

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

Transformations in the Art of Love: Kamakala Practices in Hindu Tantric and Kaula Traditions

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6c67r7tq>

Journal

History of Religions, 38(2)

Author

white, david gordon

Publication Date

1998-11-01

Peer reviewed

Transformations in the Art of Love: Kamakala Practices in Hindu Tantric and Kaula Traditions



David Gordon White

History of Religions, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Nov., 1998), 172-198.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-2710%28199811%2938%3A2%3C172%3ATITAOL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>

History of Religions is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucpress.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

David Gordon White

TRANSFORMATIONS
IN THE ART OF
LOVE: KĀMAKALĀ
PRACTICES IN HINDU
TANTRIC AND KAULA
TRADITIONS

This article focuses on the ritual “practice” of the *kāmakalā* diagram, as it appears in a number of different sectarian contexts within the “high Hindu Tantra” of the “Later Trika” and Śrīvidyā (“Auspicious Wisdom”) traditions, as well as that of the earlier—as I argue—Kaula. I do this by effecting a sort of “archaeology” of the Śrīvidyā practice of the *kāmakalā*, which I take to be the most inclusive of all the forms that practice has taken. This I do by first describing the multilayered imagery of the *kāmakalā* in Śrīvidyā practice and then by indicating the historical and sectarian sources of that imagery. I conclude by offering a number of historical and theoretical remarks regarding what I believe to have been the primal meaning of this term and the original context of its ritual practice.

“Tantra” is generally used as a blanket term by Indian practitioners and nonpractitioners as well as by Western scholars to designate a body of theory and practice that has differed in important ways from the Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain mainstream, since about the sixth century C.E. This is not how I will employ this term, however. Instead, I will take the term “Tantra” to designate the *final* phase of a historical “semanticization” and “cosmeticization” of an earlier body of theory and practice.¹ That earlier body of theory and practice often referred to itself as the

¹ See Alexis Sanderson, “Meaning in Tantric Ritual,” in *Essais sur le rituel*, vol. 3, Colloque du Centenaire de la Section des Sciences Religieuses de l’Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, ed. Anne-Marie Blondeau and Kristofer Schipper (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1995), p. 79. It may be that these developments were contemporaneous with one another, with the division between Tantra and Kaula operating on a regional level (the Kaula being based in the central Vindhya belt, with Tantra being concentrated in the north and south), rather than over time. I thank Matthew Kapstein for this insight.

Clan Practice (*kula-dharma*), Clan-Generated (*kaula*), or the Kaula Gnosis (*kaula-jñāna*). The evolution of what is generally called “Tantra” was in fact a three-stage process. In the beginning was the Kula, the Clan, persons whose cremation ground-based practice centered on the “terrible” worship of Śiva-Bhairava together with his consort, the Goddess (Aghoreśvarī, Umā, Caṇḍī, Śakti, etc.), and clans of Yoginīs and/or the worship of the goddess Kālī, independent of a male consort but surrounded by circles of female deities. The Kula, whose most notorious adherents were the Kāpālikas, was reformed, in about the ninth century, perhaps by a figure named Macchanda-Matsyendra: for this reason, Matsyendra is generally taken to have been the founder of the Kaula. This reformation involved the removal, on the one hand, of certain of the mortuary aspects of the Kula in favor of a greater emphasis on the erotic element of the Yoginī cults and, on the other, a reconfiguration of the earlier clan system into the new Clan-Generated system of the Kaula.² Classified under the Kaula rubric are the Siddha Kaula, Yogini Kaula, and Krama cults of Kālī, as well as the “Early Trika” cults of the goddesses Parā, Aparā, and Parāparā.

It is among the Kashmiri theoreticians of this last group—and here I am referring specifically to Abhinavagupta and his disciple Kṣemarāja—that “Tantra” in the sense I will use it arose. Here, in the socioreligious context of eleventh-century Kashmir, these reformers of the Trika sought to win the hearts and minds of the populace by presenting a whitewashed version of Kaula theory and practice for public consumption, while continuing to observe the authentic Kaula practices in secret, among the initiated. This eleventh-century development was Tantra,³ a religion of dissimulation⁴ and of the progressive refinement of antinomian practice into a gnoseological system grounded in the aesthetics of vision and audition. This tendency culminates in the twelfth-to-thirteenth-century Śrīvidyā. In order to avoid confusion, I will refer to these last and most sophisticated and scholasticizing developments as “high Hindu Tantra,” in contradistinction to the less refined and sublimated Kaula practices. In this perspective, I should also indicate that most of the charges leveled against “Tantra” since the Victorian age have in fact been condemnations of Kaula practice.

² Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Tradition,” in *The World's Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), pp. 669–79.

³ This picture is somewhat clouded by sectarian terminology: the postreformation Krama becomes the Krama Kaula; and the postreformation Trika, the Trika Kaula. The third “tantric” Kaula clan was that of the Kaula cult of Kubjikā; a new and highly semanticized form of Tantra called itself the Śrīvidyā Kaula.

⁴ Summarized in the aphorism “privately a Śākta, outwardly a Śaiva, among people a Vaiṣṇava; bearing various outward appearances, the Kaulas spread over the earth” (*Yonitantra* 4.20, in J. A. Schoterman, ed. and introduction, *The Yonitantra* [Delhi: Manohar, 1980]).

Within the parameters of these medieval traditions, the ultimate goal or referent of ritual practice (as opposed to the more immediate goals of tantric ritual technology, which involve the pursuit of power and pleasure in the world) is to embody the divine in the world and, more specifically, within the corporate body of the tantric clan, which is reproduced within the microcosm of the yogic or subtle body of every one of its members. Both Kaula and tantric rituals enable the practitioner (generally male) to tap into the flow of divine energy that animates both the world and his clan or lineage and to channel that flow into the crucible of his own bodily microcosm. It allows him to encapsulate the divine for internal use, to capture its boundless energy and being within a single “drop” that, absorbed into the microcosm, transforms it into a divine body. Many if not most of the sectarian differences within these allied traditions arise from the particular means these groups employ to signify the divine within the human microcosm. At one extreme, that of Kaula practice, the means or medium of identification is often sexual; at the other, that precisely of Śrīvidyā practice, it is through quietistic graphic, diagrammatic, or acoustic meditation techniques that the identification is made. Quite significantly, it is the image of a drop (*bindu*) that recurs, across the entire gamut of tantric theory and practice, as that form which encapsulates the being, energy, and pure consciousness of the divine; and so it is that we encounter a multiplicity of references to drops of fluid, drops of light, drops of sound, and drops of gnosis.

The theoreticians of post-tenth-century C.E. high Hindu Tantra (i.e., the later Trika and Śrīvidyā traditions)⁵ were especially innovative in their integration of aesthetic and linguistic theory into their reinterpretation of earlier theory and practice. As such, the acoustic and photic registers lie at the forefront of their metaphysical systems, according to which the absolute godhead, which is effulgent pure consciousness, communicates itself to the world and especially to the human microcosm as a stream or wave of phosphorescent light and as a “garland” of the vibrating phonemes of the Sanskrit language. And, because the universe is brought into being by a divine outpouring of light and sound, the tantric practitioner may return to and identify himself with this pure consciousness by meditatively recondensing those same photons of light and phonemes of sound into their higher principles.

This is, in the main, a gnoseological process, in which knowing takes primacy over doing. In fact, as Alexis Sanderson has argued, one may see in the high Hindu Tantra of the later Trika and Śrīvidyā the end of ritual: “Since [the] Impurity [that is the sole impediment to liberation] has been dematerialized, ritual must work on ignorance itself; and to do

⁵ For a brief history, see Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism: Trika Śaivism,” and “Śaivism: Śaivism in Kashmir,” both in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 13:15–17.

this it must be a kind of knowing.”⁶ In these contexts, the ritual or practical component of the *kāmakalā* becomes abstracted into a program of meditation whose goal is a nondiscursive realization of the enlightened nondual consciousness that had theretofore been one’s object of knowledge. Through the meditative practice of *mantras*—phonematic, acoustic manifestations of the Absolute—and of *maṇḍalas* or *yantras*—graphic, visual representations of the same—the consciousness of the practitioner is uplifted and transformed to gradually become God-consciousness. But what is the nature of the “practice” involved here? It is reduced to knowing as the greatest Śrīvidyā work on the *kāmakalā*, aptly entitled *Kāmakalā-vilāsa* (KKV; “The Love-Play of the Particle of Desire”),⁷ makes clear (verse 8): “Now this is the *Vidyā* of *Kāma-kalā*, which deals with the sequence of the *Cakras* [the nine triangles of the Śrīcakra] of the *Devī*. He by whom this is known becomes liberated and *Mahātripura-sundarī* Herself.”

Yet, while the acoustic and the photic, phosphorescing drops of sound, lay at the forefront of post-tenth-century Hindu tantric practice, there was a substratum that persisted from an earlier tradition (or that was borrowed from a contemporary but peripheral tradition), a substratum that was neither acoustic nor photic but, rather, *fluid*, with the fluid in question being sexual fluid. In these earlier or peripheral traditions, it was via a sexually transmitted stream or flow of sexual fluids that the practitioner tapped into the source of that stream, the male Śiva, who has been represented iconographically, since at least the second century B.C.E., as a phallic image, a *liṅgam*. Śiva does not, however, stand alone in this flow of sexual fluids. Here, his self-manifestation is effected through his female hypostasis, the Goddess, whose own sexual fluid carries his divine germ plasm through the lineages or transmissions of the tantric clans, clans in which human females called *Yoginīs*, identified with the Goddess herself, play a crucial role. In the earlier *Kula* practice, it was via this flow of the “clan fluid” (*kuladravya*) through the wombs of *Yoginīs* that the male practitioner was empowered to return to and identify himself with the Godhead.⁸ It was this, I would argue, that lay at the root of what has been so universally misunderstood as “tantric sex,” as well as of the original practice of the *kāmakalā*, the Art of Love. Having said

⁶ Sanderson, “Meaning in Tantric Ritual,” p. 46.

⁷ *Kāma-kalā-vilāsa* by *Punyānanda-nātha* with the *Commentary of Natānanda-nātha*, 3d ed., trans. with commentary by Arthur Avalon [Sir John Woodroffe] (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1961), p. 20; the French translation is by André Padoux in *Le cœur de la Yoginī, “Yoginīhrdaya” avec le commentaire “Dīpikā” d’Amṛtānanda*, Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fascicle 63 (Paris: DeBoccard, 1994), p. 111.

⁸ *Tantrāloka* (TĀ) 29.124b–125a (in *The Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta with the Commentary of Jayaratha*, ed. R. C. Dwivedi and Navajivan Rastogi, 8 vols. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987]; this is a reedition of the 1918–38 12-volume edition): *tan-mukhyacakram-uktam maheshinā yoginīvaktram// tatraiva sampradāyas-tasmāt-samprāpyate jñānam//*. For a brief discussion, see Alexis Sanderson, “Purity and Power among the Brahmins

this, I will nonetheless present a quite detailed account of the multi-leveled symbolism of the *kāmakalā*, as it is found in the primary Śrīvidyā sources, in order to demonstrate how the description itself of the diagram represents a semanticization or overcoding⁹ of the Kaula ritual on which it is based. Through it, I will return to that earlier ritual.

1. ŚRĪVIDYĀ PRACTICE OF THE KĀMAKALĀ

A word on the meanings and usages of this term is in order, composed as it is of two extremely common nouns, both of which are possessed of a wide semantic field. The simplest translation of the term might well be “The Art (*kalā*) of Love (*kāma*).” Two other important senses of the term *kalā* yield the additional meanings of “Love’s Lunar Digit” or “Love’s Sixteenth Portion.” Commenting on Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, Jayaratha (flourished ca. 1225–75) refers to the *kāmakalā* or *kāmatattva* as the “Particle (or Essence) of Love,” a gloss to which I will return.¹⁰

Nowhere in the history of these medieval traditions is the *kāmakalā* accorded greater importance than in Śrīvidyā, which, born in Kashmir in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, was “exported” shortly thereafter to south India, where it has remained the mainstream form of Śākta Tantra in Tamil Nadu, down to the present time. The *kāmakalā* is of central importance to Śrīvidyā because it is this diagram that grounds and animates the Śrīcakra or Śrīyantra, the primary diagrammatic representation of the godhead in that tradition. Thus verse 8 of the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa* of Puṇyānandanātha states that “the *Vidyā* of the *Kāmakalā* . . . deals with the sequence of the Cakras [of the Śrīcakra] of the Devī.”¹¹

The Śrīcakra is portrayed as a “drop” (*bindu*) located at the center of an elaborate diagram of nine nesting and interlocking triangles (called *cakras*), surrounded by two circles of lotus petals, with the whole encased within the standard “shivered square” (*bhūpura*) frame. The principal ritual act of Śrīvidyā is meditation on this cosmogram, which stands as an abstract depiction of the interactions of male and female forces that generate, animate, and ultimately cause to reimplode the phenomenal universe-as-consciousness. The practitioner’s meditative absorption into

of Kashmir,” in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 201–2 and notes.

⁹ Sanderson, “Meaning in Tantric Ritual,” p. 47. Semanticization is a term that was suggested to me by Sanderson in a letter dated July 6, 1992.

¹⁰ *TĀ* 3.146a–148a, with the commentary of Jayaratha.

¹¹ *KKV*, p. 20. See Natānanda-nātha’s commentary on verse 50 (Avalon, trans., p. 89): “Having in this manner described [and] explained the stages of the unfolding of the [Śrī-]Cakra [*Cakra-krama*], which is but a manifestation of *Kāmakalā* [*Kāma-kalā-vīlāsana-rūpa*] . . .” Simultaneously, the *kāmakalā*-syllable (*akṣara*) generates the Śrīcakra on an acoustic register (*Yoginīhrdaya* 1.24, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda, in Padoux, trans., pp. 121–22).

the heart of this diagram effects a gnoseological implosion of the manifest universe back into its nonmanifest divine source and of mundane human consciousness back into supermundane God-consciousness, the vanishing point at the heart of the diagram.

Or, to maintain the image of the drop, as the Śrīvidyā sources do, it may be useful to think of the entire diagram with its many “stress lines” of intersecting flows of energy and consciousness as a diffraction pattern of the wave action initiated when the energy of a single drop, falling into a square recipient of calm water, sends out a set of ripples that interfere constructively and destructively with one another. This, too, appears to be the image the Śrīvidyā theoreticians had in mind when they described the relationship of the nonmanifest male and manifest female aspects of the Godhead in terms of water and waves. In his commentary on *Yoginīhṛdaya* (YH) 1.55, the thirteenth-to-fourteenth-century Amṛtānanda (whose teacher, Puṇyānandanātha, was the author of the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*),¹² states that

The waves are the amassing, the multitude of the constituent parts of Kāmeśvara [Our Lord of Love] and Kāmeśvarī [Our Lady of Love]. It [the heart of the Śrīcakra] is surrounded by these waves and ripples as they heave [together]. . . . Here, the word “wave” [ūrmi] means that Parameśvara, who is light, is the ocean, and Kāmeśvarī, who is conscious awareness, is its flowing waters, with the waves being the multitude of energies into which they [Parameśvara and Kāmeśvarī] amass themselves. Just as waves arise on the [surface of the] ocean and are reabsorbed into it, so too the [Śrī]cakra, composed of the thirty-six *tattvas* . . . arises from and goes [back to Parameśvara].¹³

It is, then, a phosphorescing (*sphurad*) drop of sound (*bindu*) that animates this cosmogram and the universe and into which the mind of the person who meditates on it is resorbed. This drop is the point located at the center of the Śrīcakra, and the *kāmakalā* is a “close-up,” as it were, of this drop. When one zooms in on it meditatively, one sees that it is composed of three or four elements whose interplay constitutes the first moment of the transition, within the Godhead, from pure interiority to external manifestation, from the pure light of effulgent consciousness (*prakāśa*) to conscious awareness (*vimarśa*). I now give an account of these constituent elements of the *kāmakalā* and the means and ends of

¹² Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 50.

¹³ Commentary of Amṛtānanda on YH 1.55 (*Yoginīhṛdayam with Commentaries Dipikā of Amṛtānanda and Setubandha of Bhāskararāya*, ed. Gopinath Kaviraja [Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1979]). My translations from this text rely in no small part on the French translation of Padoux, *Coeur de la Yoginī*. This passage is found in Padoux, trans., p. 153.

meditation on them, as described in the Śrīvidyā and the broader Śākta literature.¹⁴

Referring to the *Jñānārṇava Tantra*, Dirk Jan Hoens translates *kāmakalā* as the “Divine Principle (*kalā*) [manifesting itself as] Desire (*kāma*).” In this context,

The triad of Śiva—Śakti—Nāda [“reverberation” is given] the name *Kāmakalā*. . . . Śiva and Śakti are called *Kāmeśvara* and *Kāmeśvarī*. The *kāmakalā* symbolizes the creative union of the primeval parental pair; a pulsating, cosmic atom with two nuclei graphically represented by a white and red dot which automatically produce a third point of gravity. This situation is often represented in graphical form as a triangle. This can be done in two ways: with the point upwards or downwards. . . . A final step is taken when this triad is enriched with a fourth element so as to constitute the graphic representation of the most potent parts of Devi’s mystical body (also in this context she is called *Kāmakalā* or *Tripurasundarī*): her face, two breasts (the white and red *bindus*) and womb [*yoni*]. They are represented by the letter Ī written in an older form akin to the Newarī [or Brahmi] sign, or by the *ha* (the “womb” is often called *hārdhakalā*, “the particle consisting of half the *ha*,” i.e. its lower part).¹⁵

In this *yantra* (fig. 1),¹⁶ the upturned triangle symbolizes the great tantric god Śiva, and the downturned triangle his consort Śakti, “Energy.” At the apex of the upturned Śiva triangle we find the Sanskrit grapheme A, which is also the sun and the mouth of the maiden who is the support for this meditation. This is also termed the “medial *bindu*.” The two *bindus* or points which form the *visarga* are the two base angles of this triangle: they are identified with fire and moon. They are also the breasts of the maiden. Located between these two and pointing downward is the apex of the downturned Śakti triangle, which is the *yoni* of the maiden and the locus of the grapheme HA. Taken together, Natānandanātha, the commentator of the *KKV* tells us, these constitute a phonematic rendering of the *kāmakalā* since *Kāma* is *Paramaśiva* (whose desire to create gives rise to the universe), pure effulgence, and the first phoneme, which is A; and *Kalā* signifies reflective consciousness and the last phoneme, which is HA.¹⁷

¹⁴ *KKV* 6–7; *YH* 1.24; 2.21; 3.163, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda. See *Gandharva Tantra* 30.48–64; *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra* 1.3.77–79, 87–95; *Jñānārṇava Tantra* 10.8; *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra* 5.16, with the commentary of Rāmeśvara; and *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* 166.

¹⁵ Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), pp. 95–96. Compare Padoux, trans., p. 387, n. 404, who identifies this as a Brahmi grapheme.

¹⁶ I generated this by using Adobe Photoshop 2.0. This diagram is based on Padoux’s rendition in *Coeur de la Yoginī*, p. 202, n. 99.

¹⁷ *KKV*, verse 25a, with the commentary of Natānanda-nātha, in Avalon, trans., p. 50: “In this way the united *Kāma* and *Kalā* (*kāmakalātmakā*) are the (three) letters whose own form is the three *Bindus*.” Commentary: “By *Kāma* is meant *Parama-śiva* who is pure

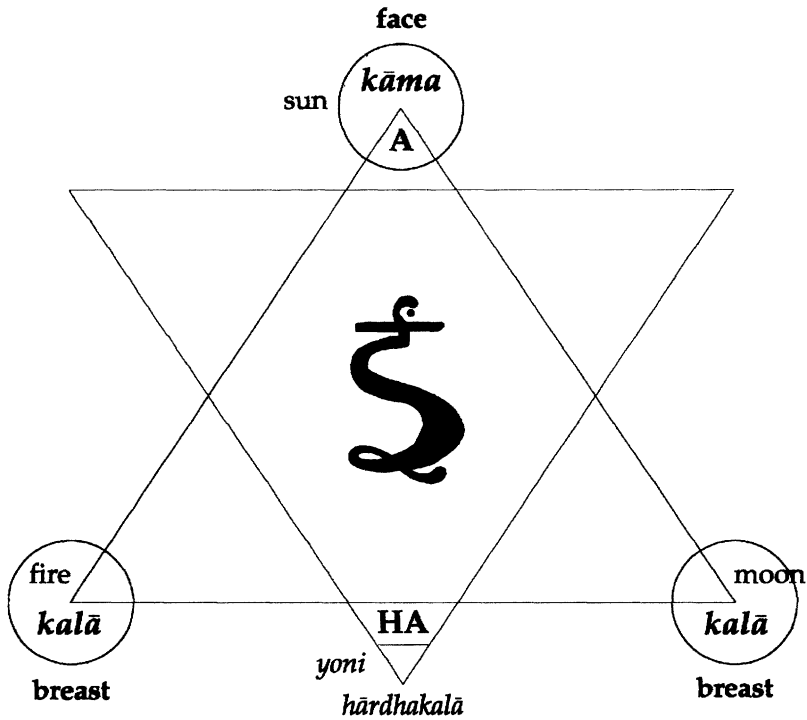


FIG. 1.—Kāmakaḷā according to *Yoginīhṛdaya* 2.21

Located in the heart of the hexagon formed by the two intersecting triangles is the *kuṇḍalinī*, the coiled serpent who here takes the form of the Sanskrit grapheme *Ī* (which, together with the *bindu*, becomes *ĪṂ*). However, *ĪṂ* is also the special grapheme of the supreme Śrīvidyā goddess, Tripurā [-sundarī]. Termed the *trikhaṇḍā* (“having three parts”), it is meditatively viewed as the body of the goddess, composed of head, breasts, and *yoni*.¹⁸ As such, it constitutes a redoubling of the symbolism of the intersecting Śiva and Śakti triangles. It is in the form of the *ĪṂ* grapheme, then, that energy, in the coiled form of the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent, dwells between the *bindu* and the *visarga*, that is, between the first and

Illumination and is the first letter which is A, and Kalā signifies Vimarśa the last of letters (*Ha*). See S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Śrī Cakra*, Sri Garib Dass Oriental Series, no. 87 (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1989), p. 65.

¹⁸ Gupta et al., p. 144. The *trikhaṇḍā* is also represented by the *mudrā*, the symbolic hand posture adopted while meditating on Tripurā: this “consists of denoting the number three by joining palms and keeping three of the five pairs of fingers in an upright position whilst bending the other two pairs” (*Nityotsava*, by Umānandanātha, ed. A. M. Sastri [Baroda: Gaekwad, 1923], p. 72, cited in *ibid.*, p. 144).

last phonemes and graphemes of the Sanskrit “garland of letters.” Lastly, the *kuṇḍalinī* is represented in the form of the serpentine grapheme $\bar{I}M$ because it is a commonplace of the Hindu yogic tradition that the female Śakti, which dwells in a tightly coiled form in the lower abdomen of humans, can be awakened through yogic practice to uncoil and rise upward, along the spinal column, to the cranial vault. Here then, the grapheme $\bar{I}M$ also represents a yogic process that extends from the base to the apex of the subtle body. Later commentators would find additional correspondences to this configuration, identifying the four components of face, breasts, and *yoni* with four goddesses, four stages of speech, and four *cakras* within the subtle body.¹⁹

There are no less than six levels of overcoding in the tantric interpretation of this diagram, which reflect so many bipolar oppositions mediated by a third dynamic or transformative element. These oppositions are (1) Śiva and Śakti, the male and female principles of the universe in essence and manifestation; (2) the phonemes A and HA, the primal and final utterances of the phonematic continuum that is the Sanskrit alphabet; (3) the effulgent graphemes or phot-emes representing the phonemes A and HA, here the *bindu* (a single point or drop) and the *visarga* (a double point or drop);²⁰ (4) two subtle or yogic “drops,” the one red and female and the other white and male, which combine to form a third “great drop”; (5) male and female sexual emissions; and (6) the corporeal mouth and vulva of the maiden on whom this diagram is projected in Kaula-based practice.

These bipolarities are mediated by the serpentine nexus of female energy, the *kuṇḍalinī*, who in her yogic rise from the base to the apex of the system is described as telescoping the lower phonemes and graphemes of the Sanskrit garland of letters back into their higher evolutes, until all are absorbed in the *bindu*, the dimensionless point at which all manifest sound and image dissolve into silence and emptiness, in the cranial vault. Also bearing a yogic valence in this diagram and its interpretation are the elements sun, moon, and fire. Identified here with the upper *bindu* and lower *visarga*, respectively, these also represent the three primary channels of yogic energy, the right, left, and central channels.

Finally, we also detect a sexual substrate to this diagram. First of all, one reading of the term *kāmakalā* is “Divine Principle [manifesting

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 96, citing Rāghavabhaṭṭa’s commentary on *Śārada Tilaka* 1.110. The four goddesses, Ambikā, Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, and Raudrī, correspond to the *mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *hṛdaya*, and *kañṭha* (or *mukha*) *cakras*, respectively. See Padoux, trans. (n. 7 above), p. 123, n. 127.

²⁰ This movement, from the one to the two, also reflects Hindu medical notions concerning lactation in pregnant women: when a woman has conceived, her uterine blood (which has only one channel of egress from the body) is transformed into breast milk (which has two points of egress): Caraka Saṁhitā 6.15.17; Mātrkābheda Tantra 2.5–6.

itself as] Desire.”²¹ Second, the ritual support of this meditation is a maiden’s naked body. Of course, in high Hindu Tantra, the flesh-and-blood maiden substrate is done away with, with the abstract schematic visualization sufficing for the refined practitioner. Yet she remains present, just beneath the surface of her geometric and semantic abstraction, as such was effected by the later commentators of high Hindu Tantra.

In a discussion of the *kāmakalā*, the *Yoginīhṛdaya* describes the two *bindus* that make up the corners of the base of the Śiva triangle and the breasts of the maiden as red and white in color. Here, the white and red drops are “Śiva and Śakti absorbed in their movement of expansion and contraction.”²² Clearly, the *bindus* so described are not abstract points but rather subtle drops of sexual fluids, that is, male semen and female uterine blood.²³ Thus, the *bindu* as photic grapheme (dimensionless point of light) and the *bindu* as acoustic phoneme (dimensionless vibration) are overcodings of the abstract red and white *bindus* of the subtle body physiology of yogic practice, which are in turn overcodings of concrete drops of male and female sexual fluids. These unite, in the upper *bindu* at the apex of the triangle, in the mouth (*mukham*) of the maiden, into a *mahābindu*, a “great drop.” We are reminded, however, that her mouth, the apex of the upturned Śiva triangle, is “reflected” in her vulva, the apex of the downturned Śakti triangle.²⁴ Furthermore, the Sanskrit term *mukham*, generally translated as mouth, becomes applied in these traditions to *any* bodily orifice, and most particularly to the male and female genital orifices. A woman’s vulva is her “lower mouth.” What does this do to discussions of oral transmission in the tantric traditions? Are both the oral phonemes and the textual graphemes of this image in fact sexually transmitted messages?

The fact that these divine principles were transacting in something more concrete than graphemes and phonemes is made abundantly clear even in these sources. On the basis of terminology alone, we can see that

²¹ Its name is reflected as well in discussion of the *Śricakra* (*Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.54, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda, in Padoux, trans., p. 150), in which “the container is Kāmeśvara [“Our Lord of Love”]: That which he receives is the supreme effulgence named Kāmeśvarī [“Our Lady of Love”].”

²² *Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.10–11, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda (in Padoux, trans., pp. 109–11). See n. 7 above. For further discussion of the practice of *bindu* in the context of the *kāmakalā*, see Rao, pp. 65–67.

²³ In spite of Sir John Woodroffe’s protestations to the contrary, in his introduction to the *KKV* (n. 7 above), p. xi.

²⁴ Padoux, trans., *Yoginīhṛdaya* (n. 7 above), p. 202, n. 99. For a parallel discussion, also from the Śrīvidyā tradition, see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 176–77 (in which Brooks reproduces verse 11 of the Tripurā Upaniṣad with the commentary of Bhāskararaya).

the conceptual matrix is sexual: “The absolute flashes forth, throbbing phosphorescently (*sphurattā; ullāsā*). It expands as a phosphorescent wave, a welling, a swelling (*sphurad-ūrmi*)²⁵ . . . thereby manifesting the cosmos made up of the thirty-six metaphysical categories (*tattvas*), from Śiva down to the element earth. . . . The Goddess is luminously conscious (*prakāśāmarśana*). . . . She is ‘throbbing incarnate’ (*spandarūpini*), being immersed in bliss (*ānanda*). . . . The cosmos is her manifest form, but, though shining as the ‘essence of divine loveplay’ (*divyakriḍārasollāsa*), the Absolute is pure undivided light and bliss.”²⁶

In spite of the fact that many of them were apparently in deep denial of it, the subliminal sexual referents of this abstract image of the “Art of Love” were not entirely lost on the Śrīvidyā theoreticians. That they were aware of such is made clear from a debate that raged within the school concerning the relative legitimacy of conventional (*samaya*) meditation on the *kāmakalā* as opposed to the Kaula form of the same. It is in this latter (and earlier) case that a maiden’s naked body is used as the substrate for meditation on this diagram.²⁷ A number of Śrīvidyā commentators, led by the highly reputed Bhāskararāya (seventeenth century) have insisted on the literal use of this meditation support, together with the practice of the five *makāras*, all of which smack of Kaula ritual.²⁸ The names Kāmeśvara and Kāmeśvarī are identified, in the pre-fourteenth-century *Kālikā Purāna*, with the *śākta pīṭha* of Kāmākhyā, whose sexual associations are legion in tantric tradition.²⁹ In addition, the worship of the sixteen Nityā goddesses who constitute the Goddess’s retinue, and which Śrīvidyā tradition identifies with the sixteen lunar *tithis*,³⁰ includes offerings of meat and alcohol. So, too, do offerings made to the Goddess and Śiva, for persons whose goal is the attainment of *siddhis*.³¹

²⁵ Both members of this Sanskrit compound have their English cognates: *sphurad* is the cognate of pho-*sphoresc*-ing, and *ūrmi* of welling or swell. The term *sphuradūrmi* is found in *YH* 1.55.

²⁶ Padoux, English introduction to *Yoginīhrdaya*, p. 15. I have emended Padoux’s prose to render a more literalist reading of certain Sanskrit terms.

²⁷ Rao (n. 17 above), pp. 68–69.

²⁸ Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, p. 82, referring to Tripurā Upaniṣad 11–12, with the commentary of Bhāskararāya.

²⁹ Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975), p. 89.

³⁰ *YH* 3.165–68, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda, in Padoux, trans. (n. 7 above), pp. 372–74; *KKV* 17, with the commentary of Natānandanātha, in Avalon, trans., pp. 33–34; Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, p. 127; and Rao, p. 69.

³¹ *YH* 3.156–58, on the four Yoginīs of the Sarvasiddhimaya *cakra* (in Padoux, trans., p. 367); *YH* 3.190, 196, 199 on *makāra* offerings to the Goddess and Śiva and their transformation into nectar (in *ibid.*, pp. 392, 396, 398); and *YH* 3.203 on the knower of this practice becoming dear to the Yoginīs (*ibid.*, p. 401).

II. THE *Kāma-tattva* IN THE LATER TRIKA

No discussion of high Hindu Tantra can be complete without mention of the tenth-to-eleventh-century polymath Abhinavagupta, whose unique marriage of aesthetic theory and nondualist metaphysics set the standard and the tone for much of what followed in the history of Hindu Tantra. The hallmark of Abhinavagupta's synthesis, which emphasized the "sound-shape of language," is its appropriation of the system of the Sanskrit phonemes as a means to "semanticizing" most of the externals (including sexual) of tantric theory and practice, that is, to internalizing ritual acts into subtle speech acts. Of course, when the ritual acts in question are of a sexual order, Abhinavagupta's discussions often become quite tortured, as in the case of his discussion of the *mālinī*—the (goddess identified with the) energy of intermediate speech (*madhyamā vāc*) in the form of the garland of letters—whom he qualifies as *bhinnayoni*, "she whose vulva is split, open."³² I will return to the matter of how a goddess could have been conceived of issuing phonemes from her open vulva; here, however, I turn to the Trika use of the term *kāmakalā* (or *kāmatattva*) as it appears in the *TĀ* and its commentary.³³ Its description is embedded in a discussion of the *visarga*, already mentioned, the surd phoneme represented by two *bindus* in the Śrīvidyā *kāmakalā* diagram. Abhinavagupta states: "Therefore, the venerable *Kulaguhvara* ["Cave of the Clan"] states that 'this *visarga*, which consists of the unvoiced [*avyakta*] *ha* particle [*kalā*],³⁴ is known as the Essence of Desire [*kāmatattva*.'" Still quoting this lost source, he continues: "The unvoiced syllable which, lodged in the throat of a beautiful woman, [arises] in the form of an unintentional sound, without forethought or concentration [on her part]—[the practitioner] entirely directing his mind there [on that sound], brings the entire world under his control."³⁵

Here, Abhinavagupta's bridge, between external ritual (if not sexual) practice and internalized speech acts, is the sounds a woman makes while enjoying sexual intercourse—a barely articulated "ha, ha, ha."³⁶ It is this particle of speech (*kalā*) that is the essence of desire or love: in other words, the "ha" sound of the *visarga* is the semanticization of sex

³² André Padoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, trans. Jacques Gontier (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 322, citing *Parātrīṣṅśikāvivarāṇa*, ed. M. K. Sastri (Srinagar: Research Department, 1918), pp. 121, 151, and 155.

³³ *TĀ* 3.146a–148a.

³⁴ Glossed by Jayaratha (n. 8 above), 2:499–500, as the "quarter portion of the phoneme *ha*."

³⁵ *ata eva visargo 'yamavyaktahakalātmakaḥ / kāmatattvamitiśrimatkulaguhvara ucyate // tattadākṣaramavyaktakāntākaṇṭhe vyavasthitam / dhvanirūpanamicchaṃ tu dhyānadhāraṇavarjitam // tatra cittam samādhāya vaśayediyugapajagat //*

³⁶ See Jayaratha's commentary, 2:503.

in Abhinavagupta's system. As in the case of Śrīvidyā, the "practice" of the *kāmakalā* is reduced to meditative concentration, this time on a syllable. Ritual doing has been reduced, once again, to a nondiscursive form of knowing. However, the presence of a sexual signifier again orients us in the direction of a Kaula ritual substratum that involved ritual practices of a sexual order.

III. THE KĀMAKALĀ YANTRA IN THE *Śilpa Prakāśa*

The *Śilpa Prakāśa* (*ŚP*) is a ninth-to-twelfth-century work on temple architecture signed by an author named Rāmacandra Kulācāra, a name that, together with the title of his work, tells us much about his sectarian orientations. Rāmacandra was a native of Orissa, and to all appearances, his work is nothing less than an architect/builder's manual for the sorts of temple constructions that we most readily identify with the medieval Orissi style: the older temples of Bhubanesvara and its environs, temples renowned for their beauty but also for the proliferation of erotic sculptures on their walls.³⁷

In Rāmacandra's text, the most powerful and comprehensive extant work on tantric temple architecture, we find a number of departures from "classical" *śilpa śāstra* traditions. Most important for our concerns is the construction, consecration, and depositing of various *yantras* in the foundations and below various parts of temples as well as beneath or behind their sculpted images. Especially distinctive are the installation of two particular *yantras*. The first of these, the *Yoginī yantra*, is to be installed beneath the inner sanctum, the *garbhagrha* (1.90–16);³⁸ the second, the *Kāmakalā yantra*, is the most pivotal decoration of the entire temple *vimāna*'s outer walls, from which are generated all of the *vimāna*'s erotic sculptures (*kāma-bandha*), in accordance with Kaula rites.³⁹ This is of a piece with the author's overarching method, which requires that all images of divinities that adorn the temple be composed on *yantras* (blueprints, models) and visualized by the sculptors through meditation on them.⁴⁰ The *Yoginī yantra* rather resembles the *Kāmakalā* diagram of Śrīvidyā tradition, discussed above: it is composed for the most part of

³⁷ *Śilpa Prakāśa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit Text on Temple Architecture by Rāmacandra Kulācāra*, trans. and annotated by Alice Boner and Sadasiva Rath Sarma (Leiden: Brill, 1966), p. vii. Boner singles out the Vārāhi Temple of Caurasi, near Kakatpur, which is of the Vāḍabhī type, to be a perfect example of a temple built according to the specifications of this work (*ibid.*, p. xix). There is an "oral tradition" among historians of South Asian art that Boner and Sarma's source was in fact a "pastiche" of medieval manuscripts and that there was no single manuscript entitled *Śilpa Prakāśa*. Nonetheless, such specialists of Orissan and tantric art as Thomas Donaldson and Devananga Desai continue to accept the authenticity of this source in their writings.

³⁸ Boner, introduction in *ibid.*, p. viii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

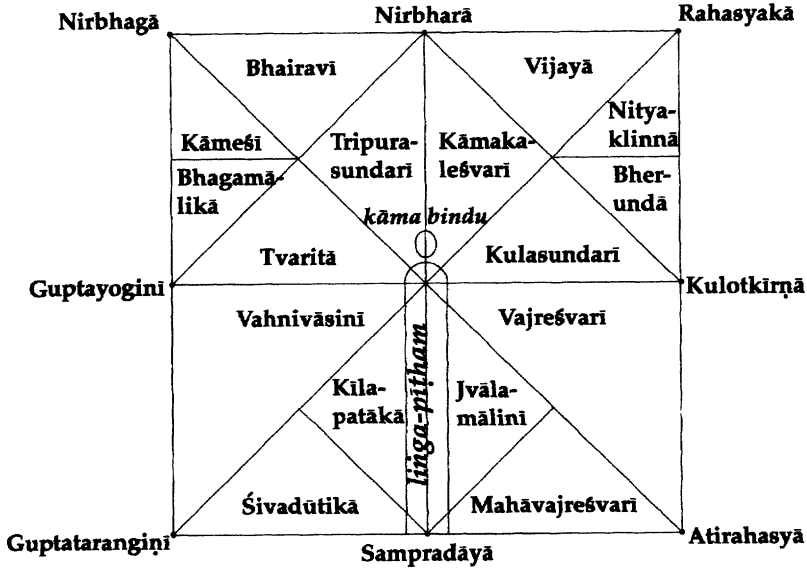


FIG. 2.—The Kāmākalā Yantra according to *Śilpa Prakāśa* 2.508–29

intersecting upturned and downturned triangles. Unlike the Kāmākalā, however, this diagram is devoid of any geometrical representation of Śiva. All of the energies depicted on it are feminine: “There are sixteen Mātṛkās resting on the Yoginī-bindus, on every *bindu* there are four Yoginīs in regular order.”⁴¹ In addition to the sixty-four Yoginīs so depicted, the diagram is also said to represent the interaction of the three *guṇas*: *sattvā*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

As for the Kāmākalā Yantra itself (fig. 2),⁴² it consists of a standing (i.e., erect) liṅgam in its chasing (*liṅga-pīṭham*) with sixteen triangles grouped in geometric fashion around it, nearly all of them contiguous with the liṅgam. Above the liṅgam is a small egg-shaped drop, called the “drop of love” (*kāma-bindu*). The liṅgam is Śiva, the triangles that converge on it are explicitly identified as vulvas (*bhagas*), and it is “only by joining the lines to the *bindu* that the *kalās* [i.e., the triangles, which represent feminine energy] are formed.” These “energy-triangles,” called the *kalā-śaktis*, bear the names of sixteen different goddesses, while “in the place of the egg at the center is the supreme Śakti called Mahākāmakaleśvari” (*ŚP* 2.508–29). These interlocking triangles combine to

⁴¹ *ŚP* 1.99.

⁴² I generated this using Adobe Photoshop 2.0. This diagram is based on Boner and Sarma’s rendering in *Śilpa Prakāśa*, p. 104.

form a square, on the perimeter of which are located the eight protective Yoginis, called the Yoginīs of the *bāhyāvaraṇa*, the outer entourage (*ŚP* 2.526b–528). This *yantra*, which was to be *concealed* by a love scene carved over it, was compulsory on temples dedicated to Śiva or Rudra. Radiating outward (at least conceptually) from this *yantra* were the erotic sculptures of the *kāma-bandha* which, in the case of the Vārāhī temple at Caurasi, depicted the eight-stage process of the powerful and dangerous Kaula rite known as *aṣṭa-kāmakalā-prayoga*, the “practice of the eight types of *kāmakalā*,” about which more shortly.⁴³

It is the names of the sixteen *kalā-śaktis* who converge on the center of this Kaula version of the *Kāmakalā yantra* that serve as the most obvious bridge between this and the Śrīvidyā version of the same, given that these sixteen names—some of which are quite evocative (Bhagamālinī, Nityaklinnā)—are identical to those of the sixteen Nityā goddesses of Śrīvidyā tradition.⁴⁴ In Śrīvidyā sources, these sixteen form the immediate entourage (*āvaraṇa*) of the Goddess, to whom sacrifices are to be offered, either in the central triangle or between the sixteen-petaled lotus and the square of the Śrīcakra. In the *KKV*, they are identified with the limbs of the Goddess.⁴⁵ The sole variation between the two lists lies in the name of the first Śakti: she is *Kāmeśvarī* in Śrīvidyā sources and *Kāmeśī* in the Kaula diagram.⁴⁶

The *Śilpa Prakāśa* discussion of the *Kāmakalā Yantra* occurs in the context of Rāmacandra’s long general description of the construction of the *Vimānamālinī* temple type.⁴⁷ The *jāṅgha* wall which supports the roof of such a temple is subdivided into a number of horizontal sections,⁴⁸ of which one is the *kāma-bandha*, the place for the insertion of love scenes.⁴⁹ The *ŚP* explains the rationale for such sculpted scenes:

Desire [*kāma*] is the root of the universe. From desire all beings are born. . . . Without Śiva and Śakti creation would be nothing but imagination. Without the action of *Kāma* there would be no birth or death. Śiva himself is visibly manifested as a great phallus [*mahāliṅgam*], and Śakti in the form of a vulva [*bhaga*]. By their union the whole universe comes into being. This is called the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. liv–lv. On the Vārāhī temple, see n. 37 above.

⁴⁴ *KKV*, verses 15–17, in Avalon, trans. (n. 7 above), p. 33. Bhagamālinī is called Bhagamālikā in the *ŚP* 2.517.

⁴⁵ “When the Śakti, this all-excelling great Queen changes into the form of the [Śrī]cakra, then the limbs of her body change into her *āvaraṇa devatās*” (*KKV*, verse 36, in Avalon, trans., p. 70).

⁴⁶ *YH* 3.165–68, with the commentary of Amṛtānanda, in Padoux, trans. (n. 7 above), pp. 373–74. See *ŚP* 2.517.

⁴⁷ This is a temple whose roof consists of a garland of spires (*vimānikās*).

⁴⁸ The *jāṅgha* is a “pilaster-like projecting wall-element between two chamfers, reaching from the *pañcakarma* to the upper *bandhanā*” (Boner and Sarma, trans., p. 147).

⁴⁹ *ŚP* 2.432.

work of desire. The science of *kāmakalā* is an extensive subject in the Āgamas. A place without love images [*kāmakalā*] is known as a “place to be shunned.” In the opinion of the Kaulācāras it is always a base, forsaken place, resembling a dark abyss, which is shunned like the den of Death. Without offering worship to the *kāmakalā-yantra*, the Śakti worship and the practice [*sadhanā*] become as useless as the bath of an elephant. The shrine on which that yantra stands is a *vīra-mandira* [a temple where advanced Kaulas, “virile heroes”, (*vīras*) practice their faith].⁵⁰

Then follows the description of the *Kāmakalā yantra*, which I have already outlined above. This description is followed by the following theoretical observations:

These are the sixteen Śāktis, all being the very essence of Desire [*kāmakalātmikā*] placed inside the square field.⁵¹ . . . In the “jewel-area” [*mañideśa*] below [the central Śakti, Mahākāmakaleśvarī] there is Śiva Kāmakaleśvara . . . always in union with Kāmakaleśvarī, established in the *ājñā cakra*, always delighting in drinking female discharge [*rajpāna*].⁵² Whose sign is the ascetic’s garb, the Yogi Kāmakaleśvara, the Śānkara of dark colour is the Lord of the *Kāmakalā Mahāyantra*. . . This yantra is utterly secret, it should not be shown to everyone. For this reason a love scene [*mithuna-mūrti*] has to be carved on the lines of the *yantra*. . . In the opinion of Kaulācāras it should be made on the lovely *jāṅgha* in the upper part of the wall. The *kāmabandha* is placed there to give delight to people [see fig. 3].⁵³

The early tenth-century Śākta temple of Vārāhī at Caurasī in Orissa has been identified by art historians as the epitome of the temple style illustrated in the *Śilpa Prakāśa*,⁵⁴ and it is on its *kāmabandha* that we find what I would argue is a depiction of the original *practice* of the *Kāmakalā*. First of all, the placement of these erotic images is telling: they replace the *āvaraṇa-devatās* standard on Śaiva temples (recall here that these are identified as the limbs of the Goddess in the *KKV*).⁵⁵ More

⁵⁰ ŚP 2.498–505.

⁵¹ ŚP 2.526. Compare *KJñN* 14.94 (*Kaulajñānanirṇaya and Some Minor Texts of the School of Matsyendra*, ed. P. C. Bagchi [Calcutta: Metropolitan, 1935]). See n. 60 below.

⁵² ŚP 2.534. Quotes from the *Mahīṣamardīnī Stotra* and the *Kaulacūḍāmaṇi* indicate that this practice becomes sublimated into the yogic technique of *khecari mudrā*, in which the practitioner internally consumes the nectar produced through his yogic practice (Boner and Sarma, trans. [n. 37 above], pp. 136–37).

⁵³ ŚP 2.535, 538–39. Devangana Desai (*The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* [Mumbai: Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd., 1996], p. 196) has suggested that the famous erotic *mēnage à quatre* sculpted into the *jāṅgha* of the ca. 1000 C.E. Kaṇḍariyā Mahādeva temple at Khajuraho is just such a love scene, as well as a case of “architectural punning.” Figure 3 is reproduced from her image of the same (p. 195) with the ŚP *kāmakalā* superimposed on it.

⁵⁴ Boner and Sarma, trans., p. xix.

⁵⁵ Thomas E. Donaldson, “Erotic Rituals on Orissan Temples,” *East and West* 36, nos. 1–3 (Rome) (September 1986): 156. See n. 43 above.

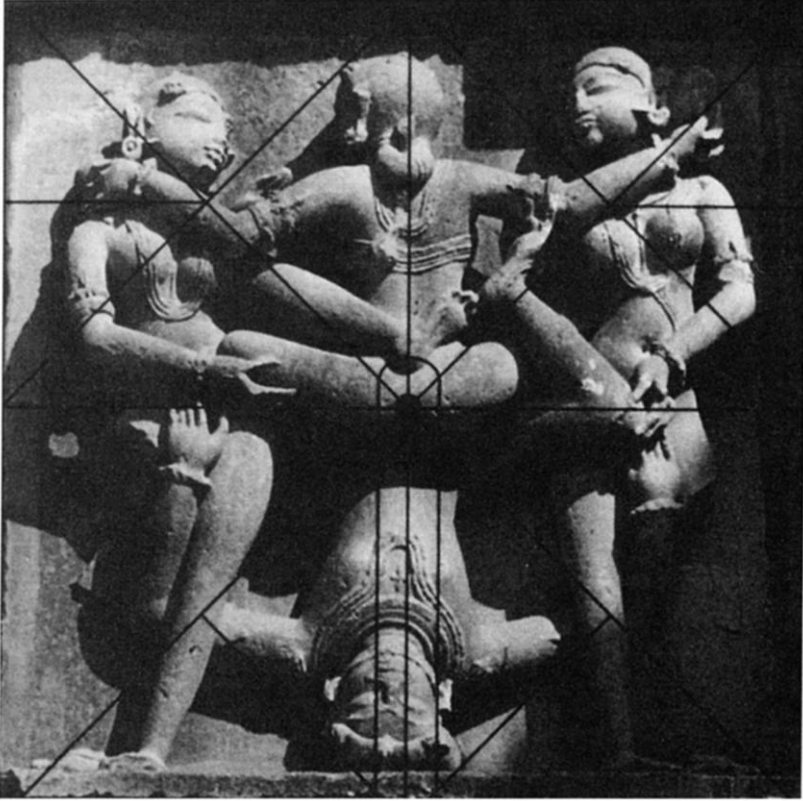


FIG. 3.—Jāṅgha of the ca. 1000 c.E. Kaṇḍariyā Mahādeva temple at Khajuraho with the *Śilpa Prakāśa kāmakalā* superimposed on it. The image is found in Devananga Desai, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* (Mumbai: Franco-Indian Research Pvt. Ltd., 1996), p. 195.

important is the content of these sculptures, which J. N. Banerjea tentatively identified, on the basis of an unpublished manuscript of the *Kaula-cūḍāmaṇi* (“Crest-Jewel of the Kaula”) as illustrations of the “practice of the eight types of *kāmakalā*” (*aṣṭakāmakalāprayoga*). In the first three of these scenes, beginning on the southern facade of the Vārāhī temple,

the Vira “Kaula Sādhaka” and the Kumārī “his Śakti or Uttarā Sādhikā” are depicted standing side by side in suggestive poses and represent 1) *vaśikaraṇa*, “bringing the Kumārī under control”; 2) *sammoha* “enchanting her”; and 3) *ākaraṣaṇa* and *uccāṭana* “attracting and preparing her for ritual sex.” . . . In the next two scenes are 4) *yonī-ābhiṣeka* [“anointing of the vulva”] and 5) *puraśca-*

raṇa “the preliminary stage of the act.” . . . Scene 6), which Banerjea interprets as *rajaṇāna* . . . actually depicts fellatio. The last two scenes possibly represent the final stages, 7) *prastava* and 8) *nivṛtti* with the Vīra and the Kumārī returning to the normal state after the sexual act.⁵⁶

Similar sequences are found on the Khiching and Gaṇeśwarpur temples from the same period and region of Orissa.⁵⁷ It is the sixth stage of the rite, *rajaṇāna*, the drinking of female discharge,⁵⁸ that I wish to concentrate on here. While it is “substituted” on the Vārāhī temple with a depiction of fellatio, it is faithfully portrayed on no less than a dozen Orissan temples of the ninth to twelfth centuries C.E., as well as on temples from south and north India, between the seventh and eighteenth centuries C.E.⁵⁹ What was it about *rajaṇāna*, the climax and seemingly the *raison d’être* of the Kaula *kāmakalā* practice, that made it meaningful to its practitioners? Having been trained in the history of religions, I find it impossible to accept the notion that people perform religious acts that are meaningless to them. So what then did this sexual practice mean to its practitioners? In what way does practice relate to precept, and precept to overcoming the human condition, that goal which seems to constitute the motor of every religious system?

IV. THE KĀMAKALĀ IN THE EARLY KAULA

It is this Kaula practice of *rajaṇāna* that renders the term *kāmakalā* meaningful in an obvious and direct way, in contradistinction to its semanticized and bowdlerized uses in the Trika and Śrīvidyā systems. The name “Arts of Love” or “Love’s Lunar Portion,” intimately associated with goddesses named Our Lady of Love, She Who Is Garlanded by the Vulva (Bhagamālinī), and She Who Is Always Wet (Nityaklīnā) and described in terminology that consistently borders on the orgasmic only makes sense in the sexual context provided by the Kaula practices portrayed on Orissan and other medieval Indian temples. Drinking female discharge is not, however, highly arousing—and it certainly has nothing to do with the Tantric Sex trade currently booming on the Internet and in California. What then can or could have been meaningful about the male consumption of female discharge, and what connection

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 156, citing J. N. Banerjea, “The Vārāhī Temple at Chaurashi,” in *Dr. Mirashi Felicitation Volume*, ed. G. T. Deshpande et al. (Nagpur: Vidarbha, 1965), p. 352.

⁵⁷ Donaldson, p. 157.

⁵⁸ Not to be identified with menstrual blood: it is either endocrinal fluid (Miranda Shaw’s terminology), cataminal fluid (in Donaldson’s terminology; see Donaldson, p. 156), or postpartum lochial discharge (facsimile communication from Wolfgang Jöchle, Denville, N.J., August 17, 1997).

⁵⁹ See Donaldson; and Ajit Mookerjee, *Kālī: The Feminine Force* (New York: Destiny Books, 1988), pp. 30, 42.

could such possibly have to the multiple layers of meaning detected in the Śrīvidyā interpretations of the *kāmakalā* as ground for the Śricakra?

The semihistorical figure to whom many of the great writers of later high Hindu Tantra refer as the founding guru of the Kaula was Matsyendra, who was the author of a seminal work on Kaulism, the ninth-to-tenth-century *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* (*KJñN*). His use of the term *kāmakalā* is therefore very important, inasmuch as it may be the earliest use of the term in the Kaula context. He mentions the term but twice, relating it to a body of yogic practice and identifying it with the nectar of immortality as well as with the “good stuff” or “real thing” (*sadbhāva*) emitted by clan goddesses whom the practitioner has brought under his control and caused to become sexually agitated.⁶⁰

The connection between yogic practice, the cranial vault, the production of nectar that is the root of immortality, and the sexual agitation of circles of goddesses brings us back to a cryptic portion of the passage, already mentioned, from the *Śilpa Prakāśa* (2.534): “In the ‘jewel-area’ . . . is Śiva Kāmakaleśvara . . . always in union with Kāmakaleśvarī, established in the *ājñā cakra*, always delighting in drinking female discharge (*rajaḥpāna*).” The *ājñā cakra*, the sixth of the yogic centers, is located precisely in the cranial region, behind the eyebrows, which is where the nectar of immortality is produced internally through yogic practice. This nectar, termed “female discharge” in the *Śilpa Prakāśa*, is said to be synonymous with [*kaula*] *sadbhāva* in the *KJñN*; in this and other sources, the term *kaulasadbhāva* is identified with the *kuladravya* or *kulāmṛta* that flows through the wombs of the Yoginīs, Goddesses, and other female beings with which the clan identifies itself. The arising of these female deities, and their excitation in the cranial vault through the nectar they drink there is of a piece with early accounts of the yogic process, in which it is circles of goddesses, rather than lotuses or wheels, that form the six or nine energy centers of the subtle body: this is in fact the original sense of the term *cakra* in subtle body mapping.⁶¹ In these early systems, these goddesses, gratified by the bodily fluids offered to them internally by the practitioner, rise along his spinal column to converge in his cranial vault. In these passages, we are in the presence of an early account of the practice of *khecari mudrā*,

⁶⁰ *KJñN* 7.32ab: devyāḥ cakrādi deveśi brahmarandhrāvaśānugam/ yuktaṃ kāmakalā-devi palitastambhaṇaṃ param//; *KJñN* 14.92b–94b: pañcāvadaśāntaṃ yāvaca śaktyācāreṇa bhedayet// devyā bhūtvā ca yoginyā mātṛcakrāvaśānugā/ liyante khecaricakre kṣobhayet paramāmṛtaṃ// amṛtena vinā devi amaratvaṃ kathaṃ priye/ amṛtaṃ kaulasadbhāvaṃ śṛṇu kāmakalātmakam//. See n. 51 above.

⁶¹ For example, in *Kubjikāmata* 23.133–44 (in *Kubjikāmata Tantra, Kulālikāmnāya Version*, ed. Teun Goudriaan and Jan A. Schoterman [Leiden: Brill, 1988]). For discussion, see Dorothea Heilijgers-Seelen, *The System of Five Cakras in the Kubjikāmata Tantra 14–15* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

through which the practitioner internally drinks the nectar raised and refined through his hathayogic practice, thereby rendering himself immortal. These being early Kaula sources, however, the sexual valence is still explicit: it is the sexual fluids of female deities that are being generated and swallowed in the *ājñā cakra*.

This reading is further supported by the use of the term “jewel area” (*manideśa*) in this passage. Just as in the case of the tantric Buddhist expression “the jewel in the heart of the lotus,” here as well the jewel area refers first and foremost to the clitoris, the egg-shaped drop or point of love (*kāma-bindu*) located just above the *liṅga-pīṭham*, and that place at which Śiva drinks feminine discharge. Now, the technical sense of the term *liṅga-pīṭham* is the “seat” or “chasing” of the *śiva-liṅgam*, as such is found in Śiva temples, and that chasing is nothing other than the goddess’s vulva, her *yoni* in which the *liṅgam* is engaged. Therefore, what the text is saying here is that Śiva is drinking feminine discharge from the clitoris and vulva of the goddess. He is moreover said to be in union with the goddess in the *ājñā cakra*, which is located directly behind the place of the third eye. But the third eye is itself an emblem of the female vulva on the forehead of the male Śiva.

In another chapter of the *KJñN*, we read a statement to the effect that “the secret field of action of the Siddh[a]s consists of five streams.”⁶² This term, the Five Streams or Currents (*pañcasrotas*) is in fact the earliest term that we find in the Śaivāgamas, the literature of the old Śaiva orthodoxy, for the lines of transmission of that tradition’s teachings.⁶³ In these early sources, the five streams or currents are said to flow from the five mouths of the god Śiva.⁶⁴ Later, Kaula traditions would posit a sixth mouth, called the “lower mouth” or “mouth of the Yoginī,” the source of its teachings and clan lineages, from which a sixth current streamed.⁶⁵

I have already alluded to the important notion that the mouth—and particularly the lower mouth—of the tantric Yoginī was not her oral cavity but, rather, her vulva. The use of a term which connotes fluid transfer (*srotas*) further confirms a hypothesis that in the early tantric context, oral transmission was an affair of sexually transmitted messages. This reading is further supported by the iconography of Śiva. Quite frequently, the *liṅgam* will be represented with a face of Śiva superimposed on the

⁶² *KJñN* 16.10ab: *pañcasrotātmakaṃ caiva gopitaṃ siddhigocaram//*.

⁶³ Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981), pp. 10, 16.

⁶⁴ Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa, and Īśāna. For a discussion, see Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Canon of the Śaivāgama and the Kubjikā Tantras of the Western Kaula Tradition* (Albany, N.Y., SUNY Press, 1988), pp. 123–25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64, and nn. 54–57 on pp. 168–69, citing the *TĀ*, *Saṣṣāhasrasaṃhitā*, *Brahmayāmala Tantra*, *Jayadrathayāmala Tantra*, and other sources. Compare *Kubjikāmata* 3.7–10.

phallic image, in which case it is called an *ekamukhi liṅgam*, a one-mouthed or one-faced image. Not infrequently, five faces of Śiva will be superimposed, with four facing in the four cardinal directions and the fifth facing upward. This is a *pañcamukhi liṅgam*, a five-faced or five-mouthed image. The Śiva liṅgam is always set in a *pīṭha*—having the form of a stylized vulva: this would be the lower mouth of the Yoginī, from which the sixth stream flows forth. What flows forth is at once the germ plasm of the old tantric clan lineages (*kulas*) and the esoteric teachings of these clans: these are the sources of the tantric flow charts, which simultaneously constitute a flow of information, of sexually transmitted messages. This emphasis, on a concrete substance as substrate for the transmission of secret gnosis, is also one borrowed from the old Śaiva orthodoxy. In both orthodox Śaiva Siddhānta and heterodox Kula epistemology, knowledge (*bodha*) and liberation are said to be produced from substances (*dravyas*).⁶⁶ Mantras are secondary.

I believe that it is this contribution, on the part of the Yoginī Kaula—founded by Matsyendra whom tradition says was himself initiated by the Yoginīs of Kāmarūpa—that marks the watershed between the earlier Kula and later Kaula in the history of medieval Hinduism: by virtue of their femininity and specifically their sexual fluids,⁶⁷ the Yoginīs were natural conduits for something that was missing or lost from the earlier male-specific Kula gnosis, and it was through them that the Kula became transformed into the gnosis that is the subject of the *Kaula-jñāna-nirṇaya*, the “Bringing Forth of the Kaula Gnosis.”

V. SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED MESSAGES

Now, in the high Hindu Tantra of the *Yoginīhrdaya*, the sexual references are sublimated in a number of ways. We have already seen that the acoustic and the photic, the phonemic and the graphic, are emphasized over the fluid and the sexual, even as they are clearly grounded in a sexually fluid substrate. In addition, these late tantric traditions stress the transmission of the tantric gnosis by word of mouth, “from ear to ear” in the Sanskrit parlance, “according to the succession of deities, Siddhas,

⁶⁶ David Lorenzen, *Kāpālikas and Kālamukhas: Two Lost Śaiva Sects* (Delhi: Thomson, 1972), pp. 68, 89, 91; and Sanderson, “Meaning in Tantric Ritual” (n. 1 above), p. 39.

⁶⁷ This notion is broached in the Kāma Sūtra of Vatsyāyana: “The fall of the semen of the man takes place only at the end of coition, while the semen of the woman falls continually” (*Kāma Shāstra: Quintessence of India's Classics on Sex*, no editor [Delhi: Kayenkay Agencies, 1971], p. 14). In spite of popular traditions to the contrary, the Kāma Sūtra likely dates from the tenth century C.E. (personal communication from Kenneth Zysk, New York, April 1997). See TĀ 29.126, 229; *Hathayoga Pradīpikā* 3.100, 102; Śiva Saṁhitā 4.1–5; Lillian Silburn, *Kundalini, Energy of the Depths*, trans. Jacques Gontier (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1988), pp. 189–92; and E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person in the Tamil Way* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 163–72.

and humans.”⁶⁸ In the early Kaula, however, it is not only from “ear to ear” but also from “mouth to mouth” (*vaktrādvaktram*)⁶⁹ that the gnosis is transmitted, and there can be no doubt that the mouths in question are the male and female sexual orifices. A number of early tantric sources further support this reading, as do iconographic representations of *raja-pāna* from the four corners of the Indian subcontinent. In tantric worship of the vulva (*yonipūjā*),⁷⁰ the so-called Clan Ritual (*kulaprakriyā*), the “Clan Sacrifice” (*kulayāga*),⁷¹ and especially tantric initiation, we find repeated descriptions of the transmission of sexual fluids from the mouths (oral and vulval) of a Yoginī into the mouth of a male practitioner. In sculptural representations of the worship of the vulva, which are frequent in this period, we see male practitioners crouching beneath the vulva of a female figure, in order to catch her sexual or menstrual fluids in their mouths, in the practice called “drinking female discharge.”⁷² In addition, the most powerful *yantras* were those drawn with the “ink” of this female discharge.⁷³ In this role, the Yoginī serves as a conduit, through initiation and ritual, for the transmission of the clan or lineage essence, which uninitiated males intrinsically lack: there is a literal fluid flow from the “mouth” of Śiva-Bhairava to that of the Goddess (who, even in her role as transmitter of *mantras* in high Hindu Tantra, is called *bhinnayoni*, “she whose vulva is open”), from her to a guru and/or a Yoginī, and thence to a male Siddha initiate.

This is stated explicitly in Jayaratha’s commentary to *TĀ* 1.13. Quoting an unidentified source which states that “gnosis is to be cast into a woman’s mouth and then taken out of her mouth,” he goes on to say that in the *kulaprakriyā*, the Clan Ritual, the disciple receives the gnosis from the lineage (*āmnāya*), via the mouth of the Dūtī, and by means of the unified emission (*samaskandatayā*) of the guru and the Dūtī. What is being described here is the dynamic of the lower end of the flow chart of the Kaula gnosis, in the form of the clan fluid (*kuladravya*) emitted by the guru and his consort in sexual intercourse and drunk by the initiate. It is this that makes the latter a member of the clan, of the family of Śiva,

⁶⁸ *YH* 1.3 (*karṇāt karṇopadeśa samprāptam*). In his commentary, Amṛtānanda stipulates that this transmission passes *divaysiddhamānavakrameṇa* (in Padoux, trans. [n. 11 above], pp. 99, 101).

⁶⁹ *KJñN* 18.22c; *TĀ* 29.125b (*vaktrādvaktrastham*). For other references, see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 255–56.

⁷⁰ See *The Yonitantra*, ed. Schoterman (n. 4 above), pp. 18–21 and passim.

⁷¹ Gavin Flood, *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Saivism* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993), pp. 283–301.

⁷² Donaldson (n. 55 above), p. 150 and passim. *Kumārī-pūja* occurred during the maiden’s menses; see Ramendra Nath Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan (c. A.D. 600–A.D. 1000)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 125.

⁷³ Donaldson, p. 156, n. 7.

the Goddess, and the Yoginīs, Dūtīs and Siddha teachers through whom that clan fluid flows.⁷⁴

As if to emphasize her transmissive role, the Yoginī is termed, precisely, the Dūtī, the female “Messenger.”⁷⁵ At no time do these sources ever describe the Messenger as speaking, so the question is, What is the Messenger transmitting?⁷⁶ When Marshall McLuhan stated that “the medium is the message,” he was referring to television and other technologies. When the Kaulas made essentially the same statement through the use of the term Dūtī, their medium/message was, instead, sexual fluid. That this is the case is made explicit as well in the term employed for the fluid messages that flow through the genealogical flow charts of these tantric clans. As we have seen, this is referred to by a number of names—including *kulāmṛta* (clan nectar), *kuladravya* (clan fluid), *yonitattva* (vulva essence), and *sadbhāva*—and is identified, in a multitude of sources, with the Yoginīs’ female discharge, either her menstrual blood or sexual emission.⁷⁷ In worship, initiation, and ritual practices involving the transmission of the clan essence from the Absolute to male practitioners through the conduit of the upper and lower mouths of the Goddess and the Yoginīs or Dūtīs, it was this fluid essence, which manifested in the form of sexual fluids, that made these practitioners part of a clan or family (*kula*). It was only later that this concrete flow of information was sublimated or semanticized into the phosphorescing drops of light or consciousness in high Hindu Tantra. In the earlier Kaula, the fluid medium itself was the message that once internalized, transformed the very being of the male practitioner, injecting him with the fluid stuff of the divine, transmitted through the Yoginīs, in whom it naturally flowed.

⁷⁴ The prototype is a divine one (Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Tradition” [n. 2 above], p. 681): “The basic Kaula pantheon consists of the Lord and/or Goddess of the Kula (Kuleśvara, Kuleśvarī) surrounded by the eight Mothers (Brahmī, etc.) with or without Bhairava consorts. Outside this core one worships the four mythical *gurus* or Perfected Ones (*Siddhas*) of the tradition (the four Lords of the Ages of the World [Yuganātha]), their consorts (*dūtīs*), the offspring of these couples and their *dūtīs*. The couple of the present, degenerate age (*kaliyuga*) are Macchanda (the Fisherman), venerated as the revealer of (*avātāraka*) Kaulism and his consort Koṅkaṇā. Of their sons, the twelve ‘princes’ (*rājaputra*), six are non-celibate (*adhoretas*), and therefore specially revered as qualified (*sādhikāra*) to transmit the Kaula cult. They are revered as the founders of the six initiatory lineages (*ovalli*). At the time of consecration, one entered one of these lineages and received a name whose second part indicated this affiliation.”

⁷⁵ On the centrality of the sexual commerce with the Dūtī and the consumption and offering of her sexual or menstrual fluids in Kaula practice, see Sanderson, “Meaning in Tantric Ritual,” pp. 83–86.

⁷⁶ Miranda Shaw (*Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994], pp. 140–78, esp. 154–58, 176, and notes) provides detailed discussion of parallel practices, involving Yoginīs/Dūtīs in Buddhist Tantra. Shaw, however, imputes greater agency and intentionality to these female figures than I find in the Hindu material.

⁷⁷ See Lorenzen (n. 66 above), pp. 89–91; and Donaldson, p. 170.

With this, I feel I have explained one pole of the bipolar sexual relationship that obtained between male and female participants in the Kaula transmission of tradition. The female Yoginī or Dūtī, by virtue of the natural presence of the clan nectar in her menstrual or sexual emissions, was vital to aspiring male practitioners who wished to be “inseminated” or “insanguinated” with the liberating fluid clan essence and thereby become members of the clan family (*kula*). Absorption of the clan fluid was effected through the drinking of such emissions as described or through the practice of *vajrolī mudrā*, urethral suction.

This model, of initiation and the transmission of gnosis through simulated sexual reproduction, is as old as the Vedas themselves, which state that “the teacher, when he initiates his pupil, places him, like a fetus, inside of his body. And during the three nights [of the initiation], he carries him in his belly.”⁷⁸ More than this, as the language of initiation in ritual sources as well as in the epic myth of Kāvya Uśanas and Kaca make clear,⁷⁹ one does not inherit *from* one’s [father]; instead one inherits *one’s father*.⁷⁹ This reproductive symbolism appears in a great number of medieval and modern non-Śākta initiation accounts, in which the guru “spits” into the mouth of his disciple to transform him into “himself,”⁸⁰ and it may be argued that the terms for the line of guru-disciple succession, *paramparā*, generated from *parampara*, “proceeding from one to another, as a father to a son,” is a conscious reflection of this. What Kaulism does is simply to render such successions or transmissions “biologically correct” through the important imposition of the female Yoginī or Dūtī in this role.

VI. WHY ḌĀKINĪS ARE FLIGHTY

By way of conclusion, I wish to raise the question of “why Ḍākinīs are flighty” and describe the second and complementary pole of the bipolar sexual relationship that obtained between male and female participants in the Kaula transmission of tradition. Here, I begin by discussion of the use of the term *extraction* in the twenty-second chapter of the *KJñN*: “The [work known] by the name of the “Bringing Forth of the [Kaula] Gnosis” was one million five hundred thousand [verses in length]. This [teaching] is the essence, *extracted* [*samuddhṛta*] from the midst of that. . . . This teaching [is found] in every one of the Yoginīs’ houses in Kāmarūpa. . . . The Great Teaching brought down at Moon Island, that which was in the condition of the Fish-Belly . . . is *sung* in Kāmākhyā.”

⁷⁸ Atharva Veda 11.5.3; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.5.4.12.

⁷⁹ Paul Mus, *Barabudur*, 2 vols. (Hanoi: Imprimerie d’Extrême Orient, 1935), 1:12.

⁸⁰ White, *The Alchemical Body*, pp. 310–13.

[*Samjud-dhṛ* is one of three Sanskrit terms that translate as “extraction,” the others being *ut-kṛṣ* (“draw upward”) and *ā-kṛṣ* (“draw toward,” “attract”). A passage from the eighth-century *Mālatī-Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti makes use of the root *ā-kṛṣ* in a way that directly relates “extraction” by a female figure to her power of flight: “Beholding by the power of resorption [*layavaśād*] the eternal Supreme Spirit in the form of Śiva [who], superimposed upon my six members [and] placed in the six cakras [*nyasta-ṣaḍaṅgacakranihitam*], manifests himself in the midst of the heart lotus [*hṛtpadma-madhyoditam*], here I have now come without experiencing any fatigue from my flight [*aprāpta-patana-śrama*] by virtue of my extraction of the five nectars [*pañcāmṛt-ākaraṣaṇād*] of people [*jagataḥ*], [which I have effected] by the gradual filling of the channels [*nāḍīnāmudyakrameṇa*].”⁸¹

Commenting on this verse, Jagaddhara states that this female figure’s power of flight is acquired through her extraction (*ākāśagāmitva-utkarṣā-pratipādanāt*) of the five constituent elements of the human body (*śarirasya pañcabhūtātmakasya*). The female figure in question is Kapālakuṇḍalā (“She Who Has Skulls for Earrings”), the consort, the Yoginī of a Kāpālīka named Aghoraṅga (“Hell’s Bells”); and in this scene, she is flying to a cremation ground. Thus we are in the presence of a commonplace of medieval Indian literature, which locates male Kula or Kaula practitioners and Yoginīs (or Ḍākinīs) in cremation grounds. In the case of the latter, they are always there to consume human flesh, a role that extends as far back as literature on goddesses (in the plural) takes us.⁸² These hosts of female figures live on, delight in, and are energized by the consumption of human flesh, and it is through their *extraction of the essence* of the bodies they eat that they are afforded the power of flight. Yoginīs or Ḍākinīs *need* human flesh in order to fly: this continues to be a commonplace of folk belief. To those who offer human flesh (their own or someone else’s), they offer their form of grace.

For the unfortunate noninitiate, becoming “food for the Yoginīs” was the end: he was finished. The Yoginīs would descend on him and drain him of his blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and seed, extracting his essence and leaving behind an empty husk. However, for the Kaula *yogin*, the male counterpart to the Yoginī (also called the *vīra*, the virile consort of the Yoginī or *siddha*, the perfected partner of the Yoginī), one could have it both ways. That is, one could offer one’s vital fluids, extracted

⁸¹ *Mālatī-Mādhava*, act 5, verse 2, in *Bhavabhūti’s Mālatī-Mādhava with the Commentary of Jagaddhara*, ed. and trans. M. R. Kale, reprint of 3d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 95–96.

⁸² Among the hundreds of references to this in the medieval literature, the *KJñN* (11.18) states: “By whatever means, one should always devour one’s object of extraction [*ākṛṣṭim*]. One should honor the horde of yoginīs with food and [sexual] pleasure.”

by the Yoginī through sexual intercourse, and yet survive and, more than this, revel together with this consort in magical flight. This was effected through the numerous Kaula techniques for the intermingling (*melaka*) and shared enjoyment (*bhoga*) of sexual fluids. These included the technique of *vajrolī mudrā*, in which the male partner extracted his own—and the Yoginī’s—sexual essence back from the Yoginī through urethral suction; as well as the drinking of the mingled sexual fluids of himself and the Yoginī. In both cases, the male partner gained what he was lacking (the *kuladravya*, the fluid of gnosis naturally present in the Yoginī), while his partner gained the raw materials necessary for her refinement of the high energy fuel that powered her flight. This is also the reason for the *repeated* exchange of sexual fluids between partners, from mouth to mouth to mouth to mouth,⁸³ that we find in descriptions of the *kula-prakriyā*: it is by this means that both partners “pump each other up” with the vital fluids of neither being catalyzed at the expense of the other. The transformative power of said fluids is discussed by Jayaratha in his commentary on a passage from the *TĀ* that delineates the practices to be performed by persons seeking *siddhis* in the form of bodily stability (*piṇḍasthairya*), that is, a body that is subject to neither aging nor death (*ajarāmarapada*):⁸⁴

The best of elixirs is an excellent fluid deposited within one’s own body. . . . [It] is known as “*kula*.” . . . By simply eating it, a man becomes immortal and praised as “Śiva.” . . . Elsewhere, the man who continuously eats [this fluid] in its mixed form becomes . . . the darling of the Yoginīs. . . . It is said in all the teachings that the tendency toward non-aging immortality is afforded through the mouth of the Yoginī [and that] it is passed back and forth, from mouth to mouth. Here, this means: from the mouth of the Yoginī into one’s own mouth, then into the mouth of the Śakti, then into one’s own mouth, and thence into the offertory bowl. . . . Having combined the great fluid [*mahārāsa*] by passing it from mouth to mouth, one should feed the circle . . . of the [female?] deities and [male] virile heros [*vīras*] with it. . . . Having aroused the *dūtī*, he whose [own] desire has [also] been quickened should eat the collected fluid [*dravya nicaya*] that has come forth [from them], back and forth [with her].⁸⁵

⁸³ An early account is found in *KJñV* 18.22: *carukaṃ bhakṣayet prājñāḥ samayahīne na dāpayet / vaktrādvaktraṃ viśeṣena siddhibhāgyaḥ samānyathā//*.

⁸⁴ *TĀ* 29.127b–129a. These passages are discussed in Flood (n. 71 above), pp. 298, 387.

⁸⁵ Parallel practices from the Buddhist “Highest Yoga Tantra” tradition of the Hevajra Tantra and other sources are described in detail in Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience: Sources and Interpretations* (Encino, Calif., 1974), pp. 140–53; David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), 1:256–64; and Per Kværne, “On the Concept of Sahaja in Indian Buddhist Tantric Literature,” *Temenos* 11 (1975): 88–135.

This is the body of fluid transaction that forms the core of early “tantric sex.” It is this as well that is represented in the elaborate erotic sculptures found on the walls of Hindu temples of Kaula inspiration. Finally, this also explains the unique architectural plan of the Yoginī temples, which date from the same period and are found in the same Vindhya mountain regions of central and eastern India as those in which the Kaula flourished. The Yoginī temples are circular and roofless, open to the sky. On the inner walls of these temples are figured voluptuous and terrible images of the (usually) sixty-four Yoginis (sometimes figured with severed human appendages in their hands or mouths; in one case with an emaciated but ithyphallic male standing below them),⁸⁶ while an ithyphallic image of Bhairava stands at the center of the edifice. This perfectly reproduces the schema of Yoginī *maṇḍalas*, in which the sixty-four Yoginīs, arrayed in eight clans, converge on their divine regent Bhairava, who is located at the heart of the diagram. It is also entirely functional vis-à-vis the purpose of the Kaula practice: initiation into the flow chart of the clan lineage, mutual gratification, and the *shared* power of flight enjoyed by Siddha and Yoginī alike. The circular Yoginī temples, open to sky, were landing fields and launching pads for Yoginīs and their male consorts.

In their seventh-to-eleventh-century heyday, these forms of Kaula theory and practice were so compelling, as direct paths to gnosis, power, and godhead, that they won the adherence of some of the great royal houses of the period: the Somavamśis, Chandellas, and Kalacuris, whose kingdoms stretched across the Vindhya range and beyond, from Rajasthan to Assam. It was these royal patrons who constructed many of the Yoginī temples whose unusual architectural ruins dot this swathe of central India, who built the “erotic” temple complexes at such sites as Bhubanesvara and Khajuraho, and who undoubtedly sought out Kula and Kaula specialists for their expertise in both the sacred and secular spheres.

These remarks have carried me far afield from the Śrīvidyā practice of the *kāmakaḷā* with which I began this study. But then, that is where I would place its origins—in a temporally or geographically distant locus, in which transactions in sexual fluids transformed a mundane human into a self-made god by initiating him into a superhuman lineage. The practitioner who meditates on the *kāmakaḷā yantra* gazes into the vulva of the Goddess, out of which all the phonemes, graphemes, and beings of the pulsating universe emerge, and into which they return.

University of California, Santa Barbara

⁸⁶ Vidya Dehejia, *Yoginī Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition* (Delhi: National Museum, 1986), p. 63.