *veḷiccappāṭus* are said to be connected throughout their life with one permanent shrine or temple and dedicated to one particular Goddess, by whom they are regularly possessed. Before the arrival of Nambūdri Brahmins and the establishment of their religious hegemony, it was believed that *veḷiccappāṭus* had a number of other roles besides being simple temple oracles - acting as priests/ritualists, diviners, healers, and exorcists. Nowadays, however, *veḷiccappāṭus* are

¹⁴⁷⁴ I was told by Dr. Padmajin that the oracle during his usual performance duties is known as the *kōmaram*, but when he is actually standing in front of the Devi and wearing the red clothing and possessed by the Devi, he then becomes the *veḷiccappāṭu*.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Caldwell (2012: 90). See also Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) for a similar phenomenon found in Garhwal along with Sax (2009).

generally attached to Brahmin temples, with their priestly roles only found in smaller non-Brahmin temples and shrines patronized by the lower castes.¹⁴⁷⁶

In Brahmin temples, they act only as oracles, communicating the words of the deity and receiving and bestowing blessings to their devotees in attendance. Though Caldwell claims the *veḷiccappāṭu* can control the Goddess, none of my own informants stated this and I would argue this is not the case in Brahmin run temples unless sorcery is involved, which temple oracles do not engage in. Rather, they too claim everything happens due to the will of the Goddess - any tantric rites involved are not to control her, but to allow her to enter into their body more easily.



Current veḷiccappāṭu of Paramakkavu Temple with the *Cāmuṇḍāvrata* of the YSP and the *Guhyakāvrata* of the BYT discussed in previous chapter.¹⁴⁷⁸ Though the *veḷiccappāṭus* are the only ones allowed to embody the deity, in

While in this role *veḷiccappāṭus* dress in *śakta* fashion, mimicking the actions and behavior of the goddess by growing their hair out, wearing blood red robes, carrying the goddesses iconic hooked sword (*val*), and adorning themselves with heavy metal waist belts studded with bells (*aramani*) and a pair of giant metal anklets known as *chilambu*. Note the similarities of this

¹⁴⁷⁶ Pepita Seth, "The Initiation of a Temple Velichapadu", *India International Centre Quarterly*, 22 (1995): 117.

¹⁴⁷⁸ See BYT 2.46cd-102ab and Törzsök (2013:193-194 fn. 49)

Brahmin-run temples the oracle himself is not allowed inside the inner sanctum. Rather, the accoutrements of Bhadrakālī (*val*, *aramani*, etc.) are passed to him from the inner sanctum by the Brahmin priests after being ritually empowered by the deity. This divine energy of the Goddess (*śakti*) is then said transfer to the *veḷiccappātu*, leading him to enter into a trance state. Possession rites are accompanied by fierce and fast rhythms from non-Brahmin *chenda* drummers, which cause the oracle's body to tremble and dance. Pepita Seth describes this possession state, which she witnessed in her own ethnographic account:

After circumambulating the shrine, usually accompanied by musicians...he will take one of the loose ends of the red *pattu* and wave it before the face of the devotee. All the while, clutched in his other hand, the great shining *val* flashes backwards and forwards but does not deter the man who now leans forward to receive *kalpana*, the very words of the goddess herself, transmitted through the *velichapadu* (sic). At this juncture, the *velichapadu's* voice is usually totally unrecognizable, the divine blessings being given in a harsh, rasping tone quite unlike his everyday speech. In addition to his changed voice everyone can see that he has an almost glazed expression, that his hooded eyes are half-closed and that his breath is coming from a deeply heaving chest. Once the *velichapadu* has finished speaking, he may either shower the devotee with a handful of paddy grains or press them into his waiting hand.¹⁴⁷⁹

This is precisely the oracular possession form I witnessed almost daily during my time at the Paramekkavu Bhadrakālī temple in Thrissur in 2016. At times the oracle would jump up and down frantically or howl out loud, but generally the possession was highly ritualized, controlled and relatively mild in comparison to other forms I saw such as the frenzied Irula village-oracle I saw in Pallakad, or the very wild and even dangerous Teyyam forms I witnessed in Northern Kerala, which I will return to shortly.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Seth (1995: 120)

This "domesticated" possession form at Paramekkavu is also greatly contrasted by the famous *veḷiccappāṭu* festival known as *Bharanippattu* ("Cock Festival"), held annually at Kerala's most ancient Bhadrakālī temple, the Kodungallur Bhagavati Temple. During this festival, which normally falls between the months of March and April, the Brahmins of the temple temporarily relinquish their power and give control of the rites to



Image of Cock at Kodungallur Bhagavati Temple, 2016

non-Brahmin ritual specialists (*aṭikaḷs*) and the thousands of *veḷiccappāṭus* who flock to the festival every year. A more ancient form of worship seems to prevail in the temple compound at this time, including blood sacrifice of cocks and the throngs of male and female *veḷiccappāṭus*, who come to worship, often offering their own blood by slashing their foreheads with hooked sabers and falling into wild and frenzied trance and possession states. During this liminal carnivalesque period, normal societal conventions are temporarily terminated, and devotees sing obscene songs in ecstatic devotion to the Goddess.¹⁴⁸⁰

I had the fortune of interviewing the *veḷiccappāṭu* of Paramekkavu Temple, Keśavankutty Kurupp, via my translator Dr. Padmajin while an annual festival known as *Vela* was commencing. We discussed the preparations and role of the *veḷiccappāṭu* during this 45-day festival for the Goddess:

¹⁴⁸⁰ See Induchudan, *The Secret Chamber - A Historical, Anthropological & Philosophical Study of the Kodungallur Temple*, (Trichur: Cochin Devaswom Board, 1969); Caldwell, "Bhagavati: Ball of Fire", in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. Hawley and Wulff, (University of California Press, 1996), and M.J. Gentes, "Scandalizing the Goddess at Kodungallur", *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51.2: (1992): 295-322 for more on Kodungallur Temple and the Cock Festival.

Starting on the first day, the *veḷiccappāṭu* stays for forty-one days as a *bhajanam* (singing devotee), always at the temple praying and doing *karma* (rituals) here. He should not go out - he stays in this small room the entire time. On the forty-first day the chief priest will make some sacred water used in the *pūjās* with Bhagavatī, taking her power into this water - it is called *kalaśam* water. At this time, the *veḷiccappāṭu* is an ordinary man. When he pours that (consecrated) water, the *kalaśam*, on his head *then* he officially becomes the *veḷiccappāṭu*. This *kalaśam* happens once every year - this gives him more power. He is experiencing that he is getting closer to the Mother Goddess. Actually, we the people are also experiencing his power. We are getting so many people coming to him and asking him for sacred thread, which he will prepare with *mantra* and give to them - and then their problems will be solved. Somebody is not having children, some are having quarrels in their house, somebody may be having land problems - so many problems are solved. So, for everything they are coming for him. In the first year he was just an ordinary man - year after year though he is experiencing this power, experiencing the mercy of the Devī. While he is chanting that *mūlamantra* and praying to God, suddenly he is getting one *āveśam* (possession) and then he starts to dance. While standing in front of that idol he experiences some shivering, starting from the toes and then going upward through his body. Then there is full *āveśa* (possession).

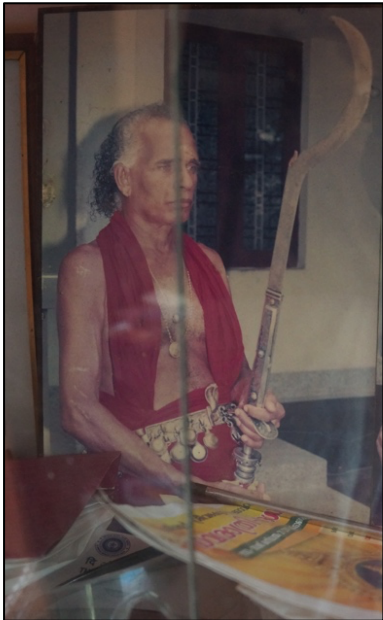
Whatever the prayers and work he is doing for others, he is getting a good result. And he has no complaints - every day for 45 days he is dancing. He has no problems, no weakness, no disease, no back pain - everything is perfect. So, he is understanding that God is pleased, whatever the prayers he does God is hearing, whatever the prayers he's doing for other people is getting a result.

Notable in this brief interview is the importance of the *veḷiccappāṭu*'s vows, the use of the *kalaśam*, and the importance of the *mūlamantra* ("root-mantra"), all of which are key to inducing possession (which he calls "*āveśam*"). All of these, as we've seen, were also commonplace within the possession rites described in the Tantras from the previous chapter. The mention of the possession starting from the feet is interesting too, paralleling the experience of possession in the *sarpam thuḷḷal* rite, and other sources, mentioned previously.

Dr. Padmajin also traveled with me to interview the former *veḷiccappāṭu* of Paramekkavu Temple, whose name was Balakrishna Kuruppa and was 79 years old at the time of the interview (1/4/2017). Much of what he said matched what Keśavankutty Kurupp told us:

Velicham means light, one who is expressing the light of the God. It is happening as an *āveśam* (possession), after having *sādhana* (penance), after having *bhajanam* (devotional songs), after having *gurūpadeśam* (advice from the guru), and after chanting the *mūlamantram* (root mantra). For forty-one days they are following celibacy, taking sacred *ghee* from the temple, taking, and pouring the sacred water, the *kalaśam* - then they are known as *veḷiccappāṭu*. He is authorized to express the light of the Goddess through him. And it is coming when he is standing in front of the Devī, one sort of *āveśam*, slowly getting some shivering from bottom to top and getting full action. It comes automatically. The *mantra* is very important - *āveśa* is only gotten after having chanted the *mantra*. The guru has given him this *mantra* and he is practicing and chanting always - then he will get the *āveśa*. Without *upadeśa* (communication of the initiatory Mantra) it will not come... While chanting during this *āveśa*, he then sees the Goddess alone, seeing the image internally in his heart. There are no other thoughts, no other images, nothing else he is seeing, nothing else he is hearing, nothing he is feeling. He is only feeling Ma. And there will be some words coming internally - that is expressing as *kalpana* (thoughts). These are the words of advice he is telling the devotees, from the Goddess' *kalpana*. He is feeling these words, from inside, and then expressing them to devotees... From the *kalaśam* he received the power, and it is we who are experiencing his power - I can say he is the Devī. Even though I have a different profession, I am always depending on him, considering him as my Guru. He is the Bhagavatī (Goddess) himself.

I would just note here the use of *kalpana*, which is understood as the oracle "hearing" or "feeling" the words or thoughts of the Goddess, which the *veḷiccappāṭu* then expresses. As



As former *veḷiccappāṭu* of
Paramekkavu Temple



Balakrishna Kuruppa today

we will see, this is very different form of possession than seen in Teyyam. Also of interest is the description of the trance, in which the oracle seems to be in some sort of

dissociative state, absorbed completely in the Goddess which is visualized within his heart.

We will return to some of these ideas in the part two of this chapter.

Finally, I did an interview with Sreenivas Kunnambath, a Nayar temple administrator and devotee of the Paramekkavu Bhagvatī Temple who provided some data on the particular rites done during the *Vela* festival at the temple, alongside his own interpretations. While his station and view are clearly aligned with the more orthodox tantra used in Keralan temple worship, he also recognizes the traditions earlier roots. Here is an excerpt from this interview:

How can we draw the *kaḷam*? We have a different way of drawing because we have the *pañcendriya* (the five senses) - the eyes for seeing, the ears for hearing, etc. Then we have the *pañcaprāṇas*, the five breaths, and our bodies, of course, which is made up of the five elements (*pañcabhūtas*). So, with these three sets of elements we are making and drawing the picture of God and Goddesses with the *pañcavarṇa* (five colors of powder). While keeping the God in our mind, we draw. No one has seen the God, nobody has seen Śiva, nobody has seen Hanuman, or Rāma, but all the people from generation to generation can identify that this is Rāma, this is Kṛṣṇa, etc. In the olden days we are drawing the pictures on the walls and the floors, the drawing system of the *kaḷams*. In all these things we use the *pañcavarṇas* - it is our way of worshipping the god. After that we thought it is not possible to talk to the *citras* (images), so then we introduced the oracles. It is only possible to see the *citras*, but you cannot talk to them. In this way we can complete our knowledge - we can see, we can taste, we can smell, we can touch, we can hear - we want the complete meaning and complete knowledge, so we need these five elements...

So, then there is the oracle, who comes to represent the Goddess. He does the *bhajans* (devotional songs) of the gods and goddess - and at last he does the trance - without that it is impossible to talk to the Goddess. In all the *pūjās* (worship rites) we have this kind of system - the inviting person, that person who can invite and receive the deity, on the same level. In tantric style we have the *deha-śuddhi* (purification of the body), not only the bath, we have the meditation and the breathing - that is also part of the trance. The trance takes someone to the level of the God - the same level - then there is a possibility to talk. After that he will give all the offerings to the god and goddesses and at last, he is invited to sit in the chair, and he gives the food (*prasāda*) and the songs and everything. After that he says bye - that is the system of *pūjās*.

The performance is the last system, but in the previous system of the Dravidian culture they were drawing the pictures and doing chants and songs of the Bhagavat [God]. The Bhagavat heard all this - he is not only in the heaven but all over the earth also. But he heard this kind of frequency of chanting sounds and was

interested to come to that place and see why they chant about him. Then they will come to see the space, and then he saw his picture. Then that picture gets the life, the *prāṇa*. Then the picture gets the life, but for that life there is no possibility to speak, so then he must go into a person. The oracle is the mediator between human and Bhagavat.

VM: So, what kind of training does the *veḷiccappāṭu* do?

S: The *veḷiccappāṭus* pray to the goddess - they do the *bhajans* continuously for years and years and years. Then the first thing is the *dīkṣaṇa* (initiation) and watching how the oracle goes into trance. After that he will learn the performance, he will learn the steps and all the things. This is the basic structure... After learning the steps then the *Veḷiccappāṭu* will pray constantly to the god, in their own capacity. We will pray to the god till we reflect the energy of God - sometimes it will happen in one day, sometimes in one year, sometime in 10 years, 60 years, 100 years, sometimes 1,000 years! When Bhagīratha prayed to Ganga, he did it for 10,000 years!

The next step will be the return of the energy in the body - the reflecting energy. Like I said it can take 10,000 years, sometimes it may never happen. It is not guaranteed. This energy will come into the body of the oracle - he gets the *ojas* (power). That *ojas*, the aura of the oracle, will be expanded and this leads to a very close relationship between the Goddess and the human body. Then it happens through the trance - that is the last part, if they are lucky. How do you get *samādhi*? There is a little bit training, but after that it is some luck, the grace of the God. It is not possible to say that this kind of training will lead to this kind of trance, it's never possible to say. It is the training and the initiation, the meditation, and the capacity of the human and the god - and some people just have this luck naturally.

Each temple you know has its own system - it is passed down continuously from generation to generation. The oracle will perform here at this temple for his entire life - in the olden days it was a particular traditional family, but nowadays that has changed. Here for example, we previously had five generations of oracles, all from one family. But then the next generation was not interested, so that last oracle appointed a new person which he himself trained.

TANTRIC POSSESSION IN KERALA

From a cursory view of these interviews, it is clear this possession form is predicated on the same tantric techniques employed by Kerala's Brahmin Tantrists in temples for invoking, enlivening, and establishing deities in images. It is this sort of tantric possession, common throughout Kerala, which JR Freeman calls "formalized possession", referring to "the widespread belief throughout South India that formally stipulated and ritually prepared

'bodies', whether of animate or inanimate matter, can routinely become receptacles for the consciousness and person of deities".¹⁴⁸¹ It is this fundamental belief which makes various possession forms and installation rites throughout Kerala congruent with each other - whether it is the installation of divine energy into a *mūrti* (icon) or into a human body. Freeman's work on tantric temple rites, drawn from Malayali tantric texts, are no different than the *pratiṣṭhā*, *āveśa*, and even Deity Yoga rites we discussed in the previous chapter, all involving the transference of Divine energy from the deity within. Freeman nicely summarizes these tantric temple rites in Kerala and its relation to the Teyyam performances he has been studying for decades:¹⁴⁸²

By tantric, I mean in this context, that the Kerala priest relies on classic tantric teachings of the psychophysical powers immanent in the human body, to first invoke the deity of worship into his own body, and only then to transfer its power, through his own metabolic life's energy or breath (*prāṇa*) into the fixed image in the temple's sanctum...it is not a great stretch to posit that a long and complex historical relation underlies the prominence of tantric worship as official Hinduism in Kerala – essentially involving a mini-possession each time the god is invoked in daily worship – and the eminence that overt possession, epitomized in *teyyāṭṭam*, as a dominant popular mode of worship in south India has enjoyed over at least the past two millennia. The paradigm of Brahmanical worship as essentially a muted form of possession thus reflects on the high end of the social scale, an historical mediation whose results we also saw in the incorporation of a tantric rationale for the ritual acts of *teyyam* possession...at the lower end of the spectrum.¹⁴⁸³

The "spectrum" Freeman discusses here ultimately has to do with the degree of Brahmin involvement, and by proxy, the use of transgressive rites and substances employed, such as blood, flesh, and alcohol - all of which were a traditional part of Dravidian worship,

¹⁴⁸¹ Freeman (1994)

¹⁴⁸² Freeman's work also aligns with Tripathi's (1978) account of Jagannath temple pūjā. David White states (personal communication) "The tantric protocols are the coin of the Hindu realm." See Tripathi, G.C. "The Daily Pūjā Ceremony of the Jagannātha" in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, eds. Eschmann et al., (Manohar: Heidelberg University, 1978).

¹⁴⁸³ Freeman, "The Teyyam Tradition of Kerala", in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin D. Flood, (Malden: Blackwell, 2003): 322-323.

but also left-handed Tantra. As mentioned previously, however, mainstream Keralan Tantra is primarily right-handed, therefore the Brahmins who established ritual hegemony over these traditional shrines, recognizing their social/religious power, had to domesticate and sanitize these more ancient practices to be in line with Brahmin orthodoxy and orthopraxy. When Brahmin control and involvement is minimal or non-existent, we tend to find the more traditional and "wild" forms of possession, which usually employs blood sacrifice (*bali*) and "lower-level deities," at least according to the Brahmin perspective (i.e., *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *bhūtas*, etc.). Brahmin run temples, in contrast, tend to have more "muted form(s) of possession" as Freeman puts it, and sanitizes polluting and dangerous elements - using, for example, *bali* substitutes like coconuts (said to be representative of sacrificial heads) or the blood red *guruti* mixture of turmeric and lime in water, both frequently employed throughout Kerala.

Before discussing Teyyam, I will give two further examples of rites I witnessed which, to me, were clearly domesticated forms of more ancient Dravidian or folk practices. The first form is a ritual performance known as *Muṭiyettu* (literally, the "carrying of the head gear"), now considered a high-caste temple art, though it undeniably has deeper roots in Kerala's folk and Dravidian temple traditions. In ancient times it was believed that communities patronized this performance to ward off contagious diseases, particularly smallpox. These smallpox pustules are still represented



Muṭiyettu - Bhadrakālī, 2016

in the make-up of Bhadrakālī, with white dots drawn with rice paste and lime, during this performance (see picture). The performance itself depicts the well-known mythological battle between Bhadrakālī and the demon Dārika¹⁴⁸⁴ and, in its present form, seems to have developed alongside other "classical" art forms, such as Kathākālī, around the 17th century.¹⁴⁸⁵ Both Muṭiyēṭṭu and Kathākālī closely conform to the standards and techniques found in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, an ancient Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts.

Nowadays, Muṭiyēṭṭu is overseen by Brahmin officiants and performed in Brahmin temples, though the actual performers are men who belong to non-Brahmin matrilineal castes such as the Marar and Kuruppu and are classified as Ambalavasis, relatively high-ranking temple servants ranked between Brahmins and the martial Nayar castes. Though now considered a "classical art", Muṭiyēṭṭu's Dravidian and folk origins have been noted by many scholars and performers alike - an art form, according to Caldwell, that "provides a striking combination of the ritual immediacy of possession performance and structural features of classical Sanskrit drama," leading her to hypothesize,

that the high castes of Kerala invented Muṭiyēṭṭu much as they institutionalized oracular practice in the temples, in an attempt to coopt the management of sacred power in the indigenous, low-caste possession performances of Dravidian India.¹⁴⁸⁶

Given my own experience in Kerala, I tend to agree with her theory. I did an interview with VN Narayana Kuruppu, a Muṭiyēṭṭu expert and teacher, who provided some details of the performance and confirmed the importance of the possession experience in the performance, involving what he called "*Kālī-āveśa*". He notes, however, that this possession is very controlled and mild compared to performances in ancient times. I also asked him what

¹⁴⁸⁴ See Caldwell (1999 and 2012) for more on Muṭiyēṭṭu

¹⁴⁸⁵ See Zarrilli, *Kathakali Dance-drama - Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*, (London: Routledge, 2000) for more on Kathākālī performance.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Caldwell (2012: 92)

he thought the differences between the Muṭiyēṭṭu performance and the oracular performances of *sarpam thuḷḷal* and the *veḷiccappāṭu*. Here is an edited portion of my interview with him, via my translator Dilip Kumar.

First the headgear is selected from a particular type of wood, it is made from a particular type of jackfruit tree. Then the performer adorns the headgear, and he is given some blessings from the priest and some rituals are performed. Before adorning the headgear various *vratams* (vows) like fasting are observed. Fasting has much influence on the possession - if you have eaten too much you feel lethargic and can't concentrate, so this fasting makes the mind stronger and helps concentration - so, it helps much. A performer who doesn't fast cannot perform. Formerly fasting was practiced for forty-one days, now it is one or two days - that is all...

With fresh leaves and the rhythm of the *chenda* drums, *kuzhal* (double reed wind instrument) and cymbals, accompanied by rhythmic dancing, he is brought to trance near the area of the *kaḷam*. All of this causes him to transform from the performer to the deity...For every performance this ritual is completed, and these offerings are made. *Thoṭṭam* is the song which invokes the particular deity, like a *mantra*. The first ritual is done on the headgear called *āhvayati* (invocation) - it attracts the power of the deity to the headgear, which then goes to the performers head and so he is made divine. After adorning the headgear, everyone gathers around him, and everybody concentrates on the performer and looks upon him as a divine character, no longer as a man. He is holding a sword, and with the rhythm of the various instruments anybody is destined to change his mental state - even if he has no belief, he is prone to change mentally.

So, then the transformation occurs, he feels the deity enters him, because this myth of Kālī and Dārika is on his mind...The divine ending is that he must kill Dārika, and he is destined to do that and so he gets extra energy and power and, at times, he gets violent. His helpers are always watching him though - his way of fighting and his rhythm. Whenever they see a change in his rhythm - if it's becoming out of rhythm, they know that the trance is going into another stage, he is getting too violent, and it will end in disaster. At that time, they take off the headgear, then the performer becomes an ordinary man, and the possession is finished...

Nowadays this type of violence is not going on - nowadays it is controlled. Now it is only a legend. His fury towards Dārika is aroused in him by the people and the peculiar conditions of this *kaḷam*, this drum beating, this *tīyāṭṭu* (dance), the peoples howling and this particular atmosphere, which is divine. So, he becomes elevated to a particular stage... The rhythm of the drum beating is structured such that it rises step by step and when it converges with the dancing rhythm it causes everyone to dance, such is the rhythm. The rhythm is very fast and contributes to the trance...It leads to changes in the mental state of performer. It is just like a sportsman who gets charged by cheering from the audience - that same effect is in the rhythmic drumming.



Bhadrakālī kalam for Muṭiyettu performance

This *kalam* also has much contribution to the possession. It is said that the nose, eyes, and breasts are filled with raw paddy and rice, it is a three-dimensional image. The performer invokes the deity before the performance. Because of the peculiar colors used and its three-dimensional features if one meditates on the *kalam* we feel that the drawing is coming up and standing up before us. Such is the impact of this drawing in tradition and so it has much

contribution to the trance...The possession is like an intoxication - only the people with full *bhakti* (devotion) can experience this. It is like an intoxication from *bhakti* - this also causes the transformation.

VM: When performer is in *āveśa*, is he conscious or not?

NK: For the performance the guru is very important. Always the performer is with devotion and fear, so he remembers the guru and is always conscious of every step, always conscious. Otherwise, the guru will punish him. So, even because of this peculiar stage, he might be in an unconscious state, he may hear the music but may think it is from somewhere else. But even then, he is always conscious of his steps, because it is instilled in his mind by his guru. This training methodology always stays with him and leads his every step, whatever his mental state it is mechanical like driving a vehicle. Fear and devotion to his guru leads these steps - the steps are maintained in spite of his other-worldly state of mind. It is the *bhakti* (devotion) that elevates the performer, so it reflects in his subtle movements, his eyes, and even facial expressions. So, *bhakti* is a must - *bhakti* creates concentration, without it you cannot get this kind of concentration. So, this *āveśa* is very *bhakti* oriented. This *āveśa* needs physical strength and micro-level movements with eyes and face.

Some possession is instantaneous, but this only comes from hard training, self-torture, preparations, rituals, knowing the rhythms of drumbeat, and the *thottam* - everything combined. So, it is a very synchronized performance. Other rituals like *sarpam thullal* may be spontaneous. Even if I don't have belief in *sarpam thullal*, because of the peculiar atmosphere created by the rhythm and even if you have never heard it before, you will dance. It is not a guided performance. It is natural.

The *veliccappāṭus* are also professionals - they also naturally enter into a trance. In *muṭiyettu* and other performances the trance is only for a short time, if this trance is too long the trance changes - no one can maintain this stage for a long time, it is only a small time. If this headgear is not removed from the performer, and the trance lasts too long, it may change into a mental disorder. So, they will be vigilant to

remove this headgear at the proper time - it can be very dangerous. Also, in Muṭiyettu [compared to Teyyam or Sarpam Thullal] there is no telling of past and future - only in rare cases. Kālī has no dialogue, she is always maintaining a fierce mood and facial expression. If she utters something this fierceness will go. Only in rare cases is some catastrophe forecasted - that something is going to happen here. I have heard of this.

There is much of interest in this interview, such as the mention of the preliminary vows, the importance of rhythms in controlling the possession, the meditation on the *kaḷam*, the tantric invocation rites, the ritually constructed atmosphere, the importance of audience participation, the possessed being in a dual state of consciousness and "otherworldly" unconsciousness, the importance of emotions such as fierceness, the crossover between devotion (*bhakti*), intoxication, and *āveśa*, and finally the non-oracular nature of this possession form. For our immediate purposes, however, one of the main points I take away from this interview is the highly controlled nature of this possession form, which as Kurrup mentions, is maintained only for a short time since there is constant fear that the possession experience may get out of hand and become dangerous, even causing mental disorders. This is echoed by another folklore scholar from Kerala, my friend and informant Dr. CR Rajgopalan, who also mentions that there are "legendary reports of Kālī actually killing the demon Dārīka" during this *Kālī-āveśa* in past performances when it has gone out of control.¹⁴⁸⁷ Of course, due to this inherent danger of possession, Brahmins have long domesticated such rites, as seen in tantric texts of the medieval period. Thus, this sort of rite has been relegated to Kerala's culture of performance arts and is no longer the transformative ritual it once may have been.

A final example of this domestication and sanitization process by the Brahmins can be seen at another temple I visited in the village of Peringottukara, dedicated to the

¹⁴⁸⁷ C.R. Rajagopalan, *Mudiyettu: Nadodi Nerangu*. (Thrissur: Centre for Indigenous Knowledge, 2003).

Dravidian/Sanskrit/Folk god Shrī Viṣṇumāyā Kuṭṭicāttan of Kanadikavu, located about twelve miles southwest of Thrissur. Sub-deities of this temple included fierce tantric goddesses such as Bhadrakālī and Bhuvaneśvarī, various nature spirits such as Nāgarāja and Nāgayakṣī, a Brahmarakṣa couple, and hundreds of smaller spirits known as *cāttans*, some said to be deceased cult ancestors. Parpola and Tarabout have previously discussed the figure of Kuṭṭicāttan, who they believe was originally a lineage deity of various low-caste and "untouchable" folk communities, especially associated with magic and sorcery, from Malabar (Northern Kerala). Such castes included the Malayans, Pānans, Pulayans, as well as a group of aboriginal hunter-gatherers known as the Nāyāṭis.¹⁴⁸⁸



Kuṭṭicāttan Teyyam, 1997



Enshrined icon of Kuṭṭicāttan, 1997

While in Kannur in 1997, I had the great fortune of witnessing a Kuṭṭicāttan Teyyam rite. The costume of the deity is one of the most interesting I have seen - both extremely

¹⁴⁸⁸ Asko Parpola, 'The Iconography and Cult of Kutticcattan: Field Research on the Sanskritization of Local Folk Deities in Kerala', in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia, Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*, ed. by Bronkhorst and Deshpande, (Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series, 1999): 198.

beautiful and grotesque at the same time. As in other Teyyam rites, offerings of cocks and toddy were made and, as a part of the possession ceremony, the medium danced madly around the compound with blazing torches in hand, at one point spinning feverishly around upon a small, raised structure (*piṭha*) like a whirling dervish for almost twenty minutes straight. This was quite the feat given the enormity of his headdress and costume. Teyyam songs associated with Kuṭṭicāttan show some degree of Tantrification - his descriptions matching some a Śaiva figure with a third eye, long dreadlocks (*jaṭa*), and carrying a wooden club, torch, and a basket in his hands. I was able to take a photograph of the deity's *mūrti* in the family shrine as well (see pics above). While possessed, the Teyyam medium would howl and laugh out loud menacingly. Towards the end of the rite, villagers would line up to receive blessings or consult the possessed medium as an oracle.

Kuṭṭicāttan means "young *cāttan*" and like Bhairava is not necessarily a single entity but can equally be plural as "*cāttans*", representing a class of ambiguous shape-shifting trickster spirits who are said to possess and cause afflictions to victims if not appeased with offerings of flesh, blood, and alcohol.¹⁴⁸⁹ Their classification is thus consistent with the various *grahas* and *bhūtas* discussed in earlier chapters, particularly those spirits popularly employed by sorcerers (*mantravādins*) of various stripes such as the *krtyās*, *yakṣiṇīs*, *vetālas*, *piśācas*, *bhairavas*, and *yoginīs*. It has been reported that Brahmin



Icon of Shrī Viṣṇumāyā Kuṭṭicāttan

¹⁴⁸⁹ Parpola (1999: 177)



Niyogam oracle (seated), Kanadikavu temple

Tantris in Kerala also specifically employ *cāttans* for various black magic rites, using blood sacrifice and alcohol as offerings when engaging with such entities.¹⁴⁹⁰

While Kuṭṭicāttan is known to be an ancient folk

deity in Kerala, at the Kanadikavu temple complex it is Kuṭṭicāttan's Sanskritic elements which dominate, the preferred name for the installed deity being Viṣṇumāyā, was said to be born from the union of Śiva and Parāśakti, in her incarnation as a tribal girl named Kuḷivāka.¹⁴⁹¹ Viṣṇumāyā's retinue, the 390 *kuṭṭicāttans*, are further equated with Śiva's horde of *gaṇas* and *bhūtas*, and known as *Śivabhūtas* in the temple literature. As seen in this photo, his iconography is drastically different from the Kuṭṭicāttan Teyyam I witnessed in Kannur.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Tarabout (2018: 461) interviewed a Kaniyan astrologer-cum-*mantravādi* from Thiruvananthapuram who describes the rite (*sāghanam*) how one acquires the mantra of Cāttan: "There is a kind of sorcery called *cāttansēva*. *Cāttansēva* means pleasing Cāttan and thereby getting control over him. Strict austerities for a period of about two or three *maṇḍalam* [period of forty-one days] are to be observed to win the favours of Cāttan. As a result of chanting mantras with the attendant rituals, one will achieve a state of purity of mind...Cāttan actually manifests before the person who wins his favour. He can see Cāttan when his mind is concentrated in meditation. . . . As a result of concentration of mind on a particular object, a strange power emanates within the mind. The chanting of mantras converts this strange power into a divine one. It is this power that enables the possessor to perform acts for and against *abhicāram* [black magic] ... He should start practicing magic only after winning the favour of his favorite god or goddess. He should also practice *nyāsam*, *aṅganyāsam*, *bharannyāsam* [imposition of mantras/deities on the body], *prāṇayamaṃ* [control of breath], etc., which would convert him into a divine person. . . . It is *mantrasādhanam* [the practice of mantras] that a student of magic gets from his guru in oral coaching. It is after repeated practice of *mantrasādhanam* that a magician starts practicing *mantrajapadhyānam* [repetition of mantras and visualization of the god]. As a result of *mantrajapadhyānam* one gets *dēvatasiddhi* [power over a *dēvata*]." See Gilles Tarabout, "On Chattan. Conflicting Statements about a South Indian Deity", in *Clio and her Descendants. Essays for Kesavan Veluthat*, ed. Manu V. Devadevan, (Delhi: Primus Books, 2018): 454-478.

¹⁴⁹¹ This story comes from literature from the temple itself. Viṣṇumāyā has also been further identified with the South Indian Purāṇic deity known as Śāstā

Though Brahmins preside over the Kanadikavu temple, Kuṭṭicāttan's nature as a possession deity still manifests daily through hereditary low-caste oracles known either as *veḷiccappāṭus* or *niyogams*, the latter also said to imply the oracles' frenzied trance state.¹⁴⁹² However, compared to the relatively "wild" Kuṭṭicāttan Teyyam rite I witnessed, which involved blood sacrifice, there was no such sacrifice here and the oracle exhibited very mild possession symptoms - quite "unfrenzied" in comparison. Rather than dancing and howling about, the *niyogam* was quietly seated the entire time, the possession state signified only by trembling in his body and random contortions of the face. Tantric invocation rites were performed by the Brahmins, though the drawing of the *kaḷaṃ* and the accompanying singing and drumming were performed by low-caste communities. After the oracle was possessed in this manner, devotees would line up to receive blessings and ask him questions directly.



Śmaśana-Kālī Teyyam



Cock sacrifice during Śmaśana-Kālī Teyyam

At the conclusion, the *kaḷaṃ* was wiped away and its powder collected and distributed to devotees as *prasād*.

I can further contrast this "muted" form of possession with another Teyyam rite I witnessed that invoked the very fierce goddess Śmaśana-Kālī ("Kālī of the Cremation Ground"). Though I will detail Teyyam rites shortly, this particular ritual performance

¹⁴⁹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avanangattikalari_Vishnumaya_Temple

was notable since it was held in an actual cremation ground (which I told was very rare), involved no Brahmin priests whatsoever, and was quite violent and terrifying in nature. In this case, the teyyam-medium who become possessed actually took the cock offering which was sacrificed to him and begin to drink the blood directly from its severed neck. This caused him (as Kālī) to go into a mad frenzy, often chasing and violently attacking devotees, and at one point throwing flaming logs from the funeral pyres at the surrounding crowd. He beat one of the audience members who had taken a photograph of him without turning the flash off. At one point, the possessed man's eyes laid upon me in fury when he (as Śmaśana-Kālī) saw that I too had a camera around my neck. He sped after me and attempted to kick me, which I thankfully dodged and ran away from in haste.

I should note that most Teyyams I witnessed did not have this violent or dangerous nature to them, at least not to this degree. I state this only to show the varied spectrum of possession rites in Kerala, which generally exists between these two extremes - on one side, the heavily Brahmin-controlled and "domesticated" possession form at Kanadikavu, involving the Sanskritized Viṣṇumāyā, and the other side, consisting of a blood-fueled frenzied possession rite with an extremely fierce Goddess, held within a cremation ground. We will now examine the more common Teyyam rites, in-between these two extremes, that I was able to witness numerous times during my travels in Kerala.

3. THE TEYYAM COMPLEX

Besides the institution of the temple oracles (*veḷiccappāṭu*, *kōmarams*, and *niyogams*), Freeman notes a second division of possession specialists known as *teyyakkārs*, the Teyyam performers themselves, who come from various low caste and untouchable

communities such as the Vaṇān, Malayan, and Vēlan. Besides caste, they differ from the *veḷiccappāṭu* primarily in their capacity to embody a variety of deities at the numerous shrines to which they travel during the Teyyam festival season.¹⁴⁹³ This is in contrast to *veḷiccappāṭus* who generally embody only one deity and are attached to one temple or shrine throughout their lives. However, another important difference also emerged during interviews I conducted when I asked people what they believed was the difference between Teyyam and other possession forms I had seen. Here is an excerpt from my interview on Teyyam again with Sreenivas Kunnambath, from Paramekkavu Temple:

Teyyam is a completely different system, because the Goddess will be involved into the performers body, but in the oracle (*veḷiccappāṭu*) system he is just the mediator. The god or goddess enters the body and the *veḷiccappāṭu* says only the *kalpana* (thought-forms) of the Bhagavatī. But the Teyyam person, at that time he is the complete *śārīra* (embodiment), the word of God, it is not the words of the performer. The difference is in the interpretation - the *veḷiccappāṭu* translates whatever the god says, but in the Teyyam performer, the god is speaking directly. The oracle (*veḷiccappāṭu*) can speak to me only, I cannot ask the questions for the oracle. But in teyyam, we can ask, we can question, we can ask everything - we can even fight with them. So *veḷiccappāṭu* is listening to the God and then they are saying it - it is not direct. It's not possible for the devotee to ask questions of the oracle, but whatever the Goddess says, the *veḷiccappāṭu* will say. But in teyyam, the human body will be changed into that God - the God is completely involved...

There is a training system - in the childhood they will go with the parents, and he sees and knows all these things, they've grown up around it and the child has the small characteristics and all the genes coming also from generation to generation. Then he can see, then he can involve the Goddess directly to *prāveśa* (enter) into his body. The community is special, only they can do it. In the Brahmin community they have a different way. In Kerala, the *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal* is the highest authority of the Brahmin community. But in Teyyam it is Parayar, Pulaya, Malaya - they are the low caste communities of the Teyyam, but they will perform, and the Brahmins also come to see to the gods. The Brahmins are praying to low caste! Why it happens? No touching system is following now like in olden days in Kerala. In that time also, when they perform the Teyyam, the Brahmin community go and worship. There is a misinterpretation of caste system - even now Brahmins go and worship Teyyam...

¹⁴⁹³ Freemam, "Performing Possession: Ritual and Consciousness in the Teyyam Complex of Northern Kerala", in *Flags of Fame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture*, eds. Bruckner, Lutze, and Malik, (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1993): 114.

In the Teyyam... they use the masks and the chanting and most important the drums, which are like the *rāgas*. It is the complete atmosphere they make - if there is not good atmosphere, they cannot get the trance.

Of note, is the brief mention of the training, which is only available to these particular lineages who can perform Teyyam and appears to involve inculcation of cultural knowledge systems and mimesis of the deities (and their mediums). He also notes the importance of the constructed ritual atmosphere for engendering the possession and the liminal nature of the rite in which social roles are reversed - the Brahmins worshipping the low caste Teyyam-mediums. Finally, the prime difference he notes between the *veḷiccappāṭu* and *teyyakkārs*, is that the *veḷiccappāṭus* are simply channels and mediators for the deity - they hear a message from the deity and then this is relayed to the audience. The *teyyakkār* mediums, in contrast, completely embody the deity's mind, body, *and* speech - thus one can directly interact with the deity themselves on all these levels. This is a notable distinction, corroborated by my translator and informant Dr. Padmajin, who also stated that *veḷiccappāṭus* act only as mouthpieces for the god and are there to give divine blessings: unlike Teyyams, they do not usually make predictions about the future.

The origins of contemporary *teyyāṭṭam* performances are traditionally traced back to the figure of Manākkadan Gurukkaḷ, who belonged to the low caste Vāṇṇan community and is honored as its founding father. His origins are described as being humble, yet he was adept in the practice of *mantravādam* (sorcery). Here is an excerpt of his legendary account as relayed by one of Martin's informants:

In the realm of Kōlattunātu [now the Kannur, Payyanur, Nileśvaram, and Kasaragod districts of contemporary Kerala], there resided an Untouchable [*avarṇa*] washerman [Vāṇṇān] who, with the aid of a *suvarṇa* [Nayār] companion, became highly literate and, as a result, was proficient in methods of sorcery and healing [*mantravādam*]. Having received renown across the kingdom for his sorcery-conjuring abilities he—along with his associate—was summoned to the Palace of Kōlattiri rājā to perform a

series of miracles in the presence of the king... Once in the presence of the King, he was ordered to fashion and embody thirty-nine local custodial deities [*teyyam*], with all equipment and ornamentations that would require many different specialists [dancer-mediums and performers]. Having successfully and effectively incarnated each deity in turn, he was praised by the King, who dubbed the lowly-washerman, Manakkadan Gurukkal, stating that all his Vaṅṅān progenies would be ratified performers of *teyyam* in Kōlattunādu, and that his rendition should be replicated across the kingdom.¹⁴⁹⁴

The various types of deities in these rites are known as *teyyams*, a cognate of the Sanskrit term *daivam* ("gods" or "divinities"), while the associated possession rites are known *teyyāṭṭam*, literally the "dancing of the gods". Freeman describes *teyyāṭṭam* as a possession cult, "since the entire program of worship is predicated on the deity's taking over the body and mind of the dancer and speaking and acting through his body as the vehicle of expression and interaction with the congregation."¹⁴⁹⁵ Teyyam worship and rites usually take place in sacred groves and local shrines dedicated to Teyyam deities who are propitiated and offered sacrificial libations regularly. There are said to be over four hundred different Teyyam deities consisting mostly of ancestral deities and valorized dead, lineage-goddesses/gods, while others have been absorbed from mostly Śaiva and Śakta cults. There are, however, some Vaiṣṇava deities, one Muslim Teyyam, and a Devakoothu Teyyam that is only performed by women.

Teyyam-mediums harness and embody the energy (described as *śakti* or *kalivū*) of these various divinities who are said to pervade the landscape and are enshrined in *murtis*, natural objects, flames, and sacred weapons. On this Martin writes,

The deities enshrined in a grove are apprehended as clan ancestors who are, at once, socially immanent, and externally personified; a god's essence is embodied in the clan and enshrined in a familial plot...Arguably, in Keralan culture, bodies, selfhood,

¹⁴⁹⁴ Martin (2021: 166-167)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Freeman (1994)

terrestrial territory, and ancestral power are porous as co-constitutive elements within the world.¹⁴⁹⁶

This permeability between divinities, humans, and the landscape is again supported by Osella's ethnography which details how Keralans believe elements of the bodies and souls of deceased ancestors "stay on the land, fixed into a *kuryāla* (ancestral shrine)," until it either eventually achieves *mokṣa* (liberation) or "merges" with other familial spirits.¹⁴⁹⁷ Throughout the year, these shrines are tended by local priests (*kōmamram*) who preserve the presence of their ancestors and clan deities in the region. The consecration of these images or objects by the collective energy of the grove divinities are said to occur either naturally or are established through installation rites by Brahmin or ritual specialists of other castes. Freeman notes that these objects also become "possessed" by this energy:

...objects which are enlivened may include swords, umbrellas, and different kinds of ritual insignia, which leap and quiver in their bearers' hands. Semantically, the "behaviors" of such objects ("leaping", "dancing", "quaking", etc.) qualify them as 'possessed' by the deity in exactly the same terms that are applied to a human medium.¹⁴⁹⁸

As we saw in Tantric texts from the previous chapter, these same "signs" of possession described not only *sādhakas*, but also in some cases empowered ritual implements and other objects (e.g., *vajrakīla*). As we will see, it is believed that it is this divine power (*śakti*) that enlivens these objects, which is ultimately transferred to the body of the teyyam-medium during possession.

The rite, as mentioned, is performed by low caste *teyyakkārs* who are entitled by lineage rights to incarnate specific clan gods, ancestors, and spirits. This is done, most generally, by donning elaborate and highly symbolic makeup and costumes specific to each

¹⁴⁹⁶ Martin (2021: 60)

¹⁴⁹⁷ See Osella & Osella (2009: 219-226)

¹⁴⁹⁸ Freeman (1994)

deity/teyyam, recitation of the deity's mythical origins and history through songs, which are accompanied by vigorous rhythmic drumming that led to the medium's possession by the invoked spirit. Possessed, the medium dances wildly throughout the shrine compound, often making oracular pronouncements and performing supernatural feats of strength and power. Towards the end of the rite, the deity then sits, and members of the community ask them questions about the past, present, or future, or receive blessings from the deity.

Before entering into the specifics of the Teyyam possession rite, let us briefly look at the invocation (*avahana*) and installation (*prāṇapraṭiṣṭhā*) rites which are central to Tantric temple worship in Kerala and which, as we will see, have a certain congruence with Teyyam possession rites. The description of this rite comes from a 15th century Sanskrit treatise, the *Tantrasamuccaya*, which Freeman and others consider "the single authoritative manual of Kerala temple worship".¹⁴⁹⁹ Its general form and structure parallels much of what we had seen in the Tantras discussed in the previous chapter. The rite begins with a series of *mudrās* and visualizations, which are said to first dissolve and purify the elements of the practitioner's body, followed by his reconstitution into a divine form through *nyāsa* rites, eventually resulting in the practitioner's identification with the invoked deity. Freeman translates the next portions of this rite:

Taking the aromatics, flowers, and grain mixture along with water from the conch in the two joined hands, bring them into the proximity of your *mūlādhāram* [root chakra at the base of the spine], and in order to dislodge that *caitanya* [consciousness] situated in the *mūlādhāram*, intone one *praṇavam* [the syllable "Om"]. With another *praṇavam*, raise that *caitanya* upward through the *susumna*, and bringing the hands reverently to the heart, praise [the deity] with the *upacāram* [the mantra of honoring the god as guest]. Then uttering a *praṇavam*, separate a fragment of the *caitanya* from your heart, and with another *praṇavam*, raise the hands up to the *dvādaśanta*-lotus [above the head], and join that fragment of consciousness with the Supreme Self (*paramātmāvu*) that is situated there. Intoning the "root" [the basic mantra of the deity] three times, conceive the actual form of the root-mantra, and uttering, "Lord!

¹⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

Come, come!", with a *praṇavam*, separate that fragment of consciousness from the Supreme Self and bringing it through the *suṣumna*-channel, conduct it into the *piṅgala*-channel [of the heart]. Then, with the utterance "I invoke [you]", conduct it in the form of breath through the right nostril that is the portal of the *piṅgala*, into the flower and grain mixture in the hands. Intoning the root-mantra, offer the flower and grain mixture to the heart of the image, and make that consciousness enter the image's left nostril, which is the portal of the *ida* [-channel], into the *suṣumna*. Through that course, visualize it as joined to the heart-lotus of the image, and then performing a flower-offering, show the *mudrās* of invocation.¹⁵⁰⁰

Compared to the various Tantras we looked at in the previous chapter, particularly those that had more developed *cakra* systems, little difference can be seen here between these installation and possession rites.¹⁵⁰¹ We can see that the divine energy, here described as *caitanya* originates in the lowest *cakra* of the priest, which is then guided upwards through various subtle channels (*nāḍīs*) and joined with the Supreme Self (*paramātmāvu*) visualized above the head. From this apex, it is again brought down into the body and made to enter the heart of the image, followed by various *mudrās*. Following this, the Tantri performs *nyāsa* rites on the image, in the same manner carried out earlier on his own body, leading Freeman to note that the image's divinization "is based on the priest's own earlier transformation into the deity rather than from it possessing any independent program of invocation."¹⁵⁰² With this brief description, let us now look at the rites of Teyyam in more detail. My own fieldwork generally matches Freeman's descriptions of the rites, so I will be relying on much of his work since he has been studying these rites for over three decades now. I refer the reader to his extensive work for a detailed study on Teyyam.¹⁵⁰³

As with other possession rites in Kerala, a Teyyam medium keeps a variety of vows (*vratas*) before the performance, such as fasting, celibacy, daily meditation upon the deity,

¹⁵⁰⁰ Ibid,

¹⁵⁰¹ Again, Tripathi's (1978) treatment of the Jagannath worship program also supports Freeman's account.

¹⁵⁰² Freeman (1994)

¹⁵⁰³ See Freeman 1991, 1993, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2009, & 2016

abstinence from meat and alcohol, and partial seclusion near the shrine of the deity for a specified time.¹⁵⁰⁴ I was told by one of my informants that traditionally this period is supposed to be forty-one days, as was the case with the Teyyams I witnessed in Kannur in 1997. However, for the Śmaśana-Kālī Teyyam I attended in 2016, I was told this period was twenty-one days, while the Pottan-teyyam I also saw that same night was only seven days.¹⁵⁰⁵ Regardless of their duration, these preliminary vows parallel some of the *vratas* in the possession rites we saw in earlier Tantras - it is a time when the practitioner takes on a liminal status in a liminal space and readies themselves for a transformation in identity.

The first stage of *teyyāṭṭam* comprises the preliminary rites (*tuttaṅṅal*), which involve bodily purification, marking of the sacred space, invocation of deities, and making ritual offerings to the various shrine and teyyam deities. In most cases these are conducted by the *kōmaram* priests of the shrine, or by a visiting Brahmin Tantri. Teyyam deities are generally housed in an enshrined image, either a *murti*, a flat icon (*titambu*), a sword, or a simple altar



Empowered ritual implements in makeshift shrine

or stool. One of my informants, told me "From the start of *vratas* (vows) the *kōmarams* are doing *pūjā* to Kālī's sacred weapon and the chest plate. This daily *pūjā* is what gives these items the 'shake' or 'power' The *pūjāris* give these

¹⁵⁰⁴ Freeman (1994) states that during this time, the dancer "is supposed to concentrate all his mental energies on the deity he will incarnate, and he recites various verses to the deity...." See also Martin (2021: 66-67)

¹⁵⁰⁵ From my interview with PhD scholar Akhila Verma in Trissur.

items their power or *śakti* from within themselves."¹⁵⁰⁶.

The power of the deity is enshrined in the same manner as the installation rite (*pratiṣṭhā*) described above, the divine power first entering or emanating from the body of either the shrine *kōmaram* or Brahmin priest, which then enters into the enshrined image. The entire Teyyam program is thus predicated on the idea that it is this *śakti*, originating in the priest, which then possesses the enshrined object and in turn possesses the teyyam-dancer.

One of Freeman's informants, a *kōmaram*, summarized this process in *teyyāṭṭam*:

The consciousness (*caitanya*) of the goddess has been deposited in a certain place; that is the temple at which we worship. At the time we get the spiritual vision of possession (*darśanam*), all of that divine power (*śakti*) we get comes from that image which is installed in the shrine chamber...The possessed vision of all the teyyam performers and teyyam priests is one and the same, but it is only in the rites [by which they get it] that there are differences... A teyyam priest is a man whose human spirit, standing within him, is witness to the goddess in whom we believe. It is that very consciousness lodged in our heart which we transfer into some other object. It is then to show others that there is consciousness in this object, that the teyyam priest performs his rituals.¹⁵⁰⁸

According to Freeman's source, both the *kōmaram* priest and the medium-dancer become possessed from this same source, though the rites during the Teyyam performance to engender this state differ: the *kōmaram* is mildly possessed through the performance of tantric rites in the inner sanctum, while the teyyam-medium becomes more vigorously possessed outside the shrine through his own ritual program and transformation. During this time, the teyyam-medium is said to meditate/visualize (*dhyāna*) upon the specific Teyyam deity he will eventually embody, while reciting various Malayali *mantras* and hymns. Following this he will come before the shrine and is given banana leaves by the *kōmaram*

¹⁵⁰⁶ From my interview with Akhila Verma in Trissur.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Freeman (1994)

containing sandalwood paste, five cotton wicks lit from the lamp of the deity, and a slew of other oblations picked from the land (betel leaves, rice grains, etc.) that were offered to the enshrined deity and considered *prasādam* (the deity's material grace). The dancer then eats some of this *prasādam*, tossing it upon and over his head and around the shrine, and then begins to smear the sandalwood paste on various parts of his own body in a prescribed manner, mimicking the temple consecration rites of icons (*murtis*). The parts of the body smeared upon also parallels the various subtle nodes of the bodies, the various *nāḍīs* and *cakras* discussed earlier. Though rather than visualizing or employing *nyāsa* as in tantric



Preliminary rituals at shrine - note the smearing of sandalwood on body; 1997

rites, this seems to be a literal interpretation which, as Freeman states, ..."is concretely conceptualized as the absorption of the god's being into that of the performer."¹⁵⁰⁹ Furthermore, through this act and the consuming of the *prasādam*, consisting of

materials from the surrounding landscape (e.g. rice grains), Martin states, "the medium literally ingests terrestrial *śakti*," alongside the *śakti* of the shrine deity.¹⁵¹⁰ The same logic is at play when the teyyam-dancer then passes his hand over the flame of the burning wicks taken from the deity's shrine, touching his brow, and infusing the vapors into his own body. The wicks are then taken to a special altar where a *kalaśam* (pot) full of toddy is placed and some rites are done with them. According to one of Freeman's informant,

¹⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵¹⁰ Martin (2021: 71)

...the flame of the wicks is understood as the physical substance of the deity's *śakti*, absorbed by conduction through the skin, and the wicks themselves and their fumes represent either the five life-breaths (*prāṇas*) known to tantra or the five physical elements (*bhūtams*), understood here to be the breaths or elements of the god's body which are inhaled and absorbed into the body of the dancer.¹⁵¹¹

Following this, the medium-dancer begins the long process of applying make-up and partially donning the costume of the deity with the help of other members of his troop. This second stage is known as the "singing phase" (*tōṛṛam*), for the invocatory and eulogistic verses (*varaviḷi*) and narrative songs sung at this time, which give details about the specific teyyam deity invoked and their legendary origins, qualities (e.g. "fierce" nature), and physical characteristics. At this time, the medium is placed upon a stool (*pīṭham*) next to the deity's shrine, which becomes "activated" by showering it with the same ritual offerings from before. Throughout the recitation of the songs, application of make-up, and the gradual costuming, the dancer continues to meditate upon the deity and its energy within him. On this Freeman, writes.

...during the actual make-up and costuming sequence, he is supposed to be concentrating his mental energy (*manana śakti*) on the deity, whose form is being built up by stages on his body. For certain Teyyams, there are formulae (*mantrams*) which the performer murmurs to himself at junctures in the costuming process to help fix the deity's power in his body... Therefore, as part of the logic of possession, this territory which instantiates the god's power is symbolically mapped into the dancer's mind. Finally, in the recitation of the god's physical form, the possession song indexes and recapitulates the entire ritual process which the dancer has actually been undergoing through the costuming and fixes the constructed form and its significance in the dancer's mind.¹⁵¹²

¹⁵¹¹ Freeman (1994)

¹⁵¹² Freeman (1994)

Throughout this process, the dancer slowly becomes transformed into a living, tangible icon - parallel to the purification and dressing of the deity in temple worship. The narrative and invoking songs also supply both the dancer and the attendees with rich verbal imagery and emotion, much in the same way *bhajans* (devotional praise songs), invocation *mantras*, and descriptions of the deities do in Tantric temples rites.



Applying make-up from natural materials



Fully costumed Veeran Teyyam

This *tōṛṛam* portion of the rite culminates with the dancer-mediums themselves singing what they call the "songs of possession" (*uraccal tōṛṛam*), which is said to establish the deity's energy into his own consciousness. At this time the final components of the deity's costume are placed upon the dancer-medium, most importantly the deity's ornate headdress (*talappāli*). The climax and full embodiment of the deity then follows with the most important rite of all - the "mirror-gazing" rite. As he completes the possession songs, he is handed a small mirror which he gazes upon intently. It is supposed to be at this point when the medium recognizes that he is in fact the deity, causing the mediums eyes to bulge out and his body to tremble vigorously.¹⁵¹³ Freeman notes that this transformation in identity is

¹⁵¹³ Note on one hand the general use of mirrors in many of the Tantras and medical texts I examined in previous chapters, as well as the many mirror-metaphors, particularly among the Recognition school of the Kashmiri exegetes (see Timalsina, 2021) and Buddhists (on this see Wayman 1984 and Orofino 1994)

charted in the sequence of deictic shifts throughout this stage - third person eulogies to the god shift to second person invocations (e.g., "Come, O Goddess, Come!") to the final stage of the possessing songs when the embodied medium begins to speak the "speech of the god" (*daiva-vakku*), referring to themselves as the deity in the first person (e.g., "I am the Goddess, I have come!"). We also saw this use of first-person speech, signifying non-dual states and possession in various Tantras discussed in the previous chapter.

At this point, the identity of the medium and the larger identity of the deity, encapsulating ancestral/clan deities, the terrestrial energies of the land, and its communities, is merged into the body of the Teyyam dancer. On this Freeman writes,

The sense of *communitas* is clearly brought on here by the individual performer, his supporting troupe, and the worshippers all participating in the same shared pool of cultural symbols which actually constitute the larger person of the deity...a fusion of persons in a single conception (*saṅkalpam*) of the deity, "in the manner of the self-witnessing itself." This is a phrase reportedly used by all Teyyams, which was explained as meaning, "When it comes about that two selves are brought into the state of witnessing each other as one, in that place a divine power is created."¹⁵¹⁴

This interpretation by Freeman's informants echoes the ideology behind what we saw, for example, in the MVT and its doctrine of multiple internal agents (or selves) and the various "perceivers perceiving themselves" during their ascent through the *tattvas*. Additionally, the merging of collective identities of the various divinities (i.e., ancestral, goddesses/gods, *communitas*, land, etc.) closely aligns with Tantric concept of *śakti* and its pervasive (*vyapta*) and permeable nature.

¹⁵¹⁴ Freeman (1993: 126)

Following the initial possession by the deity, the medium, now shaking and trembling, explodes out from his seat (*pītham*).

The dancer first walks to the *kōmaram* who hands him the empowered sword of the deity, which further intensifies his possession and leads to vigorous dancing and displays of martial arts (*kalaripayattu*). Depending on the Teyyam, the mediums may give other displays of power, such as walking on heated coals (Goolikan), sitting/laying upon a fire (Pottan), spinning around for prolonged periods (Kutticāttan), or



Goolikan Teyyam, 1997

other supernatural feats of strength and prowess. A *kalaśakkāran* (potholder) is then summoned to bring the large *kalaśam* of consecrated toddy, which is then imbibed by the medium and other members of his troupe. The toddy is splashed around the sacred complex, which is said to sanctify and appease any malignant spirits attached to the



Pottan Teyyam, 2016



Pottan Teyyam laying in fire, 2016

land. We, of course, saw the use of *kalaśas* in many of the Tantras we looked at earlier, which contained a variety of sacred and sometimes transgressive substances that were worshipped on their own, offered to deities, or used in consecration rites. Among the Brahman Tantris of Kerala *kalaśas* are also used in tantric temple rites, though the pots are usually filled with sanctified water or coconut-milk. In either case, these empowered fluids further energize the teyyam deity and medium, and some is retained and given out to devotees as *prasādam* at the completion of the rite.

Besides the use of alcohol, blood sacrifice is also a key component of Teyyam rites. In Kerala this almost always involves the sacrifice of a cock, an animal, as discussed in an earlier chapter, commonly used in protective, exorcistic, and possession rites since the time of the Atharvaveda. Martin succinctly describes this portion of the rite and its underlying meaning and function:

Dancer-mediums fulfil their ancestor's demands by imbibing toddy and sacrificing a chicken in their honour. To accord territorial prosperity, grains of rice are stuffed in the chicken's beak, so that this divine favour exsanguinates back onto—or better, into—the land. The chicken's bloodied body is also dipped in a bowl of blood-water substitute (*guruti*), which is spilled near a dancing medium's feet. As the liquid is emptied forth, a benedictory phrase...is uttered: "May a great blessing come to the sacrificer, his patron, his cattle, children, his crops and produce" to which the Teyyam dancer replies, "I am happy - very happy". Overall, this benediction hints at sacrifice's purpose: blood-spilling necessitates togetherness, so that the web-nodes of agriculture, fertility, and lineages—bodies, land, and ancestors—can re-flow.¹⁵¹⁵

Having completed the sacrificial rites and connecting all the "web-nodes" into "ritual kin," as Martin puts it, the deity possessed medium acts as an oracle for the community, blessing devotees and the shrine compound, making predictions about the past, present, and

¹⁵¹⁵ Martin (2021: 76)

future, and consulting those who have various problems and inquiries. Devotees line up in a queue and either the dancer-medium or the *kōmaram* place marks of sandalwood paste on the forehead of devotees or give other forms of *prasāda*. In rare cases, I was told, displays of miraculous healings may also occur.¹⁵¹⁶ After the oracular and blessings portion of the ceremony was completed, the medium then returns to his *pīṭham* and other members of the troupe help to remove the headdress and sword which are taken back to the main shrine, signifying the departure of the teyyam deity from the body of the medium and the end of the rite.

As seen from the above descriptions, there is a clear convergence between Teyyam and the Tantric temple rites of Kerala. The same logic and structure are essentially at work, though the methods differ. In the case of Tantric temple rites, a deity's power (*śakti*) is roused from its essence in the subtle body of the priest through visualization (*dhyānā*), *mudrās*, and *mantric* practices, which are then transferred to the deity's *murti* (icon) and/or objects which, as in *svasthāveśa* rites we discussed, are often reflective (swords/headdress/chest piece/mirror etc.). This divine essence is then harnessed by the temple oracles (*veḷiccappāṭu*), or in the case of Teyyam, the dancer-mediums and *kōmaram*. In Teyyam, however, all these acts are more literal - the *śakti* which is roused comes not only from the practitioner, but also from the landscape, the ancestral powers within the sacred groves, and even the audience itself. The invocation *mantras* and rhythms are encoded in the possession

¹⁵¹⁶ From my informant, Akhila: "I have seen her heal one child. This particular Teyyam happened because there was a kid who was dumb, he could not speak or anything. The Teyyam performer put him in his lap and told him to call him Amma, and he actually did it - I was shocked! How do I explain this? It happened; it was in Iritty Kuthavarande. I had heard this type of things, but I had never seen it before. These people called me and said this new Teyyam was happening. Aravil Bhagavati never had a Teyyam before this, it was a new deity. It's an old deity, but this was the first time a Teyyam was held for this deity. It took place in 2011. They called me and I went there, and it happened, I was asking the people to explain to me what happened actually! They said it was the power of the goddess. I don't know."

songs and dance, while sacred symbols and energy from the land itself are literally inscribed on the body through make-up, costuming, and literal ingestion of territorial *śakti*. Rather than purely mental visualizations, we also see the teyyam-medium literally visualizing themselves as the deity during the mirror-gazing rite, enacting the deity's movements, emotions and speech through dance, gestures, and oracular pronouncements.¹⁵¹⁷

Ultimately, what brings all of these systems together (Sanskritic/Dravidian /Tantric/Folk) is their congruent beliefs on *śakti* (or *kalivṛ* in Malayalam), a concept central to Kerala's religiosity long before the arrival of the Tantras. Martin concisely states,

the theological notion of śakti...enables the marrying of several meta-cosmological systems extant in Malabar...As an all-pervasive, binding essence, Śakti provides an existential nexus between Hindu deity, humans, ancestors, spirits, swords, and headdresses. Thus, these Teyyam deities are multi-layered agents... "constellations of such immanent powers externalized and personified."¹⁵¹⁸

With this documentation and analysis, let us now switch to some different lenses and approaches to examining the experience of possession and possession rites.

B. PART 2: UNDERSTANDING POSSESSION - BRIDGING DISCIPLINES

In this final section, I will conclude by bringing some of the data from my textual/ethnographic research into conversation with the larger field of possession studies, including perspectives from both the social and psycho-medical sciences. Using these insights, I will lay out some larger questions for future research I would like to continue.

¹⁵¹⁷ This whole program of worship parallels also what we saw in one of the earliest Buddhist Yoginī tantras discussed earlier, the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogatantra*, which also involved songs, drums, dancing, gestures and invoking of the various *rasas*

¹⁵¹⁸ Martin (2021: 82)

Historically speaking, the study of spirit possession has been dominated by two seemingly polarized approaches. The first would be the social or functional approach, often championed by scholars within the field of anthropology and sociology and made popular by I.M. Lewis in his seminal 1971 work, *Ecstatic Religion*.¹⁵¹⁹ This approach typically focuses on the social meaning of possession and its discursive function (or "dysfunction") within that society.¹⁵²⁰ Generally speaking, this framework views possession as a social construct, for example, as a form of social protest or empowerment by oppressed or marginalized groups. However, the consequence of this interpretation was often that the possession phenomena itself was seen simply as being imaginary or delusional - a way for marginalized groups to "act out" or express deeply seeded desires.

The second paradigm can be called the psycho-medical approach, introduced by psychoanalysts and psychiatrists who often tried to reduce possession phenomena to some form of mental illness or pathology, analyzed in terms of Western psychiatric categories (i.e., possession as culturally shaped hysteria, dissociative identity disorder, PTSD, schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, psychosis, etc.). While the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM 5 2013) currently recognizes certain cultural and social etiologies of possession, it does not address the structure and mechanism of positive possession experiences or forms and how they may relate to western models of symptomatology.¹⁵²¹

Because each approach works from its own specific preconceptions regarding the nature of possession (and reality), each arrives at vastly different and contradictory

¹⁵¹⁹ Lewis (1971)

¹⁵²⁰ See Freeman (1993: 110) who uses the term "dysfunction".

¹⁵²¹ American Psychiatric Association (APA) 2013. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5)*. Arlington: VA.

conclusions. Rebecca Seligman, a medical and psychological anthropologist, elucidates how both paradigms,

... assumed that there was some great division between brain state and social role - that they reflect separate, unrelated processes...Understanding of dissociative phenomena like trance, possession, and certain healing practices has been derailed by polemical "either/or" arguments: either dissociation is real, spontaneous and reflects basic neurobiological changes in brain state, or it is imaginary, socially constructed and entirely dictated by interpersonal expectations, power dynamics and cultural scripts that demand specific role performances. We have argued that this is a false dichotomy: every complex human experience emerges from an interaction of individual biology and psychology with social context.¹⁵²²

I situate Seligman's argument as the foundation for my own studies of deity possession in South Asia, particularly in future research I hope to do. Studying such phenomena must consider both the bio-psychological *and* socio-cultural aspects of possession. Thus, an integrated approach, employing insights from a variety of fields (e.g., Anthropology, Psychology, Cognitive Science, Neuroscience, Religious Studies, etc.) should be used to study these sorts of phenomena.

To achieve an emic understanding of possession or *āveśa*, one needs to include both textual and ethnographic components, as I've attempted to do here, which again should be analyzed in terms of their social and biological dimensions. Fortunately, in South Asia possession is still a thriving tradition and a vast ethnographic record has been compiled by numerous anthropologists over the last half century. Because much of the knowledge surrounding possession is passed on orally, ethnography becomes a key method for uncovering the details of possession rites, local perspectives, and the lived experience of possession not necessarily found in idealized or prescriptive texts such as the Tantras. However, far too often the textual and ethnographic data have been separated in research, as

¹⁵²² Seligman & Kirmayer (2008: 31)

if there were no connection between the two. Recent work on South Asian possession traditions by Anthropologists and Religious Studies scholars such as William Sax, J.R. Freeman, David White, and Frederick Smith have shown the importance of this sort of work in connecting these often-disparate fields.¹⁵²³

These calls for consilience and the use of integrated methods between the various disciplines have increased over the past couple decades, and recently many excellent studies have been done to advance analysis of complex phenomena like possession.¹⁵²⁴ Recent scholars who have been studying possession in other cultures, particularly Brazil, have heeded this call and begun to collapse the great divide between the socio-cultural and the psycho-biological dimensions. In a special issue of the journal *Ethnos* completely dedicated to the study of spirit possession, two of these scholars, Halloy and Naumescu, have succinctly laid out their interdisciplinary approach, which:

...reconceptualizes the cognitive into ontogenetic terms to account for the social, situated, and embodied dimensions of learning. With this approach, we aim to provide a more adequate level of ethnographic description, capable of articulating not only the conceptual, but also the perceptual, emotional, and material dimensions of cultural transmission... The relevant level of ethnographic description should capture thus the material conditions (objects, space, persons) as well as the mental states (intentions, emotions, perceptions) of people involved in possession-related interactions.¹⁵²⁵

Using their approach, researchers would attempt to study the simultaneous processes leading to possession as an embodied experience: the conceptual, emotional, perceptual,

¹⁵²³ See Sax (2009), Freeman (2016), White (2008; 2012b; 2013; 2021), Smith (2006) as examples.

¹⁵²⁴ See Slingerland and Collard, *Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Freeman (2016) and (1998: 74) where he states, "Similarly, surveys of spirit possession in South Asia rarely consider relating this 'folk' domain to the more classically iconic paradigms of worship, despite documentation of their repeated co-occurrence in the ethnographic literature."

¹⁵²⁵ Arnaud Halloy, and Vlad Naumescu, "Learning Spirit Possession: An Introduction", *Ethnos*, 77:2, (2012): 156.

motor and interactional dimensions.¹⁵²⁶ By analyzing each of these "building blocks", as Ann Taves has called these constituent elements of experience, one can gain greater insight into how the experience of possession is constructed and embodied through cultural knowledge, but also how bio-psychological dispositions and underlying cognitive mechanisms contribute to engendering and shaping such phenomena.¹⁵²⁷ For example, data regarding predispositions could potentially be obtained through long-form interviews on the medium's life experiences, personal narratives, attributions, training, concepts of self, and world-views. Other relevant data sets can also emerge from psychological scales and inventories (e.g. Dissociative Experiences Scale, Tellegen Absorption Scale etc.) distributed among mediums/oracles in order to establish whether or not there is any similarity in psychological profiles or if a certain group of people have similar predispositions or capacities that may allow them to become possessed.¹⁵²⁸ Unfortunately, due to my brief fieldwork I was unable to conduct these sorts of interviews or inventories, though such work would be of great value in future studies.¹⁵²⁹

Part of the goal for obtaining this type of data would be to enhance our understanding and explanations of how possession can be engendered through various cultural and biological processes. Anthropologists, such as Michael Lambek, have often argued for strictly interpretive rather than explanatory approaches to spirit possession, believing it "cannot be explained in simple terms... the diversity of its functions and expressions,

¹⁵²⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵²⁷ For much more on Ann Taves building blocks approach and what it can offer to Tantric studies see: Taves (2011; 2013; 2015); Taves and Asprem, "The Building Block Approach: An Overview", (Stockholms universitet, Institutionen för Etnologi, Religions, Historia och Genusvetenskap, 2020); Larsson, Svensson, and Nordin. *Building blocks of Religion - Critical Applications and Future Prospects*, (Sheffield; Bristol: Equinox, 2020).

¹⁵²⁸ See Taves (2011; 2013; 2015)

¹⁵²⁹ See Seligman and Kirmayer (2008) and Halloy and Naumescu (2012)

suggests turning away from causal, etiological explanations toward examining its structure, organization, reproduction, and meaning".¹⁵³⁰ Lambek's point is important and in many ways a reaction against the reductive strategies used in previous studies on possession phenomena (i.e. as a social construct or pathology). Recent scholars, such as Emma Cohen, agree that interpretive or relativistic approaches have been of great value, but she argues that this does not mean we should necessarily forego explanatory models.¹⁵³¹ Since I have only collected a few data points at this time, I will not attempt to give any explanations or conclusions, but rather explore some questions that arose from data I was able to collect, while also examining and providing an overview of recent insights from within the larger field of possession studies, particularly the social and medical sciences.

QUESTIONS

For now, I have two broad, though related, questions regarding possession etiologies which emerge from the textual and ethnographic accounts I have researched and discussed here. One of them returns to a point made by my informant Srinivasan at the Paramakkavu Bhagavatī Temple - that not all bodies become possessed, including those who train and willfully try to induce possession. This was made clear in the tantric literature as well - as we saw, a variety of techniques were given if one was unable to achieve a state of *āveśa* during initiation. If these also did not work, the texts stated that the practitioner was no longer

¹⁵³⁰ Michael Lambek, "From Disease to Discourse: Remarks on the Conceptualization of Trance and Spirit Possession," in *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health*, edited by C. A. Ward, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989).

¹⁵³¹ Cohen, Emma. "What Is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing, and Explaining Two Possession Forms." *Ethnos*. 73.1 (2008): 1-25.

allowed to continue forward - pointing to the great importance of this capacity for possession in their spiritual path.

On one hand, it seems inducing a state of possession for some involves years of training and practice, and as we saw in Kerala, some hold lineage rights to do so - in a sense, the capacity for possession being handed down through one's heredity. On the other hand, certain groups (particularly marginalized groups) seem to be able to become possessed more easily and, in some cases, spontaneously without any formal training or practice.¹⁵³² Part of my interest, then is to understand what sorts of psycho-biological and cultural knowledge systems and processes may be involved in creating such capacities or dispositions for possession. The second related question involves understanding how possession is engendered and learned particularly through tantric ritual practice, whether in the textual traditions we looked at, or the ethnographic examples I have discussed above. In other words, what are the cultural and biological process involved in these "formalized rites" that can result in states of possession?

To be more specific, my first question queries why certain social groups, particularly women, children, and other historically marginalized groups (low caste/class, homosexual/transvestites, etc.) appear to be predisposed to both positive and negative forms of possession. Across the global ethnographic record, this seems to be a universal and cross-cultural feature of possession.¹⁵³³ Indeed, this is evidenced also in South Asian ethnographies

¹⁵³² For example, the tribal Irula oracle. Many examples are found in other S Asian ethnographies such as Day (1989); Smith (2006); Diemberger (2005); Kapferer (1983), Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

¹⁵³³ See numerous examples from "Spirit Possession: Women and Possession." Encyclopedia of Religion. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/spirit-possession-women-and-possession>; Sharp, "Possessed and Dispossessed youth: Spirit possession of school children in northwest Madagascar. *Culture, Medicine, Psychiatry*, Sep; 14.3

and within the textual records.¹⁵³⁴ As we saw in numerous early Sanskrit texts going back to the time of the Atharvaveda, young women and children are especially vulnerable to attack by negative spirits, an idea still operative throughout South Asia. This is especially the case, according to texts, when the women are in transitional phases of life (puberty, menstruation, etc.). At the same time, we also saw many early examples of women acting as mediums for spirits in a variety of possession and divination rites (e.g., Upaniṣads, Brāhmaṇas, *ikṣanikās*, *vēlaṅ* priestesses of the Murugan cult, the use of low-caste women in tantric *gaṇacakra* rites, etc.).¹⁵³⁵ This includes the various tantras that describe *svasthāveśa*, which insist upon virgin girls or boys being used as mediums. While the formalized tantric possession rites I witnessed involved primarily low-caste men, the ethnographic record shows that, in fact, female oracles and mediums greatly outweigh male oracles throughout Asia.¹⁵³⁶ As noted, more often than not possession involves the feminine - either women are possessed, or men are possessed by some form of the goddess. In fact, Sarah Caldwell's ethnographic work in Kerala suggests that men's possession might have been in fact inspired by women.¹⁵³⁷ Some anthropologists have also observed that there seems to be higher incidence of possession among those who have more fluid gender identities, such as homosexuals, bisexuals, and transvestites.¹⁵³⁸

(1990):339-64; S. Ferber, "Possession and the Sexes", In: *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Sered, Susan Starr, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women*, (Bridgewater, N.J.: Replica Books, 2000).

¹⁵³⁴ See Diemberger (2005), Obeyesekere (1984), Caldwell (1999), Smith (2006), Ram (2013)

¹⁵³⁵ For more on women's role in Tantra see, Törzsök, "Women in Early Śākta Tantras: Dūtī, Yoginī and Sādhakī" *Cracow Indological Studies*, 16, (2014a): 339-367.

¹⁵³⁶ See Smith (2006), Ram (2013), Diemberger (2005), Caldwell (1999), Mines (2005), and Karin Kapadia, "Dancing the Goddess: Possession and Class in Tamil South India". *Modern Asian Studies*. 30 (2): (1996) and "Pierced by Love: Tamil Possession, Gender and Caste." In *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*, ed. Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, pp. 181–202. New Delhi: (2000).

¹⁵³⁷ Caldwell (1999)

¹⁵³⁸ See especially chapter 5 of Caldwell (1999). Also see James Sweet, "Male Homosexuality and Spiritism in the African Diaspora: The Legacies of a Link." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct. 1996), pp. 184-202; Jackson, Peter A., and Benjamin Baumann. 2022. *Deities and Divas: Queer Ritual Specialists in*

As we saw in Kerala, it is primarily low-caste men who become possessed - high-caste Brahmin men, at least here, are either unwilling or unable to do the same. Although Smith states that possession in the literary tradition is "by no means the exclusive province of the powerless", this is and was not the norm throughout South Asia and was generally the domain of early Atimārga ascetics and left-handed Tantric traditions we discussed in previous chapters, which included both Brahmin and non-Brahmin actors.¹⁵³⁹ The vast ethnographic record on contemporary possession traditions in India also seems to support this - to this day possession is predominantly still practiced by marginalized lower-caste and tribal groups. However, what is also clear from the Tantras we examined is that the *sādhaka*, some who were high caste men, had to follow prescribed ritual procedures for extended periods of time, often involving transgressive and self-mortifying practices, in order to engender a state of *āveśa*. Why this may have been the case is a point I will return to below.

From this data, the question then arises - why, across cultures, are marginalized groups seemingly predisposed to possession? Again, in the past most anthropologists have fallen back on premises proposed by social functionalists, who generally treated possession as some form of social resistance accessed by marginalized sections of the population who otherwise have little social power.¹⁵⁴⁰ These theories suggest that people consciously and strategically "act out" and that possession is merely some sort of social statement or protest. However, these theories neglect to explain how *particular* individuals come to be possessed in *particular* social situations, since *all* marginalized people do not become possessed. They do not account for the individual characteristics, dispositions, and motives leading some to

Myanmar, Thailand and beyond. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2022; Strongman, Roberto. 2019. *Queering Black Atlantic Religions. Transcorporeality in Candomble, Santeria, and Vodou*. Durham: Duke University Press.

¹⁵³⁹ Smith (2006: 63)

¹⁵⁴⁰ Lewis (1971)

become possessed, nor do they account for the cognitive and biological basis for such experiences. While I agree that "marginalization" may be a factor in triggering possession, the social-functionalist approach on its own provides little explanation beyond the abstract notions of "social forces" having "social consequences". What I am more interested in are the processes and mechanisms through which marginalization becomes *embodied* – that is, how do ideas, beliefs, and discourses actually shape and transform the states and dispositions of people's bodies? What is it about marginalized men's, women's and children's bodies that make them more prone to possession? Why would non-marginalized men have to resort to transgressive and self-mortifying practices to achieve a similar state? What does "marginalization" actually mean here?

THE CAPACITY FOR POSSESSION

South Asian emic interpretations on women's predisposition to possession varies. On one hand there is the widespread belief in South Asia that women, by their very nature and biology, inherently embody *śakti*, the divine feminine energy or power that permeates and activates the world and becomes identified, as we've seen, as the essence of the Goddess. In the tantric traditions it is this innate access to *śakti* that makes a women's body naturally sacred, permeable, and open to possession, which effectually intensifies this divine energy.¹⁵⁴¹ In men, however, *śakti* is not naturally accessible and they have to resort to a variety of methods to acquire this energy, such as penance, meditation, yoga, tantric initiation (i.e., *śaktipāta* and/or *āveśa*), through some relationship with the Goddess, or by proxy via women who become possessed and act as conduits for this power that can be transferred and

¹⁵⁴¹ Kapadia (2000)

harnessed by tantric practitioners.¹⁵⁴² On the other hand, there is also the misogynistic belief across South Asia that women are inherently impure and morally inferior to men and thus more vulnerable to possession.¹⁵⁴³ This paradoxical understanding of the female constitution is embedded in the inherent ambiguity of women in general, and specifically, in the dangerous yet potentially salvific powers of the Goddess throughout South Asian discourse. Kapadia encapsulates this misogynistic yet salvific South Asian belief about women, writing "Women have 'divine' generative powers but are incapable of directing these powers wisely. They are the source of creative energy, but it is men who embody the wisdom that must control and direct these energies."¹⁵⁴⁴

Within the sciences, the concurrence of spirit possession with women, children, and other marginalized groups is well known, though in the past explanations often revolved around what Susan Starr Sered has called "deprivation theories" that assumed possession is an abnormal behavior resulting from social, physical, or mental deprivations.¹⁵⁴⁵ More recently, scholars such as Emma Cohen have used cognitive science approaches to study beliefs surrounding possession. She hypothesizes that women's predisposition for possession is due to the fact that women have a more highly developed "Theory of Mind" (ToM), the social cognitive ability to explain and predict other people's minds and actions in terms of underlying mental states, such as beliefs, intentions, or feelings. In this regard, Simon Baron-Cohen has proposed a theoretical framework which hypothesizes psychological sex

¹⁵⁴² Many texts describe the characteristics or predispositions to look for in women who can be used as such consorts. See Hatley (2007) and Törzsök (1999) for examples.

¹⁵⁴³ See Kalpana Ram, *Fertile disorder: Spirit Possession and its Provocation of the Modern*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), Smith (2006) and our discussion of *gaṇacakras* in previous chapter.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Kapadia (2000: 197)

¹⁵⁴⁵ Sered (1994: 190–191). See Alice B. Kehoe, "Women's Preponderance in Possession Cults: The Calcium-Deficiency Hypothesis Extended", *American Anthropologist* 83 (3): (2009), 549 - 561 as an example

differences in terms of empathizing versus systematizing capacities.¹⁵⁴⁶ Subsequent studies show that women may have a higher capacity, or threshold, for empathy over men who tend to systematize.¹⁵⁴⁷ According to Baron-Cohen, this higher threshold of the ToM is especially important in spirit possession where the host needs to keep track of not only their own minds, but also the possessing entities and the clients or audience they are in front of.

The same question can be asked about the preponderance of possession among children. The emic interpretation generally claims that children are regarded as "pure", innocent, and embodiments of moral neutrality - their emotional unguardedness, according to Smith, is said to make them easy targets for spirits of various sorts.¹⁵⁴⁸ Others claim these same qualities somehow make children closer to divinities, attested throughout South Asia with the ancient worship of virgin-gods and goddesses (e.g., Vaṭuka, Skanda, Kumāri, etc.) who are always depicted as children.¹⁵⁴⁹ Again their divinity is said to be related to their inherent purity and chastity, which are considered qualities of certain deities, especially goddesses. According to Davis and Smith another explanation for the use of children as

¹⁵⁴⁶ See Baron-Cohen, "Empathizing, Systemizing, and the Extreme Male Brain Theory of Autism". *Progress in Brain Research*. 186: (2010), which states "females are, on average, more disposed to an empathizing style— i.e., the drive to identify others' mental states in order to predict their behavior and respond with an appropriate emotion. On the other hand, males are, on average, more disposed to a systematizing style, i.e., the drive to predict and to respond to the behavior of non-agentive deterministic systems by inferring the rules that govern such systems."

¹⁵⁴⁷ See for example, Adenzato et al., "Gender differences in cognitive Theory of Mind revealed by transcranial direct current stimulation on medial prefrontal cortex. *Scientific Reports*, v7 (2017) and Bettina E. Schmidt, "Possessed Women in the African Diaspora: Gender Difference in Spirit Possession Rituals" in *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Schmidt, & Huskinson, (London: Continuum, 2010).

¹⁵⁴⁸ Smith (2006: 449-450)

¹⁵⁴⁹ According to David White, the same reason is given for the casting of children as the *svabhava* (true or innate) forms of Rama and Krishna in *līla* drama performances. [Personal communication] See William S. Sax. "The Ramnagar Ramlīla: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage". *History of Religions*. 30 (2): (1990): 129-153 for more on this.

mediums in China, which conforms with the likely intent of this practice, is that their soul (*hun*) is less stable and therefore more displaceable.¹⁵⁵⁰

As previously stated, the ethnographic record also shows that males who become possessed are predominantly from lower caste/marginalized groups, or they must undergo complete ritual transformation before they are able to experience possession.¹⁵⁵¹ The emic perspective in South Asia seems to agree as well. For example, Margaret Trawick Egnor's work, which focused on Tamil women mediums for the goddess Māriyamman, wrote: "Mediums for the goddess are expected to be poor, low caste individuals . . . poverty and low status...are considered necessary conditions for possession by the goddess."¹⁵⁵² As is the case in Kerala, these groups were often institutionalized and enshrined with lineage rights to become possessed. This inheritability factor again points to the possibility of some sort of biological/cognitive predisposition to possession which can be passed on genetically, or more precisely, epigenetically. We will return to this below - for now I will provide an overview of some recent insights from the field of Cognitive and Psychological Sciences, which may shed some light on some of these questions.

INSIGHTS FROM CSR, ANTHROPOLOGY, & PSYCHOLOGY

The field of cognitive science has recently been appropriated by several academics as an approach to understanding certain aspects of possession. For example, Barret and Cohen have discussed how and why certain cross-cultural possession concepts and beliefs have so successfully spread across the world. In contrast to those who claim spirit possession is

¹⁵⁵⁰ Smith, (2006: 454)

¹⁵⁵¹ Freeman (1994); See Diemberger (2005), Smith (2006).

¹⁵⁵² Egnor, Margaret. 1980. "On the Meaning of Śakti to Women in Tamil Nadu." In *The Powers of Tamil Women*, ed. Susan S. Wadley, (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1980): 12–13.

incompatible with Western notions of “self” and “personhood”, they argue that possession concepts arise from natural and evolved cognitive processes common to all humans.¹⁵⁵³

Regularity of these concepts across cultures exist, in part, due to people’s intuitive belief systems regarding mind-body dualism as well their cognitive ability to represent supernatural agents, both of which emerge as a result of the human capacity to perceive minds (i.e. ToM - one's "Theory of Mind").¹⁵⁵⁴

Cohen has also proposed what I believe is a useful typology for possession concepts, which categorizes possession forms as either “executive” or “pathogenic”.¹⁵⁵⁵ She theorizes these forms are by-products of natural processes related to our evolved cognitive architecture. Forms involving a possession entity taking over an individual’s executive functions, is defined as “executive possession” – meaning a person’s actions, intentions, attitudes, and desires become wholly attributed to the possessing agent. In contrast, “pathogenic possession” involves

(a) the presence of an agent in or on a person, that (b) either causes no perceived effects (i.e., the spirit is ‘dormant’) or causes physical effects such as disease or illness, psychological effects such as depression or hallucinations, or existential effects more broadly defined, such as financial misfortune, that (c) may persist indefinitely or until a diagnosis is made and the agent is dispossessed of the host’s body”.¹⁵⁵⁶

This latter concept does not necessarily entail the displacement of the person’s identity or agency as it does in executive possession, but rather results in a perception of the possessing agent as a pathogen or psychic parasite. Though dualist, this typology also

¹⁵⁵³ Cohen, E. & Barrett, J. "When Minds Migrate: Conceptualizing Spirit Possession." *Journal of Cognition and Culture*. 8: (2008): 23–48.

¹⁵⁵⁴ See Cohen & Barrett (2008) and Diana Espirito Santo et al., "Around the Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition by Emma Cohen". *Religion and Society: Advances in Research*, 1.1, (2010): 164-176 for important critiques of their work.

¹⁵⁵⁵ See Emma Cohen. 2008. "What Is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing, and Explaining Two Possession Forms." *Ethnos*. 73.1 1-25

¹⁵⁵⁶ Cohen (2008: 14)

recognizes that possession states are not static - the same person who experiences pathogenic possession may also experience executive possession, say, for example, in a religious ritual.¹⁵⁵⁷ While I do not believe this is an all-inclusive typology, it does express the differences between the emic uses of "*āveśa*" and "*graha*" in South Asia discussed in previous chapters. Although current work in CSR has little to say regarding the actual experience and process of possession, scholars of cognitive science have pointed to the growing importance of the role of cognition when approaching possession, and how cultural processes, worldview, social roles, implicit and explicit beliefs, suggestions, and expectations help to shape anomalous experiences such as possession.¹⁵⁵⁸

"THE EMBODIED SELF "

A central notion in the fields of social psychology and anthropology, and one that potentially helps bridge the social and scientific fields, is the concept of the "embodied self".¹⁵⁵⁹ Embodiment describes the various ways in which culture becomes inscribed on and in human bodies through various social, political, and class factors as well as cultural and

¹⁵⁵⁷ Historically, anthropologists and psychologists have invented an array of dualist, typologies when speaking about possession forms. These include involuntary vs. voluntary possession (APA, 2013), undesired vs. desired, spontaneous vs. ritualized, central vs. peripheral (Lewis, 1971), somnambulant (amnesic) vs. lucid (conscious) (Oesterreich, 1974), possession vs. possession trance (Bourguignon, 1976), and often from an emic perspective, divine vs. demonic forms of possession. Usually, the binary is structured on one hand as negative forms being demonic, spontaneous, peripheral, undesired, and pathological, while positive forms are considered divine, non-pathological, central, desired, voluntary, and ritualized. Some of these classifications are useful, though many fail to capture the complexity and variability within possession experiences across cultures.

¹⁵⁵⁸ See Halloy & Naumescu (2012), Tanya Luhrmann, "A Hyperreal God and Modern Belief: Toward an Anthropological Theory of Mind." *Current Anthropology* 53 no. 4, (2012a): 371-395., Emma Cohen, *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Rebecca Seligman and Ryan A. Brown, "Theory and Method at the Intersection of Anthropology and Cultural Neuroscience". *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. 5.2-3 (2010): 130-137.

¹⁵⁵⁹ See, for example, Csordas (1990), Seligman, "From Affliction to Affirmation: Narrative Transformation and the Therapeutics of Candomblé Mediumship". *Transcultural Psychiatry*. 42: (2005): 272-294; Halloy, "Gods in the Flesh: Learning Emotions in the Xangô Possession Cult (Brazil)". *Learning Possession - Ethnos*. 77 no.2, (2012): 177-202.

religious practices, Related to these are the knowledge systems implicitly learned throughout an individual's life from local systems of belief and experiential learning.

Over the past decade, various scholars have argued that local concepts of the self can shape and influence various anomalous experiences like possession.¹⁵⁶⁰ Tanya Luhrmann calls this process a society's "theory of mind," the way subjective perception, intention, and inference are culturally imagined (and notably different from ToM mentioned earlier).¹⁵⁶¹ She suggests that cultural ideas can affect mental experience so deeply that they can override ordinary sense perceptions that can lead to a variety of anomalous experiences such as hallucinations, visions, hearing voices, paranormal phenomena, etc. If reinforced with practice, this can also change intuitive or implicit ways of thinking (e.g., concept of self) over time. In contrast to reflective beliefs, or explicitly learned beliefs, these are called "intuitive" because, as explained by Boyer, they "pop up" involuntarily as part of our cognitive architecture - the processes that lead to them are not accessible to conscious inspection.¹⁵⁶²

In a 2015 study by Luhrmann et al., their findings show that people with psychosis experience hallucinated voices differently in various social settings, and that these differences arise from various cultural expectations and conditioning. Luhrmann coined a term for this process called "social kindling" - the implicit and explicit ways in which a

¹⁵⁶⁰ Seligman & Brown (2010); Cassaniti and Luhrmann, "The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences". *Current Anthropology*. 55 (2014); Bhavsar and Bhugra, "Dissociative Trance and Spirit Possession: Challenges for cultures in transition", *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*. 70.12, (2016): 551-559; and Ram (2012).

¹⁵⁶¹ See Luhrmann (2012a) & subsequent studies in Luhrmann et al, "Hearing Voices in Different Cultures: A Social Kindling Hypothesis". *Topics in Cognitive Science*. 7 (4): (2015):646-663. See also Obeyesekere's (1984) earlier theories on possession etiologies in Sri Lanka, some ideas which crossover with Luhrmann.

¹⁵⁶² See Sperber, "Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs". *Mind & Language*. 12.1, (1997): 67-83. and Pascal Boyer, "Intuitive expectations and the detection of mental disorder: A cognitive background to folk-psychiatry". *Philosophical Psychology*. 24 (1): (2011):95-118; and Boyer, "Why "Belief" is Hard Work - Implications of Tanya Luhrmann's When God Talks Back". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. 3 (3): (2013): 349-357 for more on intuitive ontologies.

social world gives significance and meaning to sensations such as a hallucinations, visions, or voices.¹⁵⁶³ Social kindling not only alters the way sensations are interpreted but shapes the quality of the experience itself. Along these same lines, Bhavsar and Bhugra argue that possession should be conceptualized as a destabilization of primary agency, which is influenced by social conceptions of selfhood.¹⁵⁶⁴ Extrapolating from this research, we can conclude that implicitly and explicitly learned belief systems, coupled with religious praxis, can potentially lead to changes over time in one's intuitive belief system and sense perceptions, which in turn could help cause a loss of agency over the primary self. These factors, I believe, are essential in understanding the etiology of possession experiences.

In possession rituals around the world, one of the primary methods for disrupting and transforming one's identity and perceptions is through religious practices and the cultural knowledge systems that surround such rites.¹⁵⁶⁵ Recent evidence from the vast scientific literature on the effects of Buddhist meditation and visualization practices on the brain, have shown how this type of training can have a direct effect and alter one's cognition and perceptions.¹⁵⁶⁶ Castillo's work in South Asia also notes the overlap between Hindu yoga and meditation with dissociated states, concluding that such practices can cause non-pathological dissociated states such depersonalization and derealization, and that this depersonalized state

¹⁵⁶³ See Luhrmann et al. (2015) and Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

¹⁵⁶⁴ Bhavsar and Bhugra (2016).

¹⁵⁶⁵ Cardeña, Etzel, and Michael Winkelman. *Altering Consciousness, 2 Vol.: Multidisciplinary Perspective*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011).

¹⁵⁶⁶ See for example Kozhevnikov et al. "The Enhancement of Visuospatial Processing Efficiency through Buddhist Deity Meditation." *Psychological Science*, 20, 5, (2009): 645-53; Jha et al. "Mindfulness training modifies subsystems of attention." *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 7, (2007): 109-119; and Lutz & Davidson Lutz, "Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness," In *The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness*, eds. Zelazo et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

can become a permanent mode of functioning.¹⁵⁶⁷ Seligman's work on Brazilian spirit mediums from the Candomblé tradition also shows how initiates actively work to disrupt and transform their individual identities by gradually altering their own personalities and bodies through mimicry and various religious practices to match the culturally imagined personalities of their deities.¹⁵⁶⁸ This is accomplished through a process which Seligman calls "identity diffusion" and its subsequent "reconstitution" - a point we shall return to below.

Psychology generally accounts for the possession experience either as a dissociated self-state connected to cultural and religious beliefs or as a psychological disorder often incorporating these beliefs. Often the terms "self" and "identity" appear in the literature as synonymous. Identity might be described as the set of goals, traits, characteristics, values, and beliefs one shows to the world.¹⁵⁶⁹ Identities are not fixed markers but instead dynamically constructed in the moment. Together, one's idea of these various identities make up a dynamic self-concept.¹⁵⁷⁰ To discuss possession from this viewpoint it is important to understand various psychological theories of self and identity and how these can be influenced by culture and psychological dysfunction and/or psychological resilience. Jung (1959), for example, considered the self as a "psychological archetype" signifying the unification of the consciousness and unconscious mind. This unifying concept of self holds a number of underlying sub-selves (ego-states or identities), which are reactions to cultural and

¹⁵⁶⁷ R. J. Castillo, "Depersonalization and Meditation." *Psychiatry* 53: (1990):158–68. and Castillo, "Divided Consciousness and Enlightenment in Hindu Yogis", *Anthropology of Consciousness* 2(3–4): (1991a).

¹⁵⁶⁸ See Seligman & Brown (2010) and Seligman "The Unmaking and Making of Self: Embodied Suffering and Mind-Body Healing in Brazilian Candomblé." *Ethos*. 38.3, (2005a): 297-320, and Seligman, *Possessing Spirits and Healing Selves: Embodiment and Transformation in an Afro-Brazilian Religion*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁵⁶⁹ Cote & Levine, *Identity, Formation, Agency, and Culture a Social Psychological Synthesis*, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014)

¹⁵⁷⁰ Oyserman et al. "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity" in Leary et al. *Handbook of Self and Identity 2nd edition*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2014).

developmental stimuli. Others, such as Simpson, who references the work of Daniel Dennett, believe there is no actual unified self, but many, often competing, identities that are dynamic and in constant flux. In their view one should think of the conscious self as “a center of narrative gravity”, which is ultimately an abstraction and not real.¹⁵⁷¹ Along similar lines, Patrick McNamara, who combines neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and cognitive science to study religious experience, has argued that humans experience a range of “possible selves”, each connected to a specific neural network that can be modified and transformed by what he calls “decentering”, a process which can also occur through religious practice.¹⁵⁷² Halloy and Naumescu, working on possession rites in Brazil have similar views, though they place special emphasis on how cognition and the ritual environment continuously shape each other in determining a dynamic concept of the self and identity.¹⁵⁷³ Many of these theories, could function within a psychological or philosophical framework where a possessing entity might be consistent with psychological concepts of multiple selves, self-loss/disruption, or underlying sub-selves affected by an individual’s cultural, social and religious orientation.

POSSESSION, TRAUMA, & DISSOCIATION

Throughout the ethnographic and scientific literature, possession has often been linked across cultures to physical and mental illness, crisis, and/or trauma.¹⁵⁷⁴ Though

¹⁵⁷¹ Simpson, "The Mystical Stance: The Experience of Self-Loss and Daniel Dennett's 'Center of Narrative Gravity.'" *Zygon*. 49 (2): (2014): 418, and Dennett, Daniel C. 1991. *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little, Brown and Dennet, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity.” In *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives 1992*, ed. Frank Kessel et al., (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992).

¹⁵⁷² McNamara, Patrick. 2014. *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press)

¹⁵⁷³ Halloy & Naumescu (2012)

¹⁵⁷⁴ See for example Ferrari (2011); Sax (2009); Seligman and Brown (2010); Day (1989), Diemberger (2005); Van der Hart et al., "Somatoform Dissociation in Traumatized World War I Combat Soldiers: A Neglected Clinical Heritage." *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*, 1(4), (2000): 33-66; and Ross, C. 2011. "Possession

usually associated with negative forms of possession, numerous ethnographies evince that most oracles and mediums also had some sort of crisis or traumatic experience in their past. Seligman's work on Candomblé in Northeastern Brazil, for example, details how most of the mediums she studied had had histories of stress, trauma, emotional distress, and psychosomatic illness that preceded or accompanied the onset of dissociative symptoms.¹⁵⁷⁵ For some this trauma or crisis is linked with their first experience of possession, often associated with some form of illness and described as being a time of great fear and confusion. In Himalayan traditions, for example, possession is often linked with what they call "god-sickness" (*lha nad*), related, at least phenomenologically, to the oft mentioned "shaman-sickness" or, by more modern interpreters, as a "spiritual emergency".¹⁵⁷⁶ God-sickness manifests in a variety of ways - dreams, physical or mental illness, hearing voices, strange visions, feelings of an invisible presence, and in more extreme cases, a near-death experience.¹⁵⁷⁷ In such cases, a traditional healer, oracle, or ritual specialist is called upon to diagnose the would-be medium to determine if the possessing entity is malevolent or benevolent. If malevolent, the healers perform a rite to expel the malignant entity by "closing the energy channels", thus repairing the breach caused by the entity that they believe entered through their subtle body.¹⁵⁷⁸ If benevolent, purification rites are performed in order to "open

Experiences in Dissociative Identity Disorder: A Preliminary Study." *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 12, 4, 393-400.

¹⁵⁷⁵ See especially Seligman (2005, 2005a) and Seligman, "Distress, Dissociation and Embodied Experience: Reconsidering the Pathways to Mediumship and Mental Health." *Ethos*. 33,1., (2005b).

¹⁵⁷⁶ See Diemberger (2005) on "god-sickness". On shamanism see both Walsh, (1997). *The Psychological Health of Shamans: A Reevaluation. Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65(1), 101-124; & Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964). For "spiritual emergency" see Grof, C., & Grof, S., "Spiritual emergency: The Understanding and Treatment of Transpersonal Crises." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 36.2 (2017).

¹⁵⁷⁷ Diemberger (2005: 128-130)

¹⁵⁷⁸ See Diemberger (2005) & Berglie, "The Āveśa Ritual in Tantric Buddhism and Ritual Possession in Tibet", in *La Politique des Esprits. Chamanisme et Religions Universalistes*, ed. Denise

the energy channels” and clear it of obstructions, so no harm comes to the host if the deity enters again.¹⁵⁷⁹ According to an interview with the Dalai Lama, historically most State Oracles of Tibet did not live past the age of 50 due to the physical and mental difficulties of becoming possessed by deities.¹⁵⁸⁰ In traditional settings, patients who show signs of "god-sickness" will often go on to become oracles/mediums by training and apprenticeship with local specialists in order to learn how to control their possession experiences. Similar diagnostic practices and training procedures can be found throughout various cultures around the world.¹⁵⁸¹

Though most scholars (myself included) now agree that positive and negative forms of possession are not necessarily pathological, it is important to note the overlap with dissociative phenomena and psychological disorders (such as Dissociative Identity Disorder) that are also closely linked with trauma, since they often involve similar cognitive and biological mechanisms and processes. Dissociation often works in concert with possession experiences, and is a term that describes both a set of behaviors involving functional alterations of memory, perception, and identity as well as the psychophysiological processes and mechanisms presumed to underlie these phenomena.¹⁵⁸² The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM-5) characterizes dissociative disorders as a “disruption of and/or discontinuity in the normal integration of consciousness, memory, identity, emotion,

Aigle et al. (Nanterre: Societe d’ethnologie, 2000): 25–34. The mention of “energy channels” in the ethnographic data again shows the influences from the ayurvedic, tantric, and yoga traditions and its interrelations with popular religion in the Himalayan regions.

¹⁵⁷⁹ See Berglie (2000)

¹⁵⁸⁰ See Avedon (1984) on the Dalai Lamas reference about the Nechung Oracle

¹⁵⁸¹ See for example Seligman (2005 and 2010); Castillo (1991); Halloy and Naumescu (2012), and Goodman, *How about Demons? Possession and Exorcism in the Modern World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)

¹⁵⁸² Seligman and Brown (2010)

perception, body representation, motor control, and behavior”.¹⁵⁸³ Dissociation itself, however, is not inherently pathological and experiences exist on a wide spectrum and triggered by varying stimuli - ranging from creative and integrative “flow” experiences, as well as mild mental states such as “highway hypnosis”, to more intense experiences such as depersonalization or derealization, and finally to pathological disorders such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID).¹⁵⁸⁴ To explain dissociation, Briere, Weathers, and Runtz proposed a multidimensional state model, which describes the nuanced range of dissociative states both desired and pathogenic.¹⁵⁸⁵

Dissociation is hypothesized as the splitting off of certain mental processes from the main body of consciousness with “various degrees of autonomy of the split off states”.¹⁵⁸⁶ It is a compartmentalization of consciousness, often serving as a psychological coping mechanism to keep stressful internal knowledge (e.g. trauma) out of conscious awareness or to prevent consciousness from experiencing and suffering extreme negative stimuli.¹⁵⁸⁷ These dissociative experiences fall into one of three large domains: (1) a loss of continuity in subjective experience accompanied by involuntary and unwanted intrusions into awareness; (2) an inability to access information or to control mental functions that are normally amenable to such access or control; or (3) a sense of experiential disconnectedness within the environment.¹⁵⁸⁸

¹⁵⁸³ DSM5 (2013: 291)

¹⁵⁸⁴ See Seligman & Kirmayer (2008:40–42); Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness*. (London: Rider, 1997); Bourguignon 1976; and Ross (1997) for various discussions on this.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Briere, J., Weathers, F. W., & Runtz, M. "Is Dissociation a Multidimensional Construct? Data from Multiscale Dissociation Inventory." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 18, (2005): 221–231.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Hilgard, "Dissociation and Theories of Hypnosis," in *Contemporary Hypnosis Research*. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1992): 69.

¹⁵⁸⁷ See Seligman & Kirmayer (2008) & Ross (2011)

¹⁵⁸⁸ Spiegel et al. "Dissociative Disorders in DSM-5". *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 9: (2013): 299-326.

Around the world, dissociative experiences like possession generally take place in three main contexts: (1) in response to acute stress or trauma; (2) in socially sanctioned rituals and healing practices associated with religious knowledge systems or artistic performances; and (3) as spontaneous fluctuations in ordinary conscious experience that often go unrecognized or unmarked unless they resonate with local systems of meaning.¹⁵⁸⁹ Thus possession as a dissociative experience is often spontaneous, but can also take place in culturally sanctioned religious rituals, much as we've seen in the possession rites of Kerala. In such contexts, dissociative experiences are believed to be voluntarily induced through a variety of ritual behaviors and practices such as drumming, dancing, singing, chanting, self-mortification, visualization, meditation, the use of intoxicants, self-hypnosis, sensory deprivation or overload, hyperventilation, and other forms of regulated breathing, among others.¹⁵⁹⁰

Symptoms of dissociation have been described as positive and negative symptomology.¹⁵⁹¹ Positive dissociative symptoms include disturbance of sensorimotor functioning, including somatoform expressions, for example, pain, tics, sensory distortions, and pseudo-seizures. Negative dissociative symptoms imply a loss of function in one part of the personality, for example, analgesia, sensory anesthesia, and motor inhibitions. Psychoform symptoms include flashbacks, internal voices, or thoughts perceived as alien to the individual.¹⁵⁹² Aspects of both positive and negative psychoform and somatoform

¹⁵⁸⁹ Castillo (1990, 1991a) and Castillo "Spirit Possession in South Asia, Dissociation or Hysteria? Part 1: Theoretical Background." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 18, (1994): 1–21. See also Kirmayer & Seligman (2008).

¹⁵⁹⁰ See for example Smith (2006), Freeman (1998), Rouget (1985), Halloy & Nameșcu (2012)

¹⁵⁹¹ See Nijenhuis, *Somatoform Dissociation: Phenomena, Measurement, and Theoretical Issues*, (New York: Norton, 2004) and van Der Hart et al. (2000)

¹⁵⁹² Nijenhuis (2004); Lowenstein & Putnam, "The Dissociative Disorders." In *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, (8th ed., Vol. 1,). eds. Kaplan and Sadock, (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 2004): 1844-1901.

symptoms of dissociation also fall within examples of DID and within non-pathogenic and pathogenic trance and spirit possession states.¹⁵⁹³

Both the older ICD-9 (1975) and DSM-4-TR (APA, 2000) have recognized the existence of a trance and possession disorder that distorts one's sense of self and agency. The DSM-4-TR classified this as Dissociative Trance Disorder (DTD). Descriptors for DTD include single or episodic disturbances in states of consciousness, identity, or memory, though it also recognizes that the resultant altered state is shaped by a person's particular culture.¹⁵⁹⁴ Furthermore, DTD involves a narrowing of awareness of immediate surroundings and stereotyped behaviors or movements that are experienced as being beyond one's control and causing extreme duress. The "possession trance" component, as a part of DTD, involves replacement of the customary sense of personal identity by a new identity, attributed to the influence of a spirit, power, deity, or another person, often associated with involuntary movements or amnesia.¹⁵⁹⁵ During et al. notes that a DTD diagnosis should only be considered if the possession experience is not accepted as a normal part of a collective cultural or religious practice or if individuals enter these states involuntarily and suffer significant distress and impairment, which demarcates them from voluntary and purposeful altered states.¹⁵⁹⁶

¹⁵⁹³ See Cardeña et al., "Possession Trance Phenomena," in *Dissociation and the Dissociative Disorders: DSM-V and Beyond*, eds. Dell et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009); Krippner, "The Role of Past Life Reports in Brazilian Spiritualist Healing for Dissociative Identity Disorder." *The Academy of Religion and Psychic Research Annual Conference* (1995), Krippner and Friedman, *Mysterious Minds: The Neurobiology of Psychics, Mediums, and Other Extraordinary People*, (Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2010); and Seligman & Kirmayer, 2008

¹⁵⁹⁴ During et al., "A Critical Review of Dissociative Trance and Possession Disorders: Etiological, Diagnostic, Therapeutic, and Nosological Issues," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. *Revue Canadienne De Psychiatrie*, 56.4 (2011): 235-42.

¹⁵⁹⁵ *DSM-IV-APA*, 2000

¹⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

In 2013, the DSM-5 subsumed DTD into the rubric of DID, known as Possession-form DID, which covers involuntary possession experiences only. Within DSM-5 descriptors of DID, the individual experiences a disruption of identity characterized by two or more personality states, which may be described in some cultures as possession. Descriptors, as understood by possession-form DID, involve the displacement of the primary self, resulting in a new undesired identity attributed to a spirit, dead person, demon, or deity that is uncontrolled, distressing, persistent, and outside of normal cultural or religious practice.¹⁵⁹⁷ Possession-form DID symptoms are virtually synonymous with DTD and are said to occur only when individuals enter the possession state involuntarily and suffer significant distress and impairment through the experience. Individuals experiencing possession-form DID tend to refer to their alters as aspects, facets, parts inside, ways of being, voices, multiples, selves, people, persons, individuals, spirits, demons, or aliens.¹⁵⁹⁸

DID, and its possession-form, is often related to various physical and mental traumas such as violence, war, rape or sexual abuse, extreme social or economic marginalization (e.g., poverty, starvation, endemic disease, political persecution etc.), child abuse, primary attachment breaks, and natural catastrophes.¹⁵⁹⁹ Putnam suggests DID functions as a response

¹⁵⁹⁷ APA, (2013)

¹⁵⁹⁸ See International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (2011: 121); Cardeña et al. 2009; Dell and O'Neil, *Dissociation and the Dissociative Disorders: DSM-V and Beyond*, (New York: Routledge, 2011). Lowenstein & Putnam (2004); Krippner & Powers, (1997). *Broken images, Broken selves: Dissociative Narratives in Clinical Practice*, (Washington, DC: Brunner/Mazel, 1997). Cohen's (2008) categories of pathogenic possession, and Bourguignon's (1977) category of possession (without the trance component) seem akin to the DSM-5 definition of possession form DID. Lewis's (1971) description of peripheral possession is also similar in etiology. Lewis argues that peripheral possession occurs outside of ritual settings, seems uncontrollable, is often chronic, and involves conflict and trauma with the individual and the surrounding social/cultural milieu.

¹⁵⁹⁹ See van Duijl et al., "Dissociative Symptoms and Reported Trauma among Patients with Spirit Possession and Matched Healthy Controls in Uganda". *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. 34 (2): (2010): 380-400; Ross (2011), and Sar et al., "Experiences of Possession and Paranormal Phenomena Among Women in the General Population: Are They Related to Traumatic Stress and Dissociation?" *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*. 15, 3, (2014): 303-318.

to trauma because it provides (A) escape from the constraints of reality; (B) containment of traumatic memories and affects outside of normal conscious awareness; (C) an alteration or detachment of self; and (D) analgesia (inability to feel pain -psychological or somatic numbness).¹⁶⁰⁰ In a 2011 study by Ross, he mapped the overlap of symptoms of DID and possession and also demonstrated that possession experiences, along with trance, sleepwalking, and paranormal experiences (prophetic dreams, telepathy, contact with ghosts, spirits, etc.) were much more common among patients with DID than the general population.¹⁶⁰¹

Several researchers believe that trauma is the triggering mechanism for all spontaneous dissociative trance states, including possession states.¹⁶⁰² They argue that these states occur during times of extreme stress (real or artificially induced), which can potentially lead to sensory overrides and engendering hallucinatory visions or possession-like experiences.¹⁶⁰³ Bhavsar and Bhugra postulated that individuals who become possessed have particular innate predispositions for dissociative experiences coupled with extreme external stressors that create a fragmented self or ego-dystonic possession state. As stated, most of the Brazilian mediums Seligman studied had histories of stress, trauma, or illness, and she and others have argued that possession is partially a product of poverty, discrimination, and social marginalization to which many, particularly women, are vulnerable.¹⁶⁰⁴ However, it can be argued that possession is not just a result of social marginalization, but more

¹⁶⁰⁰ Putnam, F. W. 1989. *Diagnosis and Treatment of Multiple Personality Disorder*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1989): 53.

¹⁶⁰¹ Ross (2011)

¹⁶⁰² Castillo (1994; 1994a, 2003); Ross (2011); Van Dijke et al (2013); van Duijl et al (2010)

¹⁶⁰³ Luhrmann, "Hallucinations and Sensory Overrides". *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 40, (2011):71-85.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Seligman (2005); van Duijl et al (2010)

importantly the bio-psychological consequences of marginalization, which I will discuss more below.

Before discussing that, however, I wanted to briefly note some interesting studies on the neurobiological dimensions of possession and other dissociative experiences, since many of the same neurobiological integration systems and neurochemical activations are involved.¹⁶⁰⁵ The triggering stimuli of trauma has been consistently linked to neurobiological deregulation, including dissociation, via alteration of the autonomic and central nervous systems.¹⁶⁰⁶ The catecholamines, norepinephrine, dopamine, and endogenous opioids also seem to have an association with altered states of consciousness, DID, and experiences like possession. Norepinephrine has been consistently linked with dissociative symptoms, including intrusions and sensory alterations, altered body states, as well as DID.¹⁶⁰⁷ In a study on Balinese possession by Kawai et al, it was discovered that the “possessed” group of subjects exhibited significant increases in plasma concentrations of norepinephrine, dopamine, and β -endorphin as compared to controls, suggesting that catecholamines and opioid peptides are involved in possession states.¹⁶⁰⁸ This is one of a few studies to date that I

¹⁶⁰⁵ For example, Kawai et al. "Catecholamines and opioid peptides increase in plasma in humans during possession trances", *Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuropsychology*, 12(16), (2001): 3419-3423. Oohashia et al., "Electroencephalographic measurement of possession trance in the field," *Clinical Neurophysiology* 113, (2002): 435–445; Bell et al, "Dissociation in Hysteria and Hypnosis: Evidence from Cognitive Neuroscience." *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry*, 82, 3, (2011): 332-9. (2011); Jha et al (2007); Lutz et al (2007); McNamara (2014); Seligman and Brown (2010); Hageman et al., "The Neurobiology of Trance and Mediumship in Brazil" in *Mysterious Minds: The Neurobiology of Psychics, Mediums, and Other Extraordinary People*, eds. Krippner and Friedman, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010).

¹⁶⁰⁶ See Ford, "Treatment implications of altered neurobiology, affect regulation, and information processing following child maltreatment." *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, (2005): 410- 419 and van Dijke et al. "Association of childhood-trauma-by-primary Caregiver and Affect Dysregulation with Borderline Personality Disorder Symptoms in Adulthood. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5 (3), (2013):217-224.

¹⁶⁰⁷ See Shin, Rauch, & Pittman, "Amygdala, medial prefrontal cortex, and hippocampal function in PTSD", *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1071, 2006: 67-79, and Reinders et al., "Psychobiological characteristics of dissociative identity disorder: A symptom provocation study." *Biological Psychiatry*, 60, (2006): 730-740.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Kawai et al., (2002)

am aware of that has empirically investigated the linkage between neurochemicals and possession.¹⁶⁰⁹

As Hageman et al. have pointed out, most studies in this field have focused on religious practices and their underlying neural circuitries, though there are great differences in methodology (measuring brain activity either by topographical EEG, cerebral blood flow, or by tracers of cerebral metabolism) and inconsistencies across such studies. Nevertheless, a review of the literature and research suggests that during religious experiences such as trance and possession, there is higher activity in the frontal and prefrontal cortex, increased activity in the limbic system, and decreased activity in the parietal lobes.¹⁶¹⁰ Quantitative EEG (qEEG) studies have also revealed excessive theta and alpha power, and deficient beta brain wave activity (normative waking state activity) within dissociated states. The relationship between resting and activated brain networks (alpha and theta activity) has recently begun to receive more attention in studies of dissociation.¹⁶¹¹ In a 2002 field study on possession, Oohashia and colleagues reported the first EEG findings of non-pathogenic possession with mobile EEG equipment.¹⁶¹² They were able to record one individual who became possessed (the other two did not) using mobile EEG equipment during a ritual performance in Bali. The recorded EEG showed increased theta and alpha bands of spontaneous EEG activity consistent with dissociative states. Hageman et al. also mention a field study involving topographic brain mapping of healer-mediums conducted by Don and Moura in 2000, which

¹⁶⁰⁹ See also Bastos et al., "Physiologic correlates of culture-bound dissociation: A comparative study of Brazilian Spiritist mediums and controls," *Transcultural Psychiatry*, April 2018; 55(2): 286-313. Their study concludes that pathological and nonpathological dissociation may have different physiological correlates.

¹⁶¹⁰ See Hageman et al., (2010) for reference to these varied studies.

¹⁶¹¹ See Daniels, Bluhm, and Lanius, "Intrinsic Network Abnormalities in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Research Directions for the Next Decade", *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5(2), (2013):142-148; Thatcher, R.W, *Handbook of Quantitative Electroencephalography and EEG IO-feedback*, (Saint Petersburg, FL: Ani, 2012); and Hageman et al (2010)

¹⁶¹² Oohashia et al (2002)

revealed increased brain activity when mediums reported being incorporated by a “spirit,” compared to resting baseline conditions. They conclude that these results "suggest the presence of a hyper-aroused brain state associated with the possession trance behaviors of the mediums."¹⁶¹³ It is clear more research needs to be done in this area to study these underlying mechanisms.

"RITUAL MARGINALIZATION"

As we've seen, past and current anthropological and psychological studies point to social marginalization and trauma/crisis as etiological factors in possession. However, as stated, the abstract notion of "social forces" having "social consequences" does not seem to me to fully explain what is going on. Rather, a more accurate way of describing this would be to view this as an *embodied marginalization*, in the same way possession is an embodied experience. As implied earlier, key to understanding social marginalization is to understand the numerous cognitive and biological consequences of this marginalization, and how these processes may be involved in engendering possession states. Again, embodiment refers to complex, multilevel processes, through which human bodies literally inscribe aspects of our environments in ways that can be “read” on our biology. In other words, socio-cultural factors (e.g., economics, political, religious, etc.) effect and are affected by our psychobiological (cognitive, neurobiological, psychological, etc.) architecture. A growing body of scientific literature has begun to show how social relations and environmental stress can have

¹⁶¹³ Hageman et al (2010: 90-91) - the study they reference here is Don, N. S., & Moura, G. (2000). "Trance surgery in Brazil." *Alternative Therapies*, 6(4), 39- 48.

very physical, cognitive, and neurobiological effects on the body, including changes that affect gene activity and expression (i.e., epigenetics).¹⁶¹⁴

It is this embodied aspect of marginalization which I believe is key to understanding social marginalization as a factor in not only engendering possession but also potentially creating dispositions so that the experience of possession can even take place. Recent genetic studies have also shown how various traits and behaviors (e.g., PTSD, addiction, depression, etc.) can be passed down epigenetically to successive generations. It would not be a far stretch to think that dissociative abilities linked with trauma could equally be passed down. As we saw in Kerala, the capacity for possession is often tied to specific communities and lineages, which is understood to be somehow inherited from previous generations. Future work and research may show how this could be related to epigenetics.

As we also saw, most of the practitioners in tantric texts were generally men who voluntarily become possessed (i.e., *āveśa*) but often must go through extreme and potentially trauma-inducing measures to trigger the experience. These often involved practices performed in frightening and liminal surroundings (e.g., cremation grounds), involving unnatural body postures, feigning madness, breathing exercises, cultivating non-dual states, creating new identities through mimicry, bodily mortification, blood sacrifice, and the use of intoxicants and/or highly transgressive offerings. As noted, Olga Serbaeva states that that such actions in the JYT are akin to inducing "artificial psychological trauma," resulting in a

¹⁶¹⁴ See Youssef et al, "The Effects of Trauma, with or without PTSD, on the Transgenerational DNA Methylation Alterations in Human Offsprings." *Brain Sciences*, 8(5), (2018): 83; Jasanoff, *The Biological Mind: How Brain, Body, and Environment Collaborate to Make Us Who We Are*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018); Roberts & Karatsoreos, "Brain-body Responses to Chronic Stress: A Brief Review". *Faculty Reviews*. 10, (2021); and Bohacek et al, "Transgenerational epigenetic effects on brain functions". *Biological Psychiatry*. 73.4, (2013): 313-20.

variety of altered states and hallucinatory-like experiences.¹⁶¹⁵ What arises from all this data is that "unmarginalized" men who willfully want to become possessed can only do so by somehow "*ritually marginalizing*" themselves, in the same way that the tantric *sādhaka* in the cremation ground has to self-induce psychological or physical trauma in order to have the experience of possession.



Breastplate for Śmaśana-Kālī Teyyam

regarding ritual purity”.¹⁶¹⁷

In Karin Kapadia's ethnography of possession by the god Murugan in Tamil festivals, which involved self-mortification through body piercing (Tamil: *alaku*), she arrived at two general conclusions relevant to our discussion: first, that devotees who experience possession (Tamil: *pudiccikkira*) are mostly female and that men (who were primarily middle-ranking non-brahman Tamil castes) had to “become” female for the duration of the ritual in order to get "penetrated" by the deity and possessed. Secondly, she observes “that the lower castes do not share upper-caste assumptions

¹⁶¹⁵ Serbaeva-Saraogi (2013: 200)

¹⁶¹⁷ See Kapadia (2000: 183)

Her first conclusion is interesting in that males must undergo a complete ritual transformation of their identity - "becoming female", in this case - in order to become possessed. This is similar in some senses to the *Cāmuṇḍāvrata* of the YSP and the *Guhyakāvrata* of the BYT, in which the *sādhaka* dresses up and imitates the behaviors of various goddesses in hopes of achieving identification and possession by them.¹⁶¹⁸

Though Kapadia does not mention it in her own work, body piercing, and other extreme rituals are also linked with causing



Pierced man during Kavadi ritual at Subrahmania festival, 1997

dissociated states (including amnesia, absorption, and depersonalization), as seen in Jegindø's study on a parallel Hindu rite in the Mauritius known as the Thaipusam Kavadi ritual. I would argue that this too should be considered as an etiological factor in these types of possession rites, a point I will return to below.¹⁶²¹

Kapadia's second conclusion also raises the important contrast in implicit and explicit beliefs systems regarding purity and impurity and the consequences of such beliefs, particularly in relation to possession. Kapadia speaks more on this aspect in another article, writing,

Significantly, the body symbolism of both groups is consistent with their religious ethos: the apparent self-control of the upper castes is displayed in their (claimed) bodily immunity to penetration and possession by external beings, while the opposite is true of the lower castes. These differences correspond with the attitudes of the two groups to ritual pollution and to emotional self-control. Thus, the lower castes saw their 'abandonment' as a surrendering of self to possession by God, but to the

¹⁶¹⁸ See BYT 2.46cd-102ab and Törzsök (2013:193-194 fn. 49)

¹⁶²¹ See Jegindø et al., "Pain and Sacrifice: Experience and Modulation of Pain in a Religious Piercing Ritual." *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 23, (2013): 171-187.

Chettiars and Brahmins this was dangerously close to 'mere' abandonment and 'mere' freedom from restraint. It was dangerously close to anarchy.¹⁶²²

This is in line with Janice Boddy's definition of possession, referred to earlier, which states that possession is “a broad term referring to an integration of spirit and matter, force, or power and corporeal reality, in a cosmos where the boundaries between an individual and her environment are acknowledged to be permeable, flexibly drawn, or at least negotiable.”¹⁶²³

As we have seen, South Asian notions of personhood are generally seen as permeable and fluid, in the same way *śakti* is said again and again throughout tantric texts to be "all-pervasive" (*sarva-vyāpī*). This is in line with Marriot's discussion of "coded substances" and its relation to concepts of "the person", which she writes is,

not thought in South Asia to be “individual,” that is, indivisible, bounded units, as they are in much of Western social and psychological theory as well as in common sense. Instead, it appears that persons are generally thought by South Asians to be “dividual” or divisible. To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They also must give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances - essences, residues, or other active influences - that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated. Persons engage in transfer of bodily substance-codes through parentage, through marriage, and through other kinds of inter-personal contacts.¹⁶²⁴

Making the connection between possession and Marriot's observance of "coded substances", Smith adds,

Dividual persons, entities, or even concepts transfer parts or essences of themselves, in whole or in part, willfully or by force, to other dividual persons, entities, or concepts...The components of the individual, including the mind, body, and physical and conceptual environments, are equally permeable; possession in all its different varieties expresses the collapse of their boundaries, or even of their substantial differences.¹⁶²⁵

¹⁶²² Kapadia (1996: 437-438)

¹⁶²³ Boddy (1994: 407)

¹⁶²⁴ McKim Marriot, “The Bifurcate Hindu Body Social.” *Man* 11.4 (1976): 594–595. See also Daniel E. Valentine, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

¹⁶²⁵ Smith (2006: 75)

This distinction in beliefs, as noted by Kapadia, was explicated earlier by Sanderson in his groundbreaking 1985 article "Purity and Power Among the Brahmins of Kashmir".¹⁶²⁶ According to him, the orthodox Brahmins entire claim to power depended on their self-control and creation of self-body boundaries through ritual (*samskāras*) so that "polluting" entities and substances could not enter into them. Sanderson writes,

This functional Brahmanhood entailed a life of exacting ritual and duty, which required the relentless avoidance of the forbidden and contaminant in all aspects of the person's existence: in his relations with his wife, in his food, drink, sleep and natural functions, in his dress, speech, gestures and demeanour, and in all his contacts, physical, visual and mental, with substances, places and with persons differentiated not only permanently by their castes but also at any time by degrees of purity determined by the same or similar criteria. The Brahman could maintain his privileged position at the summit of the hierarchy of nature only by conformity to his dharma... His greatest enemy was the spontaneity of the senses and his highest virtue immunity to emotion in unwavering self-control...Any relaxation of the inhibition and self-control that this conformity required was seen as opening up a chink in the armour of the integral self through which these ever alert and terrible powers of the excluded could enter and possess, distorting his identity and devouring his vital impurities, his physical essences...It will readily be recognised that the orthodox anthropologies were in themselves a defence against such forces, admitting as they did in the sphere of action no powers external to the individual's karma-causality. Possession, therefore, was doubly irrational: it obliterated the purity of self-control and contradicted the metaphysics of autonomy and responsibility.¹⁶²⁷

What is clear from these observations is that implicit and explicit purity/impurity distinctions and the resulting open vs closed transaction systems which they entail, can lead to great differences in experiences of personhood, identity, and embodiment. Based on Sanderson and Kapadia's claims, it appears Brahmin men who have sharp purity/impurity distinctions have a much more fixed identity and inflexible concept of self, and body - thus they engage in more "closed" system with the world around them in order to maintain their caste status and power. On the other hand, lower caste, or marginalized groups (women,

¹⁶²⁶ Sanderson (1985)

¹⁶²⁷ Sanderson (1985: 192-193; 200)

queer, children, etc.) have less concerns with Brahmanical purity codes and engage in more "open" transaction systems, resulting in a less fixed, more fluid, and dynamic sense of self, identity, and body - thus, making it easier to get possessed. On a cognitive level, a sharp purity-impurity distinction may cause more stability in one's self-body relationship, while a more blurred distinction could allow for a variety of self-body options, including the incorporation or identification of other selves (or sub-selves) or external entities (depending on their cosmological/ontological views).

This may also help to explain more clearly women's more empathetic nature (i.e., ToM) in relation to possession - because women have a more fluid identity, they are able to perceive minds (including supernatural) more easily. Additionally, they can more readily adopt and identify with these other minds and perceptions (feelings, emotions, views, etc.) - to be able to "walk in someone else's shoes", as they say. One could argue that children too, before and during adolescents, have a less fixed and more fluid notion of self - making them perfect vessels for identity displacement in rites such as *svasthāveśā*. I believe this to be an area worth researching in the future.

In contrast to marginalized groups, as we've seen, Brahmin males had to willfully "marginalize" themselves to experience possession, a point also substantiated in the tantric texts we explored. However, the goal for tantric practitioners (either Brahmin or non-Brahmin) was in direct opposition to the orthodox Brahmins concern for a strong fixed identity, free from outside polluting substances or entities. Tantric Brahmins instead cultivated non-dual states in order to transcend all distinctions (i.e., pure/impure) and invited the entrance of potentially dangerous possession entities (often understood as sub-selves), in order to absorb their power. Sanderson beautifully writes on this,

The conscientiousness essential to the preservation of purity and social esteem was to be expelled from his identity by the Tantric Brahman as impurity itself, the only impurity he was to recognise, a state of ignorant self-bondage through the illusion that purity and impurity, prohibitedness and enjoinedness, were objective qualities residing in things, persons, and actions... This inhibition, which preserved the path of purity and barred his entrance into the path of power, was to be obliterated through the experience of a violent, duality-devouring expansion of consciousness beyond the narrow confines of orthodox control into the domain of excluded possibilities, by gratifying with wine, meat and, through caste-free intercourse, with orgasm and its products the bliss-starved circle of goddesses that emanated in consciousness as his faculties of cognition and action. Worshipped in this lawless ecstasy they would converge into his consciousness, illumining his total autonomy, obliterating in the brilliance of a supramundane joy the petty, extrinsicist selfhood sanctified by orthodox society...It was precisely because these forces threatened the Hindu's "impotent purity" that they invited a visionary mysticism of fearless omnipotence, of unfettered super-agency through the controlled assimilation of their lawless power in occult manipulations of impurity.¹⁶²⁸

As seen in the many tantric texts we looked at, the techniques used to engender *āveśa* involved mimesis, transgressive and self-mortifying practices, and the cultivation of non-dual mental states through disrupting and deconstructing one's normal sense of agency in order to transcend implicit knowledge systems and transform one's consciousness, perceptions, awareness, and identity. One could argue similar processes are involved in contemporary possession rites such as Teyyam in which the nominal self is deconstructed and reconstituted as one's higher self or a divine entity which inhabits them. Let us now take a closer look at how tantric practice and training, and the underlying cognitive processes and mechanisms involved, could help engender such states.

LEARNING POSSESSION - "ABSORPTION TRAINING"

Up to now I have been discussing some of the potential interrelated factors and psychological dispositions which could lead to the capacity for possession - (1) implicit and

¹⁶²⁸ Sanderson (1985: 198-199)

explicit beliefs regarding the permeability and porousness of self and other entities (2) a more fluid sense of identity and self-body relationship, and finally, (3) trauma and/or marginalization (including self-induced) and associated dissociative states, which result in ruptures of self and identity. However, these are just a few out of many other possible factors involved, as these in themselves do not necessarily result in the possession experience - even if one seems to have a disposition for it. Rather, as Robert I. Levy, an American psychiatrist and anthropologist known for his cross-cultural study of emotions, states, “Two conditions are necessary for full possession to flourish: people who are psychologically disposed to dissociation, and a cultural environment that makes conventional use of possession episodes.”¹⁶²⁹ In other words, dispositions are only useful or activated when they work in concert with cultural or religious systems of belief, knowledge, and ritual - in our case, this would be the deity possession rites.

However, even when these two conditions have been seemingly met, it does not guarantee a possession state will occur. This was seen, for example, among the two women in the Pulluvan's *sarpam thullal* who were supposed to become possessed by serpent deities but failed to do so. A more famous example is seen with the most recent Gadong Oracle, Tenzin Wangdak, one of the four State sanctioned Oracles of Tibet, who sadly passed away in 2015. This office has been traditionally held by laymen who belong to a lineage of oracles associated with the Gadong monastery. What was unique about Tenzin Wangdak was that he was able to get into trance, though was never able to get fully possessed by the deity (Shinjachen) and thus never spoke through the medium, despite the fact he belonged to a

¹⁶²⁹ Robert I. Levy, “Gods, Spirits, and History: A Theoretical Perspective.” In *Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind*, eds. Mageo and Howard, (1996: 19).

long lineage of oracles.¹⁶³⁰ Tibetan Buddhist interpretations would claim that Wangdak must have had some "impurities", though other factors were surely also involved. A parallel example is given by Hageman and Krippner with their research on Brazilian mediums. One of their subjects stated that "he must constantly work on himself to obtain clearer, purer information from the *orixás* [deities]",¹⁶³¹ because it is easy for one's own biases, experiences, and fantasies to contaminate messages from the entities they embody. According to him, it is rare for one to get more than 25% of the deity's message through, unless one deeply engages in the "work" of meditation and prayer.

One important factor that may be at work in "learning" possession is an individual's capacity for absorption, which is believed to be associated with a variety of dissociative and trance phenomena. Tanya Luhrmann, who has done a number of studies related to the "Art of Hearing God" among Evangelical Christians, states that absorption is best understood as a mental capacity and cognitive process associated with attention regulation and which is common to trance, hypnosis, dissociation and a variety of spiritual experiences, including spirit possession.¹⁶³² Absorption refers more specifically to the narrowing or concentration of attention and cognitive resources, resulting in the individual's loss of self-awareness and/or one's external environment.¹⁶³³ Absorption often involves engagement with external objects or events (films, books, music etc.), as well as internally generated thoughts, images, or imaginative content (e.g. daydreaming, fantasy, etc.).¹⁶³⁴ These absorption/dissociative states

¹⁶³⁰ See David Cherniack, *The Oracle: Reflections on Self DVD*, (Venice, CA: Distributed by UFOTV, 2010) for more on the Gadong and a video of his trance.

¹⁶³¹ Hageman et al (2010: 95)

¹⁶³² See Luhrmann (2006) and Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

¹⁶³³ Luhrmann, Nussbaum and Thisted (2010)

¹⁶³⁴ Tellegen & Atkinson, "Openness to Absorbing and Self-altering Experiences ("Absorption"), A Trait Related to Hypnotic Susceptibility." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, vol. 83, (1974): 268-277.

happens because the individual becomes hyper-focused on internal states rather than the external world.¹⁶³⁵ Absorption is also key factor in Wulff's definition of trance, which he states is, "a state of profound absorption or lack of mental content during which the individual is experientially cut off from the outside world; it is frequently accompanied by vocal and motor automatisms, lack of responsive awareness, and amnesia".¹⁶³⁶

Luhrmann and other scholars have pointed out that in various cultural contexts absorption, like dissociation, is non-pathological and even sought out and trained.¹⁶³⁷ She believes certain religious practices, such as meditation, visualization, and prayer, are ultimately attentional skills which train this capacity for absorption. Although all humans have this capacity, some are predisposed or have a natural talent for it. She argues that those who train to develop and master such skills are more likely to have powerful spiritual and sensory experiences such as hearing voices, visions, feeling the presence of God, or even possession.¹⁶³⁸ In cultures where such states are valued, people may implicitly learn these absorption skills (such as possession) by observation and mimesis at an early age, and learn how to strengthen these skills over time through religious practice. Thus, training absorption coupled with cultural knowledge and practices that invite altered experiences of agency, may lead to increased opportunities to experience dissociative phenomena like trance and possession. Alternatively, Seligman hypothesizes that individuals who intuitively use dissociative states for self-preservation when dealing with stress or trauma may also

¹⁶³⁵ Luhrmann, Nussbaum and Thisted (2010)

¹⁶³⁶ David M. Wulff, "Mystical Experience". In *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*, eds. Cardeña, Lynn, and Krippner, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2000: 399)

¹⁶³⁷ See Luhrmann (2006), Seligman (2005, 2005b, 2014); Seligman & Kirmayer (2008), Halloy and Naumescu (2012)

¹⁶³⁸ See Luhrmann (2006; 2011, 2012, 2012a, 2020), and Luhrmann, et al. (2010; 2012; 2015)

unconsciously learn absorption over time.¹⁶³⁹ Such coping mechanisms may also lead a person to have a high propensity for other dissociative states such as possession.¹⁶⁴⁰

Seligman further mentions how individuals who suffer traumatic experiences during childhood also tend to be more highly hypnotizable, suggesting that traumatic experiences may foster the development or expression of dissociative ability.¹⁶⁴¹ Hypnotic phenomena have been shown to engage similar brain processes as dissociation, leading Ann Taves and others to believe that possession might be subsumed under the heading "auto-suggestive phenomena".¹⁶⁴² Recently a study by Deely et al. claims to have modeled dissociative symptoms and possession phenomena in fMRI readings using suggestion among certain highly hypnotizable subjects [HHS]. Like Taves, Deely and Oakley believe that possession and other dissociative phenomena (including DID) "result from suggestions or autosuggestions of the type measured by hypnotic suggestibility scales".¹⁶⁴³ They note that suggestive processes can take a range of forms, including internally or externally generated verbal processes using hypnosis, as well as non-verbal external or internal cues, of the sort seen in religious possession rites. Their work illustrates how cognition, brain function, and experience can be influenced by suggestive processes (including beliefs, expectancies, and attributions), leading them to "caution against generalization about single cognitive processes or brain systems underpinning complex symptomatology and alterations in experience."¹⁶⁴⁴

¹⁶³⁹ Seligman & Kirmayer (2008 50-51)

¹⁶⁴⁰ Luhrmann et al (2010); Seligman & Kirmayer (2008)

¹⁶⁴¹ Seligman & Kirmayer (2008); see also Zachariae et al., "Autonomic and Psychological Responses to an Acute Psychological Stressor and Relaxation: The Influence of Hypnotizability and absorption." *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 48.4, (2000): 388–403.

¹⁶⁴² See Bell et al. (2011) and Ann Taves, "Where (Fragmented) Selves Meet Cultures", *Culture and Religion*. 7.2, (2006): 123-138.

¹⁶⁴³ Deeley et al. "Modeling Psychiatric and Cultural Possession Phenomena with Suggestion and Fmri." *Cortex*. 53.1 (2014): 107-119.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Deeley et al. (2014: 107-108)

To this Seligman and her colleagues add insights from performance theory and cognitive science, concluding that possession experiences are created through continuous “bio-looping” processes involving patterns of emotion, cognition, and attention which are in complex interactions with one another and the environment. These are furthermore guided by assumptions, attributions, expectations and other cultural scripts between oneself and the target audience, which help to shape the possession experience.¹⁶⁴⁵ As we saw with the example of Teyyam, dancer-mediums costume themselves gradually in stages, mentally preparing themselves to take on the identity of the deity they will embody, which is simultaneously signaled to the observing audience - resulting in what Ishi calls a transformation of the medium's "social body" and alterations in one's bodily senses. Ishi writes,

He [the medium] transforms his perspective by mimicking other performers, altering his social body, communicating with ritual participants, and being possessed by the deity. It is through these complex and generative processes of perspective transformation that a person comes to acquire the art of impersonating the deity: that is, the art of entering into the other, and at the same time letting the other enter into oneself, without totally losing one's self.¹⁶⁴⁶

I would suggest that the possession practices described in the Tantras and those I witnessed during my fieldwork involve similar processes to Seligman and Luhrmann's respective research - in all three cases, practitioners purposely induce and cultivate non-pathological dissociative states, in concert with absorption, in order to trigger, shape, and eventually master spiritual experiences like possession.¹⁶⁴⁷ Luhrmann breaks down the processes involved in the shaping of these sorts of experiences among Evangelical Christians

¹⁶⁴⁵ See Seligman & Kirmayer (2008: 49–50) and Seligman (2014).

¹⁶⁴⁶ Miho Ishii, "Playing with Perspectives: Spirit Possession, Mimesis, and Permeability in the Buuta Ritual in South India". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 19.4, (2013): 807.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Luhrmann (2010)

into three - “interpretation”, “practice”, and “proclivity”. Interpretation refers to socially taught and culturally variable cognitive categories that identify the presence of God among Evangelicals – believers must acquire the cognitive and linguistic knowledge to interpret the presence of God, often overriding implicit belief systems. Practice, she states, refers to the subjective and psychological consequences of religious training - in her case, learning to pray correctly contributed to the way divinity was identified and then experienced among her subjects. Finally, proclivity refers to dispositions or "talent" for absorption and a willingness to respond to the prescribed practices - the most talented being able to achieve the desired state, in this case the ability to hear the words of God. As we will see, each of these processes can be similarly observed in Seligman's work among Candomblé mediums as well as my own work on tantric possession.

Additionally, Seligman views possession practices as a healing modality among the mediums she studied, which contributed to the construction, deconstruction, and eventual repair of selves. One could argue that the possession state, rather than being "dissociative" could instead be seen as "integrative", serving as a therapeutic mechanism greatly benefiting the mediums she worked with. Through religious learning and participation in deity possession rites, mediums were able to transform their individual identity into the identity of the deity, which she states was accomplished through processes of "identity diffusion," and its subsequent "reconstitution".¹⁶⁴⁸ Identity diffusion acts to disrupt an individual's previous sense of self, which is done through changing one's implicit beliefs via religious praxis and rites of initiation. Initiations traditionally involve extended periods of seclusion within the Candomblé compound where individuals learn from leaders, and other mediums, proper

¹⁶⁴⁸ See Seligman (2010)

ritual behavior, esoteric teachings, prescriptive vows, healing practices, as well as songs, prayers, myths, and dances related to the Yoruban deities they invoke. In Luhrmann's terms, this would engage both the "interpretation" and "practice" processes as seen among her own Evangelical subjects.

Yoruban and Tantric cosmology are, in fact, strikingly similar - both believe in a variety of deities (*orishas* or *orixás*) and lesser spirits, all of which are intertwined with the spiritual power known as *àṣẹ* (spelled *axé* in Brazil), which pervades and animates the universe - a concept akin to *śakti* in the Tantric traditions.¹⁶⁴⁹ As in Tantra, this divine energy and power of *àṣẹ* can be accessed by humans through ritual practice, moral actions, acquisition of sacred knowledge and their active engagement with the *orishas* and other spirits of the Candomblé pantheon. Additionally, *àṣẹ* can be accessed through possession by these spirits and *orishas*, who are able to enter the material plane by temporarily occupying the bodies of humans and acting through them. Yoruba cosmology also discusses the concept of an individual's *ori*, "the owner of the head", which parallels some tantric understandings of one's true nature being the deity itself. On this Seligman writes,

This sense of "ownership" underscores the belief that the personality of a particular Orixá is part of the true nature of the individual whose head it owns. Failure to acknowledge one's *Orixá's* is understood to lead to disturbances in life, trouble with interpersonal relationships or jobs, and even health problems.¹⁶⁵⁰

One's *ori* is identified during initiation by consulting with spiritual leaders and ritual specialists through divination. This identification is significant for practitioners to transform

¹⁶⁴⁹ See Krippner (2008), Seligman (2014), Lawal et al, *Understanding Yoruba life and culture*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), and Yekeen Ajibádé Ajàyi, *Yorùbá cosmology and aesthetics: the cultural confluence of divination, incantation and drum-talking*, (Ìlṣorin, Nigeria: University of Ìlṣorin, 2009), and Gardner, *Incorporating Divine Presence, Orchestrating Medical Worlds: Cultivating Corporeal Capacities of Therapeutic Power and Transcendence in Ifá Everyday Practice*, (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley: 2010) for more on Yoruban cosmology.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Seligman (2005a: 305-306)

prior implicit beliefs and to realign their worldview with Yoruban cosmology. Seligman writes that it is

...is an active component of a system that encourages individuals to accept that some fundamental part of their self (the Orixa' part) is not under their direct control. Yet at the same time this system encourages each individual to know and respect this element of self, and in this way to exercise a certain amount of control over it... the Candomblé belief system positions the Orixa' aspect of self as simultaneously me and not me, self and not-self.¹⁶⁵¹

The practitioner's identification with their Ori is part of the initiates remaking of self, which includes practices that shape and contextualize the embodied aspects of the self. Each of the Orishas have very specific qualities and features, and Seligman has detailed how initiates are trained to gradually alter their own personalities and actions to match the culturally imagined personalities of the possessing deities. This includes wearing specific colors associated with the deity, adopting personality traits such as "tranquility" or "fierceness", learning how to walk/dance/talk like the deity, and following various vows and taboos of the deity, such as not eating salt or sugar.¹⁶⁵² Thus, the entire person's identity and body is reconstituted as the deity, leading to a profound shift in perception, awareness, and agency. In this way possession could potentially lead to a more integrated self - or in Candomblé terminology, an integration of one's self and one's divine self (*ori*) associated with the deity (*orisha*).

In many ways, Seligman's work correlates with my own initial analysis of South Asia tantric possession practices in both the tantric texts and contemporary traditions. In terms of identity diffusion, a tantric practitioner must also learn and implicitly believe in Tantric cosmology, which emphasizes meditation on and experiences of *śakti* (e.g., *śaktisamarasa*,

¹⁶⁵¹ Seligman (2005a: 304)

¹⁶⁵² Seligman (2005a: 311)

samāveśa, śaktipāta) as the all-pervasive energy and its association with one's true nature (i.e., Bhairava/Śiva or the Goddess). As we saw in the MVT, this would also involve learning about the various levels (*tattvas*) of self, the seven different perceptual agents which adepts meditate upon and learn to identify with on their ascent through their "higher selves". All of these would correlate with Luhmann's processes of "interpretation" and "practice". We also saw the use of transgressive and self-mortifying acts, resulting in altered states of consciousness which aim to integrate one's nominal self with one's divine or absolute Self. In many ways, the entire program of tantric possession rites was aimed at first disrupting one's normal sense of agency by cultivating non-dual states in which the possessor and possessed are recognized to be one and the same. Let us again return to Alexis Sanderson's description of tantric possession rites based on some of the Śaiva Tantras we looked at previously - here the process of deconstruction and reintegration is made explicit:

Daily recreating the *maṇḍala* in mental worship, he summons from within his consciousness the deities that enthrone the *maṇḍala*, projecting them on to a smooth mirror-like surface to contemplate them there as the reflection of his internal Agamic identity. He aspires to know himself only as this nexus of deities... Through the internal monologue of his ritual he is to think away the "I" of his identity in the world of mutually exclusive subjects and objects, projecting on to the mirror of the *maṇḍala* the vision of a superself whose form contains not only this "I" but all "I's" and the world of object and values by which these "I's" believe themselves to be conditioned...The process...is to be understood by the worshipper as the destruction of his public or physical individuality...So doing he opens the way for his identification with the deity through the mantras that follow: his ritual has removed the personality which impedes this "possession".¹⁶⁵³

As clearly seen from Sanderson's description, possession can only take place after the practitioner has first deconstructed his own identity and individuality through meditation and ritual - aspiring to know himself only as a "nexus of deities" and constructing a "superself" who is the "I" of all "I's". The rites aim is to trigger a non-dual experience to disrupt the

¹⁶⁵³ Sanderson (1986: 169-170)

nominal self, which "opens" the practitioner to higher states of consciousness, including possession and identification with the deity - in a state of, what I would call, "embodied non-duality". Sthaneshwar Timalisina, whose recent work incorporates Tantric studies with CSR, similarly describes how various Tantric rites serve to disrupt the conditioned mind from pre-existing suppositions and how these practices reshape and reprogram their mental states.¹⁶⁵⁴ The primary role of tantric possession therefore is ego-destruction through achieving states of non-duality, which allows one to completely alter and transform their subjective identity. The importance of achieving this state of "embodied non-duality" is quite important in certain tantric schools - as we saw the capacity for possession became a pre-requisite in many of these schools; if one did not get possessed during initiation, one was no longer allowed to proceed on this spiritual path.

The Candomblé practice of mimicking and adopting the personality and traits of their particular Orishas, is paralleled by the various *vratas* (vows) performed by early Śaiva Pāśupatas and Lākulas, and later texts like the BYT, SYM, and the YSP, in which adepts take on the qualities, perceptions, mannerisms, and identities of a variety of beings (some marginalized) - e.g., a beggar, a child, a mad-man, or various spirits, gods, and goddesses. In each of these *vratas*, it is clear practitioners strive to disrupt and transcend their nominal egoic self and reconstruct new selves and identities based on religious soteriology and cultural scripts. As seen in each of these texts, the end result of these practices allows one to get possessed by the deity.

In practices like Teyyam, similar concepts are involved as the mediums gradually costumes themselves, meditating on the identity and emotions of the divinities they will

¹⁶⁵⁴ See Sthaneshwar Timalisina, "Reconstructing the Tantric Body: Elements of the Symbolism of Body in the Monistic Kaula and Trika Tantric Traditions", *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 16.1 (2012): 57-91.

embody, and imbuing themselves with "territorial *śakti*" through the performance of various rites. In Teyyam rites, possession is further induced by the ritual environment - the rhythms of the trance-inducing drums, the powdered *kaḷams* which invoke the deities, the blood sacrifice, and the singing of the stories of the deity, reminding the performer of their true identity as the deity. The rite culminates in the act of mirror-gazing, a literal act of recognizing one's true nature as being the same as the deity. Through this, one exchanges one's normal perception and identity with the deity, who becomes embodied in the mind, speech, and body of the practitioner.

C. CONCLUSION

As we have seen from the studies reviewed above, defining possession and its etiologies is complex and requires substantial nuance and consideration of many interrelated processes. Part of the difficulty of studying possession across cultures has to do with terminology. Although anthropologists have long recognized that "spirit possession" is a Western cultural concept attached to certain locally identified markers or symptoms,¹⁶⁵⁵ we continue to discuss such phenomena across cultures under this heading despite differences in emic explanatory models and discourses. Although I have been using the term "possession" throughout this paper, it is a term overladen with cultural, philosophical, and ontological biases and prejudices that do not take into consideration the various perspectives found in South Asia. Categorizing complex phenomena like *āveśa* simply as "spirit possession" obscures differences in the range and meaning of these culturally specific concepts.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Halperin (1996).

Part of my goal with this paper was to supplement Frederick Smith's own work in order to make clear the variety of discourses and understandings surrounding this term, particularly within the Tantric traditions. With the data I've presented so far, I must agree with Malik's criticism of the term possession and his call to create a shift in scholarly discourse away from biased categories such as "spirit possession", to a more nuanced and accurate terminology. To this end, Malik proposes to use the category of "embodied consciousness", which I believe is closer to emic understandings of *āveśa*.¹⁶⁵⁶ As Malik points out in his own fieldwork on tantric-influenced possession rites in Uttarakhand, involving the deity Goludev ("God of Justice"),¹⁶⁵⁷ spirit possession is usually conceived as being dualist in nature (i.e., an external deity entering a body). However, as seen in his work, and my own here, this is not always the case, particularly when discussing Tantric possession or *āveśa/samāveśa*. Malik believes that the Indian term *avatar* (Sanskrit: *avatāra*) meaning "incarnation, "descent", "embodiment", more accurately describes Tantric views of embodiment. He describes how the dancer-mediums he studied were like avatars of the god Goludev, who is in turn an avatar of Bhairava, who himself is an aspect of the Absolute Śiva identified with pure consciousness. Malik writes,

Consciousness, however, does not exist in a disembodied form or in the dual (Cartesian) world of Mind and Body. As the notion of the avatar demonstrates, consciousness exists primarily in a series of embodiments: Shiva is embodied in Bhairava who is embodied in Goludev who furthermore is embodied in the *nacnevala* or dancer.¹⁶⁵⁸

In this context, and in contrast to the term "possession", Malik concludes,

Embodiment on the other hand emphasizes "subjectivity as a self-world relation rather than as consciousness apart from the world... (in this context) the lived body is

¹⁶⁵⁶ Malik (2009)

¹⁶⁵⁷ See Malik (2009) and Malik, *Tales of Justice and Rituals of Divine Embodiment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

¹⁶⁵⁸ Malik (2009: 91)

this relation ... that crosses subjectivity and objectivity" (Morley 2001: 75). The dancer...by embodying God represents the "relation between subject and world that is prior to their categorical division." (Morley 2001: 74). The dancer...is an embodiment of Bhairava or Shiva who is, on a fundamental level, pure consciousness. Dance, is...the critical mode of embodiment that pure consciousness chooses in order to know itself fully. And it is through this form of doing with the body therefore that self-knowledge and with it the possibility of healing and administering justice arises.¹⁶⁵⁹

In regard to possession etiologies, I have given data primarily from new research and from a variety of disciplinary fields in order to give a comprehensive set of tools and concepts to consider when discussing possession phenomena, particularly across cultures. I have endeavored to develop a lexicon of what possession is in relationship to biological functions, cultural scripts, and psychopathology. Although this is just a start, I believe cross cultural and comparative studies of possession (or more accurately, "embodied consciousness") have much to offer and I believe recent work by scholars such as Seligman, Luhrmann, Halloy and Namescu is helping to lay down such a foundation and framework - again by starting with the notion of possession being an embodied phenomenon. As stated, attention must be placed on the bio-psychological and cognitive underpinnings of such phenomena and how it interacts with culture and societal discourses - this means exploring the conceptual, emotional, perceptual, motor, and interactional dimensions of the processes that lead to possession and then using these as a basis of comparison across cultures. Using such a framework, one could potentially catalog, analyze, and compare a variety of experiences in traditions such as Teyyam, Candomblé, and New Age channelers in the United States.

From the data presented, I can summarize several key points and factors which emerge when researching possession experiences, which I hope to study more about in the

¹⁶⁵⁹ Malik (2009: 92)

future: (1) Cultural assumptions, attributions, implicit and explicit knowledge systems, and creative religious expression play a cognitive role in the possession experience both in cases where it is pathological or benign; (2) Psychological states such as dissociation, absorption and hypnosis are related to and help shape and inform the possession experience; (3) Various cultures and religions have learned methods of inducing and controlling possession experiences; (4) In various cross-cultural possession traditions, a key factor to inducing possession involves cultivating "non-dual" or transcendent mental states which serve to disrupt/deconstruct one's personal identity and allowing for its reconstruction and integration with one's higher self or as culturally imagined entities; (5) The role of trauma and embodied marginalization on identity and possession, and its importance in creating the capacity for spiritually productive dissociative (or integrative) states such as possession.

Finally, and in relation to this last point, taking up the role of a medium or oracle seems to be of great benefit for the practitioner, most of whom have experienced some form of trauma and marginalization. Data from Brazil and S. Asia has shown that the training and practices these mediums undergo deeply transforms their being and most go on to lead healthy lives as important and respected members of their society. The healing capacity of possession practices for repairing selves and stabilizing self-body relationships, and the pathways people took to get there, is something worth studying and exploring more - particularly for those in the psychological and psychiatric sciences. As we've seen, both Brazil and South Asia have traditional systems of knowledge which allow people to embrace dissociative experiences as integrative and spiritually productive. In cultures where a positive framework of possession does not exist, the possession experience may be interpreted very differently and have very different results, often becoming a frightening idiom of distress. In

North America, for example, the incorporation of alternate agencies is more likely to be understood as a defragmentation of one's own self or "unconscious" conflicts, often leading to pathological diagnoses such as DID, schizophrenia, or Multiple Personality Disorder. It is possible, therefore, that culturally recognized mediums may represent a group who have successfully incorporated various anomalous experiences (discontinuities in self, hearing voices, visions, possession, etc.) into their own lives in a productive way and allowing them to serve vital functions within their communities. Their pathway to mediumship, from fragmentation to integration, is important to study and these cultural systems of knowledge and practice may provide practical benefits and healing to individuals and their communities, as well as provide alternative models for understanding such phenomena. It is possible, in my mind, that some in our culture classified as "mad" or "insane" or "schizophrenic" and who are now homeless or institutionalized, may have the potential to become whole again and even become important spiritual leaders and advisors for their communities.¹⁶⁶⁰

¹⁶⁶⁰ See Castillo (2003) and Grof and Grof (2017) who seem to have similar views and have written more on these ideas.

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