

## THE CONCEPT OF EMOTION IN TANTRA

The concept of emotion has been very appropriately given expression to by C. S. Sherrington. He defines it as a point where physiology and psychology meet. The state of emotions comes into being when there is a tumult in thought process. This is well described by the noun 'bhāvanā' (rendered as emotion); its primary root being 'bhū,' shows that a state is 'caused' (i. e. 'bhāvayati') to exist due to certain circumstances. Tantras used the term 'vṛtti' to denote emotion. There would cease to be an emotional state if the thought process is organised and settled. This view is given expression in the Jñānasankalinī Tantra when it says:

"Yasya jāgrē praliyante sarve bhāvāḥ suṣuptavat paryāptam tasya vijñānam tripādam tena laṅghitam".<sup>1</sup>

Thus an emotional state can be defined as a disorganised thought process. In modern psychology this state is defined to be "a variety of affective process distinguished from the others as an acute (brief and intense) affective disturbance".<sup>2</sup>

The patterns of disorganisation happen to be many like fear, anger, joy, frustration. All these are named as emotions. In Indian psychology the three guṇas—the sattva, rajas and tamas are said to be the causes of mind. In Tantra, sattva, rajas and tamas represent three different energy aspects manifested by Śiva. Dr. P. C. Bagci says: "The Tantras of each class follow a particular line in Sādhana. Hence there are three classes of Tantras 'dakṣiṇa', which is characterized by sattva is pure (śuddha); vāma which is characterized by rajas, is mixed (vimiśra); and 'madh-yama', characterized by tamas, is impure (aśuddha)".<sup>3</sup> The same idea is expressed in the Kālivilāsa Tantra,

"śṛṇu bhāvatrayaṁ devī divya-vīra-paśukramāt divyaśc'a, devavatprāyo vīraśc'oddhata mānasah paśubhāvah sadādevīśuddhaśc'a śucivān sadā".<sup>4</sup>

However, even this metaphysical division points to three different mental states. And they are ultimately responsible for different vṛttis.

The psychological name given for all these vṛttis is emotion.

Tantra has classified the *vṛttis* into fifty categories. These *vṛttis* or emotions can be known through external signs like jumping in joy, clapping hands or talking rapidly.

It is not mere attachment towards the object that is responsible for causing a state of emotion. The situation obtaining also forms an important factor, known as environmental factor in modern psychology. As far as the temporal factor is concerned, the occurrence of emotional states is not only confined to the present, an event of past or an imagination of future too could cause the emotional disturbance. Hence some situations are unreal in the view of empirical psychology, for instance, when an individual identifies himself with the character on the screen, his emotions are caused due to this identification and not due to a situation where he is really involved. "Genuine emotions, therefore, can be produced by various substitutes for reality."<sup>5</sup> The same idea is found in Vedāntadesika's commentary on Rāmānuja's *bhāṣya* on *Gītā* where it is said that false identification is the cause of 'sanga' or clinging, "sangastu abhimānikaviṣayaḥ".<sup>6</sup>

This is emphasised in the Tantras, when it is said : 'kevalam viṣayāsaktaḥ patatyeva na saṁśayaḥ'."

Among the emotions some are pleasing, some others painful and still others of the nature of dullness or indolence. These determine the mode of thinking in the *sādhaka*. A *sādhaka* should approach a 'gurū' who is aware of the consequences of these three phases and can guide the *sādhaka* properly. Earlier, these are already referred to as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, Kulārṇava Tantra presents this view symbolically, when it says :

"āraktaśuklamiśrā (kṛṣṇā) khyac'āranatrayavāsanām yo jñāti mahādevi sa gurūḥ paramo mataḥ".<sup>8</sup>

The three colours red, white and black referred to in this verse represent the three *gunas* *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, respectively. In other words these are the 'pāśas' or bondages and man is predominantly under these 'pāśas'.

These *vṛttis* or emotions are the causes of wrong knowledge or innate ignorance which is technically known in the Tantra as 'āṇava mala' or innate impurity which in turn gives rise to 'karma mala' or impurity of action and this latter in turn is the cause for 'māyīya mala' or the transmigratory existence.

The individual self is said to be pervaded by all these three impurities. In the Tantrāloka it is said, "malamajñānamic'c'hanti saṃsārāṅkurakāraṇam." <sup>9</sup>

Though the vṛttis are causes of ignorance, Tantras, instead of showing an attitude of despise towards them, have successfully attempted to turn them in a direction where they prove fruitful in the practice or sādhanā. Control of senses, in a particular way, conditions the sādhanika's behaviour, he is not allowed to go astray :

"tasmād akuṣalebhyo vyāvartayitvā kāmataḥ  
kuṣāle yōjitāni tadā jītāni bhavanti" <sup>10</sup>.

Thus, Tantras assure that the so called innate ignorance need not make an individual perplexed. In reality, this happens to be one of the manifestations of the 'svātantrya śakti' or Universal Will. This supposed limitation is put forth in order to make the sādhanika aware of his responsibilities. Tantrāloka says :

"īśvarec'c'hāvaśakṣubdhabhōgalōlikac'idgaṇān,  
saṃvibhaṅktumaghoṣaḥ sṛjatiha sitetaram" <sup>11</sup>.

That the supposed imperfection can be got rid of, should be realised by him. It is the absence of such realisation which results in the rebirth of countless individual selves. Thus, innate ignorance can be put to an end by the complete detachment from all the objects of present, past and future. The Pāsūpata sūtra gives expression to this view :

"evam maheśvare bhāvasthastadasaṅgitvam  
iti arthaḥ" <sup>12</sup>.

Prof. K. C. Pandey while explaining the place of 'bhāvaṇa' in the Kula system says, "Bhāvanā is a mental activity by which the idea, which a mystic attempts to grasp, becomes gradually clear on account of persistent effort" <sup>13</sup>. Tantrāloka refers to the same thus : "kramātsputatvakaraṇam bhāvanam parikīrtyate" <sup>14</sup>. Prof. Pandey continues, "It occupies an important place in the secret ritual, performed as a means to the realisation of identity of himself with the idea, presented in the mantra, which the performer of the rite has to repeat mentally, so as to realise the state of 'Bhairava', to ascend the transcendental level of identity of the individual with the universal." <sup>15</sup> "tatrokta mantratādātmyadbbhairavātmatvamānayet" <sup>16</sup>.

The above discussion points out to a different direction in so far as the emotions could be made use of to get an equally good result. It shows that if not all, some of the *vṛttis* could be harmless and hence could be channelised in accordance with the need of the *sādhaka*. In his historical work, 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal', Darwin has pointed out that some of the emotions have utility. For instance, 'the erection of fur or feathers', 'drawing back of the ears', in a cat or a dog indicate the proximity of danger. Similarly, with man, 'laughing' represents friendliness. Weeping is good as it helps reducing tension. After experimenting with various emotions W. B. Cannon writes : "Every one of the visceral changes that have been noted - the cessation of processes in the elementary canal, (thus freeing the energy supply for other parts) : the shifting of blood from the abdominal organs to the organs immediately essential to muscular exertion; the increased vigor of contraction of heart; the discharge of extra blood corpuscles from the spleen, the deeper respiration . . . . . , these changes are directly serviceable in making the organism more effective in violent display of energy, which fear or rage or pain may involve " <sup>17</sup>

From the point of view of the above it would now appear that a reconstruction of the definition of emotion is necessary, as emotional states are found facilitative instead of its being a state of disturbance. Yet, we are to re-examine this new state and see how far it is really helpful.

The region where various emotional patterns originate lies below the region of cerebral cortex. The causation of emotional excitement affects this part of the brain and consequently it fails to respond. Psychologists like F. A. Hodge argue that, the 'Emotional reactions are inversely proportional to the ability of the higher centres of the brain to meet a given situation.' <sup>18</sup> This shows that though the activities concerning visceralization may be helped by emotions yet there is certainly a failure on the part of cerebral cortex, a 'failure of integration'. "The dominance and control of the cerebral cortex is weakened during emotion . . . . . This weakening of cerebral dominance is associated with frustration, the clash of motives, painful stimulation, thwarted expectation, the release of tension and other conditions which are direct determinants of emotional upset." <sup>19</sup>

Such a circumstance would indeed obstruct the discursive reasoning of the sādḥaka. If he is impeded by his impulses he ceases to be a sādḥaka. On the other hand, one shorn off these impediments is really a sādḥaka. Gandharva Tantra says:

“ sosmin śāstrédhikari tad anyatra na sādḥakah ”.<sup>20</sup>

Tantra, being aware of these drawbacks, advises gradual transcendence and not ‘pratyāhāra’ or withdrawal. It does not believe in unnecessary suppression of body and mind. Emotions to an extent could be made an ally, they need not be outright discarded. The sensual enjoyments are as much necessary, as they point out to enjoyments which have greater intensity. The former get divinized in the latter when associated with a spiritual motivation, “ bhāvena śumbita kāntā, bhāvena duhitānanam ”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Tantra intends to drive out the negative attitude and the misunderstandings, and assert that the biological and psychological facts are indeed against any withdrawal, that by going through them alone one can get over his limitations and not by avoiding them. So the Vīracāra Sādḥaka says,

“ alipiśitapurandhrībhógapūjāparo’ham,  
bahuvidhikulamārgārambhasambhāvito’ham.  
paśujanavimukho’ham bhairavīrāśrito’ham,  
gurūcāranaratōhambhairavoham śivo’ham ”.<sup>22</sup>

At this state the feeling of his ‘individuality’ has ceased to exist and so the material objects do him no harm.

One of the noteworthy practices of the Tantra is ‘pañcmakāra sādḥana’, which if not practised with the right spirit ruins the sādḥaka. They have to be so practised as to give rise to the right type of emotions in the sādḥaka. Hence Tantra categorically denies the indiscriminate use of these five tattvas; madya, māṃsa, matsya, mudrā and maithuna. Any excess is strictly forbidden. Moreover, not all sādḥakas can practise with the five tattvas. The sādḥaka of ‘paśavacara sādḥana’ who still is considered tāmasika by nature has to abide by the injunction: “ madyam apeyam adeyam agrahyam ”, and if he does so, he is liable to punishment as well as ‘prāyaścitta’. Further, such a sādḥaka should also not take to maithuna, not even a conversation on that topic “ maithunam tatkathālāpam tadgoṣṭhim parivarjayēt ”. The Nitya Tantra prohibits the devī-pūja even

during the latter part of day, evening or night, as all this amount to maithuna, "rātrau naiva yajeddevim sandhyāyām vā aparāhṇe". However, the vīra sādḥaka is eligible for the practise of pañcatattva. He is vīra as he is 'jitendriya', manasā c'endriyagaṇaṃ samyamātmani yojayet.<sup>21</sup> In fact, at this state drinking wine is said to be helping in the purification of mind.

"icchāsaktiḥ surāmode jñanaśaktiśc'a tadrāse,  
tatsvāde c'a kriyāśaktistadullāse parā sthitā.  
madirābrahmagāḥ proktaḥ c'ittaśodhanasādhanāḥ,  
tāsāmekaṃ samāhṛtya pūjākarma samāc'aret  
surā śaktiḥ śivo māṃsam tadbhōktā bhairavaḥ svayam,  
tayloraikyasamutpanna ānando mokṣa uc'yate".<sup>22</sup>

Again, with the same attitude, the other remaining tattvas are to be practised,

"manasā c'endriyagaṇaṃ samyamātmani yojayet,  
matsyāśi sa bhaveddevī śeṣaḥ syuḥ prāṇihimsakaḥ  
paraśaktyātmamithunasamīyogānandanirbharāḥ,  
ya āste maithunaṃ tat syādaparestrīṇiṣevakah".<sup>23</sup>

Maithuna symbolises union of Sakti with Śiva. According to Yoginī Tantra this is the best of all union,

"sahasrārōpari bindau kundalyā melanaṃ śive,  
maithunaṃ paramaṃ dravyaṃ yatināṃ parikīrtitam".<sup>24</sup>

While retrospectively we find that the empirical psychology ultimately comes to the conclusion that emotions are upsetting by nature in spite of their helpful visceral activities. Emotions make the higher centres of the brain lose control and fail to respond. This opinion is similar with that of the other schools of Indian philosophy except the Tantras. Unlike the former there need be no self-control or 'ātma-vinigraha' in order to avoid all emotion. According to the Tantras, these very vṛttis or emotions which are said to be the cause of the downfall of man could be the cause of his ascension to higher life. Hence with the exception of some vṛttis like jealousy, anger, others are indeed helpful.

bhāvanaiva tu samproktā bhāvanā siddhidā matā, bhāvanā  
yadi siddhā na tadetantu katham bhavet, bhāvanā preraṇam  
devī daivena kriyate śive, dhyānoktaṃ devatām dhyātvā  
sarvaṃ saṃsādhayet kṣaṇāt, evam bhāvanayā devī tadrūpyat-

vaṃ prajāyate sthānabhede rūpabhede nāmaabhede na vai mama, tātparyam vidyate devī kim tu c'aitanyabhāvanā. keṇa dṛṣṭam dhyānarūpaṃ bhāvanāmatragoc'aram, dyūtabhāvanayā yukte pratyakṣam darśanam bhavet".<sup>27</sup>

It indeed lies in the conviction of a sādḥaka to make him proceed with the same intensity of emotions towards the object which ceases to be any more empirical. They become necessary for his spiritual direction and hence remain no more forbidden; in this sense 'bhāvanā' is said to be 'preraṇā, or motivation in terms of modern psychology. Thus, the vṛttis become indispensable in spiritual context to reach a particular state in the Tantra Sādhana. The verse below emphasizes that view.

"Bhāvena labhate sarvaṃ bhāvādhīnaṃ idam jagat, bhāvaṃ vinā mahārāja na siddhirjāyate kvac'it".<sup>28</sup>

It is noteworthy that Tantras strikes a different note both from the other esoteric schools of Indian philosophy as well as from modern psychology, since the latter hold emotions to be a concept of disorganisation, whereas Tantra recognises them as helpful in formulating an integral thought process.

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#### NOTES

1. Jñānasankalini Tantra-74.
2. Motivation and Emotion—p. 353.
3. The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV p. 217.
4. 6. IV. X.
5. Motivation and Emotion p. 346.
6. RBTC., XIV-7.
7. Kulārṇava Tantra V. 103.
8. Kulārṇava Tantra XIII. 84.
9. Tantāloka I-54.
10. Pāśupata Sūtra. 7.
11. Ibid VI-55.
12. Ibid 1.
13. Abhinavagupta p. 608.
14. XXVIII-143
15. Op cit p. 608.
16. XXIX 19.



17. Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear and rage; an account of recent researches into the function of emotional excitement, New York : Appleton Century-Crofts 1929.
18. 'The emotions in a new role'. Psychological Review (1935, 42, 555-565).
19. Motivation and Emotion p. 409.
20. II.
21. Śakti and Śakta p. 643.
22. Rūdra Yamala, Devī rahasyakhanda.
23. Kulārṇava Tantra V. 110.
24. *Ibid* 5. 40-41, 79.
25. *Ibid* 5. 110. 112.
26. Yoginī Tantra V.
27. Śaktisāṅgama Tantra III. 2. 115-6, 135, 22, 25.
28. Quoted in the introduction to Mantra Yoga Samhitā.