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The “Scandalous” Tantric Hymn to Kālī *Karpūrādi-stotra*: an Unexpurgated Translation

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Introduction

In 1922 John Woodroffe, better known as Arthur Avalon, published his translation of the *Karpūrādi-Stotra*¹, which is the only version so far available in English and is commonly used even though it is seriously flawed.²

The *Karpūrādi-Stotra* is a short hymn of 22 couplets giving the mantras and visual descriptions of the fearsome goddess Kālī. It also provides short descriptions of meditational and cultic practices which are surprising in their frankness. It is addressed to the goddess, but is destined for her devotees, as is noted more fully towards the end of this article.

This article seeks to redress this situation. It gives background information on the *stotra*, its editions and commentaries, some suggestions on date and authorship: in short, its context. It then provides the Sanskrit text and an accurate translation in keeping with my work on other tantric texts.³ It finishes with a short commentary on the structure and nature of the text and on the practicability of its rituals.

1. The context

In 1891, Ganeśa-Candra-Ghoṣa published the *Karpūra-stotra* with a translation in Bengali by Gurunātha Vidhyānidhi and a commentary by Durgārāma-Siddhāntavāgīśa Bhattācārya.⁴ In 1899, the Sanskrit Press Depository published the *Karpūra-stotra*⁵ with a commentary in Sanskrit by Mahāmahopādhyāya Kṛṣṇanātha Nyāya-Pañcānana.⁶ It is from this latter text that John Woodroffe (aka Arthur Avalon) makes his translation of the *Karpūrādi-Stotra*.⁷

Vimalānanda-Svāmi uses a slightly different text from that of 1899 and makes a first version of his commentary which consists of «notes» (*ṭīka*) and «explanation» (*svarūpavyākhyā*). In 1915 he writes a second version of his commentary which he calls Vimalānandadāyīnī.⁸

2. Woodroffe's translation

Woodroffe makes use of Vimalānanda's second version but does not correct his work in light of it and readily acknowledges this failure.⁹ At the same time, he is heavily influenced by the Vimalānandadāyīnī – which he does not include in his 1922 publication – sometimes significantly altering the meaning of the Sanskrit text as a result. That is, in his translation he will choose the alternative given by Vimalānanda in his *ṭīka* even when the Sanskrit meaning is clear, as when he chooses «mouth» (*daśana*) in preference to «tusk» (*radana*) for *Karpūra-stotra śloka* 4. In the section of his own publication marked Commentary and Notes he adds other items from the Vimalānandadāyīnī.

He also adds information from the 1891 commentary by Durgārāma-Siddhāntavāgīśa Bhattācārya and from the 1899 commentary by Kṛṣṇanātha Nyāya-Pañcānana. Again, he quotes other variant readings that have been supplied to him by Kṛṣṇanātha Nyāya-Pañcānana. Yet again he provides further variant readings without giving their source. He makes no further comment about these publications, nor does he provide the original Sanskrit of his translation.

In short, his translation and its accompanying commentary and notes seem to be highly selective, even arbitrary.

3. Vimalānanda's Vimalānandadāyīnī

The various editions of the *Karpūra-stotra* – by The Sanskrit Press Depository in 1899, in the Vimalānandadāyīnī of 1915, in the *Kālī-rahasyam* in 1999 and in *Śāktapramoda* in 2009 – all have different readings, and none of them give their sources.¹⁰ Given the lack of any agreed version, this translation uses the version given in Vimalānandadāyīnī.

The Vimalānandadāyīnī, available only in its original Sanskrit, provides «notes» (*ṭīka*) which in general give the “gross” meaning of the words of the text, and «explanation» (*svarūpavyākhyā*), which in general gives the “subtle” and “supreme” meanings of the text.

The “subtle” and “supreme” meanings of the text are summarized in Vimalānanda's Introduction,¹¹ written in English, which presents a bowdlerized view of tantric practice. He speaks first of Śiva then of Śakti, and then of the *Agamas* which he holds to be more august than the *Vedas* and which make no typically Vedic distinctions between castes and foods. He goes on to identify Śakti with Kālī. He then teaches that Kālī assumes different forms for the sake of her devotees, and specifically lists the ten Mahāvidyās – Kālī, Tarā, Śodaśī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Cinnamastā, Dhūmāvātī, Bagalā, Mataṅgī and Kamalā – of which the first listed is always Kālī: the other nine are but her forms.

His presentation is highly selective. He does not let the reader know, for example, that some of the Mahāvidyās are horrific in function and appearance. Most notably he completely ignores the repulsive aspects of Kālī mentioned in the *stotra*: the garland of skulls, the girdle of severed arms, the sword and severed head, the blood trickling from her mouth, the cremation ground strewn with corpses. Neither does he advert to the *stotra* enjoining sexual

activity and the consumption of human flesh. He feels pressured by his contemporaries, some of whom «despise the Tantra because it contains Vīrācāra and Kulācāra, and some even refuse to admit that it is a Dharmśāstra at all». [12](#) Vīrācāra and Kulācāra involve the use of the Panchmakara, namely *mudrā* (roasted grain), *matsya* (fish), *madya* (wine), *maṅsa* (meat) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse, especially with women of low caste). Like Woodroffe, he feels compelled to obfuscate.

The same embarrassment continues to this day. In the foreword to the *Śāktapramoda*, the editors seek to show that while the texts are specifically directed to those who are Śākta, they are also acceptable to the Vedic *dharma*. [13](#)

He justifies his interest by positing the three levels: gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*) and supreme (*para*); their corresponding practitioners: the «bonded animal» (*paśu*), the «hero» (*vīra*) and the «perfected being» (*siddha*); and their corresponding emotional states: *paśubhāva*, *vīrabhāva* and *divyabhāva* (the divine emotion). By using these distinctions he reinterprets the scandalous elements to really refer to the higher states of “subtle” and “supreme”, even though he had earlier quoted the Veda: «All this is verily Brahman». [14](#)

In the remaining pages of his Introduction, Vimalānanda defends the use of the “Panchamakāra”, [15](#) by arguing that their use gives an experience of bliss (*ānanda*) such that the practitioner «no more longs for the five Makāras and becomes gradually devoted to Divyācāra». [16](#)

He ends his Introduction with a curiously ambiguous statement:

At the present time a measured use of wine, flesh and so forth and a thorough respect for woman as for the Devatā are particularly seen in the civilized society of the West. Satisfied at this, the Mahādevī, who is the Queen of Queens, has granted to the people of the West the light of science and sovereignty over the whole world. [17](#)

He thus snatches victory from the jaws of defeat, for he attributes the success of the West to the Indian Goddess, Mahādevī. At the same time, he undermines the *Karpūra-stotra*, for none of the benefits it promises have been given to those who follow it. In fact, the benefits are given to those who despise it.

4. The date of the text

The figure of Kālī has undergone the most diverse, even contradictory, interpretations. In the 6th century text *Devī-Māhātmya* [18](#) she is the incarnation of Durgā’s anger; for the 18th and 19th century Bengali poets she is the loving Mother; in the 19th and 20th centuries she is the “murderous, inhuman, sexualized she-devil and consort attacker”. [19](#) Or again, she is the devoted wife embarrassed at having inadvertently stepped on her husband. [20](#) Who is the Kālī of the *Karpūra-stotra*?

As a general rule, the later the Bengali poem, the greater the shift from tantric ritual and speculation towards devotionism. [21](#) The frequency of the epithets «Mother» (7 times) or «Birth Giver» (4 times) would, therefore, seem to suggest a connection with Bengali poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries but there is nothing “motherly” about Dakṣiṇākālī in the *Karpūra-stotra*, except in the metaphysical sense that she is the origin of all things. The Bengali themes of joy and sorrow, separation and reconciliation are completely absent.

And again, the common scholarly opinion is that the less Kālī is depicted in horrific terms, the later the text.²² The presence of «the Goddess's extreme physical associations with death, battle, cremation grounds and even eroticism» would therefore suggest a date earlier than the 18th century.²³

Rachel Fell McDermott provides the translation of a Sanskrit poem quoted from the Kālī Tantra by the 17th century Bengali tāntrika Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa in his *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*.²⁴ Dold states that Āgamavāgīśa is «sometimes credited with introducing and popularising the Dakṣiṇākālī image in Bengal».²⁵ McDermott calls that poem a «prototype» on which later Bengali poetry is modeled.²⁶ It describes Kālī in terms remarkably similar to those in the *Karpūra-stotra*, most significantly in the absence of any reference to the protruding tongue, which is normally the distinguishing iconic trait of the goddess.

While it is not possible, at this stage, to provide a sure date, the available evidence would suggest that *Karpūra-stotra* goes back at least to the 17th century. Devangana Desai claims an even earlier date, proposing that the stotra is a medieval text.²⁷ If so, it would be a late mediaeval text since the change from the gruesome, emaciated form of Cāmuṇḍā into the essentially good-looking Kālī probably originates in the 14th century.²⁸

5. The author of the text

There is no colophon in the text used by Vimalānanda, but the Vimalānandadāyini states that the *stotra* was written or spoken (*viracīta*) by Mahākāla, a name of the deity Śiva.²⁹ The version of the text given in the *Kālī-rahasyam*, adds a prefatory note referring to Mahākāla as «the ṛṣi Mahākāla».³⁰

Although the name Mahākāla can also refer to Śiva, the phrases in *śloka* 9 that «we are altogether dull of mind» and «we must be forgiven», and «bonded animal» would suggest that the actual author of the text is human: since it seem unlikely to me that Śiva would be described in this way. Yet, Kālī is seated on Mahākāla (*śloka* 7, 11, 18) or on «Śiva as a corpse» (*śloka* 18).

So, is Mahākāla the deity or the ṛṣi? The answer is perhaps both, in the sense that the author identifies with the deity. Rawson suggests that «the corpse is an analogue to the sadhaka's own body».³¹ She who sits on Śiva is imagined also to be seated on the writer of the *stotra*. He is subject to her.

6. Text and translation

1

*karpūraṃ madhyama-antya-svara-pararahitaṃ sa-indu-vāmākṣi-yuktaṃ bījaṃ te mātara
eta*³²*-tri-pura-hara-vadhu triḥ-kṛtaṃ ye japanti /*

*teṣāṃ gadyāni padyāni ca mukha-kuharād-ullasanty-eva vācaḥ svacchandaṃ dhvānta-
dhārā-ādihara-ruci-rucire sarva-siddhiṃ gatānām // 1//*

Those who recite three times your seed-mantra consisting of *karpūra* without the middle and last consonants and vowels (*KR*), and adding *vāmākṣi* (*Ī*) and *indu* (*M*), O Mother, Spouse of him who destroyed Tripura: their words, whether prose or poetry, issuing freely from the

hollow of their mouth, will be of those who have attained every power, O you who are beautiful with the beauty of a dark rain cloud.

2

īśānaḥ sa-indu-vāma-śravaṇa-parigato bījam-anya- maheśi dvandvaṃ te manda-cetā yadi japati jano vāram-ekaṃ kadācit /

jītvā vācām-adhīsam dhana-dam-api ciraṃ mohayann-ambuja-akṣī-vṛndaṃ candra-ardha-cūḍe prabhavati sa mahā-ghora-bāla-avatamse // 2//

Another seed-mantra: *īśāna* (*H*) with *vāmaśravaṇa* (*Ū*) and *indu* (*M*). O Maheśī, if a person of weak mind recites it twice, on just one occasion at any time, he will, after conquering the Lord of Speech and the Giver of Wealth, charm the band of lotus-eyed (young women) for a long time, O you who wear the crescent moon on the crown of your hair and hideous earrings made of children's (corpses).

3

īśo vaiśvānara-sthaḥ śaśa-dhara-vilasad vāma-netreṇa yukto bījaṃ te dvandvaṃ-anyad vīgalita-cikure kālīke ye japanti /

dveṣṭāraṃ dhnanti te ca tri-bhuvanam-api te vāśya-bhāvaṃ nayanti śṛkka33-dvandva-asra-dhārā-dvaya-dhara-vadane dakṣiṇe try-akṣarā-iti //3//

īśaḥ (*H*) with *vaiśvānara* (*R*), *vāmanetra* (*Ī*) and glorious *śaśadhara* (*M*). Those who twice recite this other seed-mantra of yours, O Kālīkā of the dishevelled hair, destroy the enemy and subdue the Three Worlds, O you, from the two corners of whose mouth flow two streams of blood, O Dakṣiṇā, O Tryakṣarā.

4

ūrdhve vāme kṛpāṇaṃ kara-kamala-tale chinna-muṇḍaṃ tathā-adhaḥ savye ca-abhīr-varaṃ ca tri-jagad-gha-hare dakṣiṇe kālīke ca /

japtvā-etan-nāma ye vā tava manu-vibhāvaṃ bhāvayanty-etad-amba teṣāṃ-aṣṭau kara-sthāḥ prakāṭita-radane siddhayastry-ambakasya //4//

High in your lotus-like left hand (you hold) a sword and below, a severed head; and on your right (you make the gesture of) confidence and blessing, O you who destroy the sins of the three worlds, O Dakṣiṇā, O Kālīkā. For those who recite your name or contemplate the power of your mantra, O Mother with the protruding tusk, Tryambaka's eight powers are placed in their hand.

5

varga-ādyam vahni-saṃsthaṃ vidhu-rati-lalitaṃ tat-trayaṃ kūrca-yugmaṃ lajjā-dvandvaṃ ca paścāt smita-mukhi tad-adhaṣ-ṭha-dvayaṃ yojayitvā /

mātar-ye ye japanti smara-hara-mahile bhāvayantaḥ sva-rūpaṃ te lakṣmī-lāśya-līlā-kamala-dala-dṛśaḥ kāma-rūpā bhavanti // 5 //

vargādyaṃ (K) with vahni (R), rati (Ī) and vidhu (M), three times (KRĪM KRĪM KRĪM); kūrca twice (HŪM HŪM); and lajjā twice (HRĪM HRĪM); then, O Smiling Face, adding a further two ṭha (SVĀHĀ)[34](#).

O Mother, Spouse of him who destroyed Smara, those who recite (that mantra) while contemplating your true form take on the form of love, seeming to be lotus petals in the play of Laksmī's dance.

6

pratyekaṃ vā dvayaṃ vā trayam-api ca paraṃ bījam-atyanta-guhyam tvan-nāmnā yojayitvā sakalam-api sadā bhāvayanto japanti /

teṣāṃ netra-aravinde viharati kamalā vaktra-śubhra-aṃśu-bimbe vāg-devī devi muṇḍa-srag-atiśaya-lasat-kaṇṭhi pīna-stana-adhye // 6//

They recite, with constant awareness, any one of the supreme, highly secret seed-mantras or two of them or even three of them, along with your name, even all of them together.[35](#) Kamalā plays in the lotus of their eyes; Vāgdevī (plays) in the circle at the splendid tip of their mouths, O Goddess whose throat is festooned with a garland of many heads, whose breasts are rich and rounded.

7

gata-asūnām bāhu-prakara-kṛta-kāñcī-parilasan nitambām dig-vastrām tri-bhuvana-vidhātrīm tri-ṇayanām /

śmaśāna-sṭhe talpe śava-hṛdi mahā-kāla-surata-prayuktām tvām dhyāyan janani jaḍa-cetā api kavīḥ //7//

Your hips are adorned with the girdle of a multitude of dead men's forearms; you are naked, you, the Creator of the Three Worlds, the Three-Eyed; you are intent on enjoying Mahākāla on the breast of a corpse[36](#) as on a couch, in the cremation ground: by meditating on you (in this guise), O Birth Giver, even a dullard becomes a poet.

8

śivābhir-ghorābhiḥ śava-nivaha-muṇḍa-asthi-nikaraiḥ paraṃ saṃkīrṇāyām prakāṭita-citāyām hara-vadhūm /

praviṣṭām samtuṣṭām-upari-suratena-atiyuvatīm sadā tvām dhyāyanti kvacid-api ca na teṣāṃ paribhavaḥ //8//

Those who constantly meditate on you, the Spouse of Hara, who have taken your place in the gleaming cremation ground completely filled with masses of skulls and bones and heaps of corpses, with horrible female jackals; you who are sated with sexual pleasure upon (Mahākāla), you who are very young: they are never shamed.

9

vadāmas-te kiṃ vā janani vayam-uccair-jaḍa-dhiyo na dhātā na-api-īṣo harar-api na te vetti paramam /

tathā-api tvad bhaktir-mukharayati ca-asmākam-amite tad-etat-kṣantavyaṃ na khalu paśu-roṣaḥ samucitaḥ //9//

How shall we speak of you, O Birth Giver, we who are altogether dull of mind? Neither Dhātā or even Īṣa or even Hara know you, the Supreme. Even so, devotion towards you gives voice. And so, O Boundless One, we must be forgiven. Anger towards a “bonded animal” is truly unfitting.

10

samantād-āpīna-stana-jaghana-dhṛg-yauvanavatī-rata-āsakto naktam yadi japati bhaktas-tava manum /

vivāsās-tvām dhyāyan galita-cikuras-tasya vaśagāḥ samastāḥ siddha-aughā bhuvi cirataram jīvati kaviḥ //10//

If, at night, eagerly enjoying a young woman with full, rounded breasts and thighs, the devotee, naked and with dishevelled hair, recites your mantra whilst meditating on you: whole streams of supernatural powers become subject to him and he lives long on earth as a poet.

11

samāḥ susthī-bhūto japati viparītām yadi sadā vicintya tvām dhyāyann-atiśaya-mahā-kāla-suratām /

tadā tasya kṣoṇī-tala-vihara-māṇasya viduṣaḥ kara-ambho-je vaśyā pura-hara-vadhū³⁷ siddhi-nivahāḥ //11//

If he recites (the mantra) steadily for a year, whilst always attentively meditating on you as you take supreme pleasure in Mahākāla upon whom you are (seated), then, O Spouse of the one who destroyed (Tri)pura, multitudes of supernatural powers are subject to his lotus-like hand, to him the wise one who takes pleasure in dwelling on the earth.

12

prasūte saṃsāram janani bhavatī pālayati ca samastam kṣity-ādi pralaya-samaye saṃharati ca /

atas-tvām dhātā-asi tri-bhuvana-patiḥ śrī-patir-api maheśo “pi prāyaḥ sakalam-api kiṃ staumi bhavatīm //12//

You produce and protect transient existence, O Birth Giver, and you reabsorb all things, starting with this earth, at the time of dissolution. You are Dhātā, therefore, Tribhuvanapati and Śrīpati and Maheśa, the chief part and all. How shall I praise you?

13

aneke sevante bhavad-adhika-gīrvāṇa-nivahān vimūdhās-te mātāḥ kim-āpi nahi jānānti paramam/

samārādhyām-ādyām hari-hara-viriñca-ādi-vibudhaiḥ prapanno “smi svairam rati-rasa-mahā-ānanda-niratām // 13//

Many serve multitudes of deities other than you. They are senseless, O Mother. How is it they do not know the Supreme? I turn to the Source worshipped by the learned ones starting with Hari, Hara and Viriñca, to the one who is unrestrainedly intent on the great bliss that comes from the feeling of sexual pleasure.

14

dhāritrī kīlālam śucir-āpi samīro “pi gaganam tvam-ekā kalyāṇī giriśa-ramaṇī kālī sakalam /

stutiḥ kā te mātān-nija-karuṇayā mām-āgatikaṃ prasannā tvam bhūyā bhavam-anu na bhūyān-mama januḥ // 14//

You are earth, water and fire and air, ether; you are one, beneficent, the spouse of Giriśa. O Kālī, you are all things. What can be said in praise of you, O Mother. In your compassion you are gracious towards me in my helplessness. After this existence, may I never be born again!

15

śmaśāna-sthaḥ sustho galita-cikuro dik-paṭa-dharaḥ sahasram tv-arkāṇām nija-galita-vīryeṇa kusumam /

japaṃs-tvat-pratyekaṃ manum-āpi tava dhyāna-nirato mahā-kālī svairam sa bhavati dharitrī-parivṛdhaḥ //15//

In the cremation ground, at ease, hair dishevelled, naked, (he offers) an *arka* flower³⁸ along with his own seminal emission a thousand times, and each time recites your mantra whilst intently meditating on you, O Mahākālī. He will easily become lord of the earth.

16

gr̥he saṃmārjanyā parigalita-vīryam hi cikuram samūlam madhya-ahne vitarati citāyām kuja-dine /

samuccārya premṇā manum-āpi sakṛt-kālī satataṃ gajā-rūḍho yāti kṣiti-parivṛdhaḥ sat-kavi-varaḥ //16//

On a Tuesday, in the middle of the day,³⁹ in the cremation ground, he offers a strand of hair⁴⁰ with its root which is (smeared) with semen⁴¹ emitted by the *saṃmārjanī*⁴² in the “home”,⁴³ whilst also lovingly uttering the mantra. O eternal Kālī, he will never fail to ride on an elephant, being lord of the earth, truly a master-poet.

17

*sva-puṣṭpair-ākīrṇaṃ kusuma-dhanaṣo mandiram-aho puro dhyāyan-dhyāyan yadi japati
bhaktas-tava manum /*

*sa gandharva-śreṇī-patir-api kavitva-amṛta-nadī-nadīnaḥ paryante parama-pada-līnaḥ
prabhavati //17//*

If the devotee who has the “bow”⁴⁴ of “flowers” recites your mantra while meditating again and again, Ah! before the “temple”⁴⁵ adorned with its own “flowers”, he will be master of the Gandharvas’ guild, a stream upon stream of poetic nectar. In the end he will be absorbed to the highest level.

18

*tri-pañcāre pīṭhe śava-śiva-hṛdi smeravadanāṃ mahā-kālena-uccair-madana-rasalāvanya-
niratām /*

*samāsakto naktam svayam-api rata-ānanda-nirato jano yo dhyāyet-tvām-api janani sa syāt
smara-haraḥ //18//*

You are intensely absorbed, your face smiling, in the beauty of supreme sexual pleasure with Mahākāla on the heart of the corpse of Śiva⁴⁶ on a fifteen angled⁴⁷ sacred site. The person who, at night, intent on sexual bliss with his own (śakti), meditates on you also in that state, O Birth-Giver, becomes the Destroyer of Smara.

19

*saloma-asthi svairam palalam-api marjoram-asite param ca-uṣtram maiṣam nara-
maḥiṣayoś-chāgam-api vā //*

*balim te pūjāyām-api vitaratām martya-vasatām satām siddhiḥ sarvā pratipadam-apūrvā
prabhavati // 19//*

The hair, bone and flesh of a cat, O Dark One, of a camel, of a sheep, of a man, of a buffalo, or of a goat; those mortals who freely offer (them) to you in sacrifice acquire every supernatural power, each one unprecedented.

20

*vaśī lakṣam mantram prajapati haviṣya-aśana-rato divā mātaryuṣmac-caraṇa-yugala-
dhyāna-nipuṇaḥ /*

*param naktam nagno nidhuvana-vinodena ca manum japel-lakṣam sa syāt smara-hara-
samānaḥ kṣiti-tale // 20//*

During the day, he is unhesitatingly eager to eat the oblation, O Mother, while reciting the mantra 100,000 times (and) skillfully meditating on your two feet. Then, at night, naked and while diverting himself with sexual intercourse, he recites the mantra 100,000 times. He acquires, on earth, the mind of him who destroyed Smara.

21

idaṃ stotraṃ mātā-tava manu-samuddhāraṇa-januḥ sva-rūpa-ākhyam pāda-ambuja-yugala-pūjā-vidhi-yutam /

niśa-ardhe vā pūjā-samayam-adhi vā yas-tu paṭhati pralāpas-tasya-api prasarati kavitva-amṛta-rasaḥ //21//

This hymn sets out your mantra, O Mother, describes your essence (and) gives the injunctions for worshipping your two lotus-like feet. For him who reads it, whether at midnight or at the time of worship, the ambrosial fluid of poetry flows without hindrance.

22

kurarga-akṣī-vṛndaṃ tam-anusarati prema-taralaṃ vaśas-tasya kṣoṇī-patir-api kubera-pratinidhi /

ripuḥ kārā-agāraṃ kalayati ca taṃ kelika-layā ciraṃ jīvan-muktaḥ prabhavati sa bhaktaḥ pratijanuḥ //22//

A band of women with large dark eyes⁴⁸ streams after him, trembling with love. Even the master of the earth is subject to him. He is like Kubera, and an enemy thinks of him as a prison-cell. The devotee, absorbed for a long time in the sport (of love), is liberated while living, beyond birth.

7. A brief commentary

An adequate study of the meaning and history of the rich symbolism of the *stotra*, or of the practices that are described would far exceed the limits of a journal article. The following few comments must suffice.

The basic three-fold structure of the *stotra* is given in *śloka* 20, namely, the presentation of the mantra (*manusamuddhāraṇa*), the nature of the goddess (*svarūpākhyam*) and the injunctions for worship (*pūjāvidhi*).

7.1. The presentation of the mantra (*manusamuddhāraṇa*)

In the first 7 *śl.*, the mantra (*manu*) is presented both phonically and visually, which two aspects, the phonic and the visual (*dhyāna-mantra*), complement each other for both are emanations of the goddess: indeed they are her very nature. Both are means of calling on her.

Śl. 1– 5 give the seed mantras (*bīja*) *KRĪM*, *HŪM*, *HRĪM*, *SVAHA*, as well as aspects of the *dhyāna-mantra* and the name of the goddess, Dakṣiṇākālikā. *Śl.* 6 describes the various ways in which the *bījas* can be used. *Śl.* 7 and 8 give just the *dhyāna-mantra* but they are highly significant, for the remaining verses of the *stotra* leave aside the horrific elements of her *dhyāna* whereas the image of the goddess enjoying Mahākāla, presented in *śl.* 7 and 8, prevails.

There are two basic iconographic models for Dakṣiṇākālikā: she is either standing on Śiva or inversely copulating with him.⁴⁹ The *Karpūrādi-stotra* uses the latter which Marglin traces back to the cremation ground rituals described in the *Bharavadvāja Patirṃmedhika Sūtra* (I.5.14), where the widow sits on her husband in that way in the cremation ground.⁵⁰ This

positioning of the goddess over the god is seen not as pejorative but as salvific, for by quietening the furious Kālī Śiva saves the universe. Or again, his position is one of adoration, his submission to her two feet (cf. *śl.* 20, 21).⁵¹ The goddess is dark because she represents supreme night, and is seated on “non-existence,” upon the corpse of the ruined universe”,⁵² the universe which she has reabsorbed into herself and which comes from her supreme generative power, she who is the source of all deities and beings (*śl.* 12, 13). Many other aspects of her person can be traced back to the 6th century *Devī-Māhātmya*. The *dhyāna-mantra* is typical.

Śl. 9 is a transitional verse of some importance. Having presented the mantra of the goddess, the mantra which is her very being, the author senses the inadequacy of his presentation. He asks for forgiveness. *Śl.* 9 seems to indicate, as we have already noted, that the *stotra* springs from the mouth of the mere human who has composed it but who calls himself Mahākāla and identifies himself with Śiva.

7.2. The injunctions for worship (*pūjāvidhi*)

Śl. 10 and 11 form a contrasting pair. In *śl.* 10, the practitioner enjoys the young woman whilst meditating on Dakṣiṇākālīkā. In *śl.* 11, the roles are reversed: the goddess is contemplated as enjoying Mahākāla, that is the practitioner who identifies with Śiva. In *śl.* 10 he dominates; in *śl.* 11 he is subject. The enjoyer is enjoyed.

7.3. The nature of the goddess (*svarūpākhyam*)

The injunctions for worship are interrupted by *śl.* 12-14 which present the nature of the goddess (*svarūpākhyam*): she surpasses all the gods; she projects and reabsorbs all things. She is all.

7.4. The injunctions for worship (*pūjāvidhi*) continued

Śl. 15-16 form a pair concerned with offering semen whilst in the cremation ground. *Śl.* 15 speaks of the practitioner alone offering *arka* flowers with his semen. *Śl.* 16 speaks of offering a strand of pubic hair with the sexual emission resulting from the couple's union.

Śl. 17-18 also seem to form a pair, with an emphasis on sacred places. *Śl.* 17 refers to the “temple” and its “flowers”, with the focus on the man and the woman. *Śl.* 18 refers to the “fifteen-angled sacred site” with the focus on the goddess and Mahākāla.

Śl. 19-20 continue the theme of offering and also form a pair. In *śl.* 19 the flesh etc. of various animals is offered; in *śl.* 20 these are eaten.

There seems, therefore, to be a sequence of 4 pairs, moving from intercourse (*śl.* 10-11), to the offering of semen (*śl.* 15-16), to the worship of the sacred sites (*śl.* 17-18) and finally to the sacrificial food (*śl.* 19-20).

The final two *ślokas* form a pair of conclusions. *Śl.* 21 gives the structure of the *stotra*, as mentioned above, and *śl.* 22 lists the benefits. These are many, and would seem, at first, to be concerned with only two of the four «purposes of human existence» (*pūruṣārtha*): namely *kāma* and *artha* such as women, lordship, wealth, fame, elephants and most often the gift of speech, so that the themes of *dharma* and *mokṣa* would seem to be absent. However, this is

not the case. The climax of the whole *stotra* is in fact the final phrase: “the devotee is liberated while living, beyond birth”. All the *pūruṣārtha* are ultimately attained, united and coherent.

All this being said, is the *stotra* a manual? Not exactly. How could anyone recite the mantra 200,000 times in 24 hours, or offer a thousand *arka* flowers, or obtain the hair, bones and meat of humans? These would seem to be symbolic or intentional, not actual. We can suppose that practitioners have in the past performed the various rituals described in the *stotra*, such as having intercourse in the cremation ground, but the true nature of the *stotra* seems to be indicated by the injunction in *śl.* 21 «for him who reads (*paṭhati*) (the *stotra*)...».

The *stotra* would seem to be a work of imagination, a poem drawing on past observances and on standard images of the goddess but referring the reader to ever-present principles and essential realities. In the way that a devotee is inspired by the legends and depictions of the deities, the reader is transported by the text into the divine state.

Conclusion

What is the value of the *Karpūra-stotra*? Value is not necessarily found in adopting its practices. Rather, the *stotra* promotes the identity of sexuality and religion, the idea of sexual pleasure as an essential emotion of the divinity in a way that was unacceptable in Woodroffe’s day. Furthermore, it inculcates a frame of mind that transcends the dualist categories of licit and illicit, pleasure and horror. It proposes a non-dualism of opposites which allows the devotee to attain the state of ultimate bliss, the goal of being “liberated while living”.

Woodroffe and Vimalānanda are warranted in proposing an interpretation on the subtle and supreme levels, but they have suppressed the scandalous aspects.

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Notes

1. Avalon, Arthur, *Hymn To Kālī (Karpūrādi-Stotra)*, London: Luzac, 1922. [↵](#)
2. See for example David Kinsely, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, pp. 124-125. [↵](#)
3. “Person-to-Person: *vivarana* of Abhinavagupta on *Paratrimśika* verses 3-4” in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 44: 1-16, 2001. *Abhinavagupta: The Kula Ritual as elaborated in chapter 29 of the Tantraloka*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003. [↵](#)
4. John Woodroffe, *Hymns to the Goddess and Hymn to Kali*, Madras: Ganesh & Company, 2001, p. 235. The 2001 edition is a reprint of Avalon, Arthur, *Hymn To Kālī (Karpūrādi-Stotra)*, London: Luzac, 1922. [↵](#)
5. John Woodroffe, op. cit. p. 235. [↵](#)
6. John Woodroffe, op. cit. p. 235. [↵](#)
7. John Woodroffe, op. cit. p. 235. [↵](#)

8. Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, in *Hymn to Kali, Karpūrādi-stotra*, trans. and ed. Athur Avalon, Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1953, pp. 97-131. This edition includes two further, anonymous, commentaries, the *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, pp. 132-147, and the *Karpūrādistotraṭikā*, pp. 132-147, which are intertwined on the same pages. [↵](#)
9. John Woodroffe, op.cit. pp. 239-241. [↵](#)
10. Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit., pp. 97-131. *Karpūra-stotram*, in *Kālī-rahasyam*, ed. Aśoka Kumara Gauḍa, Vārāṇasī: Chaukhamba, 1999, pp. 253-257. *Karpūrastotra*, in *Śāktapramoda*, Mumbai: Khemarāja Śrīkriṣṇadāsa, 2009, pp. 77-79. [↵](#)
11. Vimalānanda, Introduction, in John Woodroffe (ed. and tr.), *Hymns to the Goddess and Hymn to Kali*, Madras: Ganesh & Company, 2001, pp. 251-278. [↵](#)
12. Vimalānanda, Introduction, cit., p. 273. [↵](#)
13. *Śāktapramoda*, Mumbai: Khemarāja Śrīkriṣṇadāsa, 2009, pp. 1-4. [↵](#)
14. Vimalānanda, Introduction, cit., p. 258. [↵](#)
15. Vimalānanda, Introduction, cit., p. 274. [↵](#)
16. Vimalānanda, Introduction, cit., p. 275. [↵](#)
17. Vimalānanda, Introduction, cit., p. 277. [↵](#)
18. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal eds., *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 4. [↵](#)
19. Cynthia Ann Humes, «Wresting with Kālī. South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess», in Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, op. cit, p. 161. [↵](#)
20. Usha Menon and Richard Shweder, «Dominating Kālī. Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power», in Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, op. cit., p. 82. [↵](#)
21. Rachel Fell McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 92. [↵](#)
22. Patrica Dold, «Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests; the Śākta Devotionalism of the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*», in Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, op. cit., p. 41. [↵](#)
23. Patrica Dold, op. cit. p. 55. [↵](#)
24. Rachel Fell McDermott, op. cit., p. 19. The Sanskrit text is available on the internet site: http://muktalib5.org/DL_CATALOG/TEXTS/ETEXTS/purascaryaarnava-3-HK.txt (accessed 5 June 2011) Rachel Fell McDermott, op. cit., p. 154, fn. 23. [↵](#)
25. Patrica Dold, op. cit. p. 54. [↵](#)
26. Rachel Fell McDermott, op. cit., p. 19. [↵](#)
27. Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India. A socio-cultural study*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, p. 116. [↵](#)
28. Thomas Donaldson, «The Śava-Vāhana as Puruṣa in Orissan Images: Cāmuṇḍā to Kālī/Tārā», in *Artibus Asiae*, 51, no. 1/2 (1991), 107. [↵](#)
29. Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit., p. 131. [↵](#)
30. «The scope (*vinīyogaḥ*) of the royal *Śrīkarpūra-stava* is as follows: the *ṛṣi* Mahākāla; the *gayatrī* metre; the illustrious deity Dakṣiṇākālikā; the consonants as seed mantras; the vowels as *śakti*; the hidden inner syllables of the mantra (*kīlakam*); the favour of the illustrious goddess Dakṣiṇākālikā or the complete acquisition of various desires.» «*asya śrī-karpūra-stava-rājasya mahākāla ṛṣi, gayatrī chandaḥ, śrī-dakṣiṇā-kālikā-devatā, halo bījāni, svarāḥ śaktayah, avyaktam kīlakam, śrī-dakṣiṇā-kālikā – (sic) devyā-prasāda-siddhy-arthaṁ tatta-sampūrṇa-kāmanā-siddhye vā vinīyogaḥ*», *Karpūra-stotram*, in *Kālī-rahasyam*, op. cit., p. 253. [↵](#)
31. Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1978, 113, p. quoted in Donaldson, op. cit. p. 131. [↵](#)

32. For *eta* read *etat* as in version published by The Sanskrit Press Depository (1899) and in *Karpūrastotram*, in *Śāktapramoda*, op. cit., p. 77. [↵](#)
33. For *sr̥kka* read *sr̥ka*. [↵](#)
34. Vimalānanda interprets two *ṭha* as *SVĀHĀ*. Vimalānanda. *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit., p. 107. A dictionary meaning of *ṭha* is «a loud sound». Cf. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit–English Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, p. 430. The Böhtlingk Roth Sanskrit Dictionary gives the same meaning. [↵](#)
35. Vimalānanda interprets *sakalam* to mean a mantra of 22 syllables. Vimalānanda. *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit., p. 109. [↵](#)
36. Donaldson suggests that here the goddess is described as seated on two corpses, upper and lower. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, op. cit., p. 134. This may also be the case in *śl.* 18. [↵](#)
37. For *vadhū* read *vadhu* as in the *Karpūra-stotram*, in *Kālī-rahasyam*, op. cit. p. 255. [↵](#)
38. *Calotropis Gigantea* or “crown flower” in English. [↵](#)
39. John Woodroffe, op. cit., p. 321 note 3 interprets «middle of the day» as «midnight». Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit. p. 122 interprets it as either at midday or midnight. *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, op. cit., p. 141, interprets it as code for night, the time for the «dark practice» (*nīlasādhana*). [↵](#)
40. There are various interpretations. John Woodroffe, op.cit., p. 320, for his part translates this as the «hair of his S’akti». The *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, op. cit., p. 141 interprets it as the pubic hair of either the man or the woman. Desai interprets it as referring to the *sādhaka*’s own pubic hair, not his Śakti’s. Devangana Desai, op. cit. p.141. [↵](#)
41. The *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, op. cit., p. 141 interprets «semen» as the sexual fluid of the man and of the woman. [↵](#)
42. Vimalānanda interprets this as *liṅgam*. Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit., p. 122. The *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, op. cit., p. 141 gives the same interpretation. [↵](#)
43. The “*Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*,” op. cit., p. 141 interprets this as the *yoni*. [↵](#)
44. The *Karpūrādistavarājavyākhyā rahasyārthādhikā*, op. cit., p. 141 interprets this as the penis (*kaṃdarpa*) (*sic*). [↵](#)
45. Vimalānanda interprets this as the *yoni*. Vimalānanda, *Vimalānandadāyini*, cit. p. 123. [↵](#)
46. See note 38 above. [↵](#)
47. The *Śāktapramoda* gives an illustration of the Kālī *yantra* as five concentric triangles, which represent the 5 organs of sense; the 5 organs of action; and the 5 *tanmatras*. *Śāktapramoda*, op. cit., p. 4. [↵](#)
48. Literally “antelope-eyed”. [↵](#)
49. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, op. cit. p. 134. [↵](#)
50. Frédérique Apffel Marglin, «Types of Sexual Union and Their Implicit Meanings», in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (eds.), Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, p. 313. [↵](#)
51. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, op. cit. p. 135. [↵](#)
52. Thomas Eugene Donaldson, op. cit., p. 131. [↵](#)

