

Towards a Theory of Tantra-Ecology

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Eco-Scholarship on Tantra

Ecosophy is a broad-based movement that utilizes the findings of ecology as the foundation for philosophical reflection and spiritual practice rooted in environmental activism. A predominant characteristic of ecosophy is the belief that personal freedom is inseparable from the well-being of the natural world. In an important comparative essay titled “Bhagavad Gita, Ecosophy T, and Deep Ecology,” Knut Jacobsen carefully delineates the distinctions between self-realization in Indian monastic traditions and the aspirations of ecosophists:

In environmentalism, preservation of *samsāra* has become the ultimate goal, and not liberation from it, because the preservation of *samsāra* is seen as identical with realization of oneself. While self-realization in the monastic tradition meant ultimately to be free from the biological life and death cycle, self-realization in environmentalism means the flourishing of biological life. Environmentalism values the biological world of birth and death (*samsāra*) as ultimate reality, not a changeless substratum. Self-realization is nothing else than *samsāra*, and the realization of *samsāra*, i.e., to identify oneself fully with the natural processes, is *mokṣa*. The context is not liberation of the self from *samsāra* but liberation of the natural world from the suffering caused by human beings ignorant of the true identity of the self. The unity of all being does not mean that all beings share the same self, as in Advaita Vedānta, nor the oneness of humanity, as often in political interpretations, but organic wholeness, interdependence, the experience of sharing the joy and suffering of all living beings, looking at their self-realization as one’s own. The definition chosen by Ecosophy T for living beings is the Hindu definition, namely beings capable of self-realization, i.e., those sharing or possessing an *ātman* or *puruṣa*.¹

As Jacobsen himself makes clear, ecosophical traditions ought not to be categorized as the ‘same’ as any particular Indian *darśana*. Ecosophy is rooted in the complex and context-specific political agendas of 20th century activists, scientists, and philosophers—agendas that bear the mark of a genealogical tree whose intellectual roots extend into soils far afield from the land in which yogis reflected on how to achieve liberation. Nonetheless, the broad based similarities between ecosophical thought and some Indian philosophical reflection has been so apparent to certain ecosophists that they have enthusiastically drawn from Indian scriptural sources—primarily the Bhagavad Gītā and the writings of Gandhi—in order to reinforce the foundations of their own discourse and agendas.²

Jacobsen is not the only scholar to explore the possibilities for a two-way exchange between ecosophy and Indian thought. In his important work on Yoga, *Integrity of the Yoga-Darśana*, Whicher puts forth an insightful ‘ecosophical interpretation’ of classic Yoga in carefully arguing that *samādhi* does not culminate with the recognition of a ‘disunion’ of nature (*prakṛti*) and consciousness (*puruṣa*), but rather in their discriminative integration. The stilling of the thoughtwaves of the mind in higher states of meditative absorption does not lead, in the end, to a rejection of the world; rather, Whicher argued, it enables the yogin to attain a state of equipoise and insight that enables him to master and playfully engage the ‘modifications of nature,’ seeing them as a continuation on a spectrum of consciousness that extends from ‘matter’ to ‘spirit’. In this way, Whicher argued, Yoga highest result is in an affirmation of the body, the natural world and the yogin’s identification with both.

Whicher’s critique of predominant scholarly interpretations of Yoga as anti-environmental, dualistic discourse is in alignment with the analysis of eco-feminist scholar, Vandana Shiva:

Contemporary Western views of nature are fraught with the dichotomy of duality between man and woman, and person and nature. In Indian cosmology, by contrast, person and nature (Puruṣa-Prakṛiti) are a duality in unity. They are inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. Every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle. . . . Since, ontologically, there is no dualism between man and nature and because nature as Prakṛiti sustains life, nature has been treated as integral and inviolable. Prakṛiti, far from being an esoteric abstraction, is an every day

concept which organizes daily life. . . . As an embodiment and manifestation of the feminine principle it is characterized by (a) creativity, activity, productivity; (b) diversity in form and aspect; (c) connectedness and inter-relationship of all beings, including man; (d) continuity between the human and natural; and (e) sanctity of life in nature.³

Shiva's analysis reflects a common theme in eco-feminist and eco-theological thought: that the natural world is the dynamic body of the Divine Feminine, a body that is creative, diverse, interwoven, and sanctified. Shiva articulates a 'hermeneutics of interconnectedness' that links 'nature' to 'man' by positing a 'duality-in-unity' relationship of humanity predicated on the notion of a 'connectedness and inter-relationship of all beings.'

In the brief reflections to follow, I wish to think through the possibilities for 'thinking with' ecosophical thought as a creative and comparative hermeneutical exercise aimed at refining and expanding our understanding of one particular form of yogic thought and practice: Śākta Tantra. In so doing, I will not be the first scholar to address the intriguing similarities between Śākta Tantra and ecological writings and practice. This distinction belongs to Rita Dasgupta Sherma who first addressed the topic in 1998 in an important essay "Sacred Immanence: Reflections of Ecofeminism in Hindu Tantra." In this work, Sherma demonstrates, like Jacobsen, that much Indian spirituality does not share the ecologists' goal of preserving nature or even finding knowledge through some kind of reflection on the 'nature of nature.' For many Hindus, Sherma reminds us, nature has been identified as a source of bondage. However, Tantra, she argues, represents an alternative hermeneutical trajectory within Indic traditions that affirms the embodied world as the field of liberation. In this regard, she articulates seven 'affinities' between Tantra and ecological thought: (1) celebration of all aspects of life (2) elevation to ultimacy of a feminine principle linked to materiality; (3) possibility for liberation of female gender from constraints of 'fertility and nurturance alone'; (4) affirmation of phenomena as Goddess; (5) articulation of a discourse of empowerment for the marginalized; (6) veneration of the body and its sensations; (7) absence of a spirit/matter dichotomy.⁴

Sherma goes on to define Tantra as a 'theology of identification' that is not only "helpful for the cultivation of an earth-centered spirituality" but also a source of "inspiration" for "personal spiritual empowerment."⁵ However, she is careful to point that Tantra can easily be misused for power-centered agendas

that have little to do with affirmation of the environment.⁶ Much of Tantra, she observes has been used for various 'nefarious' purposes linked to sorcery and the affairs of state. Even still, she concludes, a "reconstruction" of Śākta Tantra "can become a channel through which Hindu nondualism can inspire a viable philosophy on which to base a transformed vision of the earth."⁷

Sherma's scholarship embodies an aesthetic beauty and pragmatic concern that I very much appreciate. However, while I am in agreement with much of Sherma's argument, my own interest herein is not to further inspire such a "transformed vision." Rather, my aim is much more circumscribed. In the remaining pages, I attempt to reflect back on Tantric thought and practice utilizing the modern insights of ecosophy. I seek not to suggest that Tantra is the same as ecosophy. But rather, in the spirit of J.Z. Smith I seek to observe how their revealed differences can be illuminating.

Turning to the Texts

Clearly, Tāntrikas were not seeking to save rivers and trees and regulate factories. The post-industrial devastation of our natural resources was not a concern in the world of the founders of Tantra. Moreover, many Tāntrikas—as White, Davidson, Urban, Dyczkowski and other scholars of Tantra have clearly documented—were seeking an empowerment that was firmly rooted in social and political constructions of the 'nation' (*maṇḍala*). In these contexts, power (*śakti*) was interpreted and wielded in relationship to those strategies of state that had less to do with spiritual fulfillment and ecological well-being and more to do with the acquisition of lands and the control of peoples.

However, as White demonstrates in *Kiss of the Yogini*, by the medieval period Tantra was defining not only the 'center' (i.e., the ideology and statecraft of the political elite) but also the 'periphery' (the ideology, counter politics, and spirituality of the populace). In this way, Tantra came 'interweave' the interests of politicians and generals with the high priests, philosophers, artists, poets, mystics and 'common folk' as a total system of knowledge linking meditation, health, worship, the arts, and statecraft through a discourse and logic that made the universe meaningful by highlighting its multileveled interconnections (*bandhas*).

Herein, I am limiting my concerns with that circle within the Tantric *maṇḍala* which contained the aspirations of an elite section of the population privileged to receive initiation into, practice, and write on Tantric yogic practice or *sādhana*. It is within this circumscribed field of the greater Tantric

system, that one can identify an ‘ecological logic’ rooted in the supreme goal (*paramārtha*) of experiencing a liberating empowerment through the embodied world. Akin to Whicher’s interpretation of Yoga as ‘integration’, I suggest that we interpret this high Tantric aspiration, not as a disembodied experience of ‘pure consciousness’ but as the concrete and literal embodying of the ecosphere.

In the highly coded environs of Tantric practice the final aim is the realization that the body of the *sādhaka* and the body of divinity are united in a holographic universe⁸ whose constituent parts contain within themselves the whole, “this all” (*sarvaṃ idaṃ*). The *Śiva Saṃhitā*, a Nāth Siddha guide to Haṭha Yoga (ca. Tenth century), describes the body of the *yogin* as the seat of the entire universe.

In your body is Mount Meru, encircled by the seven continents; the rivers are there too, the seas, the mountains, the plains, and the gods of the fields. Prophets are to be seen in it, monks, places of pilgrimage and the deities presiding over them. The stars are there, and the planets, and the sun together with the moon; there too are the two cosmic forces: that which destroys, that which creates; and all the elements: ether, air and fire, water and earth. Yes, in your body are all things that exist in the three worlds, all performing their prescribed functions around Mount Meru; he alone who knows this is held to be a true yogi.⁹

In Śākta Tantra the Goddess is celebrated as manifesting simultaneously on the macrocosmic plane as the universe and on the microcosmic plane in the human physiology. In Tantric traditions this twofold manifestation is at times described as a “double concealment” in which divine consciousness conceals its true nature. Sanjukta Gutpa remarks:

Tantric philosophy says that ultimately the unconscious bits of the universe, like stones, are also God and hence consciousness that has decided to conceal itself (*ātma-saṃkoca*). Here we come to the double concealment which God decides on: firstly, He conceals the fact that His true form is identical with the individual soul; and secondly, he conceals His true nature as consciousness to manifest Himself as unconscious phenomena.¹⁰

The Absolute’s contraction as the universe is understood in this context as the outward projection of its inner nature.¹¹ In this non-dual perspective, the universe is not a limitation of the Godhead. Rather, it is the pristine reflection of its infinite creative powers (*ananta-kalā-śakti*). The Godhead becomes the universe and all beings in it, enfolding¹² itself into an infinitely varied cosmic dance. However, once manifested as all living beings, the Godhead in each case conceals its true nature (*svarūpa-saṃkocana*). Tantric ritual and yogic practices provide the tools for the *sādhaka* to awaken to his or her true nature as that supreme consciousness-power which is the source and goal of all creation.

The key to achieving this realization is initiation into a Tantric lineage of perfected ones (*siddha-sampradāya*) stemming directly from the mouth of the Godhead (*divya-mukha*) and capable of revealing the technologies of self-perfection. Initiation includes training in the specialized ritual and yogic procedures that produce transformations in consciousness as a result of the manipulations of the fluids of the physical body and the energies of the subtle body. Across sectarian divisions, Tantric systems of *sādhana* share certain common features. In each case, the aim is to reverse the process of cosmogenesis and return the Godhead’s projected manifestations back to their unmanifest source. During *sādhana* the practitioner encodes in his or her microcosmic form the various parts of the Godhead’s macrocosmic form: divinities (*devatās*), phones (*mātrkāś*), graphemes (*kāras*), elementary principles (*tattvas*), worlds (*lokas*), and I-cognizers (*pramātrās*).¹³ In this way, the *sādhaka* reproduces the process of cosmogenesis within his or her own psychophysiology. He or she then reverses this process by harnessing the regressive power of the *visarga-śakti*¹⁴ and awakening the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* seated at the base of the subtle physiology. Once awakened, the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* ascends through the central channel, its ascent representing the dissolution of the universe in which all manifest forms are absorbed back into their unmanifest source in Paramaśiva at the crown of the head.

The mechanics of the *sādhaka*’s reversal of the cosmogonic process and return to the Godhead function according to an internal-external dialectic in which modalities of external worship (*bahir-yāga*) are mirrored by internalized visualizations and yogic practices (*antar-yāga*).¹⁵ The template that mediates this dialectic is the *yantra*, the mesocosmic device that is imparted by the *guru* at the time of initiation, *dīkṣā*.¹⁶ The *yantra* is the geometric embodiment of the divine that functions simultaneously as the image of the divinity, the image of the universe, and the “image of man.”¹⁷ The Tantric *sādhaka* employs

this mesocosmic device in both external ritual worship (*pūjā*) and internal meditative practice as a means of tracing the unfoldment of the cosmogonic process (*sr̥ṣṭi-krama*) from the *bindu* in the center to the outer circuits of the *yantra*'s periphery and, conversely, as a means of reversing the cosmogenesis by tracing the process of dissolution (*laya-krama*) starting from the periphery and moving inward to the center, the *bindu*. The adept's external ritual actions are mirrored by an internal movement of consciousness in which he or she moves from an extrovertive state of multiplicity represented by the *yantra*'s outer circuits to an introvertive state of undifferentiated unified awareness represented by the *bindu* in the center. In the advanced stages of *sādhana*, this movement in consciousness is accompanied by the movement of the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* from the *mūlādhāra-cakra* at the base of the spine to the *sahasrāra-cakra* at the crown of the head, which is identified with the *bindu*. Once the *kuṇḍalinī* reaches its final destination and becomes permanently established in the *sahasrāra-cakra*, the practitioner becomes a *siddha*, enters the "non-way" (*anupāya*), and transcends the need for any further form of practice.¹⁸

In the specialized *sādhana*s based on the *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava*¹⁹ the *sādhaka* transforms his body into the cosmogonic blueprint by meditatively constructing the Śrī Yantra within her psychosomatic landscape. This process identifies the *yonī* as the inner triangle of the *yantra*, the womb of consciousness from which all creation arises and is paradoxically situated at the base of the abdomen of the human being. And the functions, qualities, and design of this organ are to be seen as the supreme symbol of divine consciousness. Its fires, excretions, and juices are the alchemical properties and extractions necessary for the transformation of a microcosmic consciousness into the macrocosmic being that is Tripurasundarī. This potential for a transformation rooted in human sexuality is the supreme secret (*mahārahasya*) at the heart of high Tantric practice. It is this secret that became institutionalized as Nepal's Kumārī, the virgin goddess whose lower mouth (*adhavaktra*) was the gateway through which kings accessed total power. And it is this secret, encapsulating the paradox of being and replete with liberating power, that Tāntrikas unravel for the purpose of transforming themselves into the absolute. This secret is the mystery of God's capacity to conceal himself from himself, to be one while perpetually manifesting as more-than-one, to project limitation into transcendence and cloak omnipotence with weakness. This discourse of non-duality—the product of at least two thousand years of subcontinental theologizing—creates, through a baroque body technology, the possibility for embodying (lit., 'swallowing') the ecosphere (*brahmanda*). Tantric *sādhana* is

a body language, replete with signs whose referent is internalized experience, a realm of cognitive awareness at levels of speech that actualizes the connections (*bandhas*) with the constituent elements of the embodied universe. These connections are in turn channelized as the *sādhaka*'s own I-awareness, identified as the non-discursive field which is the foundation for those mantric cognitions that are the natural world. This I-awareness is the goddess, the divine mother, the foundational *prakṛti*, from whose interconnected and all-encompassing womb (*yonī*), expressed as a Śrī Yantra, the ecosphere arises.

Within this I-awareness lies the seeds of omnipotence in the form of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet, encoded into all creation as a result of consciousness "vomiting out" (*vamiti*) its inner nature. These phonemes, the *māṭṛkā*, are the atomic-essence of Goddess. For this reason, she is invoked as Māṭṛsadbhāva, She Whose True Being is the Phonemes. For Nepalese Śrī Vidyā Tāntrikas the key to success in their practice is the realization that this Goddess is the consciousness-power, the dynamic energy, at the heart of all language and that that language is what gives rise to the natural world. In the pursuit of this literal embodiment of 'nature', the *sādhaka* trains himself to perceive all forms of knowledge and power as arising from the very syllables he visualizes as instilled within the *yantra* that is his body. In this way, the *sādhaka* identifies his practice as the integration of all that exists within the natural world. It is this pre-10th century practice, I would argue, that leads to the discourse of the 'natural way' (*sahaja-yāna*). For it is through the internal tasting of the divine nectar (*divyāmrta*) emitted spontaneously from within the *sādhaka*'s own eco-spherized body, that he collapses all constructed notions (*kalpita-vikalpa*) into a natural, integrated vision of all reality as the playful expression of his own self-nature. "Paramaśiva," writes Amṛtavāgbhava, a 20th century initiate of both Śrī Vidyā and Trika Kaula, "having eternally risen as a wondrous, divine authority, excels all. Through His own exuberant play, He manifests His own Self in the form of the universe."²⁰ This contemporary *śloka* poetically and poignantly expresses a contemporary Tāntrika's vision of reintegration, a vision woven upon a loom whose warp and weft interweave the constituent elements of the natural world within the tapestry of a body thereby transformed into the *maṇḍala* that is the ecosphere.

In this way, Tantra articulated an understanding that the body is intertwined with a variety of forces that are simultaneously 'outside' in the natural world and 'inside' the individual psychosomatic complex. These forces, personified as a host of deities, are the constituents of a godhead that oscillates between transcendence (*viśvottirna*) and immanence (*viśvamaya*), between

being unmanifest and manifest. The template for this oscillating process is the *maṇḍala*, the theology of which is best compared to the hologram: a blueprint comprising self-replications as its atomic structure. In Hindu contexts throughout the globe, the smallest unit (*anu*) and the absolute (Brahman) are fundamentally one.

Thinking according to this particular yogic ‘eco-logic’, Tāntrikas construct, play within, and liberate themselves by means of a discourse predicated on the notion that the world around them is an outward projection of their own multi-leveled body. The key to their self-liberating strategies was the identification of ‘being’ with ‘sound.’ For the Tāntrika, all that exists is sound. Every thing is *mātrka*, divine, creative sound. The universe arises from the *mātrka* and is imbued with its energy. The word is within and without. Within the body is the word. In the world is the word. The elements are within the body and within the elements is the word. To effect change in the surrounding world one utilizes the energies of one’s own body which is an exact replica thereof. The Tantras abound with examples of this kind of thinking.

The Sarvasiddhi-Stavah, or opening 12 stanzas of the *Nityāśoḍaśikārṇava*, is paradigmatic. The first *sūtra* equates the Goddess with the cosmos. The next *sūtra* with the letters and then with the body. The text outlines a technology by which the practitioner encodes his body with the natural world. In standard *nyāsa* practice the *sādhaka* raises the *kuṇḍalinī* by returning each of the five elements to their respective higher or more subtle point of energy: earth into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into ether, ether in the void, the void into the absolute. These elements reside within power wheels within the body. They are not, for Tāntrikas, simply imaginary. These are the microcosmic correlates of the outer world. The two are inseparably linked.

The result of the encoding of this technology onto and within the body is that the *sādhaka* comes to witness a condition of internal pervasion (*samāveśa*) in which he is encoded as the natural universe. He is the stars, the constellation, the moon, the five elements, the seas, and the ocean. This is not a metaphorical condition. He is not as vast as or like the sky. He is, in his ritualized fullness, the sky itself. The channels within do not flow like the rivers of his geological surroundings. They are those rivers.

The *Vāgmatisahasranāma Stotram* from the Himavat Khaṇḍa²¹ is a hymn praising Nepal’s Bagmati River, which is a tributary of the Ganges. The hymn poetically articulates an Indic deep ecological thinking. The river is praised as flowing from the middle of the *maṇipura-cakra* (VVS 134a), as

being the Mistress of Yoga, whose essence is Yoga (VVS 142a), as the central *yoginī* of the *svadhiṣṭhāna-cakra* (147a), and as the foundation of the six *cakras* (159a-b). These verses take us into a world in which geological rivers flow from mountain tops directly into the bodies of yogis and back. Does the world contain the yogi, or the yogi the world? Architects of an Escherian discourse, the authors of Tantric texts challenged their contemporaries to deeply contemplate these questions. Whether the inside is really the outside or not, the key point is that both are part of one greater web of being in which center and periphery inner and outer, above and below are not only deemed relevant to the perspective of the Gazer, but, perhaps more importantly, identified as equally ‘real’, interwoven expressions of a singular universe that is both ‘material’ and ‘spiritual.’

Conclusion: Envisioning an Eco-Tantric World

There is potential within the ideologies and practices of Hindu traditions for the modern construction of a function eco-philosophical worldview grounded in yet transcendent to its social and cultural roots. The cult-specific dimensions of Tantra require a degree of initiatory secrecy that is beyond our concerns here. In this closing section, I seek to tease out the parameters and lineaments of Tantra-Ecology as my own rudimentary reconstruction of ecosophical thought within and through Tantric traditions. Towards this end, I seek to suggest three principles as the foundations of Tantra-Ecology.

Principle 1: Gratitude for Being in the World

The important scholarship of Jacobsen, Whicher, Shiva, Nelson, Sherma, and Chapple has skillfully assessed the depths and potential for ecologically-oriented thought and practice in Indic traditions. As these scholars have all pointed out, while Indic traditions do contain an impulse towards liberation via transcendence of the world, there is, as discussed above, an arguably deeper impulse towards liberation within and through the embodied forms of the world. This latter, stronger, impulse is clearly present in the majority of Tantric ideologies and practice. It is an impulse grounded in the understanding that the natural world is embodied divinity. If misperceived, this divinity, Goddess Earth, may be a cause of bondage and suffering (*māyā*); however, it is not Earth in her multiple forms that is the cause of delusion. Rather, the cause is the misperception, the fundamental cognitive error that

fails to identify our deep, inevitable and necessary connection to the embodied world in which we live. It is this cognitive error, the Tantras tell us, that leads to our sense of being trapped with and bound by our world-experience.

The solution is not to escape from the world. After all, is there really another place to go? Even if so, can we be certain that that other realm is a better place to be? Tantra informs us that while there are multiple realms all of those realms are contained within the embodied cognitive structures of the human experience. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, many tantric traditions take the stance that birth as a human being puts the soul (*jīva*) in the best possible circumstance for realizing its purpose and full potential. Dilgo Khyentse and other Tibetan lamas refer to a human birth as ‘precious’, as a gift of infinite value. The first principle to be drawn from the study of Tantric traditions in framing a Tantra-Ecology is precisely this sense of preciousness. We are called by Tantra to see our human condition as a blessing to be grateful for. While many of us may not be drawn to engage in Tantric practices, we can perhaps learn to deepen our sense of gratitude for being in these human bodies here and now in the world. And out of this sense of gratitude for having the bodies that we do, we can then proceed to a greater awareness and appreciation of our dependence on and interconnection with the diverse web of life that surrounds and sustains us.

Principle 2: Cultivating a Maṇḍalic Vision of Interconnectedness

Beginning with a basic sense of appreciation to our human condition as precious, Tantra-Ecology then encourages individuals to acquire a deepened awareness of the complex web of relations that sustain each of us individually and as a species. In Tantric traditions, the ‘awareness of interconnectedness’ is cultivated via the technologies associated with the *maṇḍala*. *Maṇḍalas*—regardless of their cult-specific natures—highlight a pan-Tantric vision of the cosmos as a balanced, harmonious web of interconnections. This ‘harmonious vision’ functions as a template for city construction, architectural design, and, perhaps most importantly, meditative practice. These archetypal patterns are utilized by Tantric teachers as a means for training their students to bring the energies, fluids, and ‘divinities’ of their bodies into a state of alignment, not just internally, but with the energies, fluids, and divinities of the external world.

Maṇḍala technologies in Tantric traditions are grounded in the understanding that there is an innate beauty and symmetry in the world and that our individual and collective happiness is not possible in the absence of

an understanding of that beauty and symmetry. While Tantric *maṇḍalas* are highly coded symbols requiring initiation, we can nonetheless take from them a basic point: effective ecological practice requires an interdependent vision of ourselves in relation to the world. If we view ourselves as isolated from the world we are less inclined to act in ways that preserve the web of relations that in fact sustain us. Beginning with an appreciation of the preciousness of human birth, we then move to a vision of the interdependence of our ‘being’ to the web of beings—human, plant, animal, atmospheric, ‘cosmic’—that constitutes the fuller network of Life. This vision—embodied in the *maṇḍala*—fulfills itself in the third principle: practice.

Principle 3: The Practice of Cultivating a Sense of Connection to Local Landscapes

In Tantra-Ecology, the first principles of appreciation of our human birth and maṇḍalic vision of interconnectedness fulfill themselves in the third and final principle: the commitment to practices that cultivate our connection to local landscapes. Such practices deepen appreciation and expand vision. Together with the first two principles it forms a triumvirate feedback loop that mimics the circular flow of consciousness and energy mapped in *maṇḍalas* which in turn resembles the circular patterns characteristic of Nature Herself. The fundamentals of this practice are grounded in the conscious effort to acquire a sense of harmony and alignment with one’s local landscapes.

Tantric texts instruct its adherents to engage in spiritual practice at rivers, lakes, trees, mountains, caves and other natural sites as they are considered to be places endowed with living power or *śakti*. Tantra-Ecology asserts that the intention to be in nature is a practice that fosters one’s appreciation for being alive and deepens one’s vision of interconnectedness.

The majesty and beauty of our natural world is inescapable if we simply chose to be in the presence of its extraordinary manifestations. The ‘world out there’ according to Tantra is fundamentally the same as the ‘world in us’. The same five elements that compose its body—earth, fire, water, wind, ether—constitute our own. Making the intention to encounter the sacred in our local landscape—walking in the woods, sitting silently beneath a nearby stream or tree, for example—inevitably deepens one’s awareness of the ways by which our own internal processes and cycles mirror and depend on the of the natural world around us. This deepening of awareness is beneficial not only for individual ‘spiritual growth’ but leads to a way of ‘being in the

world' that is supportive of the patterns of balance and harmony that reflect the maṇḍalic design of things as they were intended to be.

Notes

- 1 Knut Jacobsen, "Bhagavad Gita, Ecosophy T and Deep Ecology." In *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy and the Social Sciences* Vol 39 (June 1996): pp. 233-234.
- 2 Jacobsen, "Bhagavad Gita," pp. 230-234. Cf. David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecology Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall), pp. 184-192).
- 3 Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989). Quoted in Roger S. Gottlieb, ed. *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, and Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 383.
- 4 Sherma 1998: 123-124
- 5 Ibid, 124
- 6 Ibid, 126
- 7 Ibid, 126
- 8 See Ken Wilber's discussion in *The Holographic Paradigm and other Paradoxes* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1982). Cf. Paul Muller-Ortega, "Tantric Meditation: Vocalic Beginnings," in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism: Studies in Honor of André Padoux*, Teun Goudriaan, ed., (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 227-229.
- 9 "Śiva-Saṃhita 2.1-2.5. Quoted by Jean Varenne in his *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 155.
- 10 Sanjukta Gupta, "The Maṇḍala as an Image of Man," in Richard Gombrich, ed., *Indian Ritual and its Exegesis* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 32-41.
- 11 Utpaladeva, *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā* 4.1. Translated with commentary by B. N. Pandit (New York: Agama Press, forthcoming).
- 12 I adopt this terminology from Paul Muller-Ortega's discussion in "Tantric Meditation."
- 13 Gupta et. al., *Hindu Tantrism*, p. 184-185. Cf. Pandit, *Specific*, p. 39-52.
- 14 Muller-Ortega, "Power," p. 44.
- 15 NṅA 5.6: *Dhyātvetyādi. Bāhyārcanāntārārcaneti dhyāne yoge 'nāhata-prasphurat-pūjācakrarājācakrarājasannihitaṃ paradevatāṃyathāvadārādhyā prāguktaphalāptaye jāpet.* For a detailed discussion of this internal/external dialectic see Gavin Flood's discussion in his *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Śaivism* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993). Cf., Vrajavallabha Dviveda, "Having Becomes a God, He Should Sacrifice to the Gods," in *Ritual and Speculation in Early Tantrism*, p. 127.
- 16 See Alexis Sanderson's "Maṇḍala and Āgamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir," in André Padoux, ed., *Mantras et diagrammes rituels dans l'hindouisme* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1986): 169-207. Cf. Dirk Jan Hoens, "Transmission and Fundamental Constituents of the Practice" in *Hindu Tantrism*, p. 808-83.
- 17 This is Sanjukta Gupta's terminology. See her "The Maṇḍala as an Image of Man."
- 18 B. N. Pandit, "Yoga in the Trika System," in *Specific Principles of Kashmir Śaivism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997): 99. See also: Deba Brata Sensharma's overview of *sādhana* practice in his *The Philosophy of Sādhana* (New York: SUNY, 1990). Here again, we find parallels with cosmogenesis: depending on

one's perspective God's appearance as the universe is either a hierarchical and linear unfolding or an instantaneous self-manifestation. See B. N. Pandit's discussion in his, "Theistic Absolutism and Spiritual Realism," in *Specific Principles of Kashmir Śaivism*, p. 15-28.

19 *Nityāṣoḍaśikārṇava Tantra*. With the commentaries *Rjuvimarśinī* by Śivānanda and Artharatnāvalā by Vidyānada. Edited by Vrajavalabha Diveda. Yogatantragrantham A1A no. 1, Varanasi:1968.

20 Śaivācārya Amṛtavāgbhava, *Ātmavilāsa*. Translated by B. N. Pandit in his *Specific Principles*, p. 149. Amṛtavāgbhava was a widely respected *guru* of the Trika Śrī Vidyā Kaula schools and the teacher of B. N. Pandit.

21 *Himavatkhanda*. In *Himalayato Pauranic Itihasa*. (Kashi: Gorakha Tilla, 1956), Chapter 181: pp. 337-342.