

Eradicated with Blood: Text and Context of Animal Sacrifice in Tantric and Tantra-Influenced Rituals

Xenia Zeiler

Published online: 22 June 2019
© The Author(s) 2019

Abstract This essay discusses transformations in the ritual use of blood offerings from late medieval to contemporary Tantric and Tantra-influenced traditions. Specifically, it examines animal sacrifice and the use of animal blood or body parts in defensive and/or destructive Tantric *uccāṭana* rituals in historical text sources and in Tantra-influenced *ojhāi* practices (North Indian popular ritual practices of self-defense and/or destruction that are widely perceived as Tantra affiliated) in contemporary religion. The essay argues that while *uccāṭana*—mainly because of its partly destructive character and demand for blood—was apparently never integrated into non-Tantric traditions in an unaltered form, it does serve as one of several roots for contemporary *ojhāi* rituals. Thus, a form of ‘*uccāṭana* light’ (including but not limited to blood offerings) has found its way into popular Hinduism.

Keywords Tantric *uccāṭana* ritual · *uccāṭana* light · blood offering · *ojhāi*

Introduction

Animal sacrifice, and specifically animal blood, is part of various rituals and worship practices in both Tantric Hindu and mainstream Hindu traditions and is used for a number of reasons. Blood offerings—probably the predominant background for most animal sacrifices—may be perceived as vigorous and effective means to either nourish a deity or, more often, to pacify and propitiate the potentially aggressive and/or dangerous nature of a deity. This underlying assumption prevails in Tantric as well as in popular Hindu traditions (which are

✉ Xenia Zeiler
xenia.zeiler@helsinki.fi

Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 59, Unioninkatu 38B, 00014 Helsinki, Finland

often Tantra influenced), in both North and South India, and the animals offered in such practices are mainly male goats and buffaloes.¹ On the other hand, animals, specifically their blood or body parts, are sometimes sacrificed in Tantric ritual based on the belief that particular animals hold particular powers, which can be exploited effectively to enhance a ritual. In these cases, animal species other than goats and buffaloes predominate.

The idea of enhancing a ritual's effect by employing animal agency through blood offerings from an especially potent animal species serves as the basis for a number of Tantric rituals. Not surprisingly, these ritual forms are named and prescribed in *vāmācāra* ("left-hand") Tantric Sanskrit texts, the most important and frequently mentioned being *uccāṭana*. Translated as "dispelling/eradicating" (an enemy), these rituals are intended to render a foe harmless (Bühnemann 2000; Goudriaan 1978: 351–64) in more or less serious degrees for a specified opponent, meaning that the rituals may be conducted with either a more self-defensive (dispelling) or a more destructive (eradicating) tenor. In either case, the ritual may contain a blood offering, and often does. The present essay begins with a discussion of *uccāṭana* ritual and the goddess Dhūmāvātī, as she is one of the Tantric deities most strongly and consistently connected to *uccāṭana* in the textual tradition.

The essay first presents textual evidence from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries. For the goddess Dhūmāvātī, as with many other Tantric deities, later texts containing not only more but also new and partly innovative material were composed at a certain point in history for the practical ritual, as well as for mythological narratives about the goddess. These new texts meant not only more quantity, but also a new quality of wording and ritual forms. The further information provided the basis for a shift in the beliefs underlying *uccāṭana* ritual as well as for its practical implementation, especially regarding animal sacrifice. The rite now began to include not only literal blood offerings, but also animal body parts.

The second part of the essay analyzes the later textual Sanskrit tradition and highlights the innovations that occurred, especially in two widely disseminated and popular late nineteenth-century texts: *Mantramahārṇava* and *Śāktapramoda*. The analysis focuses on the substantial transformations these texts initiated regarding *uccāṭana* ritual in general, and the involvement of blood offerings in particular.

To contextualize the material in the text sources presented here and to localize the contemporary practices basing on *uccāṭana* in the living religion today, the essay concludes with an analysis of recent developments of *uccāṭana* in *ojhāi*, as these relate to Dhūmāvātī and other deities. *Ojhāi*, meaning ritualistic practices for self-defense, destruction, and ghost expelling, are a distinct part of contemporary popular Hindu traditions in North India, and they are widely perceived as Tantra affiliated. This last part of the essay discusses contemporary transformed practices rooted in *uccāṭana* rites and presents ethnographic data from the city of Banaras, pointing out processes of assimilation and the integration of Tantric heteropraxy into orthoprax contemporary Hindu tradition. By complementing the textual analysis with ethnographic fieldwork, that is, by using an Ethno-Indological

¹ For South India, see for example Craddock 2001; for the Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh, Elmore 2011; for Orissa, Mallebrein 2007; for Nepal, Michaels 2007.

approach (Michaels 2005), this essay also argues for methodical plurality in researching Tantra, especially in dealing with transformations over time, and demonstrates how anthropology can fruitfully complement textual analysis.

***Uccāṭana* Ritual and the Goddess Dhūmāvati**

Uccāṭana rituals, whose literal meaning is the “dispelling/eradicating” (of an enemy), are basically practices performed to ruin or overthrow one’s foes. Texts define the term for example as “driving the victim away, uprooting him, depriving him of his position” or as having the following effect: “The direction into which he (the victim) has been thrown by the mantra, into that direction he departs without delay; by the power (of the spell) he leaves behind his wife and sons and his possessions, never to return” (cited in Goudriaan 1978: 352).

The ritual aims at harming an enemy either materially, for example as in “destroying the dwelling houses of enemies,” or psychologically, as in “bringing about mental disorder in a person” (Goudriaan 1978: 353). Both goals are, of course, interrelated: by being afflicted with a mental disorder, the enemy is believed to be left so disturbed that he effectively destroys his home and family, leaving them and abandoning any security in his life. The result is believed to be a person in a completely deranged state of mind who is not remotely capable of harming the ritual performer. This idea—rendering an enemy harmless by driving him away, partly through afflicting him mentally—as well as this particular form of ritual self-protection is older than the Tantric traditions and is mentioned in texts as early as the *R̥gveda* (Goudriaan 1978: 359–60). Although not yet called *uccāṭana*, the tradition and its underlying beliefs have been part of South Asian texts on “magic” since ancient times.

Rituals explicitly called *uccāṭana* are fundamentally Tantric in nature. But like many other Tantric practices, *uccāṭana* rituals infiltrated Hindu non-Tantric texts as well, such as some Purāṇas. In Tantric texts, *uccāṭana* is often discussed in the context of the *ṣaṭkarman* rituals (Bühnemann 2000), six rites for magical purposes, usually including rituals to invite attraction or result in subjugation, immobilization, eradication, pacification, or killing. Originated in the *vāmācāra* Tantric tradition and serving a rather dark purpose, *uccāṭana* often includes offerings and ritual practices which are perceived as polluting and impure in Sanskrit Hinduism, such as blood offerings and animal sacrifice. This is a procedure which is not limited to Tantric texts; for instance, one passage of the *Agnipurāṇa* states that “through a sacrifice mixed with the blood of a donkey, one will eradicate the enemy (*uccāṭayet*); through a sacrifice to which the blood of a crow has been added, there occurs the destruction of the enemy” (137.12–13, cited in Goudriaan 1978: 555).

Uccāṭana is related to several deities, mainly and not surprisingly to those with a rather dark *vāmācāra* Tantric nature. The deity which is most consistently mentioned in the context of *uccāṭana* throughout its textual history is Dhūmāvati, one of the fiercest goddesses in the Hindu Tantric pantheon. The first textual evidence for her can be found in the *Śāradātilakatantra* (*paṭala* 24.10–14) from the twelfth century. From this time on, she appears in different Tantric texts, and ever since the formation of the group of goddesses known as Daśamahāvidyā she has been included among their

number. Dhūmāvātī is no exception among Tantric deities in that her representation is best surveyed in her *dhyānamantras*, which are short hymns ritually used for mental consolidation and meditation. The most influential and most frequent *dhyānamantra* for Dhūmāvātī up to the present is found in the *Phekāriṇītantra*, probably composed between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries:

She is pale and fickle, angry, tall, and wears dirty clothes. Her hair is discolored. The widow is rough and has gap teeth. She sits on a cart which has a crow on the banner. Her breasts sag. In her hand she holds a winnowing fan, and her eyes look very cruel. She has unsteady hands, and her hand shows a wish-fulfilling gesture. She has a big nose, is exceedingly deceitful, and has crooked eyes. Permanently afflicted by hunger and thirst, she arouses horror, and her abode is in conflict (*paṭala* 7; my translation).

This *dhyānamantra* dominates all of the text sources on Dhūmāvātī and bears clear witness to the way the goddess is consistently represented in textual history. It immediately reveals why this goddess was closely connected to *uccāṭana*. Since the very first mention of her and throughout her textual history, Dhūmāvātī is indeed exclusively connected to only two rituals: *śatrunigraha* (“restraining an enemy”) and *uccāṭana* (“dispelling/eradicating”) (Zeiler 2012). Both rituals are very similar up to almost identical, and both are used to render enemies inoffensive or harmless. It does not come as a surprise that a goddess with an exceptionally high potential for roughness, cruelty, deceitfulness, horror, and conflict—all symptomatic attributes of Dhūmāvātī according to her *dhyānamantra* as well as to hymns and ritual instructions beyond it—is primarily connected to the self-protecting and/or destructive ritual of *uccāṭana*.



Figure 1. A Dhūmāvātī poster displayed for worship in a side room of her temple in Banaras. Photograph by the author.

That *uccāṭana* is frequently mentioned in texts for Dhūmāvātī and elsewhere does not necessarily mean that the ritual procedure is described in detail every time. Many passages simply mention the ritual and briefly state its purpose. For instance, although all existing texts on Dhūmāvātī agree on the extremely close connection of the goddess and *uccāṭana*, none of these actually specifies the ritual's exact procedure until the nineteenth century. Probably because of the extreme brevity of all Dhūmāvātī texts in general up until that time, there is no detailed practical information on how to conduct the ritual to eradicate an enemy. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the texts in question expected the adept to know the details of *uccāṭana*, including the necessity of making blood offerings from specific animals. This is because (1) the vast majority of contemporaneous texts giving detailed ritual prescriptions on *uccāṭana*, but not related to Dhūmāvātī include blood offerings in the procedure, and (2) elaborate texts related to Dhūmāvātī from the late nineteenth century on give more detail on self-defense and enemy-annihilation rituals, and then account for animal offerings in such contexts.

Transformations I: Textual Innovations in the Nineteenth Century

Dhūmāvātī-related ritual in general, and *uccāṭana* in particular, have been described in depth for the first time only in two nearly contemporaneous late nineteenth-century texts, *Mantramahārṇava* (the *Dhūmāvātītantra* chapter of the *Mantramahārṇava*, presumably written between 1871 and 1907) and *Śāktapramoda*. These texts, for the first time in her textual history, praise Dhūmāvātī in long hymns and, as was the custom for many Tantric goddesses, include *stotra*, *kavaca*, *hṛdaya*, *śatanāmastotra*, and *sahasranāmastotra*. These poetic hymns now depict a “goddess in transition”; in other words, in addition to the established Tantric exoteric representation and ritual practice of Dhūmāvātī, they also contain ideas and beliefs from a Sanskritized Hindu orthopraxy. It is here that we first find tendencies of ‘saumyaization’—a term I use to denote sweetening or pacification, that is, ‘make *saumya*’—as well as general unifying tendencies trying to propagate a new identity for Dhūmāvātī as belonging to the universal Hindu orthopraxy pantheon of pan-Hindu goddesses. These hymns go so far as to partially identify Dhūmāvātī with Durgā Mahādevī. This identification, however, does not contradict a simultaneous Tantric representation of Dhūmāvātī in these texts—at times in the very same verses. The *hṛdaya*, the heart hymn, states:

Requested by the gods, she was born as the destroyer of Asuras. I worship this smoke-shaped one, who mutters and roars aloud (*Mantramahārṇava*, *Dhūmāvātītantra*, *hṛdaya* 8; my translation).

I worship Dhūmāvātī, who destroyed Andhaka, whose form is darkness, who looks like a rain of smoke and whose hair bun is untied, the wise one (17; my translation).

Dhūmāvātī is here linked to Durgā by connecting her to the Great Goddess's mythological birth in the first verse and to the mythology of Durgā destroying

Andhaka in the second verse. In the first verse Dhūmāvātī is also shown against her own Tantric background with a reference to her Tantric representation as connected to smoke and uttering unconventional sounds, while in the second verse reference is made to her Tantric iconography with her hair loose and again her close connection to smoke. Such interlocking of Tantric and non-Tantric representations without preference for either one is characteristic of the new hymns in the late nineteenth century.

Along with the more detailed (and complex) information on Dhūmāvātī in general, the later texts now give more comprehensive descriptions of the self-defensive and destructive rituals related to her. These rituals include animal blood offerings. For a specific reason that is rooted in Dhūmāvātī's Tantric representation, one animal is highlighted in this context—the crow. In general, Tantric texts repeatedly emphasize the ambivalent or “dark” potential in crows as being beneficial to certain “dark” or destructive rituals such as *uccāṭana* (Nihom 1987: 104–5). Occasionally, the rituals incorporate the power of the crow—“crow potency”—in their ritual instructions (Zeiler 2013). As with many dark rituals, the underlying idea is the belief that drawing on allegedly dark and/or evil powers (specifically, the blood or body parts of crows) is the perfect means to counter a threat (the enemy targeted by the ritual)—“individuals considered harmful or evil thus have to be defeated by entities or objects associated with evil” (Zeiler 2013: 231).

But rituals utilizing crow potency are not restricted to Dhūmāvātī alone, nor does crow potency occur only in *uccāṭana*. Several Tantric rituals directed at self-defense or destruction make use of animal potency by including the sacrifice of specific animals renowned for their alleged dark power in order to boost the ritual force. While animals such as dogs, donkeys, snakes, and others are cited in such contexts, the crow is the most frequently mentioned. In most cases, using these animals involves killing them. Whenever crow blood or a crow's wing is part of the ritual offerings, this is surely the case, and even when crow feathers are called for, it may be assumed that the animal does not go unharmed. Nevertheless, it is important to note once again that the specific Tantric ritual use of animals in rituals involving animal potency does not build on the same belief as animal sacrifice in the sense of slaughtering animals in more popular (often Tantra-influenced) Hindu traditions. Even though Tantric rituals involving animal potency have the same deadly outcome for the animal as contemporary ritual slaughters of buffaloes or male goats sacrificed to South Indian village deities (Arumugam 2015), for example, or for goddesses such as Kālī (Samanta 1994), Durgā (Rodrigues 2009), Kāmākhya (Urban 2001; Urban 2010: 57–72) and others, we have to keep in mind that each of these animal sacrifices has its own special background. This includes diverse reasons for the sacrifice and why it is done; it also involves fundamentally different ritual applications, that is, how the sacrifices are done.

Since the nineteenth century, rituals requiring crow blood or wings have also been connected to Dhūmāvātī. For example, verse 17.56 of the *Tantrasārasaṃgraha* advises burning a crow on a cremation ground and strewing the ashes in the house of an enemy to be killed while chanting Dhūmāvātī's *mantra*. In more detail, the *prayoga*, or ritual application, of the eight-syllable *dhūmāvātīmantra* (*dhūm dhūm*

Dhūmāvātī svāhā) in the *Mantramahārṇava* twice mentions crow potency as part of a complete and detailed rite for worshiping the goddess. Not surprisingly, this *prayoga* is tailored entirely to the deity's special sphere of action, namely, the eradication of enemies. It follows the typical format of Tantric ritual instructions, beginning with the characteristic opening sequences that precede the actual *prayoga*: *mantra*, *vinīyoga* (application of the *mantra* in ritual), *ṛṣyādīnyāsa* (mental appropriation/assignment beginning with the *ṛṣi*), *karanyāsa* (mental appropriation, assignment of the hand), and *hrdayādiṣaṅganyāsa* (mental appropriation, assignment of the six limbs counting from the heart). The person undertaking the ritual is then instructed to begin the *japa*, that is, the repetition, of one hundred thousand eight-syllable *dhūmāvātīmantras*, while standing naked on a cremation ground. After outlining several other ritual steps (requiring the perfection of the *mantra* with a *homa* (oblation) of sesame seeds and purified butter, as well as water oblations and feeding Brāhmaṇas), the actual *prayoga* instruction is given. It includes ritual directions for rendering an enemy ineffective, for example, how to inflict fever and gain power over the opponent (Zeiler 2013: 233–34). The ritual killing of a crow is also described:

If one burns a crow in the fire at a cremation ground, takes its ashes, chants the *mantra* over these, and throws them at the head of the opponent, he [the enemy] will be ruined immediately (*Mantramahārṇava*, *Dhūmāvātīmantra*, *prayoga* of the eight-syllable *dhūmāvātīmantra* 8; my translation).

After merging *nīm* and a wing of a crow, he shall recite [the *mantra*] one hundred and eight times. Then he may put this in the smoke with the name of the one to be subordinated [and] immediately he will conquer the enemies (12; my translation).

The crow's explicit involvement in Tantric rituals, especially in *uccāṭana* and other rites used for such dark purposes as killing, contributes to the understanding of inauspiciousness and impurity, especially in left-hand Tantra, where the concepts of auspiciousness and purity prevalent in Brāhmaṇic Hinduism are obliterated. Substances and materials regarded as impure or dangerous in Smārta orthoprax Hinduism, such as blood, are highlighted in Tantric ritual *precisely* because of their reputation in Smārta Hinduism. The major reason why animals like crows believed to be inauspicious by mainstream Hindu traditions are incorporated into Tantric rituals probably follows a similar logic. Both substances and animals considered inauspicious and impure are thought to enhance and highlight the "magical" potential of Tantric rituals and their alleged inherent power.

Transformations II: Blood Offerings and *Ojhāī* Today

In order to study the complex and diverse transformation processes in Tantric and Tantra-influenced ritual, it is not only beneficial, but also necessary to use interdisciplinary approaches. In researching the interrelations of popular religion and Sanskritic orthopraxy, one cannot stop at discussing textual traditions only. The

need to contextualize written sources has been acknowledged ever since the cultural turn in the humanities. The interdisciplinary approach of combining textual analysis and anthropological fieldwork in South Asia research has been termed Ethno-Indology by Axel Michaels:

If, thus, Indology opens up to an intensified study of the contexts of texts, if it also accepts fieldwork as a legitimate, adequate and proper (and not just supplementary) method for an appropriate analysis of the contents, functions and productions of texts, if it tries to combine the results of the textual and contextual studies with anthropological theory, it then situates itself at the confluence of philology, anthropology and history. It is this confluence which I call Ethno-Indology... (2005: 11).

When it comes to contextualizing Tantric *uccāṭana* and other self-defense and/or destructive rituals in contemporary Hinduism, it is fruitful to look closely at *ojhāi* practices. *Ojhāi*—healing rituals or exorcism to dispel ghosts perceived as causing a disease—is widespread in North Indian popular religion. The practice is widely perceived as Tantra-affiliated by people making use of the services of an *ojhā*, or exorcist, mainly for two reasons. First, a number of offerings are shared by Tantric and *ojhāi* rituals. All of these, namely, alcohol, *bhāṅg*, and, at times, animal sacrifice, are considered impure in Sanskritic Hinduism. On the other hand, *ojhāi* may be and in practice often is related to deities with a Tantric origin or to non-Sanskritic gods with a pronounced protective village deity background. In order to build significantly on the previous textual cases which highlighted self-protective and/or destructive rituals and blood offerings related to the goddess Dhūmāvātī, I will briefly discuss the example of Dhūmāvātī-related *ojhāi*.

This deity is worshiped today in a fairly large and lively temple in Banaras, known as the temple of Dhūpcaṇḍī. Dhūmāvātī is the patron not only of the temple, but also of the whole *mohallā*, city quarter, which also has the same name. In her contemporary temple, Dhūmāvātī is no longer perceived and worshiped as a Tantric deity with a dangerous or even malevolent nature, but as a guardian *mohallā* Devī with an inherent and pronounced protective nature. While all *pujārīs* are aware of her distinct Tantric background and representation, in her temple Dhūmāvātī is clearly depicted as a benign manifestation of Devī and, for the vast majority of devotees, has lost her Tantric affiliations. Integrating the former Tantric Dhūmāvātī into non-Tantric contexts in contemporary Hinduism was possible because of a thorough saumyaization—pacification or sweetening—of her representation and her ritual. She was transformed and adapted to the popular, nontextual context according to the interests and needs of her devotees in a contemporary temple. To reconcile the deity's textual Tantric and contemporary non-Tantric representation is not seen as an insolvable issue in her temple today:

Here Dhūmāvātī gets both [ways of worship], *aghora* and *sāmānya* ["widespread, popular"], but more *sāmānya*....In worship, Tantra is used for special things. But otherwise: How *pūjā* is done for every Devī, her *pūjā* is done—*sāmānya*. Both are possible. Her Tantric worship happens only very seldom here. Her *sāmānya pūjā* always, every day. Ninety-nine and a half

percent. Tantric worship is very rare. If someone needs something, he does it. Both are correct—this way and that. *Pūjā* is *pūjā*. Whichever way it is done.... That's just like with *balī*. No matter whether coconut or male goat or lime or fruit—*balī* is *balī*. So some people offer a coconut instead of a male goat. This is *balī* as well. Some people don't even know why it [a coconut] is offered.²

She is a Tantric goddess, and she has Tantric rituals. But not everybody knows that she is a Tantric Devī. People's ideas about worship are different. She may be worshiped as are most other deities, with devotion, simple and mainstream. She has two representations, is it not so? Widow and virgin. For the widow, it is Tantric worship; for the virgin, mainstream.³



Figure 2. Non-blood *balī* for Dhūmāvātī, made of coconut and lime, placed before her statue at the temple in Banaras. Photograph by the author.

But these quotations already hint at the fact that some remnants of the deity's Tantric textual background remain; for example, she has been used in *ojhā* and still is today by two acting *pūjārīs* of the temple. The practice is openly performed in her temple, and no objection is made by the temple visitors that *pūjārīs*, who are in fact taking care of the goddess's non-Tantric *pūjā*, are involved. In fact, in specific contexts, as in *ojhā*, Tantric worship is even considered essential, and the *pūjārīs* of the temple also serving as *ojhā* state that Dhūmāvātī favors Tantric ritual, animal sacrifice, alcohol, and *havana*. The *ojhās* of Dhūpcaṇḍī believe that only by worshiping the goddess regularly in such (Tantric) ways are they able to perform exorcisms and healing rituals successfully. Practically speaking, this Tantric worship is understood to include *japa*, repeated chanting of the Tantric Dhūmāvātī *mantra*, the offering and consumption of alcohol as *prasāda*, and occasionally *havana*, fire sacrifice. In *ojhā*, Dhūmāvātī is believed to aid the *ojhā* during the entire process of ghost exorcism. The *siddhi* or *śakti*—both terms are used in the

² One *pūjārī* of the temple who is not active as *ojhā*, temple of Dhūpcaṇḍī Banaras, February 23, 2005.

³ One *pūjārī* of the temple who is also an active *ojhā*, temple of Dhūpcaṇḍī Banaras, May 6, 2003.

temple to denote power—granted by Dhūmāvātī for long-lasting Tantric ritual practice is seen as essential authorization and a necessary prerequisite even to begin dealing with *ojhā*. It is also believed that the goddess protects the *ojhā* in his struggle with ghosts. Practically speaking, during exorcism, the *ojhā* draws concrete help from the goddess. She reveals and names the type of harmful ghost, thus opening avenues of attack: “With the help of Dhūmāvātī’s power I transfer the *bhūt*, who possesses a person, into a clove. Daily I give food to the Devī, I worship her. Thus she will do things I ask her for.”⁴



Figure 3. An *ojhā* of Dhūpcaṇḍī displaying items important to his rituals: A Dhūmāvātī yantra and a ritual compilation. Photograph by the author.

This support by the goddess in *ojhā* performed by her *pujārīs* is then combined with a characteristic of the practice widespread in North India. *Ojhā* often contains Tantric practices, as well as non-Sanskrit popular worship and exorcism practices. Of great importance for *ojhā* are Bīrs, local protective deities who accept substances in their rituals which are also crucial to some Tantric rituals: alcohol, *bhām̃g*, and blood sacrifice (Coccarri 1989a). In North Indian popular religion, Bīrs are associated with danger and also with power. *Ojhās* are dependent on the cooperation of the Bīrs in their work, as the latter are perceived as lords of all deities and ghosts in their particular geographical area of supremacy. The connection of *ojhā* to Bīrs is largely accepted in popular religion, although today the practices have also infiltrated Sanskritic Hinduism. Some of the Bīr shrines in Banaras are renowned for their Tantric practices; for example, Lahurābīr, who is one of the most popular Bīrs in Banaras, is used by the Dhūpcaṇḍī *pujārīs* in their work. The Bīrs’ power and affiliation with the ghost world predestine Bīrs for exorcism practices

⁴ One *pujārī* of the temple who is also an active *ojhā*, temple of Dhūpcaṇḍī Banaras, January 17, 2005.

and for the interweaving of *ojhāī* and Tantra in a specific way. As Diane M. Coccari puts it:

Ojhas, in particular, introduce what we might call a “transgressive” element into the Bir cult: some engage in an eclectic blend of sorcery and tantric ritual (popularly called tantra-mantra), including blood sacrifice and offerings of liquor and cannabis, and it is through this “tantric procedure” (tantrik paddhati) that worship of the Bir is thought to yield the most immediate results (1989b: 260).

Animal sacrifice is not a required part of *ojhāī*, but it may take place in order to reinforce the practices. In and around Dhūpcaṇḍī, animal sacrifice related to *ojhāī* seldom takes place. In general, beyond *ojhāī*, public blood offerings or animal sacrifices are rarely conducted today in Dhūmāvātī’s temple in Banaras. If animal sacrifice occurs, then it has become customary to perform it in the form of the so-called “ear cutting” of male goats, instead of slaughtering the animal. This practice is widespread today in many temples across India in which animals were traditionally sacrificed, a fact which in itself speaks for the normative disrepute and condemnation of all animal offerings in present mainstream Hindu society (Pandian 2005). In the Dhūpcaṇḍī temple in Banaras, the male goat’s ear is cut in front of the sanctuary, but later the animal is killed elsewhere, for example, in the courtyard before the temple entrance. So, although animal sacrifice does occur (albeit seldom), moving the act of killing beyond the sacred sphere into a public, but not religiously defined, location accounts for an advanced saumyaization of the deity and her ritual. Although to date animal sacrifices have been public events, alterations in the actual location for the sacrifice strongly indicate a new, transformed perception of Dhūmāvātī as a non-Tantric, even sanskritized deity. In public, both *pujārīs* and devotees submit to mainstream, Brāhmaṇic normative rules and values and arrange a substitute for the actual killing.

Conclusion

Contemporary popular Hinduism is influenced by many practices and beliefs. In ritual and worship practices, both Tantric and Sanskritic influences have contributed to shaping lived Hinduism. Tantric and Tantra-influenced practices, including but not limited to blood offerings and animal sacrifice, have found their way into popular or mainstream Hinduism, for example, into *ojhāī* practices. Such practices as well as others related to Tantra have been contested in Smārta Hinduism and continue to be for a number of reasons. The processes of integrating Tantric esoteric heteropraxy into Brāhmaṇic orthopraxy and normative Smārta Hinduism need to be studied by using a multimethodological approach.

This essay demonstrates the benefits of Ethno-Indology for studying Tantric traditions, and especially their transformations. It is true that the Tantric textual tradition of *uccāṭana* in general and as related to the goddess Dhūmāvātī includes blood offerings; moreover, self-protective and/or destructive Tantric rituals use animal sacrifice in a very specific form and for a very specific reason, namely, to

boost the ritual with the potency of an allegedly powerful animal species. However, with an Ethno-Indological approach, it is possible to verify that the Tantric practice of *uccāṭana* and blood offerings in general play only a minor role in today's rituals. Both the Tantric deity's representation and the Tantric rituals have undergone extreme transformations. The goddess Dhūmāvātī, despite her highly specialized textual representation as an exclusively Tantric deity with a limited and exceptionally dangerous sphere of action and ritual, was largely adapted to normative Brāhmanic standards and transformed into a widely respected, benign, and protective goddess whose sphere of action and ritual practices meet the needs of her present devotees. Combining textual and anthropological research has also contributed to understanding how changing environments and conditions, such as changes in communal structures, changes in the backgrounds of devotees, or the rise of sanskritizing and norming tendencies, have exerted an essential and direct influence on transformations in the pantheon, on ritual and worship practices, and on the belief system of contemporary Hinduism.

The transformations of both self-defense and destructive rituals and of the deity Dhūmāvātī, who is frequently related to these rituals in the textual traditions as well as in her flourishing temple in Banaras, clearly follow general tendencies in Hinduism. The diminishing of blood offerings and animal sacrifices and the saumyaization of Tantric deities go hand in hand and are subject to propagations of uniformity. In the case of goddesses, these have been and still are largely personified in the all-inclusive Great Goddess Durgā Mahādevī. Dhūmāvātī is represented and worshiped in her temple in Banaras in a popularized way, largely according to Brāhmanic tradition. As is the case with many other originally Tantric goddesses, this goddess and her ritual are today largely integrated into the Smārta tradition. Elements of Tantric and/or other rituals informed by popular religion appear in only a few contexts.

Acknowledgements Open access funding provided by University of Helsinki including Helsinki University Central Hospital.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author (s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

References

- Agnipurāṇa. 1876. *Agni Purāṇa: A Collection of Hindu Mythology and Traditions* (ed. Rājendralāla Mitra). Volume 2 of 3: Chapters 115 to 268. Calcutta: Gaṇeśa Press for Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Arumugam, Indira. 2015. "The Old Gods Are Losing Power!": Theologies of Power and Rituals of Productivity in a Tamil Nadu Village." *Modern Asian Studies* 49, 3: 753–86.
- Bühnemann, Gudrun. 2000. "The Six Rites of Magic." In David Gordon White, ed., *Tantra in Practice*, 447–62. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Coccaro, Diane M. 1989a. "Protection and Identity: Banaras's Bīr Babas as Neighborhood Guardian Deities." In Sandria B. Freitag, ed., *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800–1980*, 130–46. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Coccarri, Diane M. 1989b. "The Bir Babas of Banaras and the Deified Dead." In Alf Hildebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, 251–70. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Craddock, Elaine. 2001. "Reconstructing the Split Goddess as Śakti in a Tamil Village." In Tracy Pintchman, ed., *Seeking Mahādevī: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess*, 145–69. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Elmore, Mark. 2011. "Bloody Boundaries: Animal Sacrifice and the Labor of Religion." In Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal Mandair, eds., *Secularism and Religion-Making*, 209–25. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goudriaan, Teun. 1978. *Māyā Divine and Human: A Study of Magic and Its Religious Foundations in Sanskrit Texts, with Particular Attention to a Fragment on Viṣṇu's Māyā preserved in Bali*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Mallebrein, Cornelia. 2007. "When the Buffalo Becomes a Pumpkin: The Animal Sacrifice Contested." In Georg Pfeffer, ed., *Periphery and Centre: Studies in Orissan History, Religion and Anthropology*, 443–72. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Mantramahārṇava. 2001 [1907]. *Mantramahārṇavaḥ* (ed. Khemarāja Śrīkrṣṇadāsa). Bombay: Śrīveṅkaṭeśvara Press.
- Michaels, Axel. 2005. "General Preface to the 'Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals'." In Jörg Gengnagel, Ute Hüskén, and Srilata Raman, eds., *Words and Deeds: Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia*, 7–13. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Michaels, Axel. 2007. "Blutopfer in Nepal." In Christina von Braun and Christoph Wulf, eds., *Mythen des Blutes*, 91–107. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Nihom, Max. 1987. "On Buffalos, Pigs, Camels, and Crows." *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 31: 75–109.
- Pandian, M. S. S. 2005. "Dilemmas of Public Reason: Secularism and Religious Violence in Contemporary India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, 22–23: 2313–20.
- Phetkārīnītantra. 1992. *Phetkārīnītantram*. In Gopinātha Kavirāja, ed., *Nīrvānatantram, Toḍalatantram, Kāmadhenutantram, Phetkārīnītantram, Jñānasankālīnītantram, Savṛttiko Devīkalottarāgamasca*. Yogatantra Granthamālā 4. Varanasi: Sampūrṇānanda Saṃskṛta Viśvavidyālaya.
- Rodríguez, Hillary Peter. 2009. "Fluid Control: Orchestrating Blood Flow in the Durgā Pūjā." *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 38, 2: 263–292.
- Samanta, Suchitra. 1994. "The 'Self-Animal' and Divine Digestion: Goat Sacrifice to the Goddess Kālī in Bengal." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, 3: 779–803.
- Tantrasārasaṃgraha. 1950. *Tantra Sāra Saṅgraha (with Commentary): A Treatise Teaching Formulae and Rites for the Attainment of Health and Happiness and Even of Super-Human Power of Nārāyaṇa (Tāntric) of Śivapuram* (ed. M. Duraiswami Aiyangar). Madras: Madras Government Oriental Series 15.
- Urban, Hugh B. 2001. "The Path of Powers Impurity, Kingship, and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, 4: 777–816.
- Urban, Hugh B. 2010. *The Power of Tantra. Religion, Sexuality and the Politics of South Asian Studies*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Zeiler, Xenia. 2012. "Transformations in the Textual Tradition of Dhūmāvātī: Changes in the Reception of the Tantric Mahāvidyā-Goddess in Ritual, Function, Iconography, and Mythology." In István Keul, ed., *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, 165–94. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Zeiler, Xenia. 2013. "Dark Shades of Power: The Crow in Hindu and Tantric Religious Traditions." *Religions of South Asia* 7, 1–3: 212–29.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.