



THE AUTHOR

Though his academic attainments are in Mathematics and his professional interests lie in a specialised field of industrial management, Sri S. Shankaranarayanan has retained his first love for Sanskrit. In his childhood he was introduced to the ancient Sanskrit lore by his grandfather, Sri S. Narayana Iyer, who was himself a deep initiate in *Sri Vidyā*. Later he came under the dynamic influence of Sri Kapali Sastriar. Shankaranarayanan cherishes a special regard for this tradition of the worship of the Divine Mother and his treatises on *Devī Māhātmyam*—both in Tamil and English—have acquired an authenticity of their own. The present work on *Sri Cakra*, revealing as it does the depth of his scholarship, practical insight and occult knowledge, promises to be a classic on the subject. Endowed with luminous intellect, well-versed in the modes of esoteric worship and awake with an active spiritual aspiration, Shankaranarayanan is marked out to play a singular role in the resuscitation of the spiritual and occult tradition of India in terms of modern thought and understanding.

— M. P. PANDIT

BHAVARTHA-DIPIKA

JNANESHWARI

Sri Jnanadeva

Sri Jnanadev or Jnaneshwar, Poet and Yogi, Jnani and Bhakta, was on this earth for about twenty years, nearly seven hundred years ago. His brief life was a divine event.

The Bhagavad Gita embodies the essence of the Vedic Religion within a short compass and in the most popular form. That glorious dialogue between Nara and Narayana, Arjuna and Sri Krishna, is aptly described as Jnanamaya Pradipa – the Light of Knowledge.

Jnaneshwar Maharaj had, at a very young age, a vision of that Light and he gave discourses on the Gita which came to be known as Bhavartha Dipika or Jnaneshwari, bringing to light the deeper meaning and hidden significance of the dialogue between the Blessed Lord and Arjuna.

The very original Commentary, long confined to Marathi and a few other Indian languages in translation, was made available for the first time to the world at large by Sri Ramachandra Keshav Bhagwat

THE TEN GREAT COSMIC POWERS

(Daśa Mahāvidyās)

THE TEN GREAT COSMIC POWERS

(DASA MAHĀVIDYĀS)

S. SHANKARANARAYANAN

SAMATA BOOKS

© S. SHANKARANARAYANAN

First Edition: 1972

Second Edition: 1975

Samata Edition: 1996, 2002

ISBN: 81-85208-38-7

To

SRI KAPALI SASTRIAR

at whose feet

I found the Light

Published by:

Samata Books

10 Congress Building

573 Mount Road,

Chennai – 600 006, INDIA

Phone: 91444349216

E-mail: Veluryk@yahoo.com

Printed at:

All India Press,

Kennedy Nagar,

P.O. Box 51,

Pondicherry – 605 001,

E-mail: aippdy@vsnl.com.

PRINTED IN INDIA.

P R E F A C E

In his classic exposition of *śrī vidyā* and the *śrī cakra*, Sri Shankaranarayanan has dwelt upon the manifestation of the Primal Divine Shakti in the form of this variegated, many-planed Universe. In the present work he explains the process of this manifestation. For, as he points out, creation is not a sudden precipitation; it is a graded self-revelation. The transcendent and ultimate Mother of the Universe puts out several Powers and Personalities of herself, each missioned to work out a particular truth of her Being. Of these, some are the major, Cardinal Powers, mentioned variously as Four, Six, Ten, Twelve etc., according to the standpoint of the Seers of old. The Tantra celebrates the Ten as the *mahā vidyās*, Great Sciences, that hold the creation in their celestial grasp.

What are these *mahāvidyās*? Why are they distinguished from one another though they all proceed from and lead to the same one Reality? The author explains with his usual lucidity: "Each is a particular Cosmic function and each leads to a special realisation of the One Reality. The might of Kali, the sound-force of Tara, the beauty and bliss of Sundari, the vast vision of Bhuvaneshwari, the effulgent charm of Bhairavi, the striking force of Chinnamasta, the silent inertness of Dhumavati, the paralysing power of Bhagalamukhi, the expressive play of Matangi and the concord and harmony of Kamalatmika are the various characteristics, the distinct manifestations of the Supreme Consciousness that has made this creation

possible. The Tantra says that the Supreme can be realised at these various points.”

The secrets of these vidyas are buried deep in Sastras and oral traditions. To Sri Shankaranarayanan we owe gratitude for his intuitive grasp of these fundamentals, deep learning and conscientious scholarship in working out the clues and the facility with which he has been able to link up the dateless past of the mystics with the actual present dominated by empirical Science. He also integrates this Thought of the Tantra with the Doctrine and Practice of *Life Divine* as presented by Sri Aurobindo in his Epic, *Sāvitri*.

It has been more than a delight to follow the author in his studies of the *daśa mahāvidyās* and I am doubly happy that with this publication a larger number of readers and seekers will share in this felicity.

M. P. Pandit.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
DISCIPLINES OF KNOWLEDGE	1
KALI	11
TARA	19
TRIPURASUNDARI	32
BHUVANESHWARI	43
TRIPURA BHAIRAVI	54
CHINNAMASTA	66
DHUMAVATI	80
BAGALAMUKHI	92
MATANGI	103
KAMALATMIKA	115
CORRESPONDENCE WITH OTHER DISCIPLINES	125
SADHANA	140
SYNTHESIS	144

DISCIPLINES OF KNOWLEDGE

He had studied the Vedas. Like all *vaidiks* of his time he took to priesthood and was eking out a living. Driven by poverty he approached some one to teach him a Mantra for getting rich quickly. Having got the Mantra, he took his seat in the front courtyard of his house and began practising the repetition of the Mantra. Two hours would have passed and the Vaidik saw a beggar woman at his door. It was not an uncommon thing; he did not attempt to drive her away as he did not want his *japa* to be interrupted by some words spoken in between. The beggar woman who was in tatters stooped down, patiently untied the knots of a bundle of rags, took out the small coins kept there and before the Vaidik knew what she was doing, threw the coins at his feet. The Vaidik naturally was taken aback and began to remonstrate. "Why, you have been asking for this for the past two hours" said she and went her way. The Vaidik stopped repeating his Mantra in sheer disgust and vowed that never again would he go after such pursuits.

This incident which happened years ago is quoted here for the flood of light it throws on certain basic principles of Tantra Shastra. Evidently, the man contacted with the help of the formula given to him an entity or a spirit, a low class of deity which caught hold of the human vehicle of the beggar woman and within two hours made her part with the pittance she had in favour of the man. The deity responded quickly, as being in the lower rungs of the cosmic ladder nearest to the earth-plane it was within easy

reach of human beings; and its power was limited to grant only so much of money to the one who called for its assistance.

The Tantra recognises the one Supreme Deity presiding over everything as the Highest, at the same time admitting the existence of various Gods and Goddesses. In the words of Sri Kapali Sastriar: "The sages of the Tantra do not see any inconsistency in the position, for they recognise that this creation is not a unitary system but a gradation of worlds spread over a rising tier of consciousness and planes and the various Gods and Goddesses are higher beings, powers and entities. deriving their authority from the Supreme to take their part and act or preside over their spheres of domain. There is a regular hierarchy of Gods some of whom are far above the highest heavens of human reach. But there are also Gods and Goddesses closer to the human level. They are more readily accessible to those who aspire to them and in some cases the seeker on the Tantric path looks to the aid and lead of these deities in his effort. They are endowed with capacities and powers beyond normal human possibility, but they are not all for that reason divine in nature. There are higher and lower classes of them, *ucca* and *kṣudra* Devatas. Those that are nearest to the earth-plane, swarming in the vital world overtopping the physical, are usually of the latter type. They respond very readily to the approaches of those who seek their help but they do so mainly for their own purpose, namely, to get hold of the particular human vehicle and convert it into a centre for their activity on the earth. They may and do answer the call of the seeker in the beginning but in the end they let him down, rather roughly, once their purpose is fulfilled. The seeker is misled, his inner

progress comes to a standstill if it does not end in disaster. The Kṣudra Devatas mislead the seeker with petty glamorous gifts, induce a false sense of progress and *siddhi*, prevent the dawn of real Jnana which would expose their whole game and succeed in enslaving the man for their purpose at the cost of his soul which is betrayed into misadventure".¹

But there are also entities of a higher order, benevolent deities, Ucca Devatas and as they occupy higher levels, the seeker has to make an effort to ascend to them. But they take the seeker on the path steadily and safely and ultimately do him the utmost good. There are still higher deities with cosmic functionings nearer to the Supreme Cosmic Godhead who presides over the myriad worlds that are created. Then at the top of this pyramidal structure of the cosmos spreading over an ascending tier of consciousness, at the summit of the innumerable levels and planes of existence there are certain cardinal Godheads, so many facets of the One Truth, the Supreme

hierarchy of master and disciple. In India, the Upanishads, the repository of ancient wisdom and secret knowledge, mention in the body of their texts certain Vidyas, disciplines of knowledge. It has to be remembered that the Upanishads are not merely texts outlining the philosophical speculations of our ancient seers, as popularly held, but also manuals of Sadhana, practical guide-books on spiritual quest. These are the records of jottings of the teaching the ancient seekers had from their masters, an *aid-mémoire* to remember the direct realisations they had in pursuing various disciplines of knowledge in their Sadhana. Likewise in the Tantra which is acclaimed as the great Sadhana Shastra, a practical manual, we find the great disciplines of knowledge, Maha Vidyas, occupying an important place. Especially where the Supreme is adored as the Great Primordial Goddess, the Tantra classifies the disciplines leading to the cardinal Deities as *daśa mahā vidyās*, the ten great paths of knowledge. These cardinal Deities are the ten outstanding personalities of the Divine Mother. Their great names are: Kali, Tara, Tripurasundari, Bhuvaneshwari, Tripura Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi and Kamalatmika.

What may be the precise significance of classifying the Vidyas into ten will be a difficult question to answer. But we can indicate the following: The Supreme Mother is the Transcendent Absolute ineffable immutable. In the act of creation, she subjects herself to time and space. Though the space is actually one vast stretch, for our grasp and understanding, we demarcate the indivisible and infinite Space into ten directions, east, west, south, north, south-east, south-west, north-east, north-west, above and below. Similarly the one infinite Mother is delineated as

ten outstanding personalities. Again, knowledge is one and the consciousness is one and the same everywhere. But it is grasped and understood in ten different ways by the ten senses, skin, eye, ear, tongue, nose, mouth, foot, hand, anus and genital. Likewise, the one Truth is sensed in its ten different facets; the Divine Mother is adored and approached as the ten cosmic Personalities, Dasa Maha Vidyas.

Each of these ten great Vidyas is a Brahma Vidya. The Sadhaka of any one of these Vidyas attains ultimately, if his aspiration is such, the supreme purpose of life, *parama puruṣārtha* viz. self-realisation and God-realisation, realising the Goddess as not different from one's self. All these Vidyas are benevolent deities of the highest order and so do the utmost good to the seeker of the Vidya. For any one who takes to any of these ten Vidyas, the Sadhana proceeds

of the Sadhaka to life and things. There come about visible signs of communion, concrete evidences of contact, irresistible proofs of the Presence and the unmistakable touches of the Divine's gracious hand in every happening and in every circumstance. What were at one time miracles become now common-place things and the whole life becomes a happy hastening towards the Supreme Goal.

Thus nothing short of Self-Realisation, *ātma sākṣātkāra* is the goal of these Vidyas. Of course much depends on the seeker and on his active participation. But even if the seeker stops in the middle of the path, he does not come to any harm. Only his progress is delayed. In the Sadhana there are many pitfalls. The baser emotions may hold sway or the ego may interfere at each stage. Once an aspirant has taken to any of these ten Vidyas, he has to succeed ultimately. He may fail in the present birth. The Vidya will make him take the thread of the Sadhana in the next birth and will continue to give the necessary push to the soul of the aspirant on its onward march. Even one step forward in the path of these Vidyas goes a long way towards the Goal. Nothing goes in vain. In fact, the Tantra categorically declares that only those who have been sufficiently prepared in the previous births can approach the precincts of these Vidyas. For them alone are these well-proven carefully laid-out paths. They are the chosen ones, the men with a mission, the indefatigable toilers on the uphill path of these disciplines of knowledge.

Because all these Vidyas lead to the ultimate Reality, it does not mean that they are all one and the same. Each Vidya is distinct and distinguishable from the other. Each is a particular Cosmic function and each leads to a special realisation of the One Reality. The might of Kali,

the sound-force of Tara, the beauty and bliss of Sundari, the vast vision of Bhuvaneshwari, the effulgent charm of Bhairavi, the striking force of Chinnamasta, the silent inertness of Dhumavati, the paralysing power of Bagalamukhi, the expressive play of Matangi and the concord and harmony of Kamalatmika are the various characteristics, the distinct manifestations of the Supreme Consciousness that has made this creation possible. The Tantra says that the Supreme can be realised at these various points. According to one's ability and aptitude, one realises the great Goddess, becomes identified with her in her might, in her striking force, in her paralysing power or in her beauty and bliss, in her concord and harmony. If one wants to bathe in a river, one cannot bathe in the whole river

have a conception of the ebb and flow, the eddies and currents of a river one has to bathe at various spots in the river. This is exactly what one does when one takes a holy bath in a sacred place. For instance, in Kashi, baths in so many bathing ghats are prescribed in order that the bather may have a full realisation of the grandeur of the Divine Ganges. Similarly in these ten great disciplines of knowledge, the seeker can aspire for an integral knowledge and he may, depending on his capacity, come nearer the Total Divine, by having as many realisations as he can.

In fact, the Tantra which is justly famous as a science of synthesis holds that one Maha Vidya leads its Sadhaka to another depending on the need and aspiration of the Sadhaka. The worshipper of Kali has a unique realisation of the Divine, the Terrible. At the same time, the realisation of the Divine, the Auspicious is available to him if he understands the concept of *bhadra kālī*. Then he goes on to appreciate the correspondence between the other two Vidyas, Tripurasundari and Tripurabhairavi, Tripura the beautiful and Tripura the terrific. In the Sundari Vidya itself worship is prescribed for Mantrini and Dandanatha, the attendants of Lalita Tripurasundari. Mantrini is Syamala or Matangi and Dandanatha corresponds to Bagalamukhi. Thus the Vidya of Tripurasundari brings to the aspirant the realisations pertaining to the Vidyas of Matangi and Bagalamukhi.

Here a word of caution is necessary. When it is said that the Vidyas of Matangi and Bagalamukhi are implied in the Vidya of Sundari, the human mind immediately jumps to the conclusion that the Vidya of Sundari is superior to the other two Vidyas. The mind of man subject to the limitations of time and space can understand anything only in relation to time and space. Any new

knowledge is immediately related to the old, classified and docketed as anterior or posterior, higher or lower. We reiterate that each of the ten Vidyas leads the seeker to the Supreme Reality. Each is great in its own right and each is equal in all respects to each of the other nine Vidyas. The practices of certain disciplines are widely prevalent, others are less known. For that matter they are not less important.

Again, an integral realisation is possible in these Vidyas because though they are distinct and unique, they have among themselves many characteristics in common. Kali, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati and Bagalamukhi have the common characteristics of Power and Force, active or dormant. Sund

the cult of Kali is famous. Thus the whole of India is full of adoration for the Divine Mother and the spirit of India has been eternally sustained by the Force Supreme, *parā śakti*. The might of Kali, the wisdom of Tara and the beauty of Sundari have forged and fashioned this ancient race where the first man, the offspring of *manu*, the thinker, dared to peer with his earthly eyes into the portals of the Beyond.

We shall now take up for study the respective Vidyas.

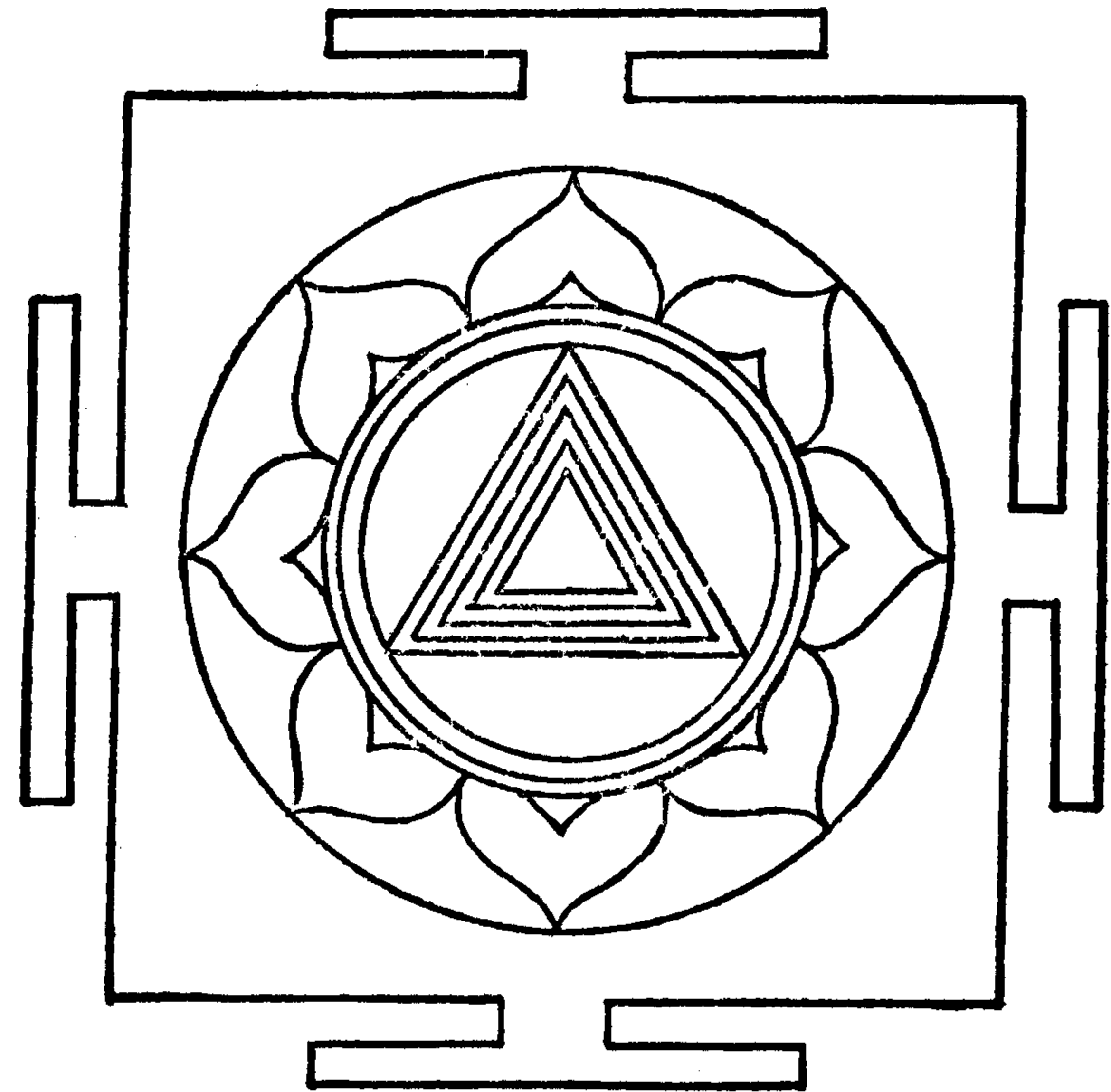
K A L I

The Supreme Consciousness is the One Reality Eternal. At first it becomes conscious of itself, holds all in itself, in essence without reference to time. The creation starts with the extension of this Timeless Spirit to bring out what is all along implied in it. This self-extension of the Supreme, this objectivisation from the subjective initial state, measured by movement and event, we call Time, *kāla*. This Time assumes a triple status *tredhā nidadhe padam* for creation and the created beings have the relative experience of Time as past, present and future. The experience is relative because past is what was present once, present is what was future before and future is what will become present and then past after a time. Thus there is a continuous movement, a Time-sequence which is an infinite continuum of apparently definite parts. And these parts, definite demarcations in the progression of successive development are the characteristics of Time. To this characteristic, we give the name Death. That is why, in the Sanskrit language Death also is denoted by the name *kāla*. The Lord of Death is known as *yama*, the restrainer, as he restrains the continuous movement in Time, as *antaka* or *kṛtānta* one who makes the termination, as *dharma* the law of this mutable creation.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo : “ There is the one fundamental necessity of the nature and object of embodied life itself, which is to seek infinite experience on a finite basis ; and since the form, the basis by its very organisation limits the possibility of experience, this can only be done by dissolving it and seeking new forms. For

the soul, having once limited itself by concentrating on the moment and the field, is driven to seek its infinity again by the principle of succession, by adding moment to moment and thus storing up a Time-experience which it calls its past; in that Time it moves through successive fields, successive experiences or lives, successive accumulations of knowledge, capacity, enjoyment, and all this it holds in subconscious or superconscious memory as its fund of past acquisition in Time. To this process, change of form is essential, and for the soul involved in individual body change of form means dissolution of the body in subjection to the law and compulsion of the All-life in the material universe, to its law of supply of the material of form and demand on the material, its principle of constant intershock and the struggle of the embodied life to exist in a world of mutual devouring. And this is the law of Death.

“This then is the necessity and justification of Death, not as a denial of Life, but as a process of Life; death is necessary because eternal change of form is the sole immortality to which the finite living substance can aspire and eternal change of experience the sole infinity to which the finite mind involved in living body can attain. This change of form cannot be allowed to remain merely a constant renewal of the same form-type such as constitutes our bodily life between birth and death; for unless the form-type is changed and the experiencing mind is thrown into new forms in new circumstances of time, place and environment, the necessary variation of experience which the very nature of existence in Time and Space demands, cannot be effectuated. And it is only the process of Death, by dissolution and by the devouring of life by life, it is only the absence of freedom, the compulsion, the struggle, the pain, the subjection to something



KALI

that appears to be Not-Self which makes this necessary and salutary change appear terrible and undesirable to our mortal mentality. It is the sense of being devoured, broken up, destroyed or forced away which is the sting of Death and which even the belief in personal survival of death cannot wholly abrogate.”¹

To this Supreme Time-force, Shakti of Kala, the Tantrics give the name *kālī*. To the Tantrics this creation is no illusion; it is as real as the Creator, and in the process of winning the Godhead they do not lose the world. Theirs is not a *mokṣa*, liberation somewhere beyond. Following the Vedic and the Vedantic seers, their aspiration aims at a liberation here and now, in the life itself. But the existence is devoured by Time and death is the end of life. In the journey of life, at each step, at every moment man is dogged by the shadow of death and all his high aims and noble aspirations are vitiated by this tragic culmination. It is the fear of death that makes man mortal. No attempt on the path of progress will have meaning, no Sadhana successful unless and until this fear is overcome. Death has to be faced; the significance of the Time-concept has to be understood. So the Tantra lays down the adoration of Kali, the Time-force, as the first and foremost of all disciplines of knowledge.

Death prowls as a hungry beast devouring the whole creation, sparing none. So the Tantric sees the world as a great cemetery, *mahā śmaśāna*. In this *mahā śmaśāna*, the Divine Mother Kali dances. Her dance indicates the intense activity, the myriad moments of the Time-sequence following in quick succession. She is Death the devourer,

¹ The Life Divine: Chapter XX.

the ruthless killer. Mounted on a dead body, terrible is she with ferocious fangs; and a derisive laughter marks her face. Stark naked, the Dark One with her lolling tongue has for her garland a string of skulls. She has four hands; in two of them she has the sword and the severed head, and the other two, the auspicious Mother keeps for giving boons and allaying fear. Thus the Tantric contemplates on the dark Mother.¹ To him two of her personalities stand out in contemplation. They are *dakṣiṇa kālī* and *bhadra kālī*.

who destroys in order to create. She cooks everything in the cauldron of the cosmos *pācaka śakti*, she is the eternal energy of evolution, Time the transformer. For successive deaths are only milestones in the highway of life. They are the thousand gates that open out to Eternity. The terrible mother lashes the mortal man with the scourge of death towards immortality. Her darkness is the preparatory time of the night before the dawn.

She represents the evolutionary principle and her cosmic actions work out the gradual unfoldment of the divine possibilities. In terrestrial existence, natural calamities like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, cyclones, flood, pestilence etc., are her actions designed for a quick upheaval. So also are wars, revolutions, riots etc., designed by her to hasten human progress. In the being of the individual she is the power of transformation; the dormant dynamism, the potential energy of evolution. She is the black serpent lying coiled and asleep in the inner body, Kundalini Shakti. Under proper conditions this force uncoils itself, stands up straight like a serpent, spreading its hood and lifts itself more and more till it meets the divine consciousness above. When this takes place, the closed planes and parts of being in man open, there is a gradual unfoldment or a speedy transformation towards the Yogic consciousness. Whether one consciously makes an effort to raise the Kundalini or not, in all paths of Yoga, at one time or other, the effects of Kundalini's play are experienced in the inner body. Thus the grace of Kali is indispensable for any kind of transformation or progress which is the avowed object of any yoga.

Now let us deal with the worship of this dark Mother. It is said that this self cannot be acquired by one devoid of strength, *nāyam ātmā balahinena labhyaḥ*. The valiant

ones know his source *tasya dhīrāḥ parijānanti yonim*, proclaims the Veda. Kali the terrible is the Mother of might and is the deity of the mighty ones strong in mind and body. The weak and the wicked are awestruck by her powerful personality. None can face her frontal assault. But she is liked by the brave, by the hero-warrior *vira*. The path of the Vira, Virachara, is eminently suited for getting the favour of the Goddess. In occult Sadhana, the characteristics of the deity are simulated. The hero-warrior Vira repairs to a cemetery

one's consciousness constantly with the inflowing and out-flowing breath.¹ There is a big difference between breathing involuntarily all the time and breathing knowingly even for sometime. By uniting one's consciousness at each step with inhalation and exhalation, one becomes conscious of the Pranic force that sustains one's being and then the great cosmic Pranic force that is Kali. Adoring the Time-force thus, one understands that

“All here is a mystery of contraries ;
Darkness a magic of self-hidden light,
Suffering some secret rapture's tragic mask
And death an instrument of perpetual life.”²

¹ प्राणसमीरं विदधानमिमं नित्यां यात्रामत्र शरीरे ।
चरणे चरणे परिशीलयति स्थिरदृष्टिर्यस्तमवति काली ॥
—Vasishtha Ganapati Muni in *umāsahasram* X. 2.

² Sri Aurobindo : Savitri X. 1

TARA

The second of the Maha Vidyas is Tara. From a comparative study of Tantric books on Tara and the Buddhistic and Jaina literature, some scholars have advanced the theory that Goddess Tara is a late and subsequent addition to the Tantric pantheon and her worship has become prevalent in this land only after the advent of Buddhism and Jainism.

In the Buddhistic lore, Tara figures as the counterpart or Shakti of *avalokiteśvara*, the Lord who has directed his glance downwards, in compassion. In the Mahayana school, she is represented as the mother of the Buddhas as well as Bodhisattvas. At times she is depicted as a Bodhisattva, not inferior to any other, rather superior who could be approached directly without the intervention of any other power. A goddess Tara figures in the Jaina pantheon as well. Hemachandra in his *abhidhāna cintāmaṇi* mentions *sutārakā* or *sutārā* as the *śāsana devatā* of the ninth Jina, Suvidhinatha. *bhrukuṣi*, a form of Tara in the Buddhistic school has been opted by the Svetambara Jinas as the *śāsana devatā* of the eighth Jina, Chandraprabha.

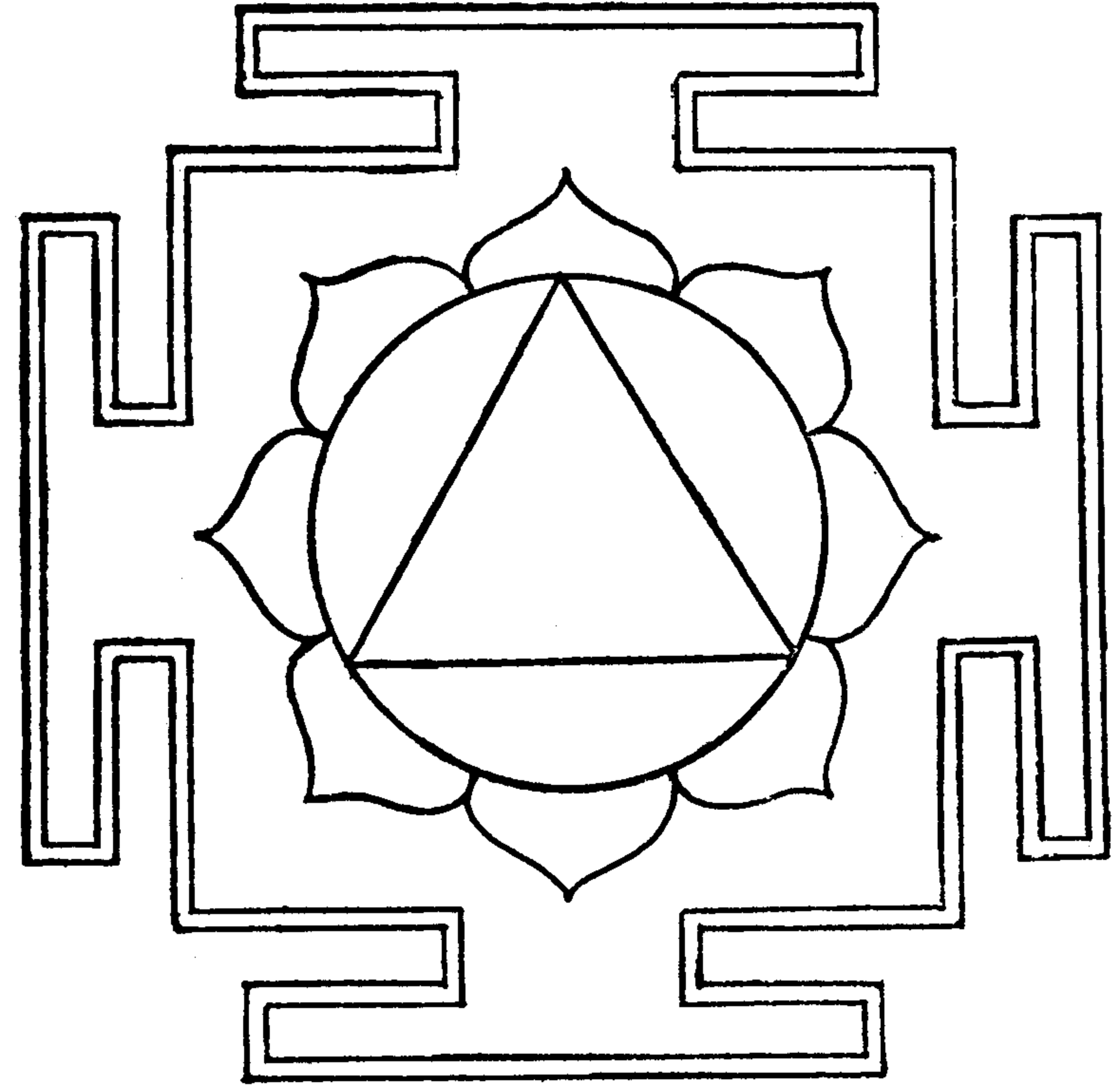
unagitated, *akṣobhya* against the onslaughts of Mara. Also, *prajñā pāramitā* is decidedly a Buddhistic appellation. And Mahachina is Tibet. Ugra Tara, the fierce, can be easily made out as Bhrukuti, the Goddess with eyebrows knit in anger. All these go to show that Tara is of Buddhistic origin, aver some scholars. They also quote some Tantras to say that Tara belongs to *uttarāmnāya*, the tradition of the North and there is a legend according to which Vasishtha went to Mahachina to learn the mode of worshipping Tara from Buddha himself.

From the inscription of the reign of the Chalukya king Tribhuvanamalla Vikramaditya VI belonging to the Saka year 1017 (A.D. 1096) on a stone tablet bearing the figure of Tara¹ one understands that Tara was invoked to allay all kinds of fears arising from lions, elephants, fire, serpents, robbers, submerging waters, ocean and ghosts.² She was the one who quickly granted the desired ends and was called to guard at the cross-roads.³ One of the images of Tara excavated at Nalanda had on the back engraved the Mantra, *om tārē tuttārē turē swāhā : tura* or *twara*, has, always been the quality of Tara and she has been quick in granting favours. Also Tara has been mentioned in connection with the crossing of waters and navigation. The famous *laghustava* indicates that one should remember Tara in the upsurge of waters, *tārām ca toyaplavē*. The Lalitopakhyana mentions that on the way

¹ Fleet: Indian Antiquity Antiquary-Vol. X, pp. 185 ff.

² हरिकरिशिखिफणितस्करनिगल जलार्णवपिशाचभयशमनि
शक्षिकिरणकान्तिधारिणि भगवति तारे नमस्तुभ्यम् ॥

³ तारा तूर्णवित्तीर्णवाञ्छितफला पायात् सदा सङ्गमम् ।



to the mansion of the Goddess Lalita there is a lake of nectar which has to be crossed by boat. There, presiding over innumerable Shaktis plying the boats, Tara shines capable of controlling the upsurge of waters.¹ Again, in the eighth century, her worship extended to Java as is evidenced by a Nagari inscription of the remains of a remarkable temple there, recording the date of construction in the year 700 of the Saka era. (A.D. 778).

From all these historical evidences and mythological references, the theory has been advanced that by the worship of Tara the Buddhists got over all their troubles and tribulations, got quick success, crossed the seas to establish their religion in Java ; and seeing their advancement the Hindus adopted the goddess Tara in the Tantric pantheon and began to worship her from thence.

There is no gainsaying of the fact that Tara is a popular deity in the religion of Buddhism. But from this, one cannot deduce that Tara is a later accretion, the Tantra having adopted her from the Buddhistic canon. And, what is the necessity for Hinduism to borrow an alien deity however potent it may be, when its perennial philosophy has embraced in its stupendous sweep, the ultimate Reality with all its myriad manifestations, from the lofty Brahma to the lowly ant *brahmādi pipilikāntam*, when its tolerant and vivifying religion has conceived of a galaxy of gods and goddesses to suit the personal need of each of its individual followers? It is common knowledge that Buddhism came into existence as a revolt to Hinduism. Initially built on the solid foundation of negation, to

¹ तासां नौकावाहिकानां शक्तीनां श्यामलत्वेषाम् ।

प्रधानभूता ताराम्बा जलोघशमनक्षमा ॥ —Ch. 31. sl. 17

survive as an edifice, it had later on to add to its structure certain characteristics of the Hindu religion. This is how gods and goddesses and Bodhisatvtas began to be worshipped in

Shiva who did not lose his presence of mind. He was the one that was unagitated, *akṣobhya*, and at the instance of his Shakti, he swallowed the poison to save the world. His Shakti is Tara, the Saviour, the one who carried them all to the path of safety.

The Sanskrit word Tara comes from the root *tṛ*, to traverse. It is used to denote one who crosses, *tarati*, and makes others cross as well, *tārayati*. Tara or Taraka is the word in Sanskrit to denote a star as it traverses in space and acts as guiding light. It is also an appellation for the guiding light in the human eye, the pupil, because of which the eye is justly called *nayana* or *netra*, that which leads. A boat is called *tari*, as it makes one cross the waters. The image of the ocean and the crossing of waters is largely employed in the ancient litanies of the Vedic seers. The Veda speaks of two oceans, superconscient, and inconscient, one high above and the other down below. We can quote many Riks to show that the art of shipbuilding or navigation was not unknown to them. For instance, in the famous Rik, *jātavedasé*¹ addressed to Agni and later ascribed to the Goddess Durga in the Tantra, the Vedic Seer affirms that Agni carries him across all tribulations like a ship across the ocean *nāveva sindhum*. And the Divine Mother, Aditi, is accosted as the Divine Ship and the Seer prays: “May we ascend Aditi for Beatitude, the Divine ship endowed with quick propellers, faultless, intact without slits, a capable protector, spacious as earth like heaven to

¹ जातवेदसे सुनवाम सोममरातीयतो निदहाति वेदः ।

स नः पर्षदति दुर्गाणि विश्वा नावेव सिन्धुं दुरितात्यग्निः ॥

—Rig Veda I. 99. 1.

inexpressible fountain-source of all original rhythms of the Supreme Ether.”¹ In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “The foundation of all the potent creative sounds of the revealed word, Om is the universal formulation of the energy of sound and speech, that which contains and sums up, synthetises and releases, all the spiritual power and all the potentiality of *vāk* and *śabda* and of which the other sounds, out of whose stuff words of speech are woven, are supposed to be the developed evolutions.....All word and thought are an out-flowering of the great Om,—Om, the Word, the Eternal, manifest in the form of sensible objects, manifest in that conscious play of creative self-conception of which forms and objects are the figures, manifest behind in the self-gathered superconscious power of the Infinite, Om is the sovereign source, seed, womb of thing and idea, form and name—it is itself, integrally, the Supreme Intangible, the original Unity, the timeless Mystery self-existent above all manifestation in supernal being.” Undoubtedly, it is this *praṇava*, Om that is known by the famous appellation, *tāra* or *tāraka*. The force whose sound-symbol is Om is the great goddess Tara. That which the Vedic seers call as Akshara, the Upanishadic sages as Pranava and the Puranic bards as the immaculate white Gouri, that force is the Tara of the Tantrics.² Thus, the Maha Vidya Tara is the primordial *nāda*, the *paśyanti vāk*, the seeing Word perceiving the coming creation, the sound-substance of all sounds, the

¹ Sri Kapali Sastriar : Lights on the Ancients.

² यदक्षरं वेदविदामृषीणां वेदान्तिनां यः प्रणवो मुनीनाम् ।

गौरी पुराणेषु विपश्चितां या सा तान्त्रिकाणां वचनेन तारा ॥

—Vasishtha Ganapati Muni in *indrāṇi saptaśati* 21. (11).

dark womb of creation from the height of her white radiance. *citrā*, the multicoloured, is the manifestation of Tara as the many forms in the work-a-day world.

Now, coming to the Mantra of the Goddess, the one seed-sound which represents her integrally is the *akṣara*, *om*. It is the sound-symbol used before every other Mantra. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "the mantra Om should lead towards the opening of the consciousness to the sight and feeling of the One consciousness in all material things, in the inner being and in the supraphysical worlds, in the casual plane above now superconscious to us and finally, the supreme liberated transcendence above all cosmic existence". Apart from this, Ugra Tara is worshipped by the Mantra, *om hrīm strīm, hūm phat*, Ekajata by the Mantra, *hrīm strīm hūm phat* and Nilasaraswati by the three seed-sounds *hrīm strīm hūm*. The tradition is that the Mantra is propagated by female Gurus. When a child is born, even before three days are passed, the mother of the child or some other woman writes with a small shoot of *vaca* dipped in honey or ghee on the tongue of the newborn child the three letters of the Mantra of Neela Saraswati.¹ Thus purified from the very birth by the Mantra, the tongue becomes a sure vehicle of superb speech, articulating in word without any distortion, the noblest thoughts and the highest inspirations. It is said that only on account of this practice prevalent there, in olden days, scholars of great distinction emerged in abundance from Kashmir.

¹ जातमात्रस्य बालस्य दिवसत्रितयादधः ।

जिह्वायां विलिखेन्मन्त्रं मध्वाज्याभ्यां शलाकया ॥

A special kind of worship is prescribed in the case of Tara, which is known as *mahācinācāra*. This was originally practised in *mahācina*, Tibet and has been much misunderstood. When the Tantric lays stress on bath, cleanliness etc., the votaries of the Achara ask the question: What is this bath, and for

constant rhythm, this eternal symphony.¹ This is the doctrine of *mahācinācāra*.

In the Sadhana of this Mahavidya, the aspirant should be an absolute servitor of Truth. Especially in speech he should never allow falsehood, in whatever form to enter. Falsehood drives away the Goddess. For this purpose, certain spiritual disciplines prescribe absolute silence. But this is avoiding the problem. Moderation in speech is much more difficult than keeping silent and this should be practised. Recital of the Vedas, sticking at all costs to Truth in speech, talking only what is helpful and necessary—these practices speedily make the aspirant a vehicle for *śuklā's* manifestation. To realise *citrā*, the aspirant should treat praise and blame equally, enjoy the underlying sound-sense equally in rhythmic poetry and in pandemonious noise. He should appreciate the harmony as well as the discordant note and perceive the *rasa* in the songs and cries of people. He should not be attached to sound, neither should he be indifferent to it. Such a one gets the favour of *citrā*, the multicoloured personality of the goddess Tara in the myriad manifestations of the universe.

There is no goddess like Tara in granting favours, *nahi tārāsamā kācit devatā siddhidāyini* proclaims the Tantra. She is the Saviour who assures thus :

“ I guide man to the path of the Divine
And guard him from the red Wolf and the Snake.

१ दिक्कालनियमो नास्ति स्थित्यादिनियमो न च ।
न जपे कालनियमो नार्चादिषु बलिष्वपि ।
स्वेच्छानियम उक्तोऽत्र महामन्त्रस्य साधने ॥

I set in his mortal hand my heavenly sword
And put on him the breast-plate of the Gods.
I break the ignorant pride of human mind
And lead the thought to the wideness of the Truth;
I rend man's narrow and successful life
And force his sorrowful eyes to gaze at the sun
That he may die to earth and live in his soul.
I know the goal, I know the secret route,
I have

TRIPURASUNDARI

The Tantra conceives the Supreme in its dual poise of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*. The Supreme as the Transcendent Absolute is the essential effulgence, *prakāśa*. When it is self-moved to manifest something of it, there is a deliberation, *vimarśa*, on itself. This deliberation takes the form of an impulsion, an urge, a desire, *kāma*. Desire comes about by a division in the being and it is a portion or a digit, *kalā*. This digit of desire of the Supreme, *kāmakalā*, is the great Goddess Tripurasundari, the third of the Dasa Maha Vidyas.

“That moved at first as desire within, which was the primal seed of mind” says the Rig Veda.¹ “He desired, I would be manifold for the birth of peoples” is the utterance of the Upanishad.² Desire is the secret of creation. Desire is the root of manifestation. Desire is the mainstay of existence. The Divine’s desire to extend Himself, in manifestation is transmitted down the line in the individual being trying to perpetuate himself, aggrandize himself by a process of possession, absorption, assimilation and enjoyment. The desire first takes the form of fragmentation and then a seeking to unite all the fragmented parts in the whole. The Divine desires to

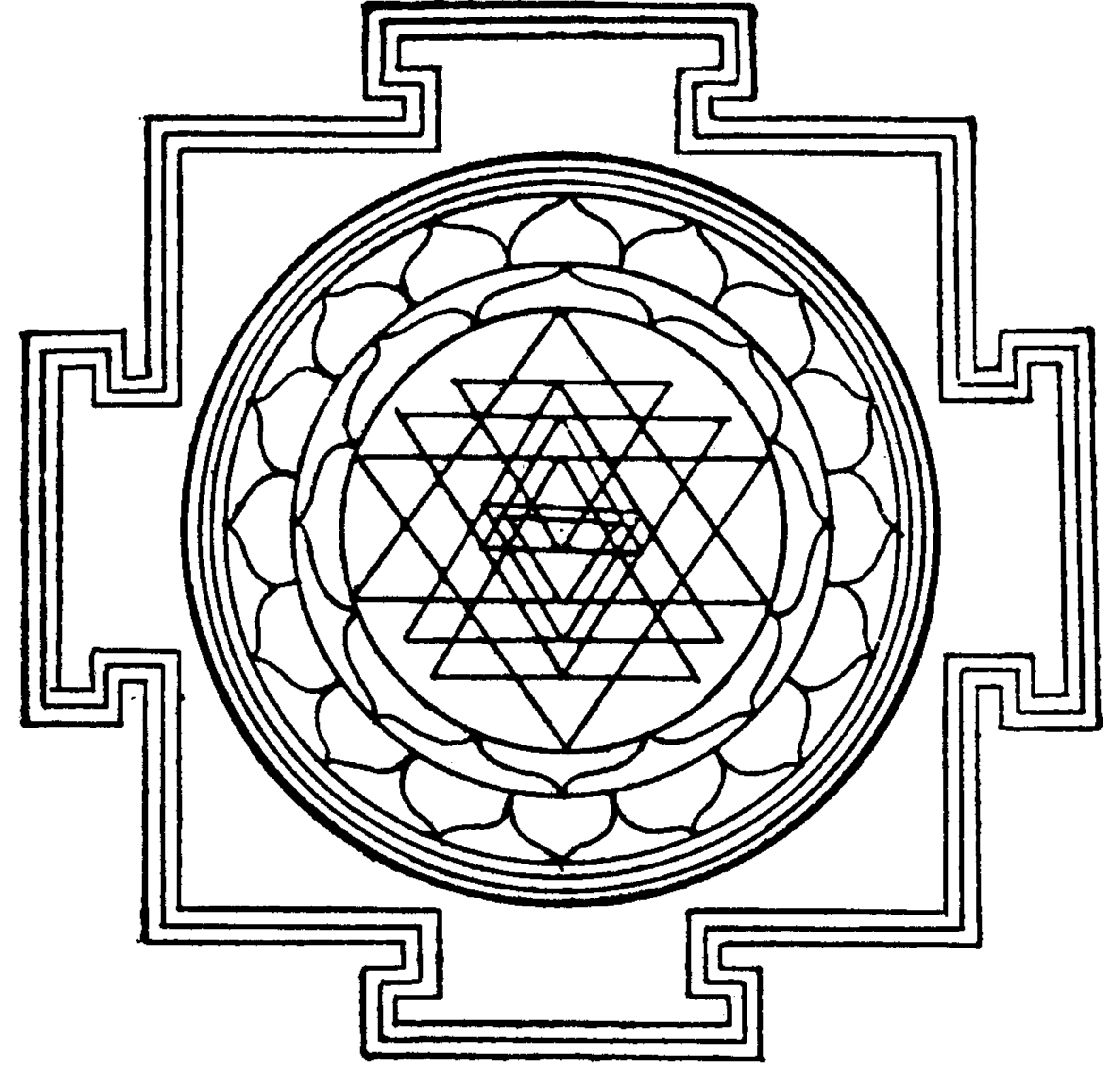
¹ (Sri Aurobindo’s Translation)

कामस्तदये समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत्

—R. V. X. 129

² सोऽकामयत् । बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।

—Taittiriya Upanishad.



TRIPURASUNDARI

In her confirmed because transformed in her,
Our life shall find in its fulfilled response
Above, the boundless hushed beatitudes,
Below, the wonder of the embrace divine.”¹

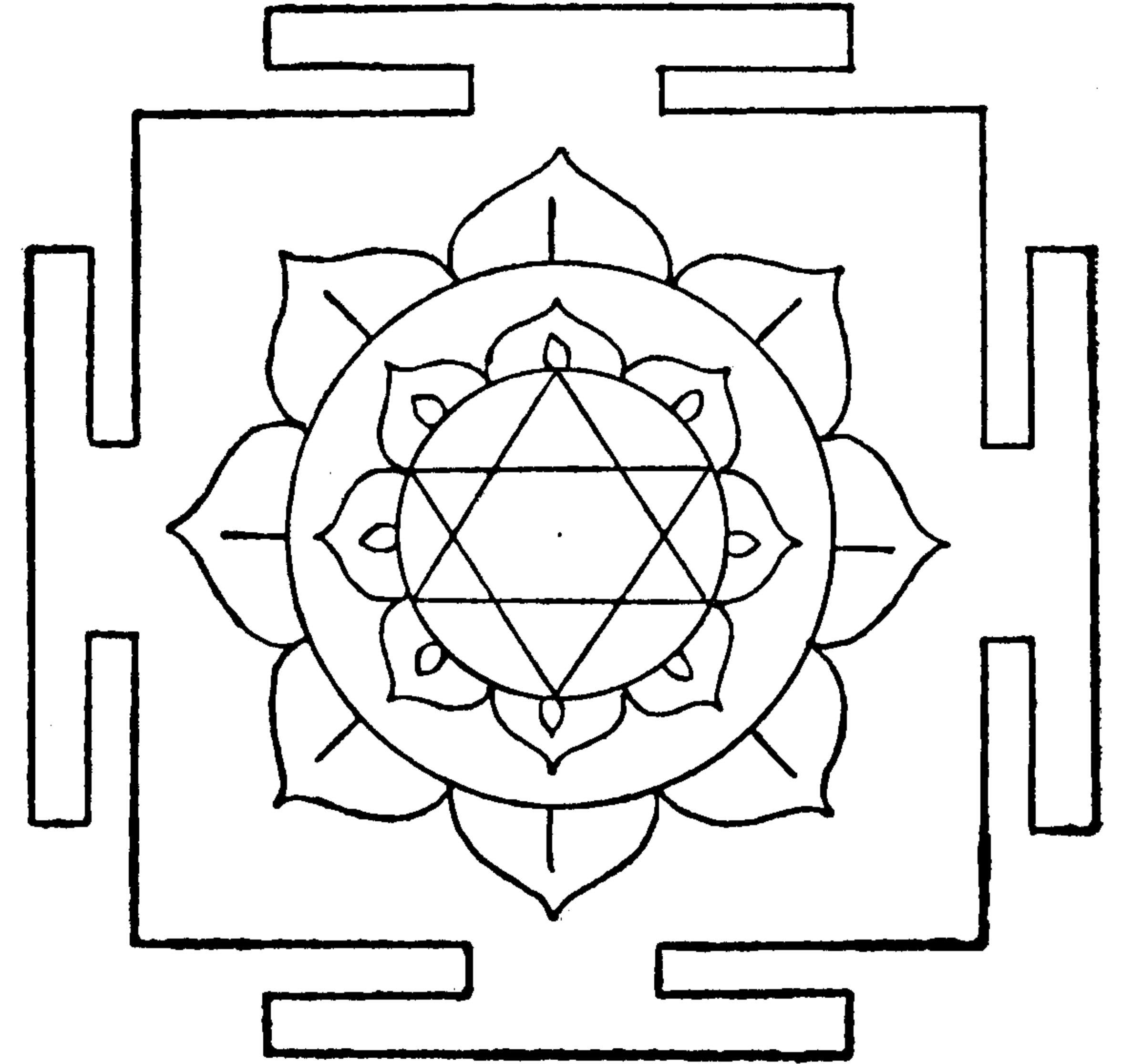
B H U V A N E S H W A R I

Coming fourth in the list of Dasa Maha Vidyas, Bhuvaneshwari stands for the concept of Space. Kali, we said, represents the supreme Time-force, the Absolute Divine in self-duration. Bhuvaneshwari is the self-conceptive extension of the Supreme Being, the Space-concept in creation. The Tantrics conceive the Supreme Transcendant Absolute as *prakāśa*, the essential effulgence. When it is self-moved to manifest something out of it, there is a delimitation, the creation of phenomenon and circumstance. The *prakāśa* becomes *ākāśa*, the Space, the extended Vastness. The prefix *ā* in Sanskrit denotes diminution, extension or boundary.¹ The *prakāśa*, the essential effulgence imposes on itself a limitation and becomes *ākāśa*, the Space, the Ether, the medium through which light moves and extends. *ākāśa* is also known as *antarikṣa*, the mid-region through which the divine possibilities high above are effectuated as actual manifestations down below. How does this self-extension take place? The Divine turning towards manifestation sees himself. *tadaikṣata*—“That saw”, says the Upanishad. This self-perception leads to self-extension as Space, as the worlds of names and forms. From the vision of the Lord, the creation starts; *srṣṭi* proceeds from *dṛṣṭi*. This perceptive Power is Bhuvaneshwari. Perception results in knowledge and so she is the Jnana Shakti, the knowledge-force of the Supreme

¹ आङ् ईषदर्थेऽभिव्याप्तौ सीमार्थे

just as Tripurasundari is the Iccha Shakti, the Will-force of the Supreme. Again, Space is nothing but the extent of perception. What we call as space is the extent to which we can see, the range of our vision. As our vision widens, the Space grows and we are able to realise more and more of this self-extension of the Divine. The Divine's vision is vast and so is the Akasa, the Primordial Space from which all the worlds have come into being. The Sanskrit word for world is *bhuvana*, that which has come into being, *loka*, that which is perceived. And so, the Great Mother is called Bhuvaneshwari, the Sovereign of the worlds. As Akasa, she not only creates the worlds but also enters into them, sustains them, supports them and nourishes them, *jagat dhātri*. She is the all-pervasive force, permeating the whole fabric of creation as its warp and woof.

In the Veda, Bhuvaneshwari corresponds to Aditi, the great Mother of the gods. The Vedic seers use three great names when mentioning about the Supreme. These are *satyam ṛtam bṛhat*. Satyam is what is *sat* existent and denotes the essential truth of being. When this truth becomes organised for active creation, when it is formulated into a law of action, it is known as *ṛtam*, the Right. *bṛhat* is the vast self-awareness, the infinite consciousness through which *satyam* becomes *ṛtam*. *bṛhat* is *antarikṣa*, the mid-region between Satyam and Ritam, between the upper half *parārdha* and the lower half *aparārdha*. Aditi is this *bṛhat*, vast infinite consciousness, *aditir antarikṣam*, the space, *ākāśa*, the Supreme Ether *paramam vyoma*. She is not only the antithesis of *diti*, the separative dualising consciousness, but in her own right



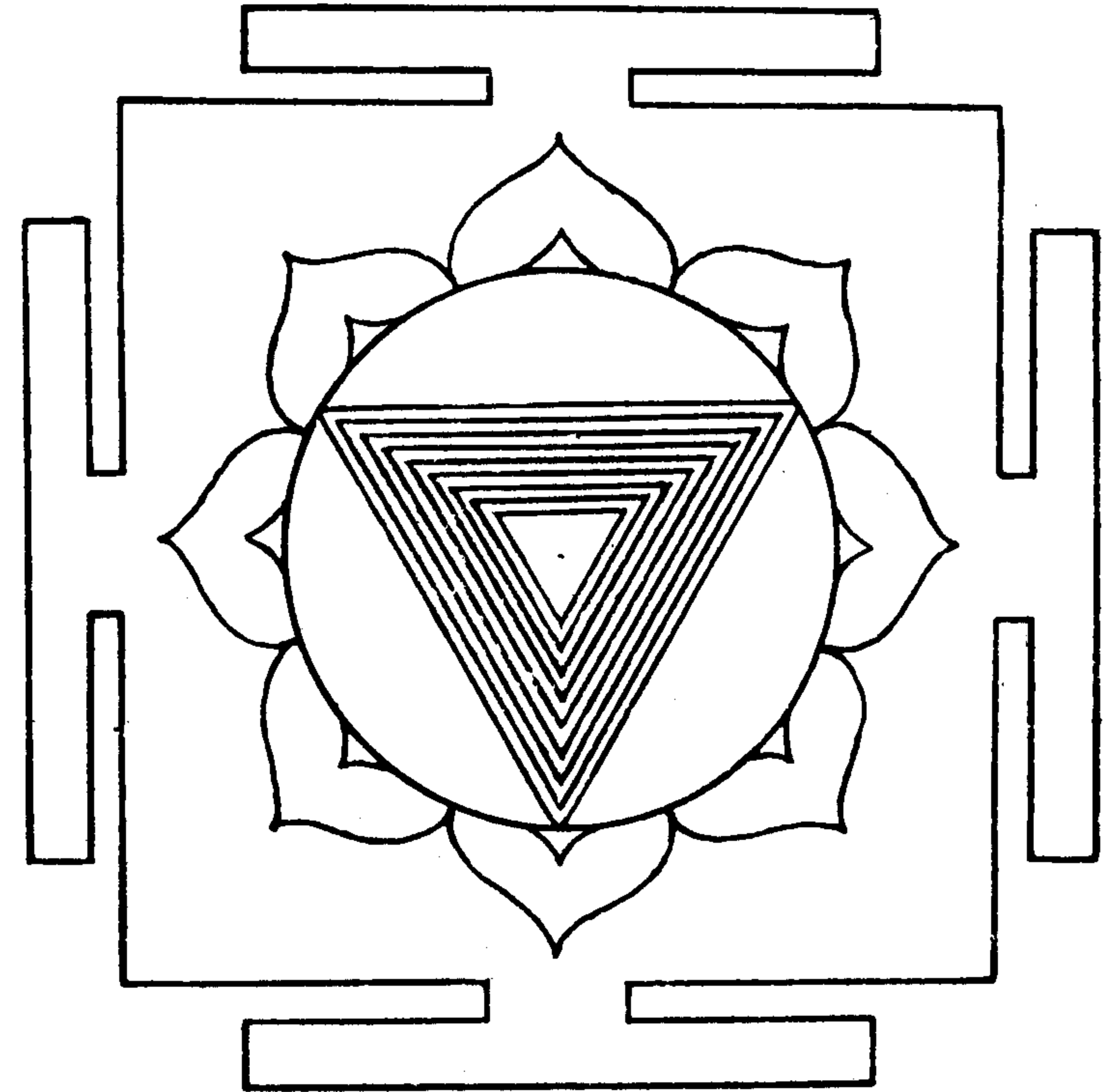
BHUVANESHWARI

TRIPURA BHAIRAVI

The Upanishads talk of three poises of the Absolute Transcendental Divine, the poises which are the precursors of creation. "He desired, *so' kāmaya*, that he should become manifold." This prime desire is *icchā śakti*, the will-force, the Tripurasundari of Dasa Maha Vidyas. Then there is the second poise: "That saw, *tadaikṣata*". This perception determines what is known as Space and results in knowledge-force, the *jñāna śakti*. Bhuvaneshwari is the name given to this poise. The third is the *tapas* of the Divine. "He energised himself: *sa tapo' tapyata*", says the Upanishad. This *tapas* is the action-force *kriyā śakti* and is denoted by the great name, Tripura Bhairavi.

What is Tapas? In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "Tapas means literally heat, afterwards any kind of energism, askesis, austerity of conscious force acting upon itself or its object. The world was created by Tapas in the form, says the ancient image, of an egg, which being broken, again by Tapas, heat of incubation of conscious force, the Purusha emerged, Soul in Nature, like a bird from the egg."¹ The self-awareness of the Absolute, the force of consciousness, when it is concentrated on itself and energised for action, becomes Tapas.

In the Veda, this heat of life, this energy of the Divine Dynamis, this consciousness, Tapas is represented by the God Agni. It is the *cidagni*, the flame of consciousness that burns in every being. All activity is supported



TRIPURA BHAIRAVI

¹ The Life Divine: Chapter XII.

towards manifestation, *paśyanti*, the word that perceives, *madhyamā*, the word in the intermediate subtle region and *vaikhari*, the articulated word from the throat. It is in the Muladhara, in the basic centre in the subtle body that the Word as a concentrated consciousness, Tapas, as a reservoir of the unmanifested potent power, *parā vāk*, abides. And so Tripura Bhairavi is *parā vāk*, just as Tara is the *paśyanti vāk*. That is why Tripura Bhairavi has the characteristics of the Goddess of speech.

Also, Muladhara is the centre of sex-energy. The Word that creates the cosmos is transmitted as sex for the purpose of procreation in ordinary life. The Sanskrit word *brahma*, which is Vedic, means the Word and *brahmacarya* means 'having the movement in the Word'. It is for this reason that the same word *brahmacarya* is used to denote the conservation of sex-energy as well. The worshipper of Tripura Bhairavi, by the grace of the Goddess accomplishes the concentration of consciousness in his mind, speech and body *mano vāk kāya*. In the physical, he learns to stop the downward course of the life-streams, conserve the sex-energy in a concentrated poise and turn it upwards *ūrdhva retah*. Then *retas*, the sexual energy becomes *ojas*, the luminous energy of power and potentialities. In speech, he learns to go behind the spoken word and arrive at the concentrated poise of *parā vāk*. Thus speech is conserved and turned back to its origin *parā* and held in a concentrated consciousness. Likewise in the realm of mind the aspirant learns to look behind all ideas, all thoughts and arrive at the one idea, at the one thought which he learns to hold in his concentrated consciousness. Thus the grace of Tripura Bhairavi acts in thought, word and deed of the Sadhaka. She removes the fear, destroys the Ignorance, makes the Sadhaka surmount

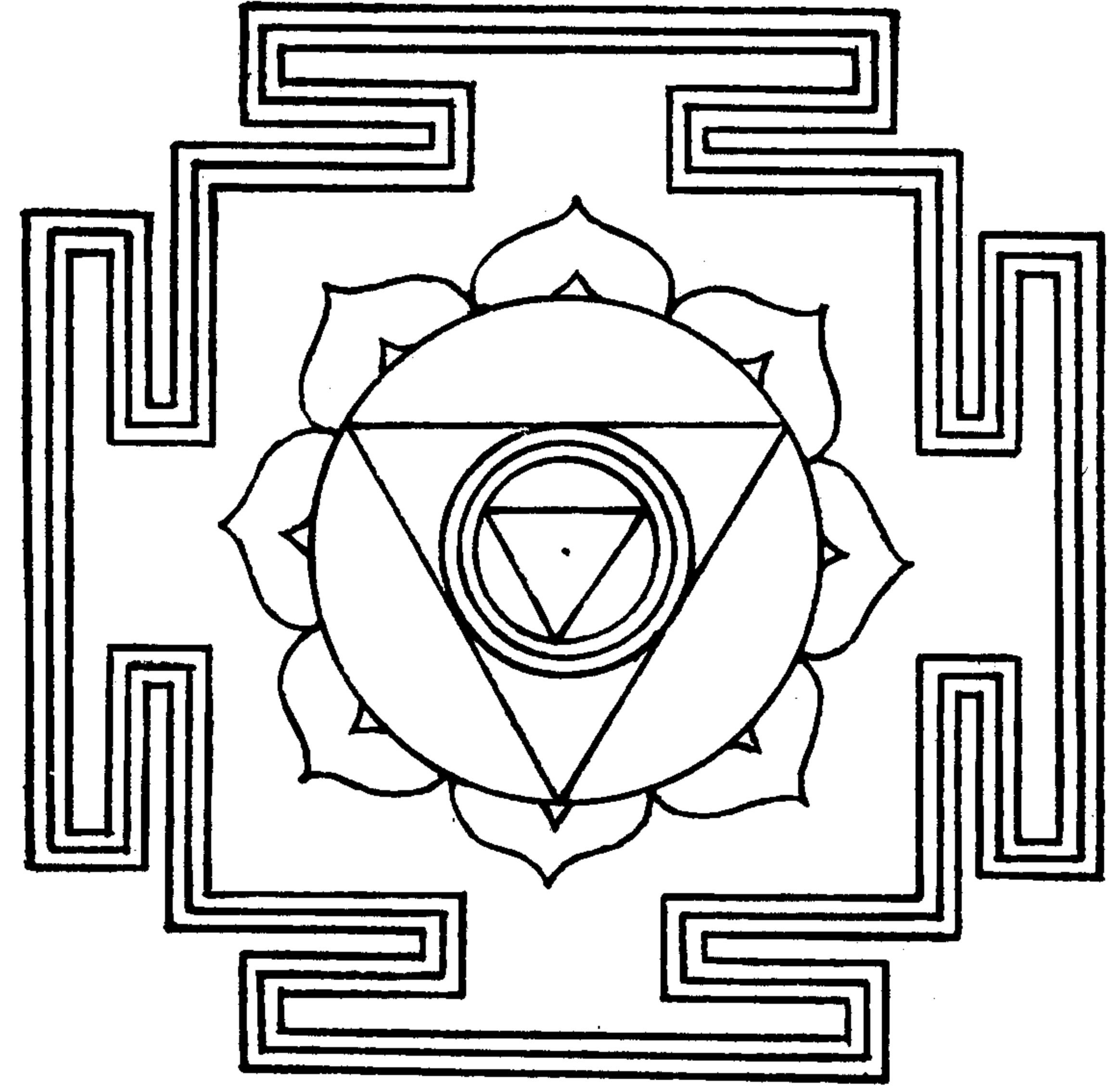
all difficulties. She is the fiery bridge closing the chasm that gulfs the narrowness of matter and the immensity of the spirit.

“ This is our deepest need to join once more
What now is parted, opposite and twain,
Remote in sovereign spheres that never meet
Or fronting like

CHINNAMASTA

“ Rati and Manmatha, the loving couple, are lying in close embrace and the Goddess is standing on them. Stark naked, her nudity does not strike the eye as she is robed in dazzling light. She has no head at all. A headless trunk with two arms held aloft is her peculiar form. In one hand, she holds her own severed head and in the other a pair of scissors. From the headless neck three streams of blood gush forth. The middle stream is drunk by her own mouth in the severed head held in her hand while the other two streams are drunk by two attendants standing on either side of the Goddess.”¹

Thus the Tantra describes the form of Chinnamasta, the sixth of the Dasa Maha Vidyas. How can a headless trunk have life? How can it hold its own head chopped off in its hand? And the ghastly sight of blood spouting forth and being drunk by the very head that has been cut off and by the two attendants! How can such a form be fit for worship? How can it be invoked to elevate and ennoble man? All these questions naturally arise in the minds of aspirants. The whole thing is incomprehensible. Whenever the human mind fails to understand something, it does not admit that it may be due to the thing being



CHINNAMASTA

¹ प्रत्यालीढपदां सदेव दधतीं छिन्नं शिरः कत्रिकां
दिग्बस्त्रां स्वकबन्धशोणितसुधाधारां पिबन्तीं मुदा ।
नागाबद्धशिरोमणिं त्रिनयनां हृद्युत्पलालङ्कृतां
रत्यासक्तमनोभबोपरि दृढां ध्यायेत् जपासन्निभाम् ॥

is called *śaṣṭhī*, not only sixth in the ten great Vidyas but also the force behind the sixth *avatāra* of Vishnu. The story goes that at the behest of his irate father Jamadagni who was displeased with the misdemeanour of his wife Renuka, Parasurama cut with his axe, the head of his mother. Then by the virtue of a boon from his father who was pleased with his unquestioning obedience, Parasurama got back his mother again alive. This manifestation of the Divine Mother is Renuka. She is known as Chinnamasta, as her head was cut off by her illustrious son. She is *ekavirā*, the sole warrior, the force that is victorious over all that opposes it.

The Mantra of the Goddess is the seed-sound *hūm*. It is known as *dhēnu bija*. It is a powerful seed-sound to get mastery over the senses and to annihilate the mind completely. Only when what we call mind is annihilated, we get in touch with the secret principle of mind, the mind of Mind, as the Upanishad calls it.

One effective way of Sadhana is to see the light instead of the object. That is, whatever a person perceives, he should not concentrate on the object of perception, he should concentrate on the Light that makes the object perceivable.¹ Another powerful method is to imagine a constant downpour of lightning from the high skies and submit the whole body, mind and self to it in absolute dedication and surrender.²

¹ दृश्यान्शेषानपि वर्जयित्वा दृष्टिं निजां सूक्ष्ममहःस्वरूपाम् ।
निभालयेद्यन्मनसा वरीयान् अन्योऽयमम्बास्मरणस्य मार्गः ॥

² तटिज्झरीं कामपि संप्रपश्यन् आकाशतः सर्वतनौ पतन्तीम् ।
मौनेन तिष्ठेद्यमिनां वरिष्ठो यद्येतदम्बास्मरणं प्रशस्तम् ॥

—Vasishtha Ganapati Muni in *pracaṇḍacaṇḍi trisati*.

DHUMAVATI

“In the beginning Darkness was hidden by darkness, all this was an ocean of inconscience”¹ declares the Veda. “In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was thence that Being was born”². “Only the Non-Being was this in the beginning. That was the Being, That became”³. “Here in the beginning there was nought”⁴. These are the various affirmations of the Upanishads. Out of the Non-Being, Being appeared and the Being dissolves back again into the Non-Being. This primal state before creation is also the ultimate state after the creation is withdrawn; and that becomes the primal state for the next creation. This state, the Tantrics give the great name, Dhumavati. As she represents the first and foremost state before creation, as she is the one in the very beginning, anterior to the age of gods, *devānām pūrvye yuge*⁵, she is acclaimed as *jyeṣṭhā*,

¹ तम आसीत् तमसा गूळहमग्रे अप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम् ।
—Rig Veda X, 129. 3.

² असद्वा इदमग्र आसीत् । ततो वै सदजायत ।
—Taittiriya Upanishad 2. 7.

³ असदेवेदमग्र आसीत् । तत् सदासीत् तत् समभवत् ।
—Chandogya Upanishad 3. 19. 1.

⁴ नैवेह किञ्चनाग्र आसीत् ।
—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1. 1. 2.

⁵ देवानां पूर्व्ये युगेऽसतः सदजायत ।
—Rig Veda X, 72. 2.

