

The Art of *Amour-cortois*: *Eros, Jois* and *Mahāsukha* in Tantra and the Troubadours

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The troubadour concept of *amour-cortois* has been an unending source of inspiration to the entire gamut of European poetry, and none can set aside the decided influence it exerted on a galaxy of poets—the French Trouvers, the German Minnesingers, the Italian poets of the sweet ‘New Style’ (*dolce still nuove*) and finally the English poets like Chaucer, Gower, Spenser, Shakespear, the Metaphysicals, John Keats, Robert Browning, the Rossettis and the famous modern-poet-critic Ezra Pound. While highlighting the psychological and esoteric implications of the troubadour poetry, Pound also made a perceptive enumeration of the modernist relevance of the provencal poetic tradition. Pound’s appreciation of Medievalism and the troubadour tradition goes as follows:

Any study of European poetry is unsound if it does not commence with a study of that art in provence.... It is true that each century after the Renaissance has tried in its own way to come nearer the classic, but if we are to understand that part of civilization which is the art of verse, we must begin at the root, and that root is medieval (Pound, 1954:101-102).

Having said this, Pound was perhaps the first American critic to emphasize the wonderful word-music as well as the troubadourian ‘trobar clus’ style and code language which the prominent provencal poets like Arnaut Daniel, Guillamu IX of Aquitaine, Vidal, Jaufre Rudel and Marcabru had introduced. At the same time, Pound’s observation that the troubadour lyrics are perhaps a little oriental in feeling, and (that) it is likely that the spirit of Sufism is not wholly absent from their content¹ has prompted many scholars to search for oriental connection with Troubadour poetry and erotic-mysticism. These scholars, of whom mention may be made of Denis de Rougemont and O.V. Garrison, assertively maintain that the troubadour esoteric-erotic rituals of romance entailing an elaborate paraphernalia of courtship ‘were unquestionably tantric in origin.’² Pound and Pe’lladan locate a cult of worship of the ‘universe of fluid force’ that operates through the divine female energy epitomized by the courtely *domna*. It is here that the troubadour erotic-mysticism comes closer to the worship of divine energy (*Śakti*) in

Indian Tantricism and Sahajiyā Philosophy in which the Primordial Energy (*Mahāśakti*) is acclaimed as all-powerful and pervasive. The Tantric Śādhakas and Sahajiyās visualize the whole universe in form of what Pound calls ‘the universe of fluid force.’

Against the aforesaid background, the present paper is designed to search for oriental connection behind the troubadour erotic-esoteric tradition by way of juxtaposing the troubadoursian concepts of eros-amor-jois with kāma-prema-mahāsukha of the Tantric-Sahajiyā tradition on the basis of the philosophical explanation of Troubadoursian dualism and Indian philosophical progression from dualism to monism.

I

The troubadours were a group of provençal as well as Italian court poets of the high Middle Ages (11th-13th c. A.D) who, under the patronage of several courts of Southern France and Italy,³ composed love-lyrics (*canso*) songs of seduction (*pastorela*), debate on the code of love (*tenso*), love song of the dawn (*alba*) and political satire (*sirventes*). But, they were primarily poets of love, and the special theme of their love-lyrics is refinement and idealization of sensual love variously known as ‘fin’amor’, ‘cortz-amor’ and ‘amour-courtois—a term that was coined and rather loosely translated as ‘courtly love’—by Gaston Paris in 1883.⁴ And since then prominent critics of troubadour poetry like A.J.Denomy, C.S. Lewis, L.T. Topsfield, R.S.Briffault, R. Boase, H.J.Chaytor and Peter Makin have unanimously acknowledged the significance of the term and thus courtly love has been accepted as idealization of passion in terms of ‘refined sensuality’ and deification of the cruel and capricious beloved-mistress (*domna/donna*) by the suppliant courtly lover.

Though scholars have laboriously gone for different sources regarding the origin of courtly love, its immediate and reliable root is located in the aristocratic/feudalistic and chivalric ethos of the high Middle Ages that inevitably reminds one of the medieval knight-hood, feudal social structure and castle civilisation. Feudalism as such entails a hierarchical pattern in which the king is placed at the top of the order, whereas the dignified knights are placed next to him. The warrior knights are allowed the third place, whereas the common men occupy the lowest rung of the ladder. Feudalism facilitated the creation of a professional military class consisting of warrior knights who not only came to the rescue of the medieval castle and the common men from frequent foreign invasion, but also served the king (Lord) with fidelity, humility and sacrifice as his ‘vassal’. The lord-vassal relationship in feudalism facilitated the romance between the loyal knight and the lady of the castle and Tristan, Lancelot, Sir Gawaine and Perceval epitomize knighthood in perfection by virtue of their humility, courtesy (*cortezia*), nobility and service to win the heart of the lady of the castle.⁵ In this connection, Maurice Valency observes:

Service was the keynote of the knightly order. The knight was dedicated to the service of his lord, his country, his king, his faith, his church and in time, his lady, he was not especially encouraged to serve himself... he was, ideally self-dedicated to a life of glorious poverty; and this ideal the courtly literature everywhere advanced. (Valency, 1958: 43)

Courtship is, as it were, the birth right of the knight and for that matter, of the courtly lover. The knight Perceval is advised by his mother not to abandon courtship:

If thou see a fair woman, pay thy court to her, whether she will or not;
for thus thou wilt make thyself a better and more esteemed man.
(Briffault, 1959: 413)

The medieval castle culture was at once conducive to the rise of courtship and furtive adulterous passion. In this connection, the condition of medieval women and the concept of marriage in the feudal society were highly influential in fomenting passion and emotional attachment outside the periphery of marriage. The aristocratic milieu to which courtly love owes a lot hardly entertained marriage as a sacred institution, and medieval marriage was, more often than not, conditioned by utility in so far as all matches for marriage were settled on the basis of material gain. The feudal society treated wife in terms of a purchasable commodity and obviously she was no better than a piece of property to her husband. The nobles married not out of affection and attachment, but because of greedy inclination towards property and aristocratic inheritance they would secure by marrying the daughters of higher nobles. A ready means for the feudal male is then, observes H.O. Taylor, “to marry lands and serfs in the robust person of a daughter or a widow.”⁶ At home, the feudal male dominated his wife and other members of the family. Frequent changes and dissolution of marriage were common place in medieval society, and in addition to that, the feudal male and warrior-nobles constantly remained away from home for war, and in their absence, their wives led a life of boredom and some of them mourned their slain husbands. Despite all stress and strain, if the wives opposed their husbands, they were freely beaten and treated with callous brutality. Against such a drab background of medieval marital life, courtship and extra martial passion gained a favourable ground, and the young knights who were entrusted with the responsibility of the castle tended to serve the castle lady by applying the art of *amour-cortois* that involved four basic principles: humility and courtesy (*cortezia*), adultery, love as longing and the religion of love.⁷ Since idealization of passion is not possible within the purview marriage which symbolizes possession of wife/women, the troubadours, following the foot steps of the courteous knights, adulterated adultery which presupposes insatiable passion, at least in theory, without the possession of the beloved. For the troubadours and the medieval knights, the courtly *domna* or the lady of the castle is feudally superior and is obviously idealised as ‘my lord’ (*maidon*) and as beloved-goddess worthy of veneration and praise. Without her mercy and spiritual illumination, the courtly lover considers himself wretched. In the ordinary sense, she is another man’s wife; but in spiritual sense, the *domna* is the lover’s mentor, preceptor, beloved-saint, secret hymn and the supreme goddess (*Mahādevī*), who secures salvation for him on the alter of sense. Adultery is thus edifying when it is viewed from the stand point of spirituality. C.S. Lewis aptly observes:

Any idealization of sexual love in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian must begin by being an idealization of adultery. (Lewis, 1961: 13)

Courtly love is anti-Christian in that it flatly opposes the view of the church and the theologians of the Middle Ages who treated adultery as wicked and sensual passion, the most notorious element in human nature. The troubadourian viewpoint is that if true love is love in separation and suffering rather than union and carnal pleasure, its logical extension is love beyond marriage married love demands complete possession of the lady which defeats the very purpose of courtly love—idealization of passion. The troubadours therefore addressed wives of others and in this respect the adulterous love of Tristan and Iseult, of Lancelot and Guinevere provided an ideal for troubadour lyric poetry. Andrea Capellanus in his book *The Art of Courtly Love (De arte honeste amandi)* observes that ‘marriage is no real excuse for not loving’ (Andrea. p.184). In much the same way, the medieval ‘courts of love’ which resolved various disputes on love pronounced the similar verdict. The judgement of Marie, the Countess of Champagne runs thus:

We consider that marital affection and the true love of lovers are wholly different and arise from entirely different sources. (Capellanus, 1959: 171)

Extramarital passion logically leads to another important aspect of courtly love, i.e., love as longing and suffering in separation. Suffering and longing in separation are the hallmarks of courtly love, and the troubadour lover suffers and swoons, passes sleepless nights and gets emaciated and even dies on the ground that death is dignified in love. The infinite suffering of Tristan for Iseult reveals the most fundamental point that courtly love has a sad tale to tell and that passion is by nature fatal. Denis de Rougement in his book *Passion and Society* emphasizes this point:

Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself. What stirs lyrical poets to their finest flights is neither the delight of the senses nor the fruitful contentment of the settled couple; not the satisfaction of love, but its passion. And passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental fact. (Rougement, 1956: 33)

If passion means longing and suffering then courtly love professes passion as ‘Eros’, and ‘Eros’ with its origin pagan antiquity, is defined as ardent longing, burning in the fire of passion that causes tension and affliction leading to the point of madness. In Greek poetry and drama, Eros is an external as well as internal tyrant, and paradoxically embodies both life and death. Eros is ardent desire for union, an intensifying drive for self-knowledge, the binding element par excellence, the bridge between being and becoming. Eros drives one to create and expand where as sex is the handiest drug to blot out burning passion. Eros is desire, an end in itself; but sex is a need because it is prompted by a desire for possession and pleasurable relief. Sex is sleep, but Eros is constant awakening, remembering, savoring and discovering ever-new facets of life.⁸ Plato’s presentation of Eros as a wandering hunter always weaving schemes of chasing the beautiful and the good, and the very fact of his birth to Penia (Poverty) and Poros (Resourcefulness) in the garden of Zeus justifies that Eros epitomizes longing for what is absent and that it represents an insatiable hunger for knowledge, an external quest

for truth.⁹ The Hesiodic conception of Eros as a creative, cosmogonic and binding principle (*Theogony*, 116) combined with the platonic view point of Eros as the principle of unity in the midst of duality and multiplicities culminated in the Neoplatonic conception of Eros as sickening and drunken frenzy of the ecstatic soul experiencing mystical ascension and vision of the Supreme.¹⁰ And following the Neoplatonic urge for ascension from the lower rungs to the higher ones in a state of constant upward progression, Eros was envisaged in the Middle Ages in terms of a ‘ladder’, a ‘chain’ an ‘arrow’ and after constant conflict, and ascillation between Christian Agape (descent) and Neoplatonic Eros (ascent), Origin (*Contra Celsum*, vi. 38), with his gnostic outlook, metamorphosed the Christian conception of ‘Agape as disinterested sacrifice into Agape as ‘Dive Eros’. He viewed, like Proclus’ ‘Chain of Eros’, God not as the object of Eros as in Plato, but as Eros himself. The chain of Eros brings God down. It is therefore imperative that by virtue of the illumination received from Divine Eros, the soul should strive for an ecstatic union with the Divine with the help of the wings of Eros. The ‘way up’ and the ‘way down’ are thus two sides of the same truth, i.e., Divine Eros.¹¹ While ingenuously utilizing the Neo-platonic pattern of mystical ladder of Eros, Gregory of Nyssa, like Origin, developed the gnostic theory of Eros and emphasized the mystical ascent of the soul in terms of sickening, passionate yearning and drunken frenzy and ecstatic vision of God. Gregory subscribes to the theory of Gnosticism that soul’s kinship with God is based on the principle of ‘original likeness’ which, however, does not mean that God and the soul are identical. Instead, it means that the soul has a flickering flash of the Divine within it and hence it constantly desires for going back to him. Gregory’s interpretation of the Biblical *Song of Songs* through the symbols of Eros such as ‘fire’, ‘flame’, ‘love’s arrow’, ‘chain of love’ and ‘sickening bride’ establishes the affinity between Neo-platonism and Gnosticism. With its root in ‘gnosis’ which means unraveling of a hideous mystery. Gnosticism as such aims at the freedom of soul from the fetters of body and the material world towards its heavenly abode through several disciplined stages of purification. Though Gnosticism, like Christianity believes in a Saviour, who descends to quicken the process of delivery of soul from the matter, both the religions differ sharply from each other in that the Saviour in the latter does not remain an abstract, in accessible and disinterested force to illumine the soul from far off place for its quick return to the Divine. Unlike the one in Christianity, the Saviour in Gnosticism simply ‘awakens’ rather than ‘saves’. The troubadours imbibed the Neoplatonic theory of Eros and the Gnostic theory of salvation by frequently referring to a ‘distant love’ at once inaccessible and abstract. Moreover, the Saviour is a ‘Female Principle (*domna*)’ which has nothing to do with either the God-father or the God-son. Courtly love is therefore heretical rather than Christian. F. Golding however claims that the Saviour or ‘distant love’ in Troubadour poetry is none but an ‘allegory for the Virgin Mary or the Holy Land.’¹² At a time when minne-poetry and bride mysticism were developed to conceive ‘love-divine’ in ‘human’ terms, and soul (bride)’s fellowship with God/Christ (bridegroom) was envisaged in terms of love and marriage within the bounds of the doctrine of *Caritas*, the troubadours professed love as Eros and brought down the sacred to the level of the ‘Profane’ on the ground that profane in its pure form is sacred indeed! With the secularization of divine love by minne-mystics, another startling development took place in the later Middle Ages in form of a markedly changed view of

women. There was a significant shift from the defiled Eve to the gracious mother epitomized by Virgin Mary, the treasure-house of mercy and affection and the reliable intermediary between the cursed men and the righteous God. In this connection, St. Bernard observes:

If you fear the father, there is Christ, the mediator. If you fear him, there is Mother, pure humanity. She will listen to thee. The son will listen to her, the Father to him. (Quoted in Green, 1971: 113)

Though F. Golding's viewpoint is vindicated here, we have reasons to contend that behind the rituals of romance in *amour-cortois*, there are influences other than the Christian concept of Mother-worship. It is needless to say that love in courtly love is directed to a lady of flesh and blood, not to Virgin Mary. Again, courtly love is based on refined sensuality in the level of the profane which the Christian concept of *caritas* (divine love) does not subscribe to. Christian love, stands for disinterested self-sacrifice, whereas self-sacrifice in courtly love is a means to the lover's self-glorification—acquiring merit, virtue, nobility and goodness—and hence courtly love is acquisitive. Eros Christian love is *theocentric*, but courtly love is *ego-centric*. A. J. Denomy rightly observes:

Courtly love is essentially a love of concupiscence, mystical love essentially a love of benevolence. (Denomy, 1951: 192)

Antony Easthope categorically supports the anti-Christian nature of *amour-cortois*:

Whatever the source and quality of its aim, the object of courtly love is not God but a woman. (Easthope, 1989: 67)

The above arguments in support of the veneration of woman (*domna*) as the alpha and omega in troubadour mysticism prompts us to search for an oriental connection, particularly in with the erotic-esoteric rituals practised by the tantric Sahajiyās who considered 'body' as the basis of spontaneous love (*sahaja prema*) reminding us thereby of the dialectical position in John Donne's poetry: "Body is the book in which the pages of soul are written."

II

As in the West, medieval Indian religion and philosophy experienced conflicts and interaction/assimilation of different thoughts and esoteric practices of which Śaktism Hindu and Buddhist Tantricism, Chaitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā cult stand prominent. Long before the emergence of the *bhakti*-movement in the Middle Ages, Indian mind had been dominantly pre-occupied with the thoughts of Śaktism, Śaivism and Tantricism and S.B. Dasgupta goes to the extreme extent of saying that "India is a land of Śakti vāda.¹³ Precisely because of the deep-rooted influence Śaktism and Tantricism have exerted on the Indian mind from the very beginning by adulating the Primordial Goddess (Mahā Śakti) as the regulator of this universe. Śaktism as such points to a cult of worship of the Mother Goddess as Śakti which means 'to be able' to act as well as activate/energize the whole cosmos. Śakti, because of its productive capacity is symbolically female, the Supreme Power (Parā-Śakti) of the Supreme-self

and (Parā-Brahman). Like Virgin Mary, She is a kind Mother, but unlike the former, She is the creatrix of the universe, the active aspect of the immanent God who creates the universe in association with Śiva, the Supreme Lord of the Śākta philosophy. She also manifests herself in the three *guṇas* (prime attributes), i.e., pure (*sattva*), action (*raja*) and delusion (*tama*) thereby determining the course of creation, preservation and destruction. As Universal Mother (Jagadambā), She is the embodiment of wisdom, peace and immortal bliss, whereas air, earth, water, fire and ether are all manifestation of her gross form (*aparā-śakti*). On the other hand, life element is her *parā-śakti* (Supreme Power) and mind, a modification of consciousness (*cit-śakti*)—the reason why She is called Blissful Consciousness (*Citdrupīṇī*). As the original and innate power (Svarupā Śakti) of the Absolute, She is the supporter of the universe, whereas She delights the Lord as the sportive power (*līlā-śakti*) and as Supreme Power (*parā-śakti*), She is the soothing mother of the ailing humanity because She protects, consoles, cheers, nurses and blesses her devoted sons and daughters of the world. Such a concept of benign Mother as developed in *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* and other Śākta texts¹⁴ with many-sided glory is really rare in the West. It is in India that Śakti is considered to be the centre of the life of the universe because She vitalizes it through her energy. Swami Sivananda writes:

She is the energy in the Sun, the fragrance in the flowers, the beauty in the landscape, the Gāyatri or the Blessed Mother in the Vedas, colour in the rainbow, intelligence in the mind, potency in the homeopathic pills, power in Makaradhvaja and gold oxide, will and *vicāra śakti* in sages, devotion in bhaktas, Samyāra and Samādhi in Yogins. (Sivananda, 1986: 69).

Sivananda's observation shows that Śākta philosophy is essentially Vedantic and that Śakti and Śiva are basically one and inseparable just as fire and heat go together. Śākta philosophy is pre-occupied with the metaphysical position of Non-dualism (*advaitavāda*) that reality is one, i.e., *sat* (Existence), *cit* (Consciousness) and *ānanda* (Bliss)—the nature of Pure Consciousness which manifests the universe through illusion (*māyā*) and the owner of *māyā* is called the *Great Lord* (Maheśvara). It is in association with the *Māyā-śakti* that the Absolute becomes the Lord of attributes (Saguṇa-Brahman), and again, it is Śakti that makes Him determinate (*vyakta*) and manifests from the state of unmanifested (*avyakta*) by endowing all attributes to Him. It is by virtue of Śakti that the one becomes multitudes and again, it is the same Śakti that takes all multitudes back, at the state of utter annihilation, for final dissolution into one justifying the non-dualistic stance of Śaktism.

Tantricism which is an extension of Śaktism attests (to) the non-dualistic philosophy of Upaniṣads and the mystic worship of Śakti as female energy on the basis that the Universal Mother is the reservoir of boundless grace, illimitable mercy and infinite knowledge. She bestows not only material prosperity, but also devotion (*bhakti*) and liberation (*mukti*). Knowing all these things fairly well, the Tantric Sādhaka feels at

ease with the Divine Mother, and prostrates before her with frankness and humility. He sings her praise, worships her with wise faith and devotion, and finally makes a total surrender to her. The tantric view of life is that sorrow and bondage in life are caused by bi-polar existence and as such the aim of tantric sādhanā is to heal the duality for realizing the fact that one is all and all is one. But unlike Śaṅkara, the exponent of pure monism (*keval-advaita*) who holds God as the only truth and the world of phenomena as illusionary, Tantra envisages both the worlds as real. For a Tantrika, the world is real and body is the altar of all sādhanā. Body is the microcosm of the universe, the abode of Śiva and Śakti, the former is located as the principle of Pure Consciousness in the highest circle of thousand petals (Sahasrāra) in the region of cerebrum, and the latter (Śakti) remains in the form of a serpentine power at the mulādhāra circle located above the anus. Śiva and Śakti, the cosmic male and female, are also envisaged in microcosmic level as human male and human female. Therefore, the profane represents the sacred. The idea is also applicable to human love which served as a simile for the Divine. In other words, human love is like the Divine—the paradigm of the love between Śiva and Śakti. Body which is condemned by the rationalists as the seat of all sufferings and all defilement is glorified in Tantra as the seat of all sādhanā, and therefore the sādhanā resorts to a coterie of mystic formulae rites and rituals to protect the glory and sanctity of body, and to identify the various centres in his body through which he can attain the ultimate state of non-duality. O.V. Garrison aptly observes that “he who realises the truth of the body can then come to know the truth of the universe.”¹⁵ Tantra emphasizes the complete identity of Nirvāṇa (salvation) and saṃsāra (world) of the Absolute and the phenomenal modes of existence. *The Hevajra Tantra* while bringing a homology between sacred and profane maintains that “there is no nirvāṇa other than saṃsāra.”¹⁶ Mircea Eliade puts in the same spirit the objective of Tantra:

The tantrika does not renounce the world, as the sage of the Upaniṣad, the yogi or the Buddha does; instead, he tries to overcome it while enjoying perfect freedom. (Eliade, 1974: 144)

The Tantra philosophy further enjoins that there is no higher heaven than the pure senses and that the way of passionate attachment (*pravṛtti mārga*) with emphasis on emotion (*bhāva*), affectionate attachment (*anurāga*) and love (*kāma*) is the surest key to salvation. Sense is divine, and since body is the microcosm of the universe, enjoyment (*bhoga*) is the befitting means to mystical union (*yoga*). The tantric way consists not in the mortification of flesh nor in its unnatural suppression but in rapturous, free and full enjoyment. However, it is important to note that the ultimate goal is not to get lost in sensual pleasure and that the Sādhanā should use ‘profane’ as the means to attain the ‘sacred.’ And while so doing, he wins passion through fulfillment. The *sense* is overcome through the *senses*. Knowing it pretty well that passion can *kill* as well as *heal*, the Sādhanā is expected to play with the fire of passion without being burnt. He has the risk of fighting the snake (*kāma*) without being bitten by it. The perfect union between Śiva and Śakti, otherwise called non-duality (*yuganaddha*) is also realized in the level of the profane in which every male and female in the mundane world represent Śiva and Śakti. Whereas the Tantric Sādhanā visualizes himself as Śiva (*Śivoham*), his female partner (Sādhikā) is conceived of as Śakti. *The Śaktisaṅgama Tantra*¹⁷ eulogizes

woman as the creator of the universe and as the embodiment of God’s inexhaustible creative force, whereas *The Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* envisages woman as the epitome of the Cosmic Energy or the ‘Universal fluid force’ in the profane form. Therefore it is imperative on the part of the Sādhanā to go for a ritualistic union with his female partner to relish the state of non-duality. The sādhanā becomes futile if it is degenerated into bestiality. Charlott Vaudeville observes:

The female partner, therefore, ought to be considered under a purely sexual angle as a manifestation of Divine Energy or Female Principle, rather than as a woman love in the full human sense, being not permissible to a Yogi... The love symbolism of the Tantric schools tends to isolate the sexual act from its human context and ignore the personal aspect of love-relationship. (Vaudeville, 1962: 32)

In the Hindu Tantra, the erotic-esoteric ritual is carried on through two modes of worship, i.e., the right-handed form of worship (*dakṣiṇācāra*) and its left-hand counterpart (*vāmācāra*). Whereas in the *former* the five necessary ingredients (*pañcamakara*)—wine, fish, meat, parched grain and copulation—are replaced by substitutes like coconut water, vegetables and cereals, in case of the latter, the ingredients are physically used. Sexual contact (*maithuna*) in right-hand worship is sanctioned either with the aspirant’s own wife or attained through the yogic union of serpentine power (*kuṇḍalīni śakti*) with Śiva in the Sādhanā’s own body. But, in left-hand worship, an elaborate mystic-erotic ritual is observed. As in troubadour esoteric practice, the left-handed worshipper prefers an extramarital partner (*parakiyā*), because ritualistic copulation with his wife is considered detrimental to perfection (*śiddhi*). To him, as it is for the troubadour lover and the medieval knight, marriage asks for legitimate indulgence/possession rather than self-control/continence. Like the courtly lover who admires the physical beauty and youth of the *domna* with perennial freshers and aesthetic alacrity, the Sādhanā, according to the *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra*¹⁸ should select a tender, passionate, truly lovable and beautiful lady. Intoxicated with passion, she should be moved by desire (*kāma*) and should be qualified only for ‘true love’. One can comfortably correlate here the tantric outlook and choice with that of the troubadours who professed passion as ‘Eros’—an ardent desire—and who distinguished pure love (*amor-purus*) from ‘mixed love’. Andrea enjoins that desire for gross sensual satisfaction degenerates the Sādhanā into a beast worthy of hell:

Blindness is a bar to love... there are men who are slaves to such passionate desire... when they see another woman straight way desire her embraces, and they forget about the services they have received from their first love... Men of this kind lust after every woman they see; their love is like that of a shameless dog. They should rather, I believe, be compared to asses. (Capellanus, 1959: 33)

While singing the glory of ‘true love’, the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn declares that love is the source of all virtue, and that life without love is no better than death. In Bernart’s scheme of life, love is considered an absolute necessity in so far as

it makes man excellent and worthy of living a noble life. In much the same way, to the troubadour Marcabru, love is the source of all delight and excellence. It is characterized by truth (*verai*), purity (*fina*), goodness (*bona*), nobility, humility and courtesy (*cortezia*). While echoing Andrea's philosophy of love, Marcabru launches a series of diatribes against 'mixed love' and false lovers who enhance crime and defame pure love:

Ah! Noble love; fount of all goodness, who have illumined all the world. (Press, 1985: 53)

Time and again, the troubadours sing the ennobling power of passion as the fountain source of all virtues and goodness. A.J. Denomy observes:

The very essence of courtly love is its ennobling force, the elevation of the lover affected by a ceaseless desire. (Denomy, 1947: 23)

Back to the tantric erotic ritual again after the selection of the female-initiate, the Sādhaka purifies the seat for her and then the vijayā bowl of hemp which is offered as libation to the Primordial Śakti, and then the Sādhaka drinks the potion and goes for invoking some auxiliary goddesses (*mātrkā*) and his own chosen deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) with flowers, incense-sticks and chanting of the secret root syllable (*bijamantra*). The subsequent steps of ritualistic worship that follow include occupying the circle (*cakrāsana*) purification of essence (*tattva-śūddhi*), purification of the visible (*sthula*) and the subtle (*paradeha*) body, taking ritual food and finally repairing to a couch for union (*maithuna*). The couch is sacralised and is metamorphosed into a seat of perfection. The female partner is then consecrated with sacred path (*mahātirtha*), the Sādhaka puts fragrant oil to her hair, combs her allows her to anoint herself, dresses her in red robes. He purifies her by sprinkling holy water on her head and observes the ritualistic touch of her six limbs—forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, arms and thighs. In the long last, the female partner disrobes herself and the Sādhaka stands stupefied so as to contemplate the immortal beauty of the Divine Mother in her nude physical form at midnight in the deep violet hue of the dim lamp light. While worshipping the delicate parts of her body, the initiate mutters all through the 'Klim' root which justifies the importance of *Kāma*, the god of love in Indian mythology religion. Whereas the Hindu tantra sanctions ejaculation as oblation into fire, in Buddhist Tantra, coitus stabilizes the 'three jewels' (*triratna*)—breath, thought and semen. A. Bharati rightly observes that the Buddhist tantrika's concern is 'purely esoteric, his method is experimental.' (Bharati, 1965: 23)

However, despite certain differences, the ultimate concern in both Buddhist and Hindu Tantra is realization of Śivahood/Bodhisatva *signifying* truth or knowledge and *Mahāsukha*—Great Bliss—which is described as the abode of indescribable joy as well as liberation. S.B. Dasgupta describes it as incessant bliss (*satata-sukhamaya*):

It is the seed of all substance; it is the ultimate stage of those who have attained perfection, it is highest place of the Buddhas and is

called *Sukhavati*—the abode of bliss. (Dasgupta, 1974: 135)

One who attains 'Great Bliss' becomes the potential Buddha, the perfectly enlightened one, whose sole aim is not to seek liberation from the cycle of birth and death, but to dedicate his life for burning the lamp of knowledge for the fallen and sorrow-stricken mankind. With full control over his senses, the enlightened initiate practices the best virtues (*pāramitas*) and attains an enlightened mind (*bodhi-citta*) which is characterized by deep sympathy and universal compassion (*mahā-karuṇa*). Here, one can make a startling correlation of the tantric realization of *mahāsukha* with the troubadourian concept of *jois* which is born out of the erotic-esoteric endeavour called 'coitu inllumination'—sexual union that leads to spiritual illumination, nobility, generosity, spirit of self-sacrifice, truth (*verai*), purity (*fina*) and goodness (*bona*). Since coitus (*maithuna*) is denied in courtly love, it is the pure love and incessant desire coupled with an elaborate paraphernalia of worship and service (reminiscent of the service to the navanāyikā in tantric tradition) that allows the troubadour lover-sādhaka to land in the abode of *mahāsukha* (*jois*). Whereas 'bliss' in tantric tradition is a concrete experience yet indescribable and ineffable, *jois* in troubadour esotericism is at once imaginative, psychological, visually satisfying and spiritually felt. The troubadour cercamon tends to relish 'pure joy' by contemplating the *domna's* physical beauty which is characterized by nobility, divinity and moral goodness. Again, it is the lover's contemplation of her fine physical form at the very first sight that foments passion in the troubadour Sordello. The more he thinks of her beauty, the greater is the intensity of passion and *jois* in him. Her beauty seduces him. Her enticing eyes, serene brows, sweet glances, blond hair, rosy lips, ivory teeth, fair complexion (whiter than ivory) have maddened the courtly lover in the lyrics of Bernart, Guillaume IX of Aquitaine, Jaufre Rudel and Cercamon. Thus sings Sordello:

Gently she knew how to steal my pure heart from me, when first I beheld her, with a sweet loving glances which her thieving eyes cast on me. With that glance, on that day, love entered through the eyes into my heart, and in such guise that it drew my heart from me and placed at her command, so that it is with her wherever I go or dwell. (Press, 1985: 243)

In courtly love, purity consists in the union of true mind and heart, and in the absence of physical union (at least in theory) what counts much is constant longing, sickening and suffering inseparation often tending towards emotional madness and idealised frustration. Passion kills passion; the fire of passion annihilates, through suffering and constant service, the baser elements in it and the courtly lover finally comes out a pure piece of gold after a protracted burning in the purgatory of passion. Andrea observes:

(Passion) arises out of the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embrace of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace. (Capellanus, 1959: 28)

what is permissible is 'embrace' and 'service' the feudally superior beloved-goddess rather than union. The lover's sickness can be cured by the beloved physician, if she

pleases, with a remedy in form of a ‘sweet kiss’ physical joy is permissible to that extent only. It is an aesthetic experience associated with ‘feeling’, ‘emotion’ or ‘passion’ arising from the possession or the expectation of the gift of love. To Bernart, it is an overwhelming ecstasy that can be felt rather than expressed: “With the joy that I feel, I neither see nor hear nor know what I am told nor what is done to me.”¹⁹ One can search for an apt parallel to Bernart’s *joï* in the overwhelming state of devotional feeling (*bhakti*) in medieval India which is, according to sage Nārada, indescribable (*anirbacaniya*) but relishable like the feeling of a dumb person (*mukasvādanāvāt*).²⁰ It is also possible that the troubadours who describe the gay spring time green meadows and thick orchards and sweet sounding birds, experience *joïe* prompted by the pleasure and the delight in the contemplation of nature. Again, be it concrete or abstract, subjective or nature-born, the *jois* can also designate the objective delight or pleasure that love brings or promises. Moreover, these can be no better place or person for joy than the beloved (*domna*) because she is the fount from which all other joys flow. Guillaume IX sings that all the joys of the world are available to him through love. Love of a worthy woman keeps the lover in a state of joy and that permanent condition of bliss is the natural abode just as water is the natural sphere of the fish. The troubadour Arnaut de Mareuil sings in praise of natural bliss:

Just as the fish spend their life in water, I spend mine and shall spend it always in joy, because love has made me choose a lady whence I live joyous merely from the desire I have for her. So worthy is she, that when I ponder over it, pride surges forth in me and my humility increases; but love and joy holds them fast to such an extent that moderation and right judgement do not vanish. (Johnston, 1935: 44)

Even as Mareuil conceives of joy in the womb of love, Marcabru intimately associates it with *Jovens* and *Pretz* epitomising eternal nuances of youth, vigour, patience and moderation and declares that joy and evil are incompatible and that complacent husbands, shameless wives and misers are unfit for the culture of *Jovens* and *Jois*. *Jovens*²¹ implies a socio-moral code of conduct, apart from a gay disposition peculiar to youth and it has a striking parallel in the tantric concept of youth and the Arabic concept of *fityan*. The tantric Sādhaka, like the troubadour lover, is an aesthete, whose worship of a beautiful maiden reveals that protection of youth and glorification of beauty is a necessity for the culture of love. The troubadourian emphasis on moderation, right judgement and goodness can be correlated with Tantric emphasis on good percentage, pure mind, intelligence, self-control (retention of semen in Buddhist tantra) and good deeds. *The Mahārudrayāmala-Tantra* declares that the lechers, shameless, greedy, hypocrite, voluptuary and drunkards to be unfit for *Sādhana*. The Arabic concept of *fityan* (*futuwwa*) which was given a spiritual significance in Sufism, denotes an ideal disposition signifying humility, devotion, liberality, self-denial and sexual abstinence and with due regard to Ezra Pound’s detection of oriental feeling in Troubadour esotericism, it may be opined that the tantric and the Arabic concept of youth is echoed in the troubadour concept of *Jovens*, just as the concept of Mahāsukha has striking similarities in the troubadour concept of *jois*. The Troubadourian distinction between *mesura* and sensual indulgence is a continuation of the Buddhist tantric conflict between

retention of semen and its awful waste. That Marcabru’s emphasis on *Mesura* (moderation and control) is decidedly tantric in origin is evident from his *poem* “Pax in nomine Domini” in which the name of Jehosaphat—the Arabic Yudhasaf and Indian Buddha—appears as the embodiment of purity and self-control:

...Hear what he says, how in His Kindness the heavenly Lord has fashioned for us a wash-place near at hand, such as there never was except overseas, yonder by *Jehosaphat* and by this one here I bring you comfort.” (Press, 1985: 47).

Ezra Pound’s inclination to connect oriental thought/Sufism with troubadour esotericism, and impact of Buddhism on Sufism can be ascertained from R.A. Nicholson’s²² observation that Sufism as ‘a complex thing’ derives inspiration from Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Vedanta and Buddhism. More significantly, Denis de Rougement²³ argues that following continuous cultural encounter between India and the Arabs on the one hand and Spain and France on the other, there was easy transmission of Buddhist tantricism, Manichaeism, Gnosticism and Sufism into Southern France—the land of troubadours. He observes that Buddhist-tantric thought influenced the provençal heresy called ‘Catharism’ or ‘Albigensianism’ which emphasizes a long course of ascetic discipline involving perpetual chastity, celibacy, suffering, sacrifice, self-renunciation and abstaining from sexual contact with wife. The initiation ceremony in Catharism entails fasting for forty days which reminds us of the ‘service of woman’ in Buddhist Tantricism that breaks up into ordeals of forty days. Both A.J. Denomy and Roger Boase emphasize the connection of troubadourian esotericism with Catharism²⁴ Again, Rougement points to the Buddhist text, *Romance of Balaam and Jehoshapat* in which Bhagavan (Balaam) and Buddha (Jehoshapat) do appear significantly and the text, according to him, influenced the twelfth century heretics of provence.²⁵

The troubadours professed a cult of worship in which the beloved (*domna*) becomes a Goddess. This concept is originally Indian because Śaktism and Tantricism visualized the primordial Śakti as all pervading. Every woman is the embodiment of Śakti. The troubadourian thought of attributing ‘divine beauty,’ to the *domna* corresponds to the Tantric Sahajiyā theory of attribution (*āropa*) of the cosmic form (*svarupa*) of the Primal Śakti which is manifested in every woman. After initiation and ritualistic observances, the divine ‘fluid’ is aroused in the Sādhikā and she is transformed into a woman of exception (*viśeṣa-rati*) as different from the ordinary woman (*Sāmānya-rati*). To the Troubadours, as it is for the tantric Sādhaka, she is the fount of wisdom and *joï* (*mahāsukha*). Surprisingly, the troubadourian *domna* (donna) bears striking similarity (in name) with the esoteric lady of the Tantric Siddhācāryas, i.e., *dombi* (domi). The *dombi* is mystically conceived as an ‘invisible power’ exactly in the same way the troubadour Jaufre Rudel sings of ‘abstract jois’ and an invisible and unattainable lady with whom he falls in love without seeing her. The troubadour ritual of *donnoi* transfigures the *domna* from the level of the profane to that of spirituality. In both the traditions, there is an erotic-esoteric progression from Eros to *Amor* and *Jois* and from *Kāma* to *Prema* and *Mahāsukha*. O.V. Garrison observes that “William of Poitiers, one of the first troubadours, unequivocally spells out this Tantric nature of *donnoi*.”²⁶

In conclusion, it must be conceded that Tantric Sahajiyā thought's passed on to Europe, particularly Provence, through the Arabs and that Kāma and Eros are metamorphosed into 'Amor' and *Prema* finally culminating in *jois* and mahāsukha. But the very nature of bliss shows that the troubadours acted upon provençal dualism, whereas Tantric Sādhana tends to dissolve dualities for realizing the monistic unity.

Notes and References

- ¹ See T.S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, London: Faber and Faber, 1954, p. 95.
- ² O.V. Garrison, *Tantra: The Yoga of Sex*, New York: The Julian Press, 1964, p.127. Also see, Denis de Rougement, *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, Faber and Faber, 1956, p.113.
- ³ Interestingly, there were a good many real 'courts of love' in France during the Middle Ages that patronized the troubadours. The courtly culture grew in Toulouse, Poitou, Limousin and Champagne, which was a reputed seat of luxury and literary taste. See. John, F. Benton, 'The Court of Champagne as a Literary Centre', *Speculum*, XXVI: 61. pp. 551-591.
- ⁴ Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, Oxford: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977, p. 1.
- ⁵ March Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans, L.A. Manyon, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. p. 232. The feudal relationship between the Lord and the Vassal prompted the troubadours to extend their extramarital passion for the *domna*. Painter observes that 'one of the basic tenets of feudal custom demanded that a vassal should respect and if necessary defend with his life the chastity of his Lord's life.'
- Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Medieval France*, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1962. pp. 102-103.
- ⁶ H.O. Taylor, *The Medieval Mind*, Vol. I. New York, 1925, p. 571.
- ⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, Oxford, 1961. p.2.
- ⁸ Rollo May, *Love and Will*, W.W.Norton, New York, 1969, pp. 74-75.
- ⁹ Plato's *Symposium* (204c). cf. Mark. P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 2nd edn., London: Longman, 1977, pp. 74-75.
- ¹⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* (VI.7.36) cf. R.T. Wallis. *Neo-platonism*, Gerald Duckworth, London, 1972. p. 3.
- ¹¹ Andersen Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P.S. Watson, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938, p.353.
- ¹² F. Golding, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvers*, New York: Anchor Books, 1973, p.62.
- ¹³ S.B. Dasgupta, *Bhārater Śakti Sādhana O Śākta Sāhitya* (Bengali), Sisu Sahitya Sansada, B.S. 1392, p.7.
- ¹⁴ The *Devī-Sūkta of Āg Veda* (VII.7-11) states that Śakti reveals herself everywhere in things both infinite and finite The *Devī Mahātmya of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* eulogizes the Goddess as at once the cause of bondage and salvation, the ultimate cause of all causes.
- ¹⁵ O.V. Garrison, op.cit., p. xv. *The Kulārṇava Tantra* declares that one must lift oneself by the aid of the ground, as one falls on the ground. Passion is the instrument to heal passion.

¹⁶ *The Hevajra Tantra*, trans. D.L. Snellgrove, Pt. II, (IV-32), Oxford Univ. Press, 1980. p. 34.

¹⁷ Cited in Giuseppe Tucci, *Ratilila*, trans. James Hogarth, Geneva: Negel Publishers, 1969, p.34.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.41.ven

¹⁹ Carl Appel, *Bernard ven Ventdown*, Halle, 1915, pp. 76-77, cited in A.J. Denomy, 'Jois among the Early Troubadours: Its Meaning and Possible Sources,' p. 177.

²⁰ *Nārada Bhaktisūtra* (2): Nārada defines the highest devotion as the most intense love (*parama premarūpa*) intense longing (*parama-vyākulatā*). Devotional love (*bhakti*) is intense attachment (*anurāga*) that begets nectar (*amṛta*) or divine bliss relish (*rasa*) on getting which the devotee becomes over-joyed, perfect and pure—a state that reminds us of the condition of the lover in Bernart's lyric poetry.

²¹ A.J. Denomy, "Javens: The Nation of Youth among the Troubadours, its Meaning and Source" *Medieval Studies*, XI, Pontific Institute, 1949, pp. 2-3.

²² R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabas*, London: Cambridge Univ. Press, p. 297. Also see Nicholson's "The Mystics of Islam", in *Understanding Mysticism*, Richard Woods, ed., New York: Image Books, 1980; "The Sufi Conception of the Passing Away (fana) of the Individual Self as Universal Being is, certainly, I think, of Indian origin."

²³ Rougement, *Passion and Society*, p.121.

²⁴ A.J. Denomy, "An Inquiry into the Origin of Courtly Love", Fn. 4. p. 258. Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, p.77.

²⁵ Rougement, op.cit., p.121.

²⁶ O.V. Garrison, op. cit, p.126. Besides William, these are Peire Vidal and Amount Daniel who tacitly refer to the technique of *donnai* which was practiced in the medieval castles by knights and the sovereign lady, who, being a staunch follower of Cathartic heresy, encouraged the secret ritual of love called 'asag' in which the knight was supposed to pass an entire night naked with the lady without giving into temptation. The tantric manner of rapturous gazing is echoed by Arnaut Daniel through a lovely blue mantle." See A.R. Press, pp. 177, 197.

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