

Passions and Emotions in the Indian Philosophical-Religious Traditions: Some Preliminary Remarks

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भारतीयविद्यापरम्परासु मनोविज्ञानं मनश्शास्त्रं वा न विकासं प्राप-इति प्रवादं परीक्षमाणः तोरेल्लामहाभागः कामक्रोधादि-मनोविकाराणां नियमने विजये च भारतीयदार्शनिकचिन्तनधारायाम् उपलभ्यमानं प्रकारद्वयं विश्लेष्यति। प्रथमस्तु प्रकारः-निग्रहणात्मकः अभ्यास-वैराग्याभ्यां साधनीयः वेदान्तिभिः, जैन-बौद्ध-योगिभिश्च प्रतिबोधितः। द्वितीयस्तु अनुगम्यनियमनात्मकः शैवशाक्ततन्त्राभिमतः। दोषदर्शन-वैराग्याभ्यां निग्रह्य प्रकृतिसिद्धबलरूपयोः उपशमनापेक्षया अनुगम्य-नियमनमेव वरं, येन स्वभावसिद्ध ऐहिकानुभवोऽपि न बाध्येत इत्यत्र स्वारस्यम्।

Anyone enquiring into the status of passions and emotions in traditional India is surprised to find that the subcontinent, so avid for analysis in every field of knowledge, has never produced any science similar to western psychology. As a first response, what comes to mind is the gymnosophist's answer to Socrates who was questioning him about man's nature: "But how can we deal with the human before knowing about the divine?" Too busy contemplating the fearful symmetries of the supernatural, were the Indians consequently not particularly interested in untangling the developments of human behaviour? The absence of psychology, as an independent discipline at least, appears all the more surprising if one considers that the Indians have never lacked a capacity either for introspection or for cataloguing. With the former, they have achieved results never surpassed in research on the two realities which, since they naturally coincide with the observer-subject, lend themselves the more readily to eluding observation. I refer to breathing, the breath of life, literally dissected by yoga, and language, the subject of the most discerning analysis that mankind has ever devoted to this

fundamental and pervasive reality. The Indians have never been in short supply with regard to their cataloguing ability and, on the contrary, have raised it to even maniacal levels, so that it is rampant in all scientific, aesthetic, philosophical and religious literature and is often one of the prime reasons making its reading so arduous. The first great philosophical system to develop from Upaniṣadic and epic speculation was given the name Sāṃkhya, meaning 'connected with enumeration, listing'.

It is in fact in philosophical texts, starting precisely from those of the Sāṃkhya school, that we should look for a *thesaurus* of human passions and emotions, analysed and classified with obstinate accuracy and an absolutely neutral and scientific grasp, as in the classical texts of Vaiśeṣika, or else with a mixture of coldness and preoccupation, as often occurs in Buddhist and Jaina texts that describe them, keeping their gaze fixed on the meditating devotee who might be threatened by them. But the researcher into Indian passions and emotions will soon discover with equal surprise that he must delve into treatises on aesthetics and rhetoric perhaps even more than into philosophical and religious texts. Risking here, moreover, losing both the reader and himself in labyrinthine systematics, in his investigation of the essence of poetry and the theatre, the Indian rhetorician must first tackle man's basic passions/emotions (*bhāva*), which the poet or actor must portray so that the reader or spectator can savour their essence, finally liberated from the restrictions of the individual ego.

If, now satiated by descriptions - albeit sometimes of great precision - the researcher of passions wishes to discover how they are assessed in the Indian world, things become even more complicated. They are differently assessed according to the subject's social position, his belonging to one or another of the four basic states of life (*āśrama*), and according to caste. While anger and disdain (*manyu*), as Minoru Hara has demonstrated in one of his seminal lexical analyses, are generally reprehensible in the man of the street, they are even obligatory for those belonging to the *kṣatriya* class of sovereigns and warriors (Hara 2001).

In examining the philosophical-religious texts of Hinduism on such themes, we must first be aware that by far the greater part of them comes from the Brahmanic élite, which thus seeks to envelop the entire Indian reality in its coils. Our first impression after observing the central stream of Brahmanic thought is of a considerable integration – mostly absent in the West¹ – of the individual's physical, psychic-emotive and intellectual dimensions. A single nature runs through them uninterruptedly: it passes fluidly from one level to another, gradually including the animal and vegetal worlds. In the words of Louis Dumont (1975: 30, quoted in Bouillier-Tarabout 2002: Introduction, 18):

Il n'y a pas de coupure entre l'homme et la nature. La chose est sensible dans le vêtement - le corps s'enroule dans une pièce d'étoffe -, dans la simplicité de vie matérielle et la forme des objets d'usage courant. En musique, l'heure de la journée prescrit le ton sentimental de la mélodie: impossible d'être nostalgique le matin et gai le soir...

(There is no hiatus between man and nature. This is appreciable in clothing – the body wraps itself in a piece of cloth – or in the simplicity of material life and the form of objects we use every day. In music, the time of day prescribes the sentimental mode of the melody: impossible to be nostalgic in the morning and gay in the evening...)

Albeit deeply rooted in common opinion, such a view is however substantially a blunder: far from being absent, dualism is merely radicalised to the extreme. In Sāṃkhya for example – and Sāṃkhya with its cosmogenesis remains the model for much of later Brahmanic speculation (cf. Torella 1999) – an apparently unbridgeable abyss separates the world of nature (*prakṛti*) – comprising the body, senses, passions and mental functions forming an integrated whole – from the world of the spirit, alone responsible for striking the spark of consciousness, without which the continual gross activity of the sensorial faculties, of the inner sense, of the I-notion and the intellect could never finally

1. Among the most conspicuous exceptions is Aristotle.

shine as 'knowledge'. An integrated monism of body, senses, emotions and intellectual faculties consequently 'does exist' but leaves out that very principle that alone can give meaning to the whole. The goal is not the final achieving of greater unity, but the recognition of an irremediable otherness, having reached which, the psyche-body-nature complex progressively withdraws from the scene, "...like a dancer", recounts a famous stanza of the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* (v. 59), "having presented her performance to her audience", leaving the spirit to shine in undisturbed solitude. The material, emotional and psychic universe thus comes into existence solely so that the soul can recognise itself as being foreign to it and isolate itself in its own self-identity. Even this recognition is made possible by the action of *prakṛti* itself, which thus finds in its own negation its ultimate reason for existence.

Based on such a premise, two alternatives are possible: to accentuate the integrated and unitary aspect of the body-senses-psyche-intellect complex, or to concentrate on the otherness of the knower principle, the 'spirit'. Brahmanic philosophy – and, *mutatis mutandis*, Jaina and even Buddhist philosophy, despite a programmatic rejection of any substantiality of the subject – decidedly take the second alternative, the option that we might, somewhat roughly, term 'ascetic'. The whole fermenting energy potential of human drives, including the intellectual, which the West would on the other hand place on the other side, is seen as troublesome ballast from which man must free himself. Solely over the desert of body and passions can the moon of the spirit rise. An incurable ontological weakness undermines the roots of whatever is tinted with pleasure or sorrow, or arouses desire or aversion. The whole human adventure may thus take on a fainter outline – or sometimes a more sombre one, as in the scenario depicted by the Vedāntin Sureśvara in its sub-commentary on the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad*, which explores man's wretchedness right from his mother's uterus, a place of ineffable delights for the West.

anubhūtāḥ purāsaḥ mayā marmacchido 'sakṛt |
karambhavālukās taptā yā dahanty aśubhāśayān ||
jāṭharānalasaṃtaptāḥ pittākhyarasavipluṣaḥ |
garbhāśaye nimagnaṃ tā dahanty atibhṛśaṃ tu mām ||

*audaryakṛmivaktrāṇi kūṭaśālmalikāṇṭakaiḥ |
 tulyāni vitudanty ārtam pārsvāsthikrakacārditam ||
 garbhe durgandhabhūyiṣṭhe jāṭharāgnipradīpite |
 duḥkham mayāptaṃ yat tasmāt kaṇīyaḥ kumbhipākajam ||*

Having entered this uterus [the foetus is speaking], I am suffering unbearable, devastating pain. Several times in past existences I have fallen into the scorching sands of hell that burn wicked souls, but these drops of bile superheated by the fires of digestion make my tender body suffer much more. Stomach worms with mouths as sharp as thorns torture me, already tortured enough by the bones of my mother's body that cut into me on all sides. The miseries of the hell of Kumbhipāka are nothing compared to the tortures I experience in the uterus, full of the most disgusting miasmas that burn owing to the stomach's digestive fire.¹

Conception was achieved during a rude nocturnal encounter, all heaviness and no grace:

*nijāvidyāmahājālasamvītadhiṣaṇaḥ pumān |
 mohotthānalakāmākhyavaḍiśāpahṛtāśayaḥ ||
 tamasā kāmaśārṅgeṇa saṃkalpākarṣaṇena saḥ |
 rāgākhyaviṣalepena tāḍito viṣayeṣunā ||
 grahāviṣṭa ivānīśaś codito janyakarmaṇā |
 yoṣidagniṃ pataty āśu jyotirlobhāt pataṅgavat ||*

The mind enveloped in the suffocating coils of innate ignorance, the heart dragged away by the hook of insatiable lust born of obnubilation, the father of the yet unborn is assailed by darkness, pierced by the arrows of the objects of the senses poisoned by passion and shot by the bow of desire drawn by his resolution. Deprived of all control as though a demon possessed him, driven by the karma of the creature yet unborn, [the father to be] plunges rapidly into the woman's fire, like a moth avid for the flame.²

1. *Taittirīyopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttikam, Brahnavallī, prathamah khaṇḍaḥ*, vv. 191-194 (p. 86).

2. *ibid.* vv. 166-168 (p. 81).

In a manner no less atrocious than life in the uterus is presented the moment of birth and infancy and youth as they come along – tormented by sexual desire, blinded alternately by one passion or other, by love and anger -, up to the rabid impotence of old age. The epilogue that follows is not exactly an apotheosis:

*hā kānte hā dhane putra krandamānaḥ sudāruṇam |
maṇḍūka iva sarpeṇa gīryate mṛtyunā naraḥ ||*

[...]

viśrāmaṇaḥ kṣaṇādṛśaḥ khalu jīvalokaḥ ||

sāyaṁ sāyaṁ vāsavaṁ sametāḥ

prataḥ pratas tena tena prayānti |

tyaktvānyonyam taṁ ca vṛkṣam vihaṅgāḥ

yadvat tadvaj jñātayo 'jñātayaś ca ||

mṛtibījam bhaved janma janmabījam tathā mṛtiḥ |

ghaṭīyantravad āsrānto bambhramīty anīśam naraḥ ||

While weeping bitterly over his beloved, his wealth and the son he has to leave, the man is swallowed up by death, like a toad by a serpent. [...] This world of mortals is indeed like a tree used for shelter. One evening birds perch on it in search of a haven for the night and next morning leave it and fly away each wherever he will. Similarly, men encounter, for a brief time, friends or strangers in this world and then disperse. Birth leads to death and death to birth: thus, men ceaselessly circle forever, like the wheel that draws water from the well.¹

The element around which the whole body-senses-emotions constellation seems to turn is attachment, desire. In any final analysis, it is from its grip that man must free himself to rise toward the ātman or nirvāṇa. Even a text certainly not focused on asceticism, like the *Bhagavadgītā*, does not fail to launch a lengthy, venomous attack against desire:

arjuna uvāca:

atha kena prayukto 'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ |

1. ibid. vv. 212-221 (pp. 89-90).

anicchann api vārṣṇeya balād iva niyojitaḥ ||

śrībhagavān uvāca:

*kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ |
mahāśāno mahāpāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇam ||*

*dhūmenāvriyate vahnir yathādarśo malena ca |
yatholbenāvṛto garbhas tathā tenedam āvṛtam ||*

*āvṛtaṃ jñānam etena jñānino nityavairiṇā |
kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca ||*

*indriyāṇi mano buddhir asyādhiṣṭhānam ucyate |
etair vimohayaty eṣa jñānam āvṛtya dehinām ||*

*tasmāt tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyamyā bharatarṣabha |
pāpmānam prajahiḥy enam jñānavijñānanāśanam ||*

Arjuna said: Moved by what does man do evil? By what is he driven almost by force, O Kṛṣṇa? The Blessed One replied: It is desire (*kāma*) that drives him, it is anger, arising from the *rajas*¹ component. This is the great devourer, the great Evil One. Recognise in it your enemy. As fire is covered by smoke, as the mirror is covered by a spot and the embryo by the womb, so is our knowledge covered by it [desire]. By this reality that takes the shape of desire, a fire that nothing satiates, eternal enemy of the knower subject, knowledge is covered. Of desire, the senses, the mind and the intellect are the substrate. Through them desire, covering knowledge, beclouds the incarnate soul. Therefore, O Bull among the Bharatas, curb first of all the senses

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1. Desire and anger are deemed strictly as a pair, or rather as two aspects of the same reality. As Śaṅkara says in his commentary on this passage, it is frustrated desire that is transformed into anger. *Rajas*, along with *sattva* and *tamas* (a doctrine belonging to Sāṃkhya, significantly present in the *Bhagavadgītā*) are at the same time psychic states and cosmic forces - an ambiguity that is unresolved in classical Sāṃkhya, which inherits and unites highly differentiated ancient doctrines. *Sattva* is characterized by joy and light: it is gentle and illuminating; *rajas* is characterized by an absence of joy and by dynamism: it is unstable and stimulating; *tamas* is characterized by inertia and restriction: it is heavy and obstructive. Passions and emotions are, of course, expressions of the *rajas* component.

and then abandon this Evil One who destroys knowledge and spiritual science. (III.36-41)

The Kashmiri recension of the *Bhagavadgītā* lays it on thicker, inserting, after the first verses of Kṛṣṇa's reply, five further verses:

arjuna uvāca:

*bhavaty eṣa katham kṛṣṇa katham caiva vivardhate |
kimātmakaḥ kimācāraḥ tan mamācakṣva prcchataḥ ||*

śrībhagavān uvāca:

*eṣa sūkṣmaḥ paraḥ śatruḥ dehinām indriyeṣu ha |
sukhatantra ivāsīno mohayan pārtha tiṣṭhati ||*

*kāmakrodhamayo ghoraḥ stambhahaṣasamudbhavaḥ |
ahaṁkāro 'bhimānātmā dustaraḥ pāpakarmabhiḥ ||*

*haṣam asya nivartyaiṣa śokam asya dadāti ca |
bhayaṁ cāsya karoty eṣa mohayaṁs tu muhur muhuḥ ||*

*sa eṣa kaluṣaḥ kṣudraś cchidraprekṣī dhanañjaya |
rajaḥpravṛtto mohātmā manuṣyānām upadravaḥ ||*

Arjuna said: But how is it born, O Kṛṣṇa, and how does it grow? What is its essence, what its operation? Answer, I pray you, this my question. The Blessed One replied: It is the subtle enemy, supreme, of bodily beings and the senses. It appears as an instrument of pleasure, O Pārtha, but in reality it obfuscates. Cruel, its essence being desire and rage, source of the evil pleasure of pride, cause of the ego, by nature presumptuous, only with difficulty can it be overcome by the wicked. First it takes pleasure from man and gives him sorrow and, that done, fills him with terror, obfuscating him increasingly. It is dark, vile, it spies on the weak points, O Arjuna; it is born of rubedo [*rajas*] and its essence is obfuscation: it is the plague of mankind.¹

One of the five major vows absolutely required by the highest Jaina ideal (the other four being non-violence, truthfulness, honesty and absence of greed) is itself continence. It is defined as follows by Hemacandra's : *Yogaśāstra*

1. III.38-42 (cf. Abhinavagupta's *Bhagavadgītārthasaṁgraha* pp. 55-56).

*divyaudārikakāmānām kṛtānumatakāritaiḥ |
manovākkāyatas tyāgo brahmāṣṭādasadhā matam ||*

The eighteen kinds of continence, in our tradition, consist of abandoning desires (*kāma*) with regard to heavenly, human and animal beings, in mind, word and body, whether one experiences them oneself, or approves their enjoyment, or ensures that others enjoy them. (I.23, p. 200)

Equipped with such readings, the first to filter through systematically in the West and to be firmly fixed in *communis opinio*, how often must the western traveller, landing in India in the expectancy of an ascetic and disincarnate world, have been stunned by the untiring proliferation of colours, odours and sounds of life in all its most splendid and ephemeral forms!

Consequently it seems that something is not right, or that there is at least a hiatus between the theories and prescriptions of traditional philosophical-religious texts and what then occurs in real life. This, however, is only a part of the truth. Indeed, there exists a highly significant sector of Indian thought and religious experience – Tantrism – that became increasingly important until it imbued the whole spiritual life of India starting from the Middle Ages, which literally turns the tables. With regard to Hemacandra's passage on desire, what the greatest master of Tantrism, the *śaiva* Abhinavagupta, says in one of his most difficult works, the *Mālinīvijayavārttika*, is in total opposition:

*kāmaṃ svīkartum icchaiva tadācchādanayogataḥ |
viśvaṃ sādhyet kāmī kāmātattvam idaṃ yataḥ ||*

Desire (*kāma*) is the will to take possession [of the other] (to make the other oneself). Veiling everything with his desire, the desirer can accomplish everything, since everything has as its ultimate principle desire itself. (I.281)

And again:

*kiṃ nākarṣati kiṃ naiṣa [read: caiṣa] na bhāvayati yogavit |
tata evocyate śāstre nārakto rañjayed iti ||*

Whoever knows this path, what may he not draw to himself or realise mentally? For this very reason, traditional texts say, “He who is not impassioned cannot arouse passion [in others]”.

(I.279)

The energy of desire, according to Śivaite Tantrism, is what is manifest in the fruition and enjoyment of the senses, that which gives life to the ferment of the emotions, which has one of its peaks in the passion of love. The whole universe is pervaded by this energy, the sole matrix of any form of dynamism and life, whose single thread crosses both the most extreme abstractions of thought and our modest daily round. The first worship that the devotee is bound to render is to the goddesses of his own consciousness (*svasaṃvid-devīs*), who are none other than the *kaṛaṇeśvarīs*, the mistresses of his sensorial faculties.¹ The sacrificial offering is thus made of everything within the bounds of ordinary life which, when all is said and done, is not all that ordinary. Neither clarified butter nor flowers are offered to the goddess’s icon, but increasingly penetrating and intense enjoyments to those unbridled goddesses that ‘are’ our senses. As stated in a verse of the *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra*:

bandhamokṣāv ubhāv etāv indriyāṇām jagur budhāḥ /
vighrītāni [nighrītāni?] bandhāya vimuktāni vimuktaye ||

“The cause of both bonds and liberation are the senses: this is what the wise said. Fettered they lead to bonds, freed they lead to liberation.” (XV.44)

This is echoed by Abhinavagupta in the *Tantrāloka*:

antarindhanasaṃbhāram anapekṣyaiva nityaśaḥ /
jājvalīty akhilākṣaughaprasṛtograśikhaḥ śikhī ||
bodhāgnau tādrśe bhāvā viśantas tasya sanmahaḥ /
udrecayanto gacchanti homakarmanimittatām ||

Perennially, whatever the fuel provided, burns within us the blazing fire of all our senses. The various knowable things, entering this consensual fire and increasing its radiance, thereby become the cause of oblation. (IV.201-202)

1. See particularly the *Dehasthadevatācakra-stotra* ‘Hymn to the wheel of deities residing in the body’, edited by Pandey 1963: 952-953.

To yoga, which requires firstly detachment (*vairāgya*) and repetitious and gradual practice (*abhyāsa*), the Śaivaite Tantra responds by opposing to the former attachment and passion (*rāga*), and to the latter the silent vortex of the moment (*kṣaṇa*). But why attachment and passion and, first and foremost, what is in this word *rāga* whose semantic area is so evasive? *Rāga* ‘attachment, affection’, but also ‘colour’ or ‘the fact of being coloured by emotions’ in Śaivaite theology and psychology constitutes one of the individual’s three innermost ‘cuirasses’, the concept of ‘cuirass’ being complex and many-faceted, irresistibly recalling Wilhelm Reich’s similar motif.¹ It is a fact accepted by all, say the Śaivaite masters, that there is no action in ordinary life that does not proceed from an idea or expectation of pleasure. Furthermore, the most disparate philosophical schools and prescriptive texts coincide in considering *rāga* as the root of all feelings, emotions and mental activities. The universe – here the great Abhinavagupta is again speaking (*Tantrāloka* IX.62) – was created in order to satisfy souls, in which a frenzy (*lolikā*), a feverish craving for enjoyment had been roused. This subtle frenzy has neither outline nor horizon: it may be said to be a ‘desiring condition’ without an object (Jayaratha: *niṣkarma abhilāṣitā*), a state of undefined expectation (Jayaratha: *lolikā svātmani sākāṃkṣateva*). Tantrism is aware that it must take this into account first of all.

In order to act on these profound structures, traditional yoga seems like a blunted weapon.

vastuto 'sti na kasyāpi yogāṅgasyābhyupāyatā |
svarūpaḥ hy asya nīrūpam avacchedavivarjanāt ||

upāyo 'py anupāyo 'syāyāgavṛttinirodhataḥ |
recanāpūraṇair eṣā rahitā tanuvātanauḥ ||

tārayaty evam ātmānaḥ bhedasāgaragocarāt |
nimañjamānam apy etan mano vaiṣayike rase ||

nāntarārdratvam abhyeti niścchidraḥ tumbakaḥ yathā |
svapanthānaḥ hayasyeva manaso ye nirundhate ||

1. Reich 1973. On the doctrine of the ‘cuirasses’ in Tantrism, see Torella 1998.

teṣāṃ tatkhaṇḍanāyogād dhāvaty unmārgakoṭibhiḥ |
kiṃsvid etad iti prāyo duḥkhe 'py utkaṇṭhate manaḥ ||
sukhād api virājyeta jñānād etad idaḥ [tv iti ?] |
tathāhi gurur ādikṣad bahudhā svakaśāsane ||
anādāraviraktyaiva galantīndriyavṛttayāḥ |
yāvat tu viniyamyante tāvat tāvad vikurvate ||

In actual fact, no member of Yoga can really serve as a means of achieving the condition of *anuttara* 'that which nothing transcends'. The means to it is, in fact, a non-means, since it comprises neither ritual practices nor suppression of the mental functions. It is a boat designed for a light breeze, without exhalation or inhalation¹, which thereby carries itself beyond the ocean of duality, albeit in the meantime the mind is immersed in the fluid of the objective world. We must bear in mind that the husk cannot be separated from the grain unless it is soaked. We consider what we are headed for when we decide to place the natural course of the mind under control, as when we wish to put a bridle on a wild horse. As a result of the violence of the procedures, the mind – like the horse – starts running here and there, taking innumerable wrong directions. Why does this occur? We all know well that the mind can take pleasure even in pain and, vice-versa, withdraw disgusted from pleasure and knowledge. This is what the master demonstrates in various forms in his treatise:² the impulses of the senses can only be thrown off thanks to a highly special kind of detachment, a detachment practiced in elegant *souplesse*. On the contrary, if we try to subdue them, they end up becoming ungovernable. (*Mālinīvijayavārttika* II.106-112)

Passions and emotions are consequently allowed to flow freely without attempting to safeguard the mind from their impact. Not only: "Passion should not be extinguished by reason, but reason converted into passion" (except that here it is not a

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1. This is a clear allusion to yoga practices focused on breathing.
 2. Here Abhinavagupta is possibly referring to Vāmanadatta and his *Svabodhodayamañjarī*; on this interesting, and very peculiar, text see Torella 2000.

Tantric master speaking, but the early XIX c. Italian poet and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi in his *Zibaldone*).¹

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1. It is worth presenting the full passage in which the sentence quoted above is contained. “Ma la ragione non è mai efficace come la passione. Sentite i filosofi. Bisogna fare che l'uomo si muova per la ragione come, anzi più assai che per la passione, anzi si muova per la sola ragione e dovere. Bubbles. La natura degli uomini e delle cose, può ben esser corrotta, ma non corretta. E se lasciassimo fare alla natura, le cose andrebbero benissimo, non ostante la detta superiorità della passione sulla ragione. Non bisogna estinguer la passione colla ragione, ma convertir la ragione in passione; fare che il dovere la virtù l'eroismo ec. diventino passioni. Tali sono per natura. Tali erano presso gli antichi, e le cose andavano molto meglio. Ma quando la sola passione del mondo è l'egoismo, allora si ha ben ragione di gridar contro la passione. Ma come spegner l'egoismo colla ragione che n'è la nutrice, dissipando le illusioni? E senza ciò, l'uomo privo di passioni, non si muoverebbe per loro, ma neanche per la ragione, perchè le cose son fatte così, e non si possono cambiare, chè la ragione non è forza viva nè motrice, e l'uomo non farà altro che divenirne indolente, inattivo, immobile, indifferente, infingardo, com'è divenuto in grandissima parte. (22 ottobre 1820)” (G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, a cura di F. Flora, vol. I, Milano, Mondadori, 1937, pp. 173-174). [But reason is never as effective as passion. Listen to the philosophers. Men should be led to act in accordance with reason as much as, indeed much more than, out of passion; in fact their actions should be determined solely by reason and duty. Nonsense. The nature of human beings and other things can easily be corrupted but not corrected. And if we let nature take its course, things would run very smoothly, despite the said dominance of passion over reason. Rather than extinguish passion with reason, it would be better to turn reason into passion: to make duty, virtue, heroism etc. become passions. So they are in nature. So they were among the ancients, and things were much better. But when the only passion in the world is egoism then it is right to cry out against passion. But how can selfishness be eliminated by reason, which fosters it by destroying illusions? And without it, a man deprived of passions would not be motivated by them, or by reason, either, because things are like that, and cannot change, reason is neither a living nor a motive force, and man will do nothing but become lazy, inactive, immobile, indifferent, uncaring, as in large parte he has become. (22 Oct. 1820).] I wish to heartily thank Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino

Indeed, Tantrism, especially in its most extreme forms, goes far beyond any instrumental acceptance of the emotive dimension (for the purpose of neutralising it). If the divine is first and foremost energy that unites and overwhelms all provisional levels of being, it is in the tumult of the passions that we best meet it face to face. Emotional states, whether sexual excitement or fright, joy or terror, not only should not be obliterated, any more than they should be merely accepted. They should be cultivated, skilfully intensified and then exploded and spread in order to create subtle rents in the veil of ordinary existence, through which we can contact the magma of universal consciousness/energy. Liberation does not occur therefore in spite of human passions, but precisely by virtue of them. By way of a provisional conclusion, we may use a passage from the *Kiraṇa-tantra* (IV.29a), which ventures, if possible, even farther: “Without the body, there can be no liberation (*na dehena vinā muktiḥ*)”.

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