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# Between Fear and Heroism

## *The Tantric Path to Liberation*

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The very notion of Tantrism appears to rest on misunderstandings fostered by various explanatory enterprises that enjoy labelling Tantrism as the daring hunt for a widely defined power, a ritualised form of sexual activity or executive competence to perform six acts of magic (*ṣaṭkarmāṇi*). However, in all these different approaches to Tantrism, spinning out semantically broader applications of this vague term, there has hardly been an attempt to look at the aspect of tantric lore that lies deep in a psychological domain of the individual. It was none other than Sri Aurobindo who in his, however brief, remarks on tantric traditions claimed that 'Tantras contain some original psychological intuitions which have a living relevance for the spiritual seekers' (The Mother 1978: 30–33). The most unique and pivotal contribution to the psychological dimension of Tantrism comes from two Jungian theoreticians on religion: Joseph Campbell and Heinrich Zimmer who analysed tantric *sādhanā* in terms of a spiritual quest for self-discovery of one's own true identity. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that confrontation with unconscious part of the psyche, however unpleasant and terrifying, is a necessary preliminary for any spiritual growth. Following this line of reasoning, I argue in this essay that the tantric path, especially in certain aspects of the non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, is a spiritual discipline that found a new way to challenge one of the most powerful experiences in the dynamics of emotions: fear. Fear participates in several conceptual patterns: (*a*) it is sacralised

as the god Bhairava; (*b*) it constitutes, through fear of transmigration, a powerful stimulus for undertaking tantric *sādhanā*; and (*c*) ritualistic ingestion of fear-eliciting substances is used to reduce contraction of consciousness (*saṃkoca*), the cause of bondage, consequently leading to the expansion of consciousness (*vikāsa*) and liberation (*mokṣa*). Thus, liberation is approached here through the paradigm of psychological growth that involves a direct, face-to-face confrontation with fear. Fear, so conceived, becomes a principal driving force for undertaking a tantric path of heroism. Fear functions as a central organising feature in a dynamic construction of tantric identity. The tantric practitioner is a called a Hero (*vīra*). His heroism, religiously motivated, lies in the conquest of fear. It is fear that he is compelled to face both in the outer realm and in the deepest recess of his soul. Such confrontation endows a Hero with steadfastness (*dhairya*) that becomes a heroic-personhood-defining feature and leads a Hero significantly farther, to the ultimate knowledge of the goddess Kālī.

'Tantrism' is a term used to characterise a corpus of 'heterodox religious teachings' covering a wide range of esoteric practices that enveloped Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina traditions, becoming a widespread 'trend' in South and South-east Asia from the 5th century CE onward. Perhaps, the most prominent feature of Tantrism was its radical break with the traditional Brāhmaṇical caste-structured society that consequently opened up the possibility for spiritual realisation for everyone, equally. In my essay, the word 'Tantrism' is employed in reference to the non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaiva traditions that developed in Kashmir between 9th and 13th centuries CE, and spread to south India and far beyond the Indian subcontinent.

## Bhairava and Sacralisation of Fear

Sacralisation of fear has a long history in the phenomenology of religion. It was Rudolf Otto's epochal book *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) that set forth a completely new understanding of the sacred. As Otto pointed out, the experience of the 'wholly other' instigates a powerful psychological mechanism that gives rise to the emotional response of fear and awe. Otto's classic definition of the sacred avers thus: '[T]he sacred is the mystery that causes both threat and fascination' (*mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*). In this definition, the inexplicable encounter with the sacred is highlighted in the perspective of the emotional response *par excellence*, which is, at the same time, overwhelmingly dreadful and

wonderful. Otto's position is important because it concentrates on the analysis of religious feeling by showing 'how this feeling becomes manifest in elements given to consciousness' (Corrigan 2008: 466). This approach bears the mark of the non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaiva own methodology, according to which the ultimate status of a religious emotion is acknowledged in the symbol of the Heart, the affective seat of both feeling and consciousness. Yet, the Kashmiri Śaiva Tāntrikas provide us with another far more complex example of sacralisation of fear. In his *Tantrāloka,* Abhinavagupta (10th–11th century CE) appeals to traditional semantic analysis (*nirvacana*) to establish an etymological foundation for the sacralisation of fear. He starts his argument by tracing the etymology of the word *bhairava* to 'sound of terror' (*bhaya*: fear, terror, dread; *rava*: sound, roar). Thus, Bhairava, the fierce form of Śiva and a popular god of the tantric pantheon, becomes a religious representation of the affective experience of fear, expressed in the audible sound of terror. Abhinavagupta's argument is purported to show that the sacralisation of fear, epitomised in the figure of Bhairava, does not belong to the category of otherworldly, transcendent experience that is inaccessible to mortal man; rather it turns out to be just the opposite. Abhinavagupta shows that fear is a sacralised emotion because it results from the most tangible and profane experience given to man entangled in everyday human affairs: fear of transmigration. Here, the distinction between sacred fear (embodied in Bhairava) and ordinary fear (reflected in the emotional response to human misery) is blurred.[1] This is in accordance with the fundamental 'tantric' presupposition that continuously makes an attempt to unify the two apparently contradictory spheres of reality, sacred and secular. Abhinavagupta clarifies it in the following words: 'Bhairava (The Sound of Terror) is so called because He is born in the Heart (of consciousness) by the reflection aroused by the cry of fear of transmigration' (*Tantrāloka* 1.1, in Dyczkowski forthcoming). It is at this crucial moment when the awareness of existential fear of *saṃsāra* comes into being that the sense of the supernatural overwhelming presence of Bhairava's great power is attested. Of special significance is the emphasis put on the 'Heart', the affective centre of conscious life. Moreover, the actual experience of fear that is aroused by the dreadful realisation of transmigratory existence is reflected upon as Bhairava's bestowal of grace.[2] In other words, to be afraid of *saṃsāra* is to be blessed by Bhairava himself. Abhinavagupta avers thus: 'He is called Bhairava, "The Sound of Terror"' because 'he helps those who are frightened by transmigration. It is by virtue of his grace that the awareness of the fear

of bonded existence is clearly apparent' (ibid.). It should be noted that fear of transmigration plays important role in stimulating reflective awareness which is in itself just a prelude to the religious experience culminating in the 'encounter' with Bhairava.

For the Kashmiri Śaiva Tāntrikas, intensity of emotional life is valued as the source of spiritual power. In these powerful emotional states, even the most negative ones, the ongoing agitation of thought-constructs is suspended. As a consequence, expansion of consciousness (*vikāsa*), evoked by such terms as *sahaja* (spontaneity), *khecarī* (sky-farer), *samāveśa* (possession), *sāmarasya* (one-sentiment), and *spanda* (vibration), takes place (Eliade 1969: 123). For example, the *Spandakārikā*, a seminal text of the Spanda school of non-dualistic Kashmir Śaivism, provides examples of many of these 'negative' emotional states, in which the sense of fear, identified with the 'Bhairava state', becomes activated. Thus, it is declared that one enters the 'Bhairava state' in the moment of great fear, generated by the sight of a lion or python: when all mental activities come to a dead stop, the vibration of consciousness (*spanda*) is established (Singh 1980: 102–03).[3] This passage illustrates that the emotional meaning of fear has been adopted by Kashmiri Śaiva exegetes as a practical device for reaching the spiritually significant level of experience. The function of fear, thus, is to assert the possibility of achieving identification with the supreme reality, represented by Bhairava.

## Fear as an Example of Socially, Morally and Culturally Constructed Emotion

Richard A. Shweder and Jonathan Haidt, exponents of the cultural psychology of emotions, suggested that emotional experience depends on the social and moral context. Moreover, emotions can be understood only with reference to a specific cultural setting to which they belong. Cultures generally follow three types of ethics to varying degrees: (*a*) 'ethics of autonomy', which finds its basis in motivation of the individual; (*b*) 'ethics of community', in which the needs of the individual are suppressed for the sake of collective good; (*c*) 'ethics of divinity', in which the religious aspect becomes prominent. Following this scheme of conceptualisation, I argue that, even though both the Brāhmaṇical orthodox tradition and heterodox tantric tradition are governed by the 'ethics of divinity', their radical disparity still holds in regard to the 'ethics of autonomy' and the 'ethics of community'. Seen from this

perspective, the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy favours the 'ethics of community', where 'ontological priority is given to collective social entities (the family, guild, clan, community)' (Shweder and Haidt 2000: 409). In contrast, the tantric heterodoxy is inextricably linked to the 'ethics of autonomy' that implies freedom from socially binding constraints.

Fear is an example of emotion that is socially and culturally constructed. In other words, 'fear' is woven into a wider social and moral context, in which the impurity mechanism is evoked. On the specific ground of the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, purity is a guarantee of individual, social and metaphysical security, while impurity stimulates fear-response. The ideal Brāhmaṇa is required to avoid contact with forbidden and contaminated substances, places, persons, foods, drinks, dresses, etc. In a vast spectrum of rules regarding this what should be followed and what must be abandoned, a demarcating line between the pure and the impure is carefully drawn. The tantric Hero is the exact opposition of the ideal Brāhmaṇa. He goes to the cremation ground, the place of the greatest danger and the epitome of pollution and terror. The Karavīra cremation ground is the most sacred place in the tantric universe because it is believed to represent the material location of Kālī, or more precisely Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī (The Enchantress of Time). The act of interiorisation places the outer site of material cremation ground as a symbol for the inner one (Bharati 1980: 155). In this way, the cremation ground, sanctified and personified as the Goddess, becomes the location of the Hero's heart, the seat of both intense feeling and consciousness. This idea is elucidated in the following quotation from verse 82 of the *Cidgaganacandrikā*:

> You are said to be the cemetery, which free of the fluctuating activity of the mind is the cremation ground within the Hero's heart. Difficult to behold, yet you are the meeting ground, the ever illumined light which consumes everything.[4]

The deadly, terrifying cremation ground, considered by ordinary awareness to be an impure and polluted place, becomes here the seat of emotional power and purity of consciousness. It is a symbolic representation of the lucid light of consciousness, freed from the darkness of mental agitation and thought-constructs feeding upon the condition of contraction that belongs to ignorance and bondage. This is in itself just an example of a conceptual shift presupposed in tantric metaphysics that, through a radical break of fears, hates and traditional notions of

good and evil, explicitly challenges the play of opposites to behold the perfect harmony of all contradictions.

## Fear-eliciting Question that Leads to Liberation

Tantric texts do not seem to praise psychologically calming experiences, nor do they discuss comforting issues regarding human existence. On the contrary, what they tend to convey in their bone-chilling narratives is often expressed in the language of gruesome visuals. Similarly, the philosophical discussions these texts promote have a fear-stirring capacity. A textual example of this kind is found in the *Kramasadbhāva*, one of the root texts of the Krama tradition of non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaivism. As is often the case with the Krama scriptures, textual authenticity is often tightly bound to the potent mythological realm. Myth and text reflect each other. Moreover, the Krama tantric texts claim to have the position of supreme authority in the elaboration of esoteric teachings *because* they were written in the actual cremation ground. This is certainly the case with the *Kramasadbhāva* that, as we are told, was written in the Karavīra cremation ground. The first *paṭala* of the *Kramasadbhāva*, entitled 'A Question Concerning the Teaching of Vyomeśī (Mistress of Emptiness)', focuses on a dialogue between Bhairava and his female counterpart Bhairavī. The central theme of this dialogue is the importance of asking the right question. Abhinavagupta discusses the metaphysical aspect of the 'question' in the context of revelation of knowledge in the sacred texts.[5] He says that question is the essential part of the revelation, for, without question, the answer could not reach a state of certainty. Here, the question is additionally described as a fear-eliciting one; for this reason, perhaps, it is able to trim the path to liberation. Bhairava asks Bhairavī a question concerning the nature of the ultimate reality. Bhairavī replies by saying that the moment this question is asked it leads to liberation (*tathāpi kālaṃ praśnasya mokṣanāya idaṃ bhavet*). This question which brings fear (*bhayāvahā*) and is the object of the quarreling of people is established in Bhairava's own Heart.[6] The main characteristic feature of this question is that it brings fear; it is profound, terrible, secret, and the most secret.[7] The answer to this question is desired by the Great Perfected Ones (*mahāsiddha*s), gods, sages, *brahmarākṣa*s,[8] *gandharva*s, *kinnara*s[9], nymphs (*divya*s), celestial beings (*sādhya*s), the lord of Vasus, Rudra, Viṣṇu, Īśvara, Sadāśiva, Bhairava, serpents (*nāga*s) and the lord of the *nāga*s, tree-spirits (*yakṣa*s), ghosts (*bhūta*s), *piśāca*s,[10] demons (*asura*s), the lord of *rākṣasa*s and humans

(*Kramasadbhāva* 1.46–48). Here, the conceptualisation of linguistic inquiry intimately involves affective sensation. More specifically, the question can be truly powerful and liberating only if it has the capacity to cause fear. Here again, the importance of the Heart is evoked. By continuing in the same 'direction', we move toward fear-stirring places and substances that constitute an important part of tantric *sādhanā*.

## Fear-stirring Places and Substances: Uprooting *Saṃskāra*s

> There is a peculiar and essential trait of the tantric affirmation which distinguishes it from the earliest philosophies. For the ideal of Tantra is to achieve illumination precisely by means of those very objects which the earlier sages sought to banish from their consciousness . . . The tantric Hero goes directly through the sphere of greatest danger. It is an essential principle of the tantric idea that man, in general must rise through and by means of nature, not by the rejection of nature. As one falls onto the ground, so one must lift oneself by the aid of the ground — says *Kulārṇavatantra* . . . The excluded forces . . . are incorporated in Tantra, what is discovered in due is the intrinsic purity and innocence of the seemingly dark and dangerous sphere. In this way, he breaks within himself the tension of the forbidden and resolves everything in light, recognizing in everything the one śakti (Zimmer 1961: 576–79).

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973), Campbell developed the theory of a universal hero myth which he believed was common to all cultures and historical periods. He claimed that stories of the Heroes found in mythological narratives 'shared an underlying archetypal unity of common motifs, symbols and themes' (MacWilliams 2005: 1379). They also held universal meaning 'common psychological and metaphysical reality was at work in these tales' (ibid.). Campbell defines 'Hero' as those persons who are able to transcend or go beyond the personal limitations, prejudices and stereotypes. The one attribute, says Campbell, that distinguishes the Hero from the rest of the world is the courage to face alone the 'other' self (Campbell 1973: 19–20). According to his theory of the mono-myth or the Hero's journey, a brave man who sets on a dangerous expedition to the Self, passes through three states or three rites of passage.[11] The first of these states is 'departure', when he is expected to confront the unconscious part of his psyche. The core emotional component of departure is fear. According to John W. Tigue (1994: 49–50):

> Departure is the call to adventure which beckons the latent heroes or heroines into an unplanned encounter with darkness . . . The intrepids enter the darker places of the world: forest, swamp, caves, storm ridden seas; climb treacherous mountains and trek overall hazardous paths.

In the psychological and metaphysical reality underlying the tantric Hero, the moment of departure is enacted when the tantric adept goes directly to the places of greatest danger that give shape to inchoate fears. The basic practices of Tantra must be performed in dark and dangerous areas. The Tantric texts often give a detailed description of such places. The most suitable spot for tantric worship is the cremation ground of Karavīra. As stated in the introductory verses (1.3–6) of the *Devīpañcaśatikā* (*Kālīkulapañcaśatikā*), a root text of the Krama tradition:

> The cremation ground of the venerable Northern Seat (*Uttarapīṭha*) is Karavīra, worshipped by the supreme Śiva, god of gods. The Karavīra is heated by the fire of a funeral pyre (*mahāciti*) and is attended by great *yoginī*s, great ghosts (*bhūta*s) and great mothers (*mātṛ*s). Great yogins gather there, and it is respected by the great *siddha*s. A great monastery is established there and it resounds with great sound of *phet*. That cremation ground (Karavīra) gives great accomplishments (*siddhi*s) and contains great terror. It is full of Bhairava who is more terrible than terrible, and filled with great power (*tejas*).[12]

Among other locations worth considering for tantric practice is any isolated place that brings fear, such as a big mountain, a crossroads, a river, the deep, scary forest, the great battlefield, greedy to consume every Hero (*Kramasadbhāva* 4.41–43). Such places come to be regarded as *sādhanā* places. Wandering through such places is part of a Hero's vow. Similarly, the ritualistic usage of forbidden, fear-eliciting 'substances', viz., meat (*māṃsa*), alcoholic drink (*madya*), fish (*matsya*), parched grain (*mudrā*) and intimate intercourse (*mithuna*) (known under the rubric of five Ms), based on the Kaula practices,[13] has a psychological function in helping a tantric Hero to confront fear. The five Ms form a part of practice known as the left-hand path (*vāmācāra*). The left-hand path constitutes a specific mode of tantric worship that requires an adept of a heroic disposition (*vīrabhāva*). It stands in a diametrical opposition to the right-hand path (*dakṣināchāra*) meant for adepts of a divine type (*divyabhāva*).[14] Of particular significance is the fact that these two modes of tantric worship are differentiated in accordance with a psychological disposition of an adept, understood as his or her natural tendency.

In modern psychology, this psychological disposition is usually defined as a generalised neuropsychic structure peculiar to the individual that forms an adaptive or stylistic behaviour.[15] In other words, some people are naturally inclined to be shy and introverted, while others tend to be assertive and extroverted. Tantrism assumes a fundamental dichotomy between the psychological dispositions of divine attitude (*divyabhāva*) and heroic attitude (*vīrabhāva*) that are explained in terms of qualities (*guṇas*) of the Sāṃkhya philosophical system. Thus, the adepts classified as *divyabhāva* are believed to be 'pure' in their essential nature (quality of purity or *sattvaguṇa* is predominant in them). Those who are of heroic disposition are said to be 'energetic' (quality of energy or *rajasguṇa* is prevalent in them). A heroic path (*vīra-sādhanā*) is advocated in virtually all the Kaula-based schools of tantric lore. It is traditionally considered to be the most dangerous and challenging of all spiritual paths that requires a great amount of courage and perseverance. Zimmer (1961: 217–18) summarises the heroic path in the following words:

> The contrast of morally reprehensible, forged by the ethical commands that sets[*sic*] the limits, boundaries in the profane world and shape both his behavior and what is permissible and prohibited are abolished through the rites of 5Ms in order to allow for the experience beyond polarity, and reconcile even the most far-fetched bifurcations. The secret of *kulācāra* practice lies in its prescribing for the rite things shunned in the everyday world, for it is obvious that the undifferentiated, suprapolar state of the purely divine stands in clear contradistinction to human existence, which is in so many ways determined and delimited. There seem to be no integrating links between them; the only possibility is to transcend them.

The practice of heroism that aims at the dissolution of all distinctions is characteristic of the wider practice of non-duality (*advaitācāra*) that had been taught by Śiva himself as the highest method of achieving liberation.[16] In thus asserting the irreducible non-duality of consciousness pervading all states and conditions of being, the tantric adepts try to exclude any notion of duality that results in fear. In such a context, the spiritual practice itself becomes a battlefield upon which the struggle against duality takes place. The dualistic perception that causes fear in the subject is considered to be the enemy which must be destroyed and supplanted with the vision of non-duality grounded in the Self. In this process, the sense of duality or this-ness merges into non-duality of the Self, bringing forth the reconciliation of all opposites. The famous stanza of the *Parāpañcāśīkā* advances this notion in the following words:

'Effecting the dissolution of the enemy, [which is] this-ness, in the I-ness, he who is intent upon power (heroism) enjoys the natural state [which is] the destroyer of all that is inauspicious'.[17] It is this within this theoretical framework of inner battlefield, evoked in the language of military conquest, that the culture of heroism has developed. The tantric Hero fights his own fear as well as dangers associated with undertaking the tantric path of heroism; he wears a protective armour (*kavaca*)[18] and holds a weapon (*astra*). He is a warrior engaged in battle against his own deep-rooted fear.

Interestingly, the powerful theme of warfare and fear recurs also in Bengali Tantrism, but in a totally different context. In a beautiful poem (poem no. 76, in Thompson and Spenser 1923) of the 18th-century-CE Bengali poet Rasikachandra Ray, the very worship of fierce Kālī, the goddess of battlefield *par excellence*, is metaphorised as the arena of battle. The devotee invites the goddess to the 'battlefield of worship' with the following words:

> Come, Mother, join the battle with me as I worship.
> Let us see, Mother, who will be conquered, the Mother or the son . . .
> Today the battle shall decide the issue.
> What fear have I of death?
>
> With beating of drums, I will seize the wealth of salvation. In battle after battle you have overthrown the Daityas. This time, O Goddess, come and fight with me. Rasikachandra your votary says: it is in your strength, Mother, that I shall conquer you in battle.

The sense of inner struggle associated with the worship of Kālī is certainly reflected in the poetic expressions of this poem. This struggle somehow recaptures the intensity and power of the tantric tradition. The fear of death does not any longer hold the Tāntrika in its grip. He marches with faithful courage for the final battle with the goddess, for he knows that his strength lies in her hands and liberation is near.

The Tantric approach to fear, and to emotions in general, does not attempt to eliminate, control or withdraw the human psyche from its emotional component; to the contrary, it enables a more constructive understanding of the emotions' irresistible power. This understanding leads to the praxis that seeks to intensify emotional patterns through the fullest engagement in their power. In the *Mahārthamañjarī* of Maheśvarānanda (12th–13th century CE), a Krama text written in

Chidambaram (Tamil Nadu), the ritualistic usage of the five Ms forms a part of Means of Power (*śāktopāya*). In this text, we are reminded of the fact that engagement in forbidden, terrifying practices requires a great amount of bravery. It is not a coincidence that these ritual substances are often called the 'heroic ingredients' (*vīradravya*). The *Mahārthamañjarī* (stanza 58) refers to those who undertake the secret *kulācāra* practice thus: 'Those who give themselves to the pleasure of a Great Union in a Cup of Totality, which contains the essence of nectar are verily those who savour the courage expelling seeds of mental agitation'.[19] These cryptic verses refer to two tantric practices that constitute the core of *kulācāra*: (*a*) the 'intimate intercourse' (*mithuna*) or 'Great Union'; and (*b*) the ritual ingestion of wine (*madya*) or 'Cup of Totality'. Both these practices belong to the conduct of the Hero (*vīrācāra*), whereas wine is additionally described as the 'heroic drink' (*vīrapāna*). Engagement in these transgressive practices is equated with the 'savouring of courage'. Interestingly, 'courage' stands here for a psychological bravery that involves overcoming habitual tendencies of the unconscious latent impressions (*saṃskāra*s). The latent impressions are accumulated in the storehouse of past actions (*karman*) residing there in the potential form, as the germs of transmigration (*saṃsāra*). These germs are about to surface again, during each time of human existence on earth, sprouting into 'new growths of entanglement, yielding the fruits of still another destiny of delusory performances and rewards' (Zimmer 1961: 303). The *saṃskāra*s are unconscious complexes responsible for casting the shadow of ignorance forged by the impurity of determined thought-constructs. Since they reside in the unconscious sphere of consciousness, it is difficult to take hold of them. In the analysis of psyche rendered by the Tantras, one is supposed to get rid of the *saṃskāra*s through the act of purification of the thought-constructs. It happens so that on the ground of the non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, the impurity is not a material substance, as in the dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta, but, on the contrary, it abides in thought only. Therefore, all rituals are performed to eradicate the impurity residing in the mental sphere. Purification implies cleansing of the impurity of determined thought-constructs that directly leads to the uprooting of the seeds of latent impressions from which the impure thought-constructs spring forth. As Hanneder points out, the tantric idea of liberation rests on the fact that the impure thought-constructs are the cause of contraction (of the consciousness) through fear (*śaṅkā*): '[C]ontraction results from fear experienced by the

individual who tries to protect his identity continuously recreating his limited, artificial identity (*kṛtrima-aham*)' (1998: 144–45). The contraction of the consciousness (*saṃkoca*) connotes bondage and is the exact opposition of the expansion of the consciousness (*vikāsa*) and liberation. The *Mahārthamañjarī* follows this paradigm when it enumerates eight bondages cultivated in the Brāhmaṇical orthodox society that stand in a sharp opposition to a true tantric Hero. These are hate, doubt, fear, shame, disregard, family, caste, and the (orthodox) way of life.[20] The ritualistic use of fear-eliciting substances and places were thought to be effective in reaching the state of absence of contraction through fear. This experience culminating in true and pure identity (*akṛtrima-aham*) is liberation. Additionally, the *Mahārthamañjarī* defines the condition of a liberated *yogin* in terms of *naiścintyam* or 'absence of fear', which is additionally described as free from limitation caused by the perception of duality. The state of 'absence of fear' is characterised as a sudden expansion of one's own consciousness that brings forth the realisation of the essential non-duality that pervades all states and conditions.[21]

It is now clear that *vīra-sādhanā*, in its more 'liberal' or even 'fearless' attitude for the ritualistic usage of substances normally shunned in the everyday life, aspires for a new psychological paradigm, reflected in the powerful status of a Hero whose 'absence of fear' is perceived as the final emancipation. The *Śiva Sūtra*s (1.11) of Vasugupta, the 9th-century-CE scriptural authority held in high esteem by the Kashmiri non-dualist Śaiva exegetes, conforms to this view when it deliberately equates the Lord of the Heroes (*vīreśa*) with the highest spiritual achievement known as the Fourth State (*turiya*).[22] The Krama tradition of Kashmiri Śaivism is particularly aware of its 'heroic' identity that remains central to its concept of historical lineages. According to the *Kālīkulapañcaśatikā,* the first teachers in the Krama's lineage, Vidyānanda and Niṣkriyānanda, were Heroes (*vīra*); and according to *Ciñcinīmatasārasamuccaya* 7.183 they lived in the cremation ground (*śmaśānavāsī*) and practiced the vigilance at night (*niśātaṇa*). Also, Prabodhanātha, the author of *Aṣṭikā* and a disciple of Cakrabhānu, was an ascetic who was given the venerable title 'the Lord of the Heroes' (*vīrendra*) (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 163).[23] What becomes immediately clear here is that heroic virtue was not only a sign of tantric practice, but more importantly, a visible mark of a spiritual achievement. In this process, 'heroism' becomes itself a sectarian label that marks and confirms its legitimate authority in the multi-denominational religious world of mediaeval India.

## Tantric Hero: A Psychological Profile

Finally, I would like to turn our attention to the psychological portrait of the tantric Hero focusing on the Hero's two inherent qualities: (*a*) heroic steadfastness (*dhairya*), and (*b*) virility (*vīrya*). My argument intends to demonstrate that *dhairya* and *vīrya* are emergent features that constitute heroic personhood.

Heroic steadfastness (*dhairya*) is considered to be a fundamental 'character' trait of the tantric Hero. Interesting parallels can be drawn between Karṇa, a hero figure from the *Mahābhārata*, and the tantric hero as regards *dhairya*. The word *dhairya,* derived from the verbal root *dhṛ*, is often used to designate 'firmness', 'constancy', 'courage', 'psychological composure', 'calmness', and 'mental equilibrium'; these states are often metaphorised as the tranquility of the ocean that, in spite of minor interruptions on the surface, remains largely untroubled (van Buitenen 1958: 307). Bhoja, in his famous *Śṛṅgāra Prakāśa* (11th century CE), avers: '[W]hat makes us call a Hero is the fact of his possessing continuity or stability of character (*dhairyam*)' (Pollock 2001: 225). Aditya Adarkar, who in his analysis of the hero Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata* translates *dhairya* as 'courageous constancy', suggests that the concept of psychological growth through heroic steadfastness can be seen 'as a powerful alternative to the Freudian model of individual change' (2008: 139). The same word *dhairya* is used in two different Krama scriptures, *Kālīkulapañcaśatikā* and *Kramasadbhāva*, for a description of heroic steadfastness, free of mental fickleness, identified with the knowledge of Kālī (*dhairyatvāt kālikājñānaṃ cañcalatvavivarjitam*). The *Kālīkulapañcaśatikā* avers that by means of *dhairya* one acquires the knowledge of Kālī, which is without instability. This condition is imperishable, unmovable. The whole universe is pervaded by it (*Kālīkulapañcaśatikā* or *Devīpañcaśatikā* 1.53). Here, 'courageous constancy' assumes an important epistemological dimension, as a firm knowledge of Kālī emerges from it. Similarly, the *Kramasadbhāva* equates Kālī with the strength of heroic composure when it explicitly says: 'Lay hold of this strength, the essence of heroic steadfastness (*dhairyasadbhāva*), which is named Kālīka' (*Kramasadbhāva* 2.2). Such examples show that the tantric practitioners, despite their outrageous practices, are instructed to remain mentally stable. Mental stability or psychological composure are, therefore, seen as truly heroic virtues that are internal to the tantric practice. This observation, it should be noted, stands in contrast with the mainstream Brāhmaṇical 'hallucinatory'

opinion about the tantric adepts, who are perceived as insane fellows roaming in the cremation grounds in the frenzy of demonic seizure.

The second important 'personality' trait in the psychological portrait of the tantric Hero is virility (*vīrya*). Etymologically, the term *vīrya* stands for 'manliness', 'valour', 'strength', 'power', 'energy', 'heroism', 'heroic deed', 'virility', 'semen virile', 'efficacy', 'splendour', and 'dignity' (Monier-Williams 2002). Undoubtedly, the non-dualist Kashmiri Śaivas were aware of the tremendous conceptual potency yielded by this term, as they gave *vīrya* a prominent place in their 'heroic' scheme. The concept of *vīrya* is intrinsically related to the problem of *mantric* efficacy (*mantravīrya*) and the level of spiritual realisation of the tantric adept. In response to such questions as to why *mantra*s are inefficient and why do they bring only limited results, the Kashmiri Śaivas say: they do not have *vīrya* or potency. *Mantra*s which lack potency are only compilations of sounds and do not differ from the thought-constructs. Therefore, only *mantra*s provided with *vīrya* are effective. In examining this topic, the *Mahārthamañjarī* puts emphasis on the relationship between the efficacy of *mantra*s and the spiritual realisation of the tantric adept, when it explicitly says in stanza 26: 'That is called *vīrya* which belongs as an attribute to the Hero (*vīra*)'.[24] *Mantric* potency can be awakened by those adepts who have mastered the great *mantra* AHAṂ, the perfect and full I-consciousness. Padoux (1990: 174) explains that AHAṂ, 'which is regarded as identical with the Heart (*hṛdaya*) that is, with consciousness as the source of the energy, and notably of the potency of *mantra*s (*mantravīrya*), is the reflective awareness (*vimarśa*)'.[25]

However, the 'awakening' of *mantravīrya* is also connected with the discovery of virile power in the subtle physiology of the body. Abhinavagupta provides us with a detailed analysis of this process in his commentary on the *Parātrīśikā Tantra*, when he speaks of the vital energy (*ojas*) abiding in the middle canal of *suṣumnā* that becomes diffused as an enlivening factor in the form of virility (*vīrya*) to all parts of the body (Singh 2000: 42). He writes thus: '[W]hatever is taken in, whether in the form of food or perception (sound, visual awareness of form, savour, contact), first it is converted in the middle channel into the form of *ojas*; then, this *ojas* is converted into virility (*vīrya*), which permeates the whole body' (ibid.). Abhinavagupta enlarges on these glosses by saying that those adepts in whom *vīrya* has not reached its full potential, the energy acquired from the sense-perceptions builds up only in the sense-organ itself. But those in whom *prāṇa* and *apāna* becomes submerged in the middle channel, i.e., *suṣumnā*, *vīrya* automatically connects with

the *śakti* — the spiritual enlivening force that stands behind all physical, mental and emotional activities of the *sādhaka*.

These few illustrations demonstrate a number of characteristic features consistently associated with the tantric Hero. The examples cited show that heroic steadfastness arising from mental stability, the development of potency to make *mantra*s effective, or the discovery of inner virility triggered by successful practice of 'rising *kuṇḍaliṇī*' are all part of a heroic ethos which constitutes Tantrism. Therefore, the psychological profile of the tantric Hero presented here is that of a man of Heart, endowed with a fearless attitude, strong mind, firm character, spiritual potency; he is also one who always finds courage to combat the powers of contraction and bondage by which men are beset.

## Conclusion

An important conclusion about fear that emerges from my analysis is its ambiguous nature. On the one hand, we have a 'positive' fear, regarded as an emotional peak experience providing religious and spiritual power that is mostly welcomed. On the other hand, we have a 'negative' fear resulting from the *saṃskāra*s that gives rise to the contraction of consciousness and bondage. The task of the tantric Hero lies in the conquest of this 'negative' fear. 'Positive' fear differs in regard to its object: it may be a fear of the inescapable force of man's destiny, fear of the cremation ground or fear of philosophical questioning. Nevertheless, despite the diversity of objective stimuli that cause fear, there is an important common element to be found: 'positive' fear always arises in the Heart. The symbol of the Heart has been adopted by the Kashmiri non-dual Śaivas as the locus of both emotive power and supreme liberated consciousness. It is conceivable that this assumption represents an attempt to elevate emotional life that can be seen as a mode of access to the higher metaphysical reality blooming with full glory and impenetrable depth.

## Notes

1. Even the great Abhinavagupta struggles under the weight of the fear of transmigration (*bhavabhaya*). In verse 18 of the *Kramastotra*, a devotional hymn dedicated to Kālī, he expresses his anxiety with emotional intensity: 'Let that great goddess entirely remove for me the fear of becoming' (*mahādevī seyaṃ mama bhavabhayaṃ saṃdalayatām*). Another example of the same rhetoric used to explicate the devotee's moving appeal to the goddess is found in verse 23: 'May she (Kālī) lessen my sense of differentation originated from the fear of worldly existence' (*kṛśatu mama bhedaṃ bhavabhayāt*).

2. For an analogous theme in the Śaiva Siddhānta, see Andrea Acri's essay (Chapter 7) in this volume.
3. Similarly, *spanda* manifests in the moment of intense terror at seeing the horrible pain of endless wars. Likewise, one's mind reaches the state of *spanda* during a deeply moving experience of joy and happiness of looking at the beloved person whom he taught was dead. The principle of *spanda* also manifests in the moment of mental confusion when 'there is a confusion as to what to do', for example, when one's kingdom is violently attacked by another cruel king and a decision has to be taken on what should be done; being in this perplexed state, one thinks on and on: 'what should I do?'. *Spanda* is further experienced in the time of misfortune, when one receives the message of the death of a kin; in this moment, in which the state of consciousness is altered, the sorrow grows and the tears flow manifesting suffering, *spanda* is established. Similarly, in the moment of sudden terror, when one is confronted eye to eye with an angered tiger, one experiences *spanda.* And again, in the state of retraction, seeing something horrifying, one enters *spanda.* Or, in a moment, free of thought-constructs, in a state of full enthusiasm, when, for example, a man suddenly finds inside himself the force to complete a difficult task, *spanda* arises. Or else, in seeing something extraordinary beautiful, never seen before, *spanda* is established.
4. The translation of this verse was given to the author by Mark Dyczkowski.
5. In doing so, Abhinavagupta refers to three stages of knowledge in Nyāya, viz., *uddeśa* ('enunciation'), *lakṣaṇa* ('definition') and *parīkṣā* ('examination') (Bäumer 1994: 13).
6. *anekakāraṇaireva vivadanti bhayāvahāḥ|*
   *hṛdisthaṃ praśnaṃ ajñātaṃ āsāṃ tu paramārthataḥ ||*

   'People quarrel for this which brings fear for many reasons, because they do not know the question established within your heart, which is the supreme truth' (*Kramasadbhāva* 1.43).
7. *bhayāvahaṃ mahāraudraṃ bhīmarūpaṃ mahotkaṭam |*
   *atyantagahanaṃ gūḍhaṃ guptaṃ guptataraṃ param ||*

   '[This question] brings fear; it is greatly terrible, in the form of the terrific, it is proud, deep, profound, secret and the most secret' (*Kramasadbhāva* 1.45).
8. The *brahmarākṣa*s are the class of demons who possess persons who dislike study, asceticism, religion, fasting, celibacy, and the worship of the gods, ascetics and gurus; and are unclean or rather arrogant (Sutherland 1991: 167).
9. The *kinnara*s, also called *kiṃpuruṣa*s (literally, 'what sort of men?'), are creatures with human bodies and heads of horses. The females of this class function as sirens and seductress (Sutherland 1991: 61).
10. The *piśāca*s are lower on the scale of beings than the *rākṣasa*s. Often described as 'flesh eaters', ignorant, impure and false, they do not have any benevolent side to their nature (Sutherland 1991: 59).

11. These three rites of passage are identified as 'Departure', 'Initiation' and 'Return'.
12. *śrīmaduttarapīṭhasya [k: śrīmaduttaraṃ-] śmaśānaṃ karavīrakam |*
*pūjitaṃ devadevena śivena paramātmanā [k, kh: paramātmane; g: paramātmano] || 1.3 ||*
*mahācityagnisaṃtaptaṃ mahāyoginīsevitam [k, kh, g: -evitam] |*
*mahābhūtasamākīrṇaṃ mahāmātṛbhiḥ [k: -mātṛbhiḥ; kh, g: -mātṛbhi] sevitam || 1.4 ||*
*mahāyogaiśca nicitaṃ mahāsiddhairnamaskṛtam |*
*mahāmaṭhakasaṃjuṣṭaṃ [k, kh, g: mahāmaṭaka-] mahāphetkāranāditam || 1.5 ||*
*mahāsiddhipradātāraṃ mahābhairavasaṃkulam |*
*mahāghorātighorograṃ mahātejopabṛṃhitam || 1.6 ||*
13. The *Sarvācāra-tantra*, quoted in the *Parātriśikā-tantra*, provides us with a very interesting explanation of the 'impure' five Ms by pointing out to their constitutional origins from the five gross elements (*pañca-mahābhūta*). The text says that drinkable and non-drinkable is simply water; eatable and not eatable is simply earth; beautiful and ugly is simply fire; touchable and untouchable is only a matter of air; the hole of male organ or the female organ is nothing more than space (Singh 2000: 222–23).
14. The right-hand path is so called because of its progressive method of worship (*pravṛtti-mārga*), in which the senses are suppressed. On the contrary, the left-hand path advertises a regressive method of worship (*nivṛtti-mārga*), in which 'the senses are deliberately brought into contact with everything that tempts them in order to experience the relativity of this temptation and to rise above it and, thus, to become the master of it' (Pott 1966: 13).
15. See, for example, the 'personality theory' of American psychologist Willard Gordon Allport (1937).
16. *Jayadrathayāmala* 4 folio 127v2–6 = *Tantrāloka* 29.73c–75b (Sanderson 1996: 17).
17. *Parāpañcāśīkā*, verse 50 quoted in the *Yoginīhṛdaya* with *dīpikā* of Amṛtānanda (Mayer-Kǫ̀nig 2005: 82). See also Mayer-Kǫ̀nig 2005: 77–81.
18. *Kavaca* in the specific sense means 'armour'. In the context of tantric ritual called *aṅganyāsa* that includes ritual placement of the *mantra*s on six parts of the body, viz., heart, head, top-knot, torso, eyes, and weapon, *kavaca* is a term used for the torso. The worshipper covers these places with the *mantra*s by touching them with fingertips and at the same time uttering the sacred formulas. This ritual is part of a procedure to transform the human body into a divine body. *Kavaca* is the part of the body which is protected against danger, and the weapon (*astra*) is the means to avert danger (van Kooij 1983: 118–29).
19. *ye kulakumbhasudhāsavapānamahotsavasukhe pravartante |*
*te khalu vikalpāṅkurān rasikā upadaṃṣṭuṃ pragalbhante ||*
20. Commentary on stanza 58.

21. Commentary on stanza 65.
22. *tritayabhoktā vīreśaḥ.*
23. *śrīcakrabhānupādaistu paramārthārthapāragaiḥ |*
*kṛtaprasādo vīrendraḥ [-de vīrendra] śrīprabodhastapodhanaḥ [-prabodha-] ||*

    'The venerable ascetic and Lord of Heroes, Prabodhanātha, was graced (with the teachings) by venerable Cakrabhānu who had grasped the highest truth' (trans. Mark Dyczkowski).
24. *vīrasaṃbandhī hi dharmo vīryam ity ucyate |*
25. This topic is only signalled here; for a full explanation of this practice, see Padoux (1990) and Bäumer (2011: 141–226).

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