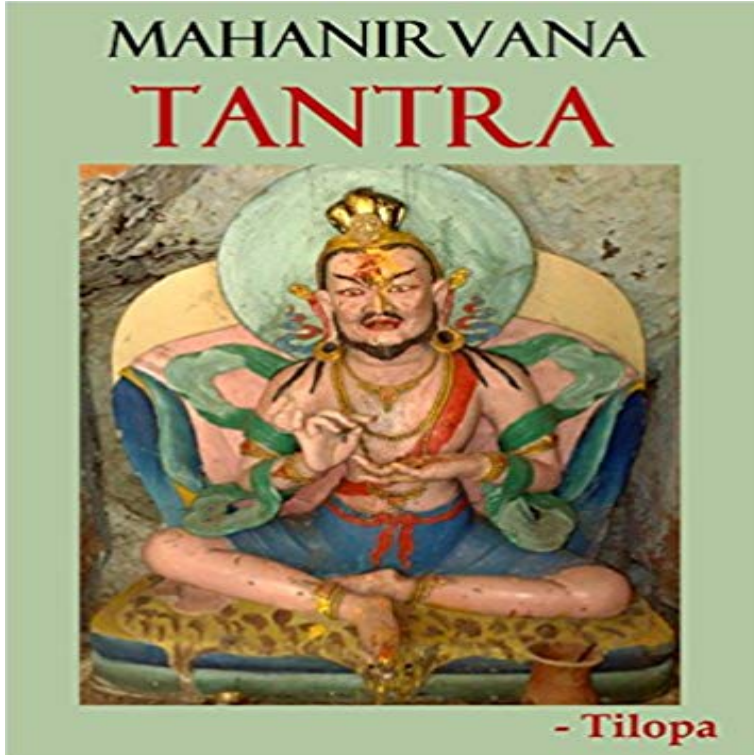


Mahanirvana Tantra: Tantra of the Great Liberation (Niravana)



Introduction and Preface PREFACE THE Indian Tantras, which are numerous, constitute the Scripture (Shashtra) of the Kaliyuga, and as such are the voluminous source of present and practical orthodox Hinduism. The Tantra Shastra is, in fact, and whatever be its historical origin, a development of the Vaidika Karmakanda, promulgated to meet the needs of that age. Shiva says: For the benefit of men of the Kali age, men bereft of energy and dependent for existence on the food they eat, the Kaula doctrine, O auspicious one! is given (Chap. IX., verse 12). To the Tantra we must therefore look if we would understand aright both ritual, yoga, and sadhana of all kinds, as also the general principles of which these practices are but the objective expression. Yet of all the forms of Hindu Shastra, the Tantra is that which is least known and understood, a circumstance in part due to the difficulties of its subject-matter and to the fact that the key to much of its terminology and method rest with the initiate. The present translation is, in fact, the first published in Europe of any Indian Tantra. An inaccurate version rendered in imperfect English was published in Calcutta by a Bengali editor some twelve years ago, preceded by an Introduction which displayed insufficient knowledge in respect of what it somewhat quaintly described as the mystical and superficially technical passages of this Tantra. A desire to attempt to do it greater justice has in part prompted its selection as the first for publication. This Tantra is, further, one which is well known and esteemed, though perhaps more highly so amongst that portion of the Indian public which favours reformed Hinduism than amongst some Tantrikas, to whom, as I have been told, certain of its provisions appear to display unnecessary timidity. The former admire it on account of its noble exposition of the worship of the Supreme Brahman, and in the belief that certain of

its passages absolutely discountenance the orthodox ritual. Nothing can be more mistaken than such belief, even though it be the fact that for him who has faith in the root, of what use are the branches and leaves. This anyone will discover who reads the text. It is true that, as Chap. VII., verse 94, says: In the purified heart knowledge of Brahman grows, and Brahmajnane samutpanne krityakrityang na vidyate. But the statement assumes the attainment of Brahmajnana, and this, the Shastra says, can be attained, not by Vedantic discussions nor mere prayer, after the manner of Protestant systems of Christian worship; but by the Sadhana which is its main subject-matter. I have referred to Protestant systems, for the Catholic Church possesses an elaborate ritual and a sadhana of its own which is in many points strikingly analogous to the Hindu system. The section of Tantrikas to whom I have referred are, I believe, also in error. For the design of this Tantra appears to be, whilst conserving commonly-recognized Tantrik principles, to secure that, as has sometimes proved to be the case, they are not abused. Parvati says (Chap. I., verse 67): I fear, O Lord! that even that which Thou hast ordained for the good of men will, through them, turn out for evil. Hitaya yane, karmani kathitani tvaya prabho Manyetani mahadeva viparitani manave. It is significant, in connection with these observations, to note that this particular Tantra was chosen as the subject of commentary by Shrimad Hariharananda Bharati, the Guru of the celebrated Hindu reformer, Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

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