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## WHY GURUS ARE HEAVY\*

DAVID GORDON WHITE

In his renowned essay, "Religion as a cultural system,"<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz speaks of symbols as being unique to humans in the sense that, in any given culture, they may serve at once as models *of* and models *for* both a meaningful understanding (a world view) of reality and a pattern of thought and behavior (an ethos), which mutually reinforce one another. Drawing on random existence, a culture recognizes, aesthetically, in given social, linguistic, natural, etc, objects, forms, processes and concepts, various congruencies with its own received understanding of itself; and through the manipulation and integration of the same it is able to evoke anew that same (symbolic) understanding. In this way a culture recognizes meaning in being—without which existence would be intolerable—through intersubjective extrinsic sources of information which serve as templates for cultural patterns which shape public behavior. Culture is thus process, in which a people exists as a "being-interpreted"<sup>2</sup> through the totality of cultural signifiers (appropriated from the world) at its disposal, even as it interprets itself and its world. We are what we eat, but tastes change.

There are many ways of interpreting oneself through one's world, of recognizing a basic congruence between particular lifestyle and a specific (if implicit) metaphysics. Principal among these are a belief system and a system of ritual practice, which are inseparable as they are informed by, and exist in a relation of process with, a set of symbols common to both. In religious practice, as in performance, one *interprets* a role which is based upon and enriches the belief system which makes that interpretation meaningful. There would be no need for a ritual interpretation if there were nothing to interpret, but there would be nothing if there were no interpretation of it. "In plastic drama, men attain their faith as they portray it."<sup>3</sup>

A symbol system thus sanctions given patterns of conceptualization and behavior (an ethos) by recognizing and reenacting through

them a vision of the way things really are (a world view). In order for these two modalities to reinforce each other, to serve as templates for each other, it is necessary that their constituent parts adhere to the internal logic of the symbol system in which they are situated. A symbol system must in some way—according to the physical, social, cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. matrix in which it operates—be efficient; and as it must be efficient over time and through change, it must be resilient and adaptable.

One means to understanding the resilience of “successful” symbol systems may be found in the concept of “key symbols,” as developed by Sherry Ortner.<sup>4</sup> Ortner derives a schema for the interplay of what she terms “summarizing symbols”<sup>5</sup> and “elaborating symbols,”<sup>6</sup> with the latter category being divided into “root metaphor” and “key scenario.”<sup>7</sup> This understanding of the potentialities of symbol systems to associate “vertically”, “horizontally”, “qualitatively”, “quantitatively”, etc. through ritual orientation and belief orientation is useful to a comprehension of a system’s flexibility. Furthermore—and this is Ortner’s explicit intention in her article—such a schematic understanding of the dynamics of a symbol system is very useful to their study.

A restatement of Ortner’s categories may be effected by substituting for “summarizing symbol” the concept of *hierarchical system*, for “elaborating symbol” that of *system of correspondences*, for “root metaphor” *belief system*, and for “key scenario” *ritual system*. While I wish to retain the values Ortner assigns to these concepts, I wish to employ the alternative terminology in cases where such lends itself better to the systems I intend to investigate, as will be shown. At the same time, I wish to maintain Geertz’ insight on the mutual reinforcement of ethos and world view through a culture’s self-interpretation in its belief and ritual systems.

The immediate object of this study is to be Hindu alchemy (*rasāyana*),<sup>8</sup> as it constitutes a belief system and a ritual system, both as it is located within a broader hierarchical system and as it stands in correspondence with other related hierarchical systems. As alchemy today is nearly the “dead science” in India that it is in the west, this will be, of necessity, a textual study. The text upon which I will rely most heavily here is the *Rasārṇavam* (“The Ocean of Rasa”),<sup>9</sup> a twelfth century text which is generally seen as being the

earliest “complete” Hindu treatise on alchemy, of which most subsequent texts were little more than restatements. In addition to this primary source, I will use other texts of the alchemical tradition to the extent that such serve to further elucidate points made in the *Rasārṇavam*. I will also draw upon various sectarian sources, generally those of the same period, particularly those of the *Nāth panth*, to illustrate correspondences between the alchemical world view and ethos and those of yoga, Tantra and devotional Śaivism.

I intend to develop my analysis in the following manner: 1) to sketch the cultural and conceptual context of the Hindu alchemical tradition as one of a system of hierarchies; 2) to show how the alchemical tradition drew explicit correspondences between itself and the broader hierarchal (as the mythic) matrix; 3) to point out correspondences between certain aspects of yogic, Tantric and devotional Śaivite traditions and alchemy, as all four hierarchized systems interpenetrated one another within the broader hierarchical context, and 4) to discuss the “innovations” realized in these corresponding systems, even as they drew upon the broader “sedimented” tradition, which in turn influenced the broader tradition in such a way that, through the use of a new “key scenario,” a new ethos came into being which nevertheless rested upon an unchanged world view possessed of relatively unchanged “root metaphors.”

Implicit to the Indian world view, from the earliest traditions down to the present, has been an understanding of reality as being ordered hierarchically with correspondences existing between different or “parallel” hierarchical orderings. This is present in nearly every Indian realm of thought and practice, from the correspondences between the hierarchized social orders (*varṇas*) and cosmic epochs (*yugas*) to those between the senses (*indriyas*) and the elements (*bhūtas*). The same understanding is inherent to the concepts of the hierarchically ordered *guṇas*, the aims of life (*puruṣārthas*), the stages of life (*āśramas*), the arrangement of the concentric islands (*dvīpas*) of the earthly disc around the central axis of Mt. Meru, the vertical arrangement of heaven, midspace, earth and the subterranean worlds, the planets, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Such systems of hierarchies and correspondences exist in ritual practice as well as in conceptual systems, The varṇa system, by

which social relations and interactions are ordered in a ritual manner, has its origins in the sacrifice of the Puruṣa. To this we might add the homologization of the parts of the body of the *Aśvamedha* horse with the physical and divine universe, or the naming of each of the bricks of the Vedic sacrificial altar (*vedi*) such that the totality of the five-layered bricks stood for the whole hierarchized universal order.

Essential to these corresponding systems of hierarchies are the “Neoplatonist” concepts of emanation or penetration (*vyāpana*) and participation or absorption (*laya*). In each hierarchical system, that which is superior penetrates (but cannot be penetrated by) and is capable of absorbing (but cannot be absorbed by) that which is inferior to it. Such hierarchical ordering is ultimately rooted in an understanding of cosmogony by which an original being or essence creates from itself, through emanation, something slightly different from itself which is so by virtue of the fact that it is less essential or original than the original essence from which it emanates—and so on, through a chain of emanations to the less and less essential, until all that has been created is located in the hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> By the same token, but in reverse order, that which is closer to the original essence i.e. more subtle (*sūkṣma*) is capable of (re-)absorbing that which is an emanation of itself i.e. more gross (*sthūla*), as in the cosmic dissolution or reabsorption (*pralaya*), such that the whole may be seen as a system capable of telescoping outward from or inward back into its essentially and cosmically original form.<sup>11</sup>

In India, this original uncreated essence is alternately called Brahman, Puruṣa, Parameśvara, etc., according to different sectarian traditions. This essence is conceived in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*<sup>12</sup> as a cosmic man (*puruṣa*) possessed of 1000 heads, eyes, and feet, whose body extends beyond the bounds of the universe by a distance of ten digits. In the same vein, the words for creation, existence and dissolution are themselves indicative of Indian understandings of being: Creation is *sr̥ṣṭi* “surging, emission”; existence is *saṃsāra* “flowing together with”; and dissolution is *pralaya* “reabsorption.” In this way, the Brahman, Puruṣa, etc. is seen to be that essence from which all is emitted, with which all flows, and into which all is ultimately reabsorbed. When hierarchy is informed by cosmogony, a temporal element is introduced, which will be discussed later.

The understanding of reality as a hierarchized system of correspondences emanating from and participating in an original essence, may be described through the metaphor of a tree, in which one hierarchy or element of a hierarchy may stand analogically for several other “parallel” hierarchies or elements. If one were to picture parallel hierarchies as branches growing outward from a single trunk (the universal, original essence), the correspondences would be seen as cross-sections of a number of those branches such that the hierarchical element signified by a point ten feet out from the main trunk on branch “a” would have as its corresponding hierarchical elements those points at the same distance from the main trunk on branches “b”, “c”, “d”, etc. Thus the four yugas may be analogized with the four varṇas, or, as in the Sāṅkhyan system, the five elements may be analogized with the five senses and the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*),<sup>13</sup> even as they stand in a hierarchical relationship with one another.

As with Neoplatonist thought, man is conceived in these Indian systems as being at the midpoint of, and thus as the microcosm for, all of creation. He lies midway between the lower creatures, plants and nonliving matter on the one hand (the *tamasic*), and the divine hierarchies and subtle beings on the other (the *sattvic*). But, more important than this, man is seen as possessing an individual soul or spirit (*ātman*)—at least since the time of the Upaniṣads—which is a microcosm for the universal Brahman, Puruṣa, etc. Just as the Brahman is the hub of the cosmic round of creation, the Meru axis of the universe, so man’s *ātman* is at the center of his body.

The *ātman* is also that which gives life to and sustains the body, and that upon the departure of which the body dies (to have its parts reabsorbed into the five elements: *pañcatvaṃ gamanam*, and ultimately into the universal essence of which all matter and form is an emanation). In the Sāṅkhyan system, individual souls proceed from the universal soul and are *multiple*, as are the bodies in which they take incarnation.<sup>14</sup> This concept is important to the understanding of yogic, Tantric and alchemical systems, as will be shown below. Furthermore, as will be seen particularly in the case of yoga, the human body, with its hierarchically ordered constituent parts, is directly analogous to the Egg of Brahmā (*Brahmāṇḍa*) with its concentric sets of islands ringing the central axis of Mt. Meru and its vertically ordered *lokas*.

The alchemical, yogic and Tantric traditions which will be developed in this study grew out of, and explicitly situated themselves, for the most part, in the Śaivite traditions which existed in northern India in the medieval period. These traditions (as the Kaulas, Siddhas, Kāpālikas, Śāktas, etc.) may be seen as corresponding to the Sāṅkhyan system in many ways, with the impersonal Puruṣa, and its primary emanation *Prakṛti* (“Nature,” with which it stands throughout all of her secondary emanations) being deified as the anthropomorphic gods Śiva and Śakti (or some other form of the goddess). Whereas in “dualist” Sāṅkhya, the male Puruṣa emanates into the female Prakṛti, and is thenceforth separated from although present with her, in Śaivite cosmogony it is an “androgynous” form of Śiva (*Sadāśiva*, *Parameśvara*) who emanates into male (Śiva) and female (Śakti) “hypostases” with Śiva being cosmogonically and ontologically precedent to Śakti. Furthermore, where the Sāṅkhyan system conceives of all of the hierarchies of being as emanating from prakṛti (into the *bhūtādi*, etc.<sup>15</sup>), Śaivism understands all of the material world to be (an emanation of) the body of the goddess. In both cases, the sthūla (prakṛti, Śakti and all of the material world) is penetrated by the sūkṣma (Puruṣa, Śiva). In the same way, just as all is ultimately reabsorbed into the Puruṣa in Sāṅkhya, so all is reabsorbed into the essential Śiva in the pralaya. Only in the Śaivite system, however, is all of being penetrated “directly” by the universal essence, Sadāśiva—undoubtedly a borrowing from Vedāntic thought.

In this comparison of the Śaivite and Sāṅkhyan traditions, one last “wrinkle” of the former upon the latter must be mentioned: the concept of the *sexualized* universe.<sup>16</sup> Whereas in Sāṅkhya the genders of the sources of creation are not particularly stressed, in Śaivism creation is explicitly sexual (except when Śiva is portrayed as a *yogin*). As such, creation, existence and dissolution are alternately conceived as being the eternal dance or orgasm of Śiva and Śakti. When creation is perceived as sexual, it is from the emission of a drop of Śiva’s seed (*bindu*) into Śakti (who is the world) that all of being emanates. Both Śaivite understandings of creation are schematically portrayed in the *Śrī Cakra* yantra. In this system, in which no being does not bear a sexual valence, all interactions between beings are understood as being, in some way, sexual. As



such, every interaction in the universe is an emanation of the primal interaction of Śiva and Śakti, or, more explicitly, the penetration (vyāpana) of Śiva into Śakti or the reabsorption (laya) of Śakti into Śiva.<sup>17</sup>

The Hindu alchemical tradition possibly arose, along with Tantrism and numerous yogic traditions, in the Himalayas and Vindhyas, in a swathe of mountains extending from Afghanistan and Baluchistan in the west to Assam in the east. This is known in the alchemical case from the descriptions of the places in which various elements were to be found, and in the fact that many such elements (as cinnabar) only exist in these mountainous regions. In the Tantric and yogic contexts, it was in the same regions that the pilgrimage sites (as the *Śākta pīṭhas*)<sup>18</sup> peculiar to the various sects were to be found. In both cases, textual traditions date from about the tenth century onwards. Preceding the Hindu traditions of alchemy, Tantra and *tīrthas* in these regions were analogous Buddhist traditions, which date from the fourth century, or perhaps earlier. In addition to the Buddhist substrata, these Hindu traditions also drew upon earlier Hindu *Āyurveda* (of which one branch, that of “rejuvenation,” was termed *Rasāyana*),<sup>19</sup> and quite possibly upon indigenous vegetation cults and shamanic traditions in which “magical” powers were important.<sup>20</sup>

The hierarchical model of *rasāyana*, as a cultural system with a world view based upon that of Śaivism, is the element *mercury*,<sup>21</sup> which is variously known as *pārada* (“that which gives transcendence”), *rasa* (“essence,” etc.<sup>22</sup>), *rasendra* (“the lord of essences”), and *sūta* (“that which engenders”). The *Rasataramgīnī*<sup>23</sup> adds that all the names of Śiva are also names for mercury. The identification of mercury with Śiva is made even more explicit in the *Rasārṇavam*,<sup>24</sup> in which Bhairava (= Siva)<sup>25</sup> says: “This mercury is the same as me; it is integral to all of my body. My body is *rasa*, thus it should be called ‘*rasa*’.” Even more explicit, and more essential to an understanding of *rasāyana*, is the equating, in every alchemical text, of mercury with the seed of Śiva.<sup>26</sup> The *Rasaratnasamucchaya* also gives an account of the origin of mercury, drawing on the Purāṇic myth of the birth of Skanda:<sup>27</sup>

Once while Śiva and Parvatī were indulging in amorous sport in the Himalaya, the gods came to them out of fear of the asura Tāraka. Surprised

in the act of intercourse, Śiva ejaculated into his own hand. Ashamed of this, he placed that seed into the mouth of Agni (i.e. offered it as an oblation into the fire). Because of its *tejas*, Agni could not hold that seed in his mouth. He spit it into the Ganges, for whom it was unbearable as well. Her waves pushed it to her shores, which is why one attains *siddhis* on the banks of the Ganges. That seed was spread throughout the world, where it remains in the form of mercury. It is especially concentrated in five wells of mercury deep in the earth.

The same text later refers to the means by which mercury spread from its wells—by pursuing women on horseback!—into other parts of the world, particularly in the mountains of *Dārada-*(= cin-nabar)-*deśa*.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, the seed of Śiva penetrates through all of existence in the form of mercury, just as the Brahman penetrates into everything through emanation. Furthermore, the Ganges and the earth are to be seen as the female (Śakti) counterpart of Śiva, in a sexualized universe.

Just as mercury is the particular element which stands for the essence of Śiva, so there is a particular element which signifies the essence of Śakti, which is sulphur.<sup>29</sup> As with mercury, sulphur too has a myth of origins:<sup>30</sup>

Once, while the goddess was playing in the Ocean of Milk with the Vidyadhāras and Apsarases, some blood issued from her. That blood was extremely fragrant and delightful. Her blood stained her garments, so she left them on the shore and bathed to cleanse herself. When she returned to the city, her garment, which she had left behind on shore was carried into the middle of the Ocean of Milk by its waves. In the churning of that ocean, that blood rose together with the *amṛta*. All the gods and Dānavas were pleased by the goddess's odor (*gandha*) in her blood. Thus all the gods and Dānavas said, "Let this be called *Gandhaka* ("fragrant" = sulphur). Let this be used for the calcination and fixation of mercury. May those qualities that exist in mercury also be found here in the sulphur." Thus it is called *gandhaka* on earth.

The sexual essences of Śiva and Śakti exist in the mineral world in the form of mercury and sulphur, which are, not surprisingly, the two elements which are the most essential to alchemical practices. Thus every alchemical operation is a reenactment of the sexual union of Śiva and Śakti, and, as such, as in the case of Tantric sexual practices, constitutes a ritual act. And, as with Tantra, such ritual practices were also devotional (*bhakti*).

Following the opening devotional invocation of the *Rasārṇavam*, there is a description of the peak of Mt. Kailāsa, the abode of Śiva,

which is described as a fairyland of vegetal life, and a storehouse of minerals, metals and precious stones. It is in this setting, an alchemical vision of paradise, that the whole of the narrative, presented in the form of a dialogue between Parvatī and Bhairava, takes place. There, once the aims of Rasāyana have been discussed, Bhairava immediately explains the usefulness of taking *darśana* of mercury, which is his body.<sup>32</sup> Failure to worship mercury or the insulting of mercury, results in millions of rebirths into bodies of base creatures. In addition to mercury, the alchemist must worship his *guru* (which most literally means “heavy” in Sanskrit), as in yoga and Tantra, if any of his works are to be successful.

A *Rasaliṅgam*, made of mercury, gold and other elements, is to be established in the center of the alchemist’s laboratory, and protected by the lords of the cardinal directions (*dikpālas*).<sup>32</sup> In yogic practice, which must accompany the alchemical procedures, one is to meditate upon *Rasabhairava* in union with the goddess, and mentally construct the whole of his body, in which each of his body parts stand for different forms of Śiva. This body is to be conceived as being the source of, but subtler than, the three *guṇas*, the five elements, etc.<sup>33</sup> Every alchemical operation (*saṃskāra*)<sup>34</sup> is seen as a form of devotion, both a reenactment of the cosmic process initiated by Śiva and Śakti, and an offering to them. In the latter case, prescriptions are given concerning what portions of the total offering are to be given to various secondary gods and alchemical gurus.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to its Śaivite cosmogonic and world views, ritual practices and belief system, rasāyana is also possessed of a cosmology, which is portrayed in terms of the alchemist’s laboratory as microcosm. As has already been stated, the laboratory has the *Rasaliṅgam* at its center, with the *dikpālas* at its cardinal points. In addition to these beings, the basic layout of the chemicals, equipment and other substances constitute a reproduction of the Purāṇic Śaivite universe:<sup>36</sup> Herbs are to be placed in the eastern (*Indra*; associated with the herb *par excellence*, *soma*) quarter of the laboratory; distilling instruments are to be placed to the southeast (*Agni*; fire); “metal-killing” chemicals to the south (*Yama*; god of death); grinding tools to the southwest (*Nirṛti*): who

“grinds” the sinful with his club); liquifying instruments to the west (*Vāruṇa*; god of the waters); bellows to the northwest (*Vāyu*; wind); coloring agents to the north (*Kubera*; god of wealth); and transmuting elements (including mercury) to the northeast (*Īśāna*; a form of Śiva). In this way, the alchemist, situated at the center of the universe, “attains his faith as he portrays it,” participating in the world-creating godhead of Śiva and Śakti by worshipping them through ritual practice by means of which, as will be seen, he reintegrates the universe into its most subtle essences just as does Śiva in the pralaya, the cosmic reabsorption.

The instruments and apparatuses which the alchemist uses in his work are called *yantras*, the same term as is used for the schematic diagram of the universe employed in meditation in order to better concentrate. The word *yantra* has for its verbal root the element *√yam*, which means “to control, subdue.” Principal among the *mantras* which are necessary to the successful performance of alchemical operations is the *Rasāṅkuśa* (“the elephant hook of rasa”) mantra. This too is understood in the sense of subduing, as mercury in its liquid form is, like Śiva’s seed, highly volatile, and like an elephant in rut, must be brought under control in order to be used in further processes: “Just as he who attempts to mount a rutting elephant in the forest without a hook, so it is with he who tries to obtain mercury without the knowledge of the *Rasāṅkuśa* mantra: he becomes exhausted.”<sup>37</sup>

The practice of alchemy is divisible into two basic steps. The first is to gain control of the essence of Śiva (mercury) by which the alchemist himself becomes like Śiva, and the second is to use those “powers of Śiva” upon the world to reintegrate the gross elements of the universe into their most subtle and powerful “stages.” Alchemy thus entails the manipulation of nature or the world, for the sake of controlling it and returning it to a previous and more pristine state. This has surprising theoretical consequences, as will be discussed. Finally, as the world is perceived as female (even when “male” elements are employed), the alchemist, through the alchemical *samskāras*, initiates himself into Śivahood, and thus becomes the master, source and mover of Śakti.

In concrete terms, the alchemist’s two tasks are 1) the purification and stabilization of mercury through the use of sulphur, and 2)

the perfecting or transmutation of base metals into gold, the most essential substance (save mercury) through the use of that “controlled” mercury. The second step, when applied to the alchemist’s own body (which, as matter, is originally a form of Śakti, even if it later becomes “androgynous”) rather than the “bodies” of metals, results in the perfection of the body, as will be shown. In this case, Rasāyana bears the sense of “elixir” and “rejuvenation”, as in the Āyurvedic tradition.

In order to fully understand the processes of alchemy, we must come again to the Sāṅkhyan hierarchical system of the elements, as a corresponding hierarchical system. The *Rasāyan Sār*<sup>38</sup> is explicit in this regard, in its chapter entitled “The progression of absorption” (*Layakrama*):

The absorption of herbs takes place in lead. Lead is absorbed in tin, tin in copper, copper in silver, silver in gold and gold in mercury. Mercury which has been calcinated in sulphur is capable of restoring the body and is capable of “cooking” all of the elements. In the same way that earth is absorbed into water, water is absorbed into fire, fire into air, air into ether, ether into the *jīva*, and the *jīva* into the Brahman. Therefore, just as earth and the other elements associated with it, by virtue of being *sthūla*, are absorbed into water, they and all that follow (water, on the hierarchy) are absorbed into the most *sūkṣma* element, which is Brahman. In the same way, wood and other herbal forms are absorbed into the more *sūkṣma* element of lead, such that they and all that follow (lead, on the hierarchy) are absorbed into mercury.

Thus an explicit correspondence is made between the hierarchy of the elements and the hierarchy of metals, with Brahman equated with mercury (which in this text, as elsewhere, is identified with Śiva’s seed). These parallel hierarchies are not, moreover, arbitrary in the least. Just as it is a fact that earth dissolves in water, that water is penetrated and evaporated by fire, etc. etc, so the hierarchy of the metals is scientifically attributable to the relative *densities* of the metals which constitute it (except tin?), with lead being the least dense, and mercury the densest. In summary, that which is the most dense is the most subtle, and thus the closest to the universal essence and the power which obtains to it. This important point will be studied in depth later in this paper.

It thus seems safe to say that, in alchemical processes, a correspondence between these processes and an understanding of the nature of hierarchical reality was recognized, through which, in

turn, every element of the one was recognizable in the other. In this way, the Sāṅkhyan or Śaivite concept of the universe as a hierarchy based upon penetration and absorption came to stand as a hierarchical model (or summarizing symbol) for the processes of alchemy, or vice versa. By the same token, from the alchemical viewpoint, mercury was recognized as the essential element of a system of correspondences (or as an elaborating symbol), as it stood at once for the Brahman or Puruṣa, the seed of Śiva, Śivahood, and other analogous concepts in other parallel hierarchies which will be discussed below. Furthermore, in the saṃskāras of alchemy, the world view and ethos of the alchemist were mutually reinforcing, in the ritual dramatization of his faith.

Having developed the conceptual bases for alchemical processes, we may now describe those processes in greater detail. The first stage of alchemy consists in the preparation of mercury such that it may be capable of perfecting other elements. Mercury must be first extracted from the ores in which it is found, in which it has been “germinating.” It is most commonly found in cinnabar (*dārada*),<sup>39</sup> which is, not surprisingly, a compound of mercury and sulphur, mica or red arsenic, the latter being the primary mineral forms of Śakti in the world. With mercury, as with all elements, the term used for this extraction and purification is *śodhana* (“purify, refine, examine”), which is the first saṃskāra of every series of alchemical processes. Mercury, when purified, is liquid quicksilver, the potential analogy with sperm (*bindu*, *bīja*) being obvious. This is but a first step, however. In order to be capable of acting upon other metals, mercury must first be perfected. Mercury is perfected through several stages,<sup>40</sup> such that there exists a hierarchy of forms or stages of mercury, according to relative powers of transmutation. Once again, the position on the hierarchy is determined by the relative densities of the forms of mercury at those stages. In its densest form, mercury is called *khecari* (“that which flies through the air”), in which state mercury has the properties of a dense *solid*. As such it is called “fixed” (*baddha*),<sup>41</sup> as its volatile nature has been subdued.

The “fixing” (*bandhana*) of mercury is a saṃskāra that occurs at the end of a series of the intermediate processes, of which “aging” (*jāraṇa*), “swooning” (*mūrccana*) and “killing” (*māraṇa*) are the

most important. These successive processes are repeated six times in order that the mercury may become *khecarī*. Such “six-times killed” mercury is extolled in texts as early as the *Kubjikā Tantra*.<sup>42</sup> This process of “killing” and “resurrecting” mercury into a “younger” and most subtle state has parallels with sacrificial *dīkṣā*;<sup>43</sup> and the concept of rebirth from dissolution, the “reversing” of time, is one that recurs in many parallel systems.

The means by which mercury is “killed” and “resurrected” into a subtler, more powerful form is fascinating.<sup>44</sup> In most general terms, mercury is placed in a closed crucible and heated along with sulphur and other female elements. The process takes place in two steps: first the mercury penetrates the sulphur and other female elements (the sexual analogy is to be borne in mind here), and it subsequently absorbs into itself the power residing in those female, less subtle substances. In this way, mercury is seen as sucking into itself the subtleness that lays embedded in the female elements, in order to make itself all the more subtle. At the same time, when it penetrates the sulphur in the first step, it sloughs off all of the gross impurities it might have contained in itself. The mercury then emerges from the crucible, reborn as it were, from the womb (*garbha*) of the female elements, purified and fortified, having left behind its own impurities in a useless compound (*bhasma*; ash, oxide) with the sulphur and the other female elements. At each successive “killing”, the mercury enters into greater and greater quantities of sulphur, in which it “dies” and is “resurrected” in a state more powerful and subtle than those which preceded. The *bhasma* that remains is testimony to its having been killed. Like the king who is reborn through the purificatory rites of *dīkṣā* in order to play the role of *yajamāna* in his own *rājasūya*, etc., without himself being sacrificed, so “King Mercury” (*rasendra*) emerges reborn from the purificatory womb of the female elements in order that he may effect the *saṃskāras* of *rasāyana*, without himself being burned away in the process.

The purification process of mercury may be repeated over and over again, as mercury mounts the six stages of its forms, and thus increases its powers of transmutation. In the end, it becomes capable of transmuting hundreds, thousands and millions of times its own weight of base metals into gold. In its most subtle form, it is

capable of transmuting by its mere “smell”, “smoke”, “sight”, or “sound”, following the hierarchy of the tanmātras.

Once mercury attains its pure, fixed form, it may be used to transmute other substances, such as the base metals. It must be borne in mind here that, as with mercury, the metals exist as “stages” in a hierarchical flux rather than as discrete, inert elements. In this context, transmutation is the passage, following the hierarchy of elements, from a lower more entropic stage to a higher more stable and primal one. In transmuting metals, one is, in effect, returning them to a primal purity, and thus reversing the processes of creation and remounting the passage of time. This is exactly how it is portrayed.<sup>45</sup> As with mercury, metals are first purified, and then pass through other intermediate saṃskāras precedent to transmutation. Transmutation is called *vedhana* (“piercing”), as this is what happens on the conceptual level. Because of its subtle nature, mercury is able to pierce or penetrate less subtle metals. In doing so, it “kills” them, such that their sūkṣma form emerges, as resurrected, from its previous, more sthūla envelope (which it has “sweated off”, as in dīkṣā—through the agency of mercury), leaving that old body behind as an ash (bhasma) in compound with the other substances. Thus, depending upon its own degree of perfection, mercury is capable of forcing the “self-transformation” of other elements by causing them to slough off their less dense, sthūla content, before becoming exhausted itself.

Thus, when mercury pierces lead, lead first sheds its “lead-ness” to become the stage known as tin. In the next process, the lead-made-tin sheds its “tin-ness” to become copper, and so on, until gold is realized and resurrected from the “chinese boxes” of the killed bodies that had previously enveloped its original subtle nature. As with mercury, there is a hierarchy of stages of gold as well, the highest of which is *hāṭaka* (“ferment gold”),<sup>46</sup> which has, in addition to the density of gold and gold’s other properties, the quality of nearly being *alive*. So charged is *hāṭaka* with subtleness and power that it has a rosy quality to it, is sweet-smelling, and shines “like a newly-risen sun.” However, even in its *hāṭaka* stage, gold can never be as subtle as mercury, which by virtue of its essential nature, is able to move at will on earth and in the air, to



“roar”, to transmute, etc. Just as only Śiva can be Śiva, so no metal, no matter how perfected, can become mercury itself. In this sense, mercury is conceptually divorced from the world of metals, even as it is essential to the transformation of that world in practice.

The realization of “living” hāṭaka gold brings us to the ultimate end of alchemical processes, which is the purification, rejuvenation and perfection of the human body. As was mentioned previously, Rasāyana has, as its earliest sense, in Āyurveda, “rejuvenation”; and in subsequent alchemical and medical tradition, “elixir of life,” when applied to the human body. In this regard, drawing directly upon the Śaivite understanding of absorption and penetration, and transferring all of the processes applied to metallic bodies to the human body, the hierarchized correspondences are made to operate in yet another sphere—that of human physiology—with all of the correspondences and hierarchies of the other systems remaining constant. The root metaphor (which is in this case based upon teleological reasoning) or model belief system thus becomes extended from the perfecting of base metals into gold to the perfecting of the human body. The summarizing symbol remains the Sāṅkhyan-Śaivite hierarchical model, and the elaborating symbol continues to be mercury = Śiva’s seed = Śiva = Brahman. The key scenario, or model for ritual practice, moves from the means by which wealth and powers are to be gained through the alchemical saṃskāras to the wealth, powers and immortality to be gained through similar saṃskāras as they are applied to the body. The key terms, in this latter case, are *siddhis* (“perfections, powers”) and *jīvanmukti* (“liberation in the body”). Returning to the opening lines of the *Rasārṇavam*, we find that this is the first matter of which Parvatī and Bhairava speak, and as the entire last chapter is devoted to *dehavedha* (“transmutation of the body”), we come to see that this is the concept which “frames” and, in a sense, constitutes the “raison d’être” for the whole text. In *Rasārṇavam* 1.6, Parvatī asks, “Of what nature is *jīvanmukti*?” to which Bhairava responds:<sup>47</sup>

“The nonaging-ness (*ajāra*) and immortality (*amāra*) of the body consists in the perceiving of Śiva-hood in one’s self. *Jīvanmukti* is difficult even for the gods to attain. Both the fall of the body (death) as *mokṣa* and *mokṣa* (liberation) itself are nonsensical. When its body falls, even a donkey is liberated.

Who of those born as dogs or pigs is not released? Even in the six schools, liberation is revealed as occurring upon the death of the body. The maintenance of the body is attained through *karma-yoga*. *Rasa* (mercury) and *pāvana* (the vital breaths, wind) are known as the twofold *karma-yoga*. Where there is stability of mercury, there is a solid body. He who eats killed mercury sees his mantras become effective. When one does not eat *pārada-rasa-Harabīja* (mercury-essence-Śiva's seed), whence is his liberation, whence the maintenance of his body?"

It is clear from this passage that this tradition, while "mainstream" Śaivite in the sense that it recognizes the individual ātman as being liberated into the universal essence Śiva or Brahman at death, places a low value upon such liberation. Apart from mere mokṣa there exists a means to a much higher end, which is to be gained through the elite, esoteric practices of alchemy. The Sāṅkhyan concept of multiple individual souls in multiple bodies seems pivotal here, as it is by means of this theological principle that a "shift" to "thinking with metals" more than with the original summarizing symbol of the all-absorbing, all-penetrating Brahman, Puruṣa or Śiva, is made possible. It is through this "loophole" that the more "matter-oriented" hierarchical model of the alchemical processes comes to alter the ultimate aims of man. This "new" materialist bent, which is to be found in certain forms of yoga and Tantra as well turns around the concept of *maximizing density* as a means to impenetrability, in the individual mercurial or human body. This concept, which I believe is absolutely essential to a proper understanding of these three traditions, even as they stand within or parallel to the broader hierarchical model of the Śaivite world view, will be developed throughout the balance of this essay. It must first be understood in terms of mercury.

In the Sāṅkhyan and Śaivite world views, all that exists in the material world is an emanation of the universal essence, and will ultimately return to that essence. In metaphysical terms, that essence, being wholly sūkṣma, is devoid of material attributes or properties. The material etc. being into which it emits itself through a series of hierarchical stages is possessed of properties of mass, energy and volume, but the essence itself is possessed of none of these. It is pure being, and thus the necessary ground for all other forms of being, none of which are like itself. Likewise, when the universe is reabsorbed into that essence at the end of time, although

the world is possessed of mass, energy, (time) etc., the universal essence does not take on these physical properties in reabsorbing them, as it is always wholly subtle. This is not so in the case of perfected mercury, however. Quite the contrary, in fact, as mercury, in becoming perfected, becomes possessed of an optimum mass, density, and energy. It becomes solid, impenetrable and supernaturally heavy for its volume, and its great energy is seen as existing by virtue of its incredible density. It seems that the key concept here is that of impenetrability, as the original essence, in its ability to penetrate all of creation, is itself impenetrable; but in the material world, such impenetrability is only achieved through maximizing density.

As with mercury, so with metals: their subtleness is measured in terms of their physical density, contrariwise to the nonphysical original essence, Brahman, Śiva etc. It is this phenomenon, recognized as being inherent to the hierarchical world of nature, that effects the “shift” of the hierarchical model from Śiva or Brahman to mercury, and thus necessitates the shift in the root metaphor and key scenario from reabsorption of the ātman back into the Brahman-Śiva (mokṣa), to the manipulation of the means to reabsorbing the mass, density, energy (and time) of the world back into the autonomous individual body (jīvanmukti). This perspective changes from one of participation within a closed, self-perpetuating system of temporally cyclic emission and reabsorption on the part of an essence of which one’s self is but a stage, to participating *as* an open system of pure absorption of energy and mass into a body of finite proportions which itself takes the place of the universal essence, and whose potential is infinite in terms of the accumulation of time (longevity), powers (siddhi) and density. The body becomes as perfected as the densest of metals and powerful as the most perfected forms of mercury, a human “black hole” as it were, sucking mass, energy and time into its tiny volume. Thus, while the reintegration of the gross into its more essential stages remains conceptually operative, the summarizing symbol is now solid mercury, and no longer an essence void of physical properties or qualities. The diamond (*vajra*) or golden body thus becomes a prime indicator of jīvanmukti, and in its more “expressive” forms, the Tantra which drew on this understanding extolled the worship

of one's own body as a god, and the use of any means to further the end of self-perfection.<sup>48</sup> As "human black holes", such *siddhas* saw themselves as transcending the laws of nature and of the gods.

The processes involved in the transmutation of the body are identical to those of metals. The body is "pierced" by the ingested, perfected mercury, which causes it to rid itself—through sweat, urine, feces, etc.—of that which is *sthūla* in it, such that only the *sūkṣma* remains. As *sthūla* "envelopes" are successively stripped away, the body, like the metallic stages, becomes denser, more powerful, shining and immortal. The body becomes perfected (*kāya siddha*),<sup>49</sup> as hard as a diamond (*vajra*), impenetrable and all-penetrating. It shines and smells like *hāṭaka* gold. The hair becomes as black antimony, and the face and form of the man become those of a beautiful adolescent just entering into maturity. He becomes eternally young and unsusceptible to disease or injury. He is possessed of all of the *siddhis*, which include invisibility (*āñjana*), the ability to fly (*khecara*), to make things appear or disappear at will, to make his body infinitely small (*aṇimā*), great (*mahimā*), light (*laghimā*), heavy (*garimā*), the ability to attain all of his desires, to control others' minds, and numerous others, ranging from the sublime to the pornographic.<sup>50</sup>

The *siddha* also becomes capable of transmuting base metals into gold through the use of his bodily excrements, his touch or the mere sound of his voice.<sup>51</sup> At this point, the need to perform alchemical *saṃskāras* is transcended. *Jīvanmukti*, which once attained is irreversible, permits an individual to control the universe through his body alone. He becomes greater than even the gods themselves. Depending on how long he holds a pill of mercury in his mouth, a *siddha* attains the spheres and powers, successively, of Indra, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Īśvara, Śiva Īśāna and Svayambhū. He then becomes capable of effecting his curses upon the material world, of himself becoming the *Viśvārūpa*, and of being worshipped by the gods. His longevity also increases in function of the amount of time he holds the mercury pill in his mouth, until he is able to outlive the universe.<sup>52</sup> Here, clearly, the original hierarchical model has been "imploded", and a "new" one, informed by chemical processes, has taken its place, in making the original model a subcategory of itself.

It is at this point, having arrived at the human body itself as an independent center of power and being, that we may approach the subject of *yoga*, and the analogies it bears with alchemical substances, processes, hierarchies and aims. It has been noted by several scholars<sup>53</sup> that *yoga* basically consists in internalizing the chemical processes of alchemy into the psychochemical processes of the subtle body (with changes in the subtle being manifested in the gross, corporeal body). The parallels between the two systems are nearly all-encompassing, such that for any term or element in one, there is a direct correspondence in the other. In order to discuss these parallels, I will draw on various traditions of *yoga* which were contemporary with the *Rasārṇavam*. These include *Laya*, *Siddha*, *Kuṇḍalinī*, *Rāja*, *Hatha* and various other Śaivite Tantric forms of *yoga*, as well as a certain “grounding” in *Pātāñjala* *yoga* and the *yoga* of the *Nāth* *panth*.

The *Rasārṇavam* itself is rich in injunctions and instructions regarding the performance of various yogic practices, especially the use of mantras, the regulation of the breaths, various postures and meditative states, the necessity of receiving instruction from a guru, aspects of the subtle physiology, etc. etc. As will be shown, yogic texts are equally rich in references to alchemy. The intimate relationship between the two systems may be further elucidated through historical documentation. The *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* of Mādhava enumerates “the science of the lord of essences” (*Raseśvara darśana*) as one of the schools of *yoga*.<sup>54</sup> The word “*yoga*” itself, while it bears as its primary sense the concept of “union” or “the act of harnessing” (*√yuj*), also has the sense of “method” or even “magical recipe”. Thus the *Yogatattva Upaniṣad* can make the statement, “By means of *yoga*,” one can, “with the help of a little mud mixed with urine, transmute brass into gold.”<sup>55</sup> If *yoga* is understood as a method to controlling the powers of nature, of reintegrating those powers into oneself, the parallels with alchemy are readily apparent. The Buddhist Tantra, the *Sādhanamālā*, makes an interesting statement in this regard: “As copper leaves its dirty color behind (and becomes gold), when it comes into contact with the magical *rasa*, similarly the body leaves off its attachment of hatred, etc. when it comes into contact with the *rasa* of *Advāya*.”<sup>56</sup>

Before we turn to the yogic tradition *per se*, it must be pointed out that the concentration here will be upon the physical processes that take place within the (subtle) body, rather than upon the accompanying mental states. I choose this emphasis for three reasons. First, of the eight steps of yoga as outlined by Patañjali,<sup>57</sup> only the final two deal exclusively with “disembodied” states of consciousness. Second, there are many more parallels to be found between alchemical processes with the psychochemical processes of yoga’s subtle body than with the purely mental states of yoga. Finally, although it is true that *samādhi* (con-centr-ation, enstasis, liberation of the soul) is the ultimate aim of yoga, the great wealth of yogic literature, especially hagiographic, is devoted to what yogins *do* and how they do it. Moreover, those yogins who attain *samādhi* and do not “pass on” remain in their physical state because they are *jīvanmukta*.<sup>58</sup>

Having discussed the conceptual and terminological parameters of alchemy, an explanation of yoga may be accomplished, to a certain extent, by paralleling terms. The *saṃskāras* of alchemy become the *sādhanas* of yoga. As with the *saṃskāras*, the *sādhanas* consist in a series of initiations into subtler and subtler stages of the elements of the (in this case, human) body. *Sādhana* is derived from  $\sqrt{sādh}$  “to accomplish, complete, make perfect,” and is etymologically related to  $\sqrt{sidh}$  (its “weak form”), and thus to *siddha* (“perfected one”) and *siddhi* (“perfection” n.m.), which have already been discussed. Once again, leaving considerations of purely mental processes aside, we are in the presence of a system whose end is to perfect the human body.

Sexualization and hierarchization are also present, as in alchemy, but with new sets of correspondences. The subtle body is androgynous, being possessed of a male *liṅgam* (rooted in the lowest *cakra*, the *mūlādhāra*) and a female serpent, the *Kuṇḍalinī*,<sup>59</sup> who sleeps with her mouth over the tip of the *liṅgam*. It is also androgynous in that it contains both sperm (*bindu*) and blood (*sonīta*),<sup>60</sup> the bodily essences of Śiva and Śakti, which are also equated with the ambrosia-*(amṛta)*-producing *moon* in the highest *cakra* and the all-devouring *sun* in the lowest *cakra*, the *Īḍā* (major upward-tending *nāḍī*) and the *Pīṅgalā* (major downward-tending *nāḍī*) *nāḍīs*, respectively. The subtle body is also hierarchized, principally in the

systems of the cakras and nāḍīs. Running from the base of the spine to the dome of the skull, the spinal column (*Meru-daṇḍa*) is the center of this system. Located at regular intervals along this vertical axis are the six cakras, the lower of which are associated with *pravṛtti* (active, concerned) Śakti, and the upper with *nivṛtti* (inactive, indifferent) Śiva,<sup>61</sup> which have the form of lotuses.

At this point, we may speak of the yogic cosmology of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The concept of the body as microcosm is made explicit in Yoga. The *Gorakh Sabadi* (GS) speaks of the brahman as residing in the *brahmarandhra* (“the cleft of brahman”, located in the highest cakra) in the yogin’s head in the following terms: “Here (in the brahmarandhra) is the undecaying, hidden brahman. Here the three worlds are made. The undecaying is always with us. For this reason, one may become an eternally perfect (*siddha*) *yogēśvara*.”<sup>62</sup>

The cakras of the subtle body are also called *tīrthas* (watered pilgrimage sites)<sup>63</sup> or *pīṭhas* (“seats” of the goddess, as pilgrimage sites).<sup>64</sup> The body is seen as containing all of the *tīrthas* and *lokas* (worlds, levels)<sup>65</sup> of the physical universe, with its rivers (*nāḍīs* = *nāḍīs*), of which the Sarasvatī (= *Suṣumṇā*), Gaṅgā (= *Īdā*) and Yamunā (= *Piṅgalā*) are the three principal ones.<sup>66</sup> To these three correspond three pairs of cakras, the three *guṇas*, the gods of the *Trimūrti*, three pairs of elements (with *manas* as the sixth), the triad of fire, sun, and moon, etc. etc.<sup>67</sup> In Buddhist Tantra, the *four* major cakras are named for the four principal *pīṭhas*: *Kāmarūpa*, *Jālamdhara*, *Pūrṇaśaila* and *Uḍḍiyāna*, with these ordered hierarchically in the body and in cosmogony, as each is considered to be the site at which the goddess resides in each of the four yugas.<sup>68</sup> The Kuṇḍalinī is called *pralaya*<sup>69</sup> and is conceived as meditating (or dancing) upon the “cremation grounds” of the subtle body (= the universe at *pralaya*),<sup>70</sup> thus making the body a microcosm for temporal as well as spatial constructs. The moon of the *Sahasrāra* (the uppermost cakra) is conceived as a *well of amṛta* (with *amṛta*, as refined semen, equated with mercury),<sup>71</sup> recalling the wells of mercury of the alchemical tradition, in the GS: “In the sphere of the sky (= *Sahasrāra*) is an upside-down well where *amṛta* dwells. He who has a guru may drink his fill; he who has no guru is thirsty.”<sup>72</sup>

The pīṭha of the goddess Kāmākhyā in Kāmarūpa was reputed to have a well of mercury adjacent to the goddess (who is represented as a cleft in the rock which is said to be her vulva), whose stone body is itself composed of red arsenic, one of the forms she takes in uniting with Śiva in his mercurial form. A myth from the *Siṃhāsanadvātriṃśikā* tells of an ascetic who attains mercury and siddhis at that well.<sup>73</sup> The names for certain rites (of purification, etc.), the use of ashes and other substances at such pīṭhas have numerous parallels in alchemy, yoga and dīkṣā.<sup>74</sup> In this way, it becomes apparent that the yogic body microcosm, the universal macrocosm and the alchemical hierarchical model mercury (= *amṛta* = bindu = liberating waters of tīrthas) are mutually informing within the context of Śaivite understandings of cosmogony, cosmology and tīrthas.

Let us return to the yogic microcosm. Each cakra is analogized with a potential state of purification and *sūkṣmaness*, and, as such, each is associated with one of the elements, from earth in the Mūlādhāra to ether/*manas* in the Sahasrāra,<sup>75</sup> and with a mystic *māṭṛkā*.<sup>76</sup> The nāḍīs, through which the breaths (*prāṇa*, *apāna*) circulate weave back and forth across the axis of the cakras. Running upwards through the cakras is the *Suṣumṇā nāḍī*, the most essential nāḍī, which is equated with the (fire of) Brahman; uniting with the *Suṣumṇā* once at each of the cakras are the *Īḍā* (moon, male) and *Piṅgalā* (sun, female) nāḍīs. These are the three subtlest nāḍīs, and correspond to Sadāśiva, Śiva and Śakti, respectively. The goal is to regulate (*prāṇāyama*) and suppress (*kumbhaka*) the breaths in the thousands of nāḍīs, including the *Īḍā* and *Piṅgalā*, such that the fiery *Suṣumṇā* alone may become the sole passage of the breaths, by which all breath may become concentrated in the axis of the cakras. This is effected through the use of breathing techniques, yogic postures, meditation, mantra, yantra and retention of the sperm (or sexual intercourse, in certain Tantric traditions), etc. All serve as means to the ultimate end of *absorption* into one's center (the Sahasrāra, or 1000-petalled cakra) of all of the bodily elements and thought processes. In terms of states of consciousness, the ideal is total absorption into the wholly subtle *cit* (pure consciousness = Brahman), by which one "bursts into" union with the absolute. In terms of physical states, it is the perfecting of the body



fluids, the transmutation of the body, and once again, the getting of density, impenetrability and immortality that is the ultimate end.

As with mercury in alchemy, so the forms of the male essence (sperm = *rasa*) in the body exist as stages of an absolute essence (*amṛta*). When the *rasa* is in the lower cakras, it exists as sperm; in the uppermost *Sahasrāra*, the downturned lotus or full moon, it exists as *amṛta*.<sup>77</sup> The reason for this is simple: the lower cakras are *sthūla*; the *Sahasrāra*, when properly controlled, is Brahman. The goal of *Kuṇḍalinī* yoga, then, at least as far as physical processes are concerned, is to “excite” the *Kuṇḍalinī* serpent goddess into a wakeful state, and into desiring and effecting union with her consort in his pure state in the *Sahasrāra*. When she sleeps, that is, when the body in which she dwells is not subject to yogic exercise, the *rasa* that flows into her mouth from the *lingam* in the *Mūlādhāra* flows through and out of the lower end of her coiled body, and remains in the region of the *sthūla* male sexual organ. Unnourished by the *rasa* she bears with her when she mounts the cakras, the downturned moon in the head wanes down to a single digit, the other fifteen being dissipated through the body, and settled out as sperm in the lower cakras. Through *prāṇāyama* (which is equated with transmutation)<sup>78</sup> and *kumbhaka*, the *Kuṇḍalinī*, awakened and full of desire, is forced into the passage of the *Suṣumṇā* (also called the *brahmamārga*, “the path of/to Brahman”), through which she mounts the cakras towards the *Sahasrāra*. As she comes to each *cakra*, she must pierce (*vedhana*, as in alchemy) through it. In doing so, the heat produced causes a refining of the *rasa* that fills her body, such that a portion of it is forced upward out of her mouth to “recondense” in the dome of the skull, in the now waxing moon of the *Sahasrāra*, in the form of perfected *amṛta*.<sup>79</sup> Thus, at each of the six cakras, a purification/transmutation of the *rasa* takes place, such that by the time the head of the *Kuṇḍalinī* reaches it, the downturned moon is once again full and oozing with *amṛta*. There can be no doubt that with this we are once again in the presence of six-times-killed mercury (*rasa* = sperm = source of immortality),<sup>80</sup> which, having been purified through heating inside the female *Kuṇḍalinī*, attains a state which renders it capable of transmuting other bodies. The alchemical parallel, as well as the sexual metaphor, and the evocation of the

process of dīkṣā are all very clear here. And, as will be seen, the transmutation of the body does in fact follow directly upon the yogic mounting of the Kuṇḍalinī.

As the Kuṇḍalinī rises, through the regulation of the prāṇas and other practices of con-centr-ation, both consciousness (cit) and the rasa are made stable (*sthira*).<sup>81</sup> It is in this making sthira of the cit, prāṇas and the rasa that the “fixing” of mercury into a state most capable of transmuting has its strongest analogies in the physiological and psychochemical processes of yogic practice. These parallels are made explicit in the *GS*<sup>82</sup> and the *Rāja Rāṇi Saṃvād*:<sup>83</sup>

Control of water brings unwavering ether; control of food makes the light shine forth; control of the breaths closes the nine doors (the bodily orifices); control of the seed makes the body *sthira*.

When the mind (*man*) is sthira, then the seed (*byand = bindu*) is sthira; from stability of the seed there is a stable body.

When the mind is wandering (*calantam*), the breath (*pavan*) moves; when the breath is moving, so is the seed; when the seed is moving, the body falls (i.e. dies).

The analogy of the elephant in rut is reproduced as well, with the cit-amṛta standing for mercury: “Bringing the moon from its setting place to its rising place, where it mingles with the breaths, the elephant is bound and held in its pen.”<sup>84</sup>

The term used by the Nāth tradition to describe these processes of mounting the Kuṇḍalinī (or the fire), and rendering the body, prāṇas, cit and seed immobile and stable is *ulātā* (“reversal”). For, indeed, as in the case of the purification, transmutation and perfection of metals, the entropic course of nature, even of time, is reversed. That which has emanated into ever more sthūla forms is brought back its earlier sūkṣma state. So it is with the practice of yoga. When the Kuṇḍalinī sleeps and the moon, breaths, consciousness and bodily elements are dispersed, the body is in its original state of entropy. In the process of reintegrating all of these elements back into their primal state, i.e. to the state of the unmoving, unmoved, self-contained, etc. Brahman, a reversal of the bodily processes of aging, disease, decay and death is effected. This is an absorption back into the original essence, and thus a return to an earlier (ontological) time. Thus the necessity of rendering the various elements into a state in which their essences

are concentrated enough to resorb all that originally arose from them. The idea of *ulaṭā* is mentioned in many places in the *Gorakh Sabadi*:

“Devour the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. Close the nine doors. In six months the body is reversed and the yogin attains supreme indifference. One should keep the body stable and the breaths restrained. He is then never sick. In twelve days the body is reversed three times, through the use of tin, lead and herbs.”<sup>85</sup>

With the reversal of the bodily processes and the stabilizing of its essential elements, the body is primed for transmutation. The Kuṇḍalinī (or fire) unites with the full moon in the dome of the head, wherein the stabilized cit and prāṇa also lie, and a torrent of amṛta floods through the body in an orgasmic rush:

“When the *nāda* is reversed, the sperm is reversed. When the breaths are restrained, the immortal essence is realized. The torrent surges from the sphere of the void when the sun and moon hold one in indifference. Going to the northern region, the fruit of the void is eaten, and one wears the fire of Brahman as his ascetic garb. He whose mind is made steady drinks the amṛta that surges out in a flood.”<sup>86</sup>

Through repeated mountings of the Kuṇḍalinī,<sup>87</sup> the cit-prāṇa-amṛta becomes more and more stable (or “fixed”) and their powers become greater and greater. The flooding of the body with amṛta after each union of the Kuṇḍalinī with the Brahman in the Sahasrāra transmutes the body, just as does mercury when it is taken orally. With each union, with each transmutation, then, the body becomes progressively purified and more subtle. Just as with metals, the bodily elements remount the hierarchy of matter until, as with mercury, the body is wholly transmuted, and becomes golden or diamond-like, impenetrable, immortal and possessed of siddhis:

“By seating the primal Brahman between the two (*nāḍīs*), the siddhi of *Guṭika bandha* (= the fixing of a pill of mercury, in *Rasārṇavam*) is obtained, and one’s body lives as long as the earth. Transmute the diamond with the proper sounds, using the tongue as a stamp. Good qualities are produced from lesser qualities. In this way all of existence becomes one’s disciple.”<sup>88</sup>

As with the ingestion of mercury, the siddhis enjoyed by the yogin are numerous and varied. The oral tradition is full of stories of yogins who have gained immortal, impenetrable bodies. Gorakhnāth, whose body is *vajra*, does battle with another yogin,

Āllabha Prābhudeva. Āllabha strikes Gorakh with his sword, and the sword is shattered without Gorakh being pierced in the least. Gorakh then strikes at Āllabha, whose body is cut in half, only to reappear, intact and flying through the air.<sup>89</sup> Gorakhnāth turns horse dung into a blanket, a bundle of grass and then a human being, which he infuses with life. He grants children to barren women, is able to exert his powers over great distances, burn heaven and earth with his austerities, and transform himself into whatsoever being or form as he desires.<sup>90</sup> Once Gorakh's guru, Matsyendranāth, having lost his yogic powers through dissolute living, is taken by Yama (i.e. he dies). Gorakh goes to Yamaloka, gives Yama a beating, threatens to do worse if Yama ever tries to touch a Nāth again, and restores Matsyendranāth to life.<sup>91</sup> Once again, through reversing the processes of creation (which tend towards entropy), the adept becomes capable of overcoming, of tricking Time (*“Kāla-vāñca”*) and Death.<sup>92</sup>

There is another aspect of yoga which must be discussed here, which will serve to bring us back to our considerations of attaining physical density as the ultimate end of the “new” matter-oriented ethoi and world views of the traditions under study. This concerns the place of sperm in the yogic subtle physiology. Sperm is as essential to yoga as mercury is to alchemy. Only from sperm is it possible to obtain the amṛta by which the body is rejuvenated and made siddha. It is thus very valuable, and the necessity of having an optimum quantity of sperm in the body to fuel the psychochemical process is emphasized in every tradition. There are two means to retaining a rich supply of sperm in the body. The first is abstinence, which is the path stressed in the teachings of Gorakhnāth: “Do not allow sperm, the essence of the blood, to go out, and the diamond will not crack.”<sup>93</sup>

Once again, the hierarchical model of the Brahman is shifted to that of the subsidiary, parallel category. When sperm-born amṛta is *sthira* in the Sahasrāra, along with the cit and prāṇa, the yogin is the most absorbed into the most elevated state. Through repeated transmutations, in the use of transmuted sperm, the whole body becomes “packed” as it were, with that physical form of the essential. It is made solid with the transmuted sperm to the point of impenetrability. It is in this way that the body becomes *vajra* to the

outside, because inside it is packed with perfected, fixed, solidified sperm. The yogin who, through the *sādhanas*, attains a perfect body and *siddhis*, becomes, as in the case of alchemy, a “black hole”, capable of absorbing the energy of the universe into himself and transmuting it into an ever denser body that flouts the laws of the universe.

There is another means to retaining one’s sperm, which makes this parallel even more explicit. This is to be found in the sexual practices of Tantric yoga, particularly in the *vajrolī* (or *amarolī* or *sahajolī*) *mudrā*.<sup>94</sup> In this practice, the yogin, having ejaculated inside his partner, draws his sperm back into himself by mechanical means, using his penis like a “fountain pen”. In doing so, he retrieves all of the sperm he would otherwise have lost.

But this is not all. One need only recall the way the purification of mercury in sulphur was conceptualized in alchemy for this to be understood clearly. As with mercury and sulphur in alchemy, sperm and blood are to be seen as complementary, corresponding to Śiva and Śakti. Although it was not emphasized above, it is the *interaction* of blood and sperm, the sun and moon, the Kuṇḍalanī and the Sahasrāra, the Piṅgalā and the Īḍā, that is essential to the refining of sperm into *amṛta* and the subsequent transmutation of the body. The energy of blood must be fused with that of sperm for an embryo to be created which will develop into a child. In many ways, the Sāṅkhyan system from which these traditions took their structure, is based upon embryology.

The Tantric yogins conceived of the *vajrolī mudrā* as follows: by emitting one’s semen into a woman and drawing it back into the penis before withdrawal, one leaves behind the gross matter of the semen and, in addition to the “subtle” sperm, the energy of the blood inside the *yoni* or *garbha* is also drawn into the yogic. This is exactly what takes place in the purification, etc. of mercury in sulphur. The mercury penetrates the sulphur, absorbs the energy of the sulphur into itself, and leaves behind a useless residue of its own impurities in compound with the drained sulphur. In this way, through repeated penetrations and absorptions into itself of the female essence, the male essence is made *baddha*,<sup>95</sup> *sthira* and *siddha*.

What better metaphor for the “new” hierarchical model of these traditions than the *vajrolī mudrā*? The yogin = sperm = mercury

penetrates the yogini = blood = sulphur to absorb their energy and thus become “dense” = Śiva = Brahman. In all three of these traditions, the concept of *laya* into the impenetrable Brahman becomes transformed into the absorption of matter and energy into a hyper-concentrated bodily crucible, by virtue of which that body becomes supernatural.<sup>96</sup> In this way, a Śaivite version of a Sāṅkhyan world view and ethos, with the hierarchical model of the Brahman (Puruṣa, Sadāśiva...) and its corresponding ritual and belief systems undergoes—through a teleological form of reasoning founded upon the properties of the constituent elements of a corresponding alchemical (or bodily) hierarchy—a transformation into a quite “different” world view, ethos and hierarchical model. And, based upon the hierarchical model of mercury = sperm = amṛta, the ritual and belief models come to be transformed into a perception of the material world as the source of the essential, with the manipulation and absorption of matter as the ultimate human activity. Yet, even within the context of their “new” world view and ethos, most alchemists, yogins and Tantrics of medieval India perceived their belief systems and ritual practices as being quite consonant with the Śaivite system of which they considered themselves to be a part.

It has not been my intention here to argue that any one of the alchemical, yogic or Śaivite cosmological or cosmogonic systems that have been discussed was the source of any or all of the other traditions. My intention throughout has been to “bracket out” such questions of primacy, even when referring to “new” systems, hierarchical models, world views, etc. In these cases, “new” was meant to be taken in the sense of “alternative, but parallel,” which should bring us back to one of our original theses: that the parallel hierarchies of these systems were mutually informing and enriching. Thus the variations on a cosmological hierarchy realized through the manipulation of mineral substances did not rule out an understanding of the original essence as being without physical properties or qualities: the two simply “resonated” together as analogues of one another. This was not a case of *either this or that*, but of *both this and that*. Thus the getting of density, through alchemical and yogic practices, while “physically” contradicting the parallel model of the absolute essence in fact complemented that model symbolically, and vice versa. In this way, “thinking with

metals” and bodily fluids reinforced a process of symbolic (self-)interpretation that had been ongoing, no doubt, even before the conceptual models of Sāṅkhyā, etc. hierarchies had been “canonized”. Furthermore, the idea of reversing the cosmogonic process, and thus time itself, was not one which contradicted the cosmogonic model, as *pralaya* was in fact conceived as a reversal of the cosmogonic process of *śṛṣṭi*. In this sense, the alchemist, yogin or Tantric was merely “helping nature along” towards its irreversible end—which would serve as a new matrix for a new beginning of the cosmic cycle. In one sense, there was nothing “new” in these traditions, apart from the bodies upon which they operated; in another sense, they were wholly new. Herein lies the reassuring redundancy of variant interpretations or versions of any given myth, symbol or ritual.<sup>97</sup> Not either/or, but both..and. Such is the wealth and power of symbols that permit us to tell ourselves who we are.

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, Basic Books, 1973), pp. 87-125.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> Sherry Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” *Reader in Comparative Religion* ed. by William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, (New York, Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 92-98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97: “...a given summarizing symbol is “key” to the system insofar as the meanings which it formulates are logically or affectively prior to other meanings of the system. By “logically or affectively prior,” I mean simply that many other cultural ideas and attitudes presuppose, and make sense only in the context of, those meanings formulated by the symbol.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97: “The key role of the elaborating symbol, by contrast, derives not so much from the status of its particular substantive meanings, but from its formal or organizational role in relation to the system; that is, we say such a symbol is “key” to systems insofar as it extensively and systematically formulates relationships—parallels, isomorphisms, complementarities and so forth—between a wide range of diverse cultural elements.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96: “Root metaphors, by establishing a certain view of the world, implicitly suggest certain valid and effective ways of acting upon it; key scenarios, by prescribing certain culturally effective courses of action, embody and rest upon certain assumptions about the nature of reality.”

<sup>8</sup> *Rasāyana* is a compound of *rasa* + *āyana*, in which “*rasa*” stands at once for “essence”, “mercury”, “sperm”, “liquid element” etc., and “*āyana*” for “the way of”. While the common translation for this term is “the way of mercury,” the other senses of “*rasa*” are also inherent to it. It is also the Ayurvedic term for longevity, or the elixir of life.

<sup>9</sup> *Rasārṇavam* ed. by Sir Praphulla Chandra Ray and Pandit Harischandra Kaviratna, (Bibliotheca Indica, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Nos 1193, 1220 and 1238) Calcutta, Satya Press, 1901-1910. All translations my own.

<sup>10</sup> This is admirably illustrated by medieval Puranic accounts of primary creation (cf. Madeleine Biardeau, “Cosmogonie Purānique,” in *Dictionnaire des mythologies* ed. by Yves Bonnefoy (Paris, Flammarion, 1981), vol. I, p. 236), schematically described as follows: Puruṣa → Avyakta → Mahān (ātmā) → the three guṇas → Ahaṁkāra → Vaikārika/Bhūtādi → the five cognitive organs/the five sentient qualities—the five sensory organs/the five elements.

<sup>11</sup> This reverse movement is epitomized in the stages of yoga, as related in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.10-11; 6.7-8 (cf. Biardeau, *op. cit.*, p. 236), by which reabsorption into the absolute proceeds from the sensory organs → manas → mahān (ātmā) → Avyakta → Puruṣa (→ Brahman).

<sup>12</sup> *RV* 10.90.

<sup>13</sup> The *Parasāra* version of the tanmātras is as follows: The tanmātras originate from one another in one linear series, and each bhūta originates in a separate line from its own tanmātra, such that:

*Bhūtādi*

*Śabdātānāmātra*—— (Sound tanmātra), as a radical or center encircled by Bhūtādi, generates *ākāśa* (ether).

*Sparśātānāmātra*—— (Touch tanmātra), as a radical or center encircled by Śabdātānāmātra, with the *ākāśa*-atom as a catalyst, generates *vāyu* (air).

*Rūpātānāmātra*—— (Color tanmātra) as a radical or center encircled by Sparśātānāmātra with the *vāyu*-atom as a catalyst, generates *tejas* (fire).

*Rasātānāmātra*—— (Taste tanmātra), as a radical or center encircled by Rūpātānāmātra with the *tejas*-atom as a catalyst, generates *āpas* (water).

*Gandhātānāmātra*—— (Smell tānmatra), as a radical or center encircled by the Rasātānāmātra, with the *āpas*-atom as a catalyst, generates *pṛthivī* (earth).

(Cf. P. Ray, *History of chemistry...*, p. 264. See n. 42).

<sup>14</sup> *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* 10.10.1, cited in Jean Varenne, *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. notes 10, 11, and 13.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris, Flammarion, 1977), pp. 27-34 and *passim*. Creation is viewed as sexual from an early time in Hindu mythology, an example being in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4.1-6) myth of the man-soul who divides himself into man and woman. The two then mate, in various creaturely forms, to give rise to all of the creatures of the universe. In Sāṅkhya, the primary emanations of Puruṣa and Prakṛti give rise, through further emanations of



themselves (being male and female respectively), to all of creation. Śaivite cosmology, drawing on the yogic tradition, conceives of all of creation and universal processes as being emanations of the eternal union of Śiva (as male and potentiality) and his female aspect Śakti (as energy and manifestation).

<sup>17</sup> The yogic representation of creation as the reverse of yogic processes should be retained here (cf. notes 10 and 11) as well as the relationship between *laya* and *pralaya*, especially when Śiva is portrayed as the great yogin.

<sup>18</sup> D. C. Sircar, *The Śakta Pīthas* (New Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), pp. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> Van Kooij, *Worship of the Goddess according to the Kālikā Purāṇa*, (Leiden, Brill, 1972), vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Rasataramṅinī*, ed. by Haridatta Shastri et. al., (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1965) 5:1-2; *Rasaratnasamucchaya of Vāgbhaṭṭācārya*, ed. by Pandit Sridharmananda Sharma (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1964) 1:67; and *Rasārṇavam* 10:4-5.

<sup>22</sup> See note 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Rasataramṅinī* 5:2.

<sup>24</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 1:36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:28.

<sup>27</sup> *Rasaratnasamucchaya* 1:61-66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:85-88.

<sup>29</sup> The goddess's mineral essence is also qualified as being mica (*Rasārṇavam* 6.1) or red arsenic (Van Kooij, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

<sup>30</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 7:57-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:37-38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:43-44, 52 etc.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:109-116.

<sup>34</sup> *Samskāra* (*saṃ-s-√kr*: join together, form well) has as its primary sense "putting together, making perfect". Applied to food, it has the sense of "preparation"; to animal husbandry, "rearing"; to human education, "cultivation"; to astronomy, "correction"; to the human body "cleansing". In religious life (if such is separable from culture in the Hindu tradition), *samskāra* stands for "sacrament" or "sanctifying or consecrating ceremony." There are traditionally twelve *samskāras*, the performances of which extend from womb to tomb to regeneration beyond death. In the practice of the *samskāras*, the self is made perfect according to the nature and processes of being itself. It is with this and the preceding applications of this term that one must approach this concept as it applies to alchemy.

<sup>35</sup> *Rasaratnasamucchaya* 8:2-3.

<sup>36</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 2:107-108.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:90.

<sup>38</sup> *Rasāyan Sār*, ed. by Syamasundaracarya Vaisya (Varanasi, 1914), pp. 85-86. While this is a very late compilation, it nearly wholly respects earlier textual traditions.

<sup>39</sup> S. Mahdihassan, *Indian alchemy or Rasayana* (New Delhi, Vikas Press, 1979), p. 101. See also note 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 12: 198 ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Bandhana* is generally translated as "fixing" in alchemical contexts, with the metaphor of the wild rutting elephant which must be bound or subdued standing for mercury (see note 37 and below) and for the *cit* in yoga. This term also covers,

however, the concepts of stabilization or solidification (of mercury, from its liquid form) and even “tumidification” in the sense that, as with the sperm with which it is identified, the confinement of mercury causes it to harden and swell, and thus become more powerful in its ability to penetrate other (female) substances.

<sup>42</sup> Praphulla Chandra Ray, *History of Chemistry in Ancient and Medieval India*, ed. by Priyanaranjan Ray (Calcutta, Indian Chemical Society, 1956), p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 108, and Mircea Eliade, *Le yoga: immortalité et liberté* (Paris, Payot, 1954), pp. 113-118.

<sup>44</sup> *Rasārṇavam* chaps. 11 and 12.

<sup>45</sup> Eliade (1977: 117).

<sup>46</sup> *Rasopaniṣat*, ed. by K. S. Shastri (Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, No. 92), Trivandrum, 1924: 18:77 *inter alia*; Mahdihassan, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 1:8, 9, 11, 18, 19, 22, 28. Bhairava is a form of Śiva.

<sup>48</sup> *Two Vajrāyana Works*, ed. by Benoytosh Bhattacharya, (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. 44), Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1929, p. ix.

<sup>49</sup> Many of the siddhis have alchemical names, as *khecarī* (= mercury; “flying through the air”) and *āñjana* (= black antimony; “invisibility”). The eight siddhis are mentioned in *Rasārṇavam* 14:43-44; 18:167-169. For many of the thirty-five siddhis, see Varenne, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Rasārṇavam* 12:336-337.

<sup>51</sup> *Rasopaniṣat* 17:1-34 *Rasārṇavam*, chap. 18, *passim*.

<sup>52</sup> *Rasārṇavam* 14:24-44.

<sup>53</sup> Eliade (1977: 107-117); Shashibhusan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta, Mukhyopadhyaya, 1969), p. 194.

<sup>54</sup> Cited in Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>55</sup> *Yogatattva Upaniṣad*, cited in Varenne, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>56</sup> *Sādhnamālā*, ed. by Benoytosh Bhattacharya (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. 41), Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1928), p. lxxvi.

<sup>57</sup> Varenne, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>59</sup> In the “desexualized” context of the Nāth tradition, it is the fire of Brahman (*Brahmāgni*), rather than the Kuṇḍalinī, that mounts the cakras. Yoga, as the internalization into psychochemical processes of the alchemical processes, and of the purificatory rite of *dīkṣā* etc., is to be seen as a ritual process in the same way that alchemy was so described.

<sup>60</sup> The complementarity of blood and sperm also exists in Indian perceptions of human genesis, with the embryo understood as being evolved solely from sperm and blood. Cf. Gopinath Kaviraj, *Tāntrik vānmay mēm Śaktidṛṣṭi* (Patna, Bihar Rashtrabhasa Parisad, 1963), p. 238: “The secret is that just as the material body is born of a combination of sperm and blood, in the same way the rasa-body is born of the power of Śiva and Śakti. That being whose dissolution takes place and that in which dissolution takes place become identical. By the dissolution of gold, etc. in mica-swallowed mercury, the immortal essences become manifest, by the power of which stability occurs in the body.”

<sup>61</sup> Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>62</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 3, in *Gorakh Bānī*, ed. by Pitambaradatta Bharathwal (Prayag, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1961).

<sup>63</sup> *Tīrthas* (√*tī*: “cross over, ford”) are cosmologically conceived, in *bhakti*, as points at which, by virtue of the god who resides in those places, the devotee may, by bathing, cross over from one state of being (existence, *samsāra*) to a higher state (liberation, *mokṣa*). In yoga, cakra as *tīrtha* is the point at which the Kuṇḍalinī, by crossing it, causes the yogin to accede to a higher yogic state.

<sup>64</sup> *Pīṭhas* are “seats” where the goddess (or parts of her body) is located on earth, along with her consort, who is generally Bhairava (see note 47). Bhairava was an important form of Śiva for many of the traditions under study here, including alchemy, Nāth panth, Śākta yoga etc. For the origins of the Śākta *pīṭhas* and the names of the Bhairavas who dwell with the goddess at her *pīṭhas*, see Sircar, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7 and *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> Sir John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power* (Madras, Ganesh and Company, 1973), p. 248.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111; and Varenne, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>67</sup> Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>68</sup> Van Kooij, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>71</sup> *Rasopaniṣat* 18:54. The origin myth of mercury also makes explicit the association of mercury, *amṛta* and Śiva’s seed.

<sup>72</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 23.

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Van Kooij, *op. cit.*, p. 27. The goddess’ body of red arsenic also has the power to transmute, cf. Van Kooij, p. 26 and *Kālikā Purāna* 64:72-75.

<sup>74</sup> Van Kooij, *op. cit.*, p. 11 and *Kālikā Purāna* 55:15-18. On *dikṣā*, see Eliade (1977: 108): “...the old initiation ritual (of *dikṣā*), which effected the symbolic return to the embryo followed by rebirth into a higher spiritual level (“divinization”, “immortalization”) was interpreted by traditional medicine as a means to rejuvenation and designated by a term (*rasāyana*) which came to designate alchemy..”

<sup>75</sup> The six *cakras* (“psychochemical centers”) are the *Mūlādhāra* (earth), *Svādhiṣṭhāna* (water), *Maṇipura* (fire), *Anāhata* (air), *Viśuddha* (ether), and *Sahasrāra* (*śūnya* = “the void” = Brahman).

<sup>76</sup> *Mātrkā* has the (intended) double sense of “mother” and (acoustic) matrix, as there exists at each *cakra* a form of the mother goddess (at her *pīṭha*) whose name has as its root or matrix one of the mystic syllables used in meditation.

<sup>77</sup> As the moon is *Soma*, the equation with *amṛta* is a natural one.

<sup>78</sup> Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>79</sup> Eliade (1954: 246), and Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>80</sup> The mounting of the six *cakras* would seem to be analogous with killing mercury six times. See notes 42 and 43.

<sup>81</sup> Eliade (1954: 248); and Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>82</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 57, 123.

<sup>83</sup> *Rājā Rāṇi Saṃvād* of Gopīcand, in *Nāth Siddhṃ kī Bānīyām*, ed. by Hajariprasad Dvivedi (Benares, Nagaripracarini Sabha, 1964), pp. 18-19.

<sup>84</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 88.

<sup>85</sup> *Ulaṭā* is the turning back of ontogenic time, such that one becomes as a child again. Cf. *Gorakh Sabadi* 1,52 and 92.

<sup>86</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 55, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Woodroffe, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>88</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 19, 49, 60.

<sup>89</sup> Kaviraj, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>90</sup> George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), pp. 179-207.

<sup>91</sup> Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>92</sup> *Gorakh Sabadi* 219.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 141; Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-334. “-olī” is probably a shortening of the Sanskrit *-ālaya*, which means “the place, depository of”. *Vajra-* is “diamond”; *Amara-* is “immortality”; and *Sahaja-* may refer to the Vaiṣṇavite Tantric *Sahajīya* sect.

<sup>95</sup> See note 41.

<sup>96</sup> It is possible that the name for preceptor (*guru*) in these traditions takes its original meaning (“heavy”) from this ultimate end of maximum density and impenetrability.

<sup>97</sup> Edmund Leach, *Genesis as myth and other essays* (London, Grossman, 1969), pp. 8-9.