The Monistic Śākta Philosophy in the *Guhyopaniṣad*

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Overview

Studies on the pantheon of Kālī have either focused on autochthonous rituals and practices, or have read the canonized Tantric texts in relation to the Kashmiri traditions. In these readings, what has been overlooked is the lived Śākta worldview that integrates philosophies and practices from various Vedic and Tantric traditions. My effort here is not to find the most archaic form of Kālī practice or to say which of the practices represents the most authentic form. Any and all practices are authentic as long as they reflect the beliefs of the real people in the field and are not fabricated by ethnographers or historians. The Kālī text I am reading is Vedāntic, and non-dual through and through. To engage the texts like this, one has to evolve from the parameters of what constitutes Tantric and has to be willing to walk through the blurred lines of Vedic and Tantric. This is what living Hinduism is all about: it is a synthesis of everything that has evolved in the pan-Indian cultural milieu. Vedas, Purāṇas, Tantras, folk rituals and practices, dualistic and non-dual philosophies, everything blends in a real-life Hindu practice. And for the laymen, Kālī stands for a mother goddess like any other, and the categories of Vedic and Tantric are irrelevant. Kālī may have been the central goddess of the folk cultures and could have evolved in an extra-Vedic religious paradigm.[1] However, she is not less popular among the Vedic scholars or Smārta householders. The text under consideration is an epitome of this synthetic tendency.

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[1] I have used 'Vedic' and 'Tantric' as working categories and do not accept this distinction in the absolute sense. It is problematic the way contemporary scholarship divides Vedic and non-Vedic. I do not believe that there were ever two separate closed systems as some scholars have imagined. Although the particular text I am examining dates from medieval times, there are some earlier texts in the Upaniṣadic genre that are dedicated to Durgā or Kubjikā. Most importantly, the text being examined here defies the distinction of the Vedic versus Tantric, as it is a synthesis of the Vedic Upaniṣads while at the same time is a section in one of the key Tantric texts.

The *Guhyopaniṣad* (GU) is not an independent text with a proper recognition as an Upaniṣad, but rather a section inside the *Mahākālasaṃhitā* (MKS) that is fashioned within the Upaniṣadic framework.[2] The text is broadly unnoticed for it is mostly a summary of the pertinent sections from the principal Upaniṣads. I find this text nonetheless significant because (1) it documents the Vedicization of the Tantric worldview and demonstrates the process of the integration of Kālī within the Vedic paradigm, (2) shows the influence of the Vedantic worldview and at the same time strives to keep the Śākta worldview alive. In particular, the text reflects the lived vitality of Śākta monism, the philosophy that might appear identical to the Advaita of Śaṅkara at first glance but is different in many regards when read closely. The work of Goudriaan and Schoterman (1994), with its focus on the goddess Kubjikā, is exemplary to introduce this genre. This is to argue that the role the Goddess Kālī plays in this paradigm is that of the Parabrahman in Śaṅkara's philosophy, albeit she is not a passive Brahman lacking all attributes and is not equivalent of Māyā, illusory in nature and consequently to be shunned for one to achieve liberation. The worldview presented here is monistic-panentheistic, and the goddess is described as both the transcendent Brahman and the immanent world. The theism imprinted here is radically different from the one viewed in the dualistic traditions where there is a clear separation of the divine and the world, of the individual and the absolute, of the mind and body, of matter and consciousness, and so on.

The pantheon of Kālī has evolved and transformed multiple times: first it emerged from the archaic folk Kālī worship to the established schools of Kula and Krama, giving rise to Krama and Mahārtha philosophies; then, the Purāṇic and popular practices have reshaped the tradition. And third, we are observing a current New Age revival of Kālī practice, particularly at the forefront of Neo-Pagan movements, the feminist theology movement, and various others that have brought the divine feminine to prominence. The text under consideration epitomizes Guhyakālī,[3] one of the most archaic forms of Kālī with her polyanthropomorphic forms, incorporates the practices of the Kāpālikas or other Vāmācāra or left-hand oriented Tantric pantheons that adopt forbidden substances in ritual practices, and at the same time draws

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[2] The first of two texts, entitled *Guhyakālyupaniṣad*, has 84 verses, and can be found in the anthology, *Upaniṣatsaṅgraha* (pp. 410-420). The other, with the title *Guhyopaniṣad*, contains 53 verses and appears as a section within the first chapter of the Guhyakālī Khaṇḍa of the *Mahākālasaṃhitā* (Hereafter MKS, verses 200-253). I have followed the title and the verses according to the MKS, because the text in the *Upaniṣatsaṅgraha*, in its colophon, cites the MKS as its source and the initial and final verses found in the *Upaniṣatsaṅgraha* are not considered as part of the Upaniṣad.

[3] For studies on Guhyakālī or Guhyeśvarī, see MICHAELS 1996, 303-342.

its philosophical essence from the Vedic Upaniṣads. The text documents a medieval Tantric movement to integrate Kaula practices and rituals within mainstream Hinduism. After a brief introduction, I will focus on select passages from the text to help comprehend the transaction of thoughts among different Hindu pantheons.

Kālī —— the Hindu goddess of time, death, liberation, immortality, among many other roles that she plays — is mostly a peripheral divinity, with male counterparts such as Viṣṇu or Śiva assuming the central stage. Hindu apologetics often shy away from associating with Kālī, and the goddesses such as Tripurā or Lakṣmī whose appearance is pleasant and peaceful receive more prominent positions in the public display. In Tantric traditions, however, Kālī often enjoys the central place. The Kāpālikas, early Tantric practitioners who carried skull cups and dwelled in the cremation grounds, were most likely the first adherents of Kālī. The goddess breaches the parameters of the outcastes and swiftly becomes popular, as is evidenced with the emergence of the Tantric philosophies of Krama and Mahārtha. These systems provide the autochthonous practice a much-needed metaphysical and theological grounding. These, however, are not the only conceptual frameworks for Kālī practice, as the Purāṇic texts such as *Devīmāhātmya* demonstrate a reframing of Kaula philosophy with adaptation and reinterpretation of the Sāṅkhya categories. In this new metaphysics, *prakṛti* is not an inanimate tendency from which one strives to separate in the quest for enlightenment, but rather is the absolute divinity in feminine form. Śākta theology culminates in the Kashmiri traditions of Spanda, Krama, and Mahārtha, where divinity is identical to pure consciousness (*citi*), autonomous in creating the world. Creation, in this paradigm, is the mere expression or an expansion of this feminine principle, pure energy found in the form of consciousness.

Śākta Monism in the *Guhyopaniṣad* (GU)

Guhyopaniṣad (GU) is a small text of 53 verses, and comes as part of the *Mahākālasaṃhitā,* (MKS) roughly dated around 12th century. When read closely, the GU reflects more of the Upaniṣadic philosophy than Kashmiri Krama or Mahārtha philosophies. Presumably, there was no spread of the Tantric Śākta philosophies in the area where this text was written. MKS extensively treats Kālī rituals, incorporating various pantheons for practicing Kālī, such as the Kāpālika way or the Bhāṇḍikera way. However, the text recommends Smārta Brahmanic rules and regulations and thus appears to

seek a compromise between Tantric and Smārta lifestyles. Whether or not this text helped shape the popular social milieu, it nonetheless reflects the societal transformation wherein Kālī emerges in the mainstream culture and enters Brāhmaṇa households. Studying GU therefore offers insight to this negotiated ground between different sub-cultures. More importantly, despite such appropriations, GK seeks to retain the positive and world-affirming tendencies of the Śāktas by advocating a form of monism that greatly resembles Śaṅkara's Advaita. However, it is not identical, as it differs both metaphysically and theologically. This text reflects a new strand of Hindu thought that accepts the non-dual platform but advances its theology for a wider audience.

The text unfolds against the background of a visualization of the goddess Guhyakālī in her cosmic form. The concept of *virāt* or the divinity permeating all that exists, is ubiquitous to Hindu literature and is found as early as in the *Puruṣasūkta* (Ṛgveda 10.90).[4] This Ṛgvedic archetypal imagery migrates to the Purāṇas and is applied to the imagery of the popular Purāṇic divinities. MKS does the same when it describes the graphic image of Guhyakālī. In this depiction, the body of Guhyakālī is parallel to the cosmos, and the practice of visualization translates into the subject viewing his own body as mapping the body of the goddess. In this stage, Guhyakālī's visualization involves the practitioner imagining the deity's body permeating the cosmos; this visualization is identified as the *virāṭ-dhyāna* or cosmic visualization (MKS I.1.178-198). Aspirants visualize the divine having corporeality and find a correlation of the divine body with their own. This presumably allows the subjects to have an affirmative attitude towards the body and the world. The bodily being of the goddess thus mirrors the body of the yogin, mapping his physicality in relation to the divine body. In this depiction, the goddess Guhyakālī permeates all that exists. Her forehead, eyebrows, and ears comprise the heavens, including the abodes of Śiva and Viṣṇu. Her nose becomes the galaxy, the moon and the sun are her eyes, with her eyelashes their rays. Different layers of the heavens constitute features of her body and attire, such as cheeks, earrings, and lips. Her teeth house the deities that govern directions and the planets. Her mouth is the sky, her throat the heaven of Brahmā, her breath is the air, her bodily hair are plants and herbs, the opening and closing of her eyes signal the day and the night, while the cosmos rests in her heart and the earth in her feet. Different layers of the underworld are her toes. From her speech flows the Vedas, her joints comprise different

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[4]   The term *virāṭ* already appears in the *Puruṣasūkta*. Virāṭ, Vaiśvānara, or Hiraṇyagarbha are some of the terms to describe the deity that encompasses all manifest reality. Every deity can assume this Virāṭ form, giving rise to the concept of Viśvarūpa.

aspects of time. The cosmic fire called Vaiśvānara and time and death are her three tongues. In this way, her body permeates all that exists, from Brahmā to the smallest particle, and the dissolution of the world is her feasting time.

The most popular Hindu imagination of the divine in cosmic manifestation comes in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chapter 11) wherein Kṛṣṇa displays his true form. As described above, the depiction of Guhyakālī extends this genre with a description of her esoteric nature, and the text becomes profoundly monistic. Just as a spider spreads its web and absorbs it back into itself, just as sparks emerge from a firebrand and disappear, the world, in the same way, manifests from and dissolves back into the body of goddess Kālī. This description (GU 200-202) is an exact reproduction of Muṇḍaka 1.7 and 2.1. Guhyakālī's physical characteristics, when she is equated with the Brahman and is described all-permeating appears to expand upon Muṇḍaka 2.4, wherein the Brahman is described in its cosmic manifestation. Descriptions, articulary the identification of the heart as the cosmos and the earth as the feet, and the sun and the moon comprising her two eyes, are identical. Muṇḍaka 2.3, 6-8 appear in expanded form in verses 203-208, where the text describes the goddess permeating all that exists. This transition is effected by shifting the term from Brahman to the goddess Kālī, with the pronouns and synonyms now designating the goddess. In particular, two of the verses in this sequence (GU 209-210) are identical to Muṇḍaka 3.1.7-8. The prominent passage from Muṇḍaka 3.2.8, where all manifestations with name and form (*nāmarūpe*) dissolve into the formless, appears in GU 211 with a slight variant, changing the *puruṣa* transcendent to the transcendent' (*parāt paraṃ puruṣam*) to 'the mother of the world, who is transcendent to the transcendent' (*parāt parāṃ jagadambām*).

GU verse 212, in describing that this is the very goddess that all the Vedas describe and for whom the sages maintain austerities, mirrors *Kāṭhaka* (KU 2.15). A slight variation in this passage is found in the anthology which adds a passage "*saivaitat*," which seems to follow the sequence in KU. The phrase in KU, '*tadevaitat*' - this is indeed that' - refers to Brahman, while the GU identifies it as *saivaitat*, with the absolute in the feminine form (*sā + eva + etad*). This tendency of altering the gender indicators in describing the absolute marks a shift from the early Vedic to later Śākta monism and is one of the most prominent features of GU. For instance, the next passage, GU 213, is a paraphrase from Kāṭhaka 1.2.17, except that '*etad,*' a neuter pronoun, is changed to '*eṣā,*' a feminine one. In order to demonstrate the textual composition, one example from the passage may suffice:

Compare
mahataḥ param avyaktaṃ avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ |
*puruṣāt **tu parā devī** sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ* ‖ GU 215.

With
mahataḥ param avyaktam avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ |
puruṣān na paraṃ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ ‖ *Kāṭhaka* 3.11.

In the instance above, GU skillfully interpolates a few words and thereby alters the hierarchy of the divine. Where the Kāṭhaka maintains that there is nothing beyond *puruṣa*, GU places the goddess at the pinnacle. Metaphysical statements in the Upaniṣadic literature provide a theological twist to this text in many other instances, and there are a number of passages that are relevant for one interested in gendered theology. In establishing parallels with the Upaniṣads, GU does not simply appropriate the categories, but rather, it constitutes its own hierarchy in which the absolute is altered, with the goddess Kālī replacing *puruṣa.* The imagery of Kālī where she stands atop Śiva vividly reverses the Sāṅkhyan metaphysics wherein *prakṛti* is a lower category in relation to *puruṣa.* GU repeatedly borrows passages from the Kāṭhaka and alters the gender indicator. For comparison: *tām ātmasthām* (GU 217) and *tam ātmastham* (KU 5.13), *tām eva bhāntīm* (GU 219) and *tam eva bhāntam* (KU 5.15). This alteration continues even with the passages borrowed from elsewhere: *yasyā paraṃ* (GU 220) and *yasmāt param* (Śvetāśvatara 3.9)).[5]

GU swiftly moves from KU to the Śvetāśvatara (ŚU), another principal Upaniṣad. Yet again, GU meticulously transforms the linguistic structure to meet the new feminine paradigm. While in the Śvetāśvatara (3.16), the absolute is indicated by the neuter gender term '*tat*,' GU (224) refers to it with the term '*eṣā*.' It is noteworthy that there are various pronominal terms in Sanskrit, and the use of '*tat*' is to refer to something outside of sensory perception (*parokṣa*), and '*etad*' is used to refer to entities that are immediately available. It would therefore be wrong to conclude that there is just a

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[5] A text borrowed from the Upaniṣadic text and also found in the *Bhagavadgītā* (13.14) demonstrates a skillful transformation of the theistic paradigm from the gender-neutral Brahman paradigm to the Śākta workdview:
   sarvataḥ pāṇipādaṃ tat sarvatokṣiśiromukham |
   sarvataḥ śrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati ‖ *Śvetāśvatara* 3.16.
   sarvataḥ pāṇipādāntā sarvatokṣiśiromukhā |
   sarvataḥ śrutimaty eṣā sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati ‖ GU 224.

linguistic shift to accommodate the gender when the absolute is transformed into the divine feminine.[6]

Suffice it to say that over half the verses, and particularly most of the verses that have any philosophical significance, are directly derived from the Upaniṣadic literature. Now the issue is, what purpose does this appropriation of the Upaniṣadic passages serve in the context of Śākta Tantrism? More importantly, is there anything unique to Śākta metaphysics that is consonant with this reverberation of the Upaniṣadic philosophy other than altering the gender identity of the absolute? I believe there is, and what is crucial to Śākta philosophy in this text is not just what it contains but also what is absent. Missing from this appropriation are the metaphysical nuances of Vedic rituals found still remaining in the early Upaniṣads. The meticulous depersonalizations apparent in some Upaniṣads are either abandoned or altered to fit to the embodied Śākta theology. Most importantly, there is no mediation between the absolute and the world in this Śākta monism: nothing separates the individuals and the goddess. In this theology, there is no veil of *māyā* or bondage due to *avidyā* to keep the individuals perpetually transmigrating. What this text evokes is the early monistic philosophical paradigm with a more assertive worldview than that which is somewhat compromised in the scholasticism of Śaṅkara.

The relation between the absolute and the world needs to be reiterated in this light. What metaphors can we find in this text to describe the process of creation? Salient examples include:

[1] The causal relation between the absolute and the world is like that of the spider and its web (GU 200).

[2] This relation is similar to the herbs and plants growing on earth, relying on soil and water etc. (GU 200).

[3] The world and the absolute can be compared to the components of hair and nails belonging to a person (GU 201).

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[6]   Additional parallels demonstrate this shift:
   GU (225-27) parallels ŚU 3.17-19.
   GU (228) parallels ŚU 4.2-3 with a slight modification.
   GU 229-231, accordingly, mirrors ŚU 4.8-10;
   The verse 232 in GU is borrowed from ŚU 4.12.
   Likewise, GU 233-239 is derived from ŚU 4.14-20.
   GU 241 is borrowed from ŚU 5.10.
   GU 242-244 is borrowed from ŚU 6.7-9.
   GU 245-247 is borrowed from ŚU 6.11-13.
   The first line of GU 250 is borrowed from ŚU 6.19.

[4] Just like sparks fly off a radiant firebrand, so does the world emanate from the absolute (GU 202).

[5] The goddess makes a single seed manifold, giving rise to plurality (GU 246).

[6] She assumes manifold forms (GU 247).

Analysis and Conclusion

The passages found in GU that derive from the Upaniṣads are not randomly framing monistic Śākta theology. Rather it is a systematic appropriation that makes synthesis of the monistic worldview possible while discarding the passages focused on rituals. The absolute in the Upaniṣads is the disembodied Brahman, with name and form not applicable to this transcendental mode of reality. The paradigm of GU is somewhat different: early philosophical speculations change when articulating the goddess-centric theology. For example, in contrast to the characteristics of the *nirguṇa* Brahman as has been characterized in the Advaita of Śaṅkara, the goddess Guhyakālī is depicted as motherly and caring. In addition to the philosophical foundation of the GU passages, the much-larger MKS also provides details to rituals dedicated to Gukyakālī and her variations, with a central focus on extensive visualization and ritual positioning (*nyāsa*) of the syllables. If GU is to complete the text by providing philosophical foundation, what constitutes Tantric Śākta philosophy here is not the concepts found in the early Āgamas or in Śākta Tantric philosophies of Krama or Mahārtha but rather, it is the Upaniṣads. This negotiation of Tantrism and Vedism is what makes GU unique.

A few observations are worth mentioning here. Kālī is not simply invoked here as the supreme goddess but also as the one who reveals the Vedas. Rather than Kālī creating the world, she manifests in the form of the world. The body becomes the site for directly encountering the goddess, particularly accessible to those practicing yoga. At the same time, the text maintains her transcendence, claiming that she cannot be fully grasped by the sense organs. The goddess, in essence, is felt by the body in the absence of language and sensory processes. She is to be realized and not cognized, an important distinction. The language of discourse may appear paradoxical, as the goddess is described as residing everywhere while still remaining hidden. She is present everywhere and easily accessible but at the same time she cannot be grasped with eyes or speech. The metaphor of the rivers flowing towards the ocean suggests that our activities eventually lead to directly apprehending the divine. By adopting the Upaniṣadic terminology, GU ex-

plains this encounter to be made possible with an abandonment of name and form. Following the text, Kālī is the singular reality throbbing through all hearts and giving rise to manifold manifestations. With one more Upaniṣadic metaphor, the goddess cannot be illumined by any light while all is manifest with her luminosity. Like the theology found in the *Bhagavadgītā,* she assumes all corporeal forms by residing in the hearts of the living beings. Although MKS meticulously describes the visualizations of the goddess, nestled within this text, the GU stresses that the goddess sees without eyes, hears without ears, moves without feet and receives without hands. Following GU, Kālī manifests all heavenly bodies and all deities, male and female. The divine magical power that gives rise to the world is the procreative force of *prakṛti* and the goddess Guhyakālī is her mistress. She is hidden beneath all the entities in the world; she is the essence of all, and the origin of the world. There is neither cause nor effect in her; there is no lord for her; she alone permeates all; she still is the primary agent of all actions, abiding in the heart of sentient beings. Although she manifests in preferred forms such as the goddess Guhyakālī with ten faces, GU stresses that she can assume any form she likes.

This central theology of Guhyakālī also borrows the Upaniṣadic sentences identified as the "great sentences" (*mahāvākya*), again altering their structure. Rather than the instructional 'you are that' (*tat tvam asi*), common to the classical Unpaniṣadic tradition, the instruction here is 'I am that' (*so 'ham asmi*), 'I am she' (*sāham asmi*), and 'that I am' (*tad asmy aham*).[7] In essence, this text restructures Kālī practice, negotiating between one of the most esoteric Tantric practices and Upaniṣadic monism. In this effort of recontextualization, the practice is brought back to its roots, to the early Upaniṣads that are the sourcebooks for various philosophical and theological schools in classical India.

In practice, this Sanskritization of the vernacular culture and Vedicization of the folk indigenous practice helps neutralize sectarian division and harmonizes divergent practices, creating a new faith community by blending existing beliefs and practices. As a consequence, this helps redefine the parameters of the central theology. In this context, the central goddess of the Kāpālikas finds home amongst the Brāhmaṇa households. The Kālī in this new order is *vedavedāntavedyā*, the one who is known by means of Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Even though her corporeal form is not rejected in this new theology, what is valued here is her transcendent aspect. Although the

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[7]   The *Mahākālasaṃhitā* does not consider this passage as belonging to the Upaniṣadic text (MKS, GU 1. 256cd-257ab). The text found in the anthology, on the other hand, considers it as intrinsic to the Upaniṣad (GKU 79-80).

author of GU seems unaware of the differing prominent philosophies within the Kālī system, such as Spanda, Krama, and Mahārtha, this new philosophy plays a unique social role with its efforts to bridge the Vedic and Tantric traditions. In this new paradigm, the transcendent and immanent meet, and name and form retain their significance, albeit secondary to that of the name-less and formless. This, however, also resolves the tension that we find in Śaṅkara's non-dualism regarding the concept of ignorance (*avidyā*). In this new paradigm the world is real and the creation is carried out by the goddess herself. And in this transition the essential Śākta philosophy remains intact. As the goddess herself is śakti or pure potentiality, there is no need for a distinction between power and the power-holder.

While this fusion lacks the philosophical depth of early Śākta Krama and Mahārtha texts, it nonetheless preserves the core of the teachings, placing the non-dual cosmos within the centrality of the divine feminine. Medieval India, the period in which MKS was composed, endured many socio-cultural upheavals. Based on manuscript availability, the distribution of the shrines of Guhyakālī, and the practitioners using MKS as their manual for daily practice, MKS was most likely composed in the north-east of the Indian sub-continent, particularly the Mithila region. During this era, devotion dedicated to the formless absolute was slowly gaining ground. The decline of the early city enclosures may have facilitated the influx of the tribes of Kālī worshippers. The same may have allowed the outcastes and Kāpālikas to re-enter the town and propagate their faith. Most notably, Kālī was never alien to the Vedic households, and the only contribution of this cultural fluidity was to provide a seamless integration of textual and folk practices. This new language and philosophical structure gave Kālī worshippers a much-needed identity. The new ethos visible in MKS portrays this social change and addresses the societal need of the time. This example of religious dynamism demonstrates how communities endeavor to redefine their ideology in new language, and how this new language hews closely to the original source. To name just a few instances of how this new paradigm has kept the original monistic tendency alive, the absolute in this paradigm is effulgent with self-emanating potencies, her forms or manifestation and the world are not distinct from her transcendental nature, and above all, the world is real and religious pursuit does not require tormenting the body with various ascetic practices. Devotion comes to prominence, albeit mixed with meticulous rituals that remain central to Tantric practice. The manifest reality is the play of the goddess, identified with pure consciousness. Creation and dissolution are compared to the deity's inhalation and exhalation or the opening and closing of the eyes of the goddess.

Finally, this transformation has served the Śāktas well, as the once-archaic Kālī practice is now ubiquitous among Hindu households, particularly in Nepal where the consort of Paśupati is worshipped in her Guhyakālī form. The central image of the goddess at her shrine, a vase, sums up the consistent and altering factors in this cultural flux. *Kalaśa* or water vase, signifying the mother goddess, her womb, and fecundity, is a neutral symbol, used in both Vedic and Tantric rituals. The goddess becomes formless, as her iconic representation is absent here, unlike other Hindu temples. These rituals confirm the continuity of Tantrism, as the manuals preserve the most esoteric Kālī practice. The liquid, a mixture of water and liquor found in the *kuṇḍa* or the pond in which the goddess is worshipped, metaphorically describes the divine with no inherent form, albeit potent to assume any form. With these transformations, worshipping Guhyakālī becomes as acceptable as worshipping any other goddess. Congruent with this thesis, Kālī in this pantheon also assumes a Lakṣmī form, identified as Siddhilakṣmī/Siddhalakṣmī.[8] Negotiating the boundary among the sects is one of the common strategies of the mainstream cultures. Although this transformation may not guarantee the resurgence or even survival of the traditions, the pantheon of Guhyakālī appears to have fully benefitted from this move. Just as the early Upaniṣads shifted the cultural milieu by internalizing practices and providing deeper philosophical and theological meaning to opaque rituals, GU plays the same role by transforming the ritual paradigm of Guhyakālī. Even the ritual installation of the phonemes (*nyāsa*) in MKS are reminiscent of the Vedic rituals, with the most prominent *yajñas* being installed in the body. GU epitomizes this transition where the Upaniṣads transform into Tantra. Likewise, MKS alters the ritual paradigm for Guhyakālī, accommodating the Smārta households. With regard to the Śākta philosophy, this Upaniṣadic interpolation provides a unique platform for the new circles of Tantric practitioner which was not possible through the early scholastic developments. What is unique to this attempt is the reverberation of the Vedic Upaniṣadic philosophy within the Śākta paradigm. The same efforts underwent in South India with the popularity of Tripurā. The challenge for the Kālī worshipping Śāktas was daunting. Nevertheless, what we learn from history is that this integration was timely and eventually successful. Has this transformation forced a sacrifice of core Śākta philosophy? Not at all. On the contrary, the monistic worldview expands its scope through this new theological thrust.

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[8]   For studies on rituals and visualizations of Siddhilakṣmī, see Timalsina 2015, 89-95; 2006, 59-73; Sanderson 1990, 63-64.

The revival of monism to counter world-negating philosophies extant at this juncture proves decisive for the emergence of new theology: a Śākta Vedic philosophy.

Abbreviations

GU   *Guhyopaniṣad*
GKU   *Guhyakālyupaniṣad*
KU   *Kāṭhakopaniṣad*
MKS   *Mahākālasaṃhitā*
MU   *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*
ŚU   Śvetāśvataropaniṣad

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