

# Untouchables in Hindu Tantric Literature

Hiroki WATANABE

## 1

It is well known that what is called Hindu Tantrism, on the assumption of the concept of the corruption of the Kali Age (*kaliyuga*), denies caste discrimination and makes the practice of its doctrine open to people of all castes and that it reveals a new and easy way by which even the people in this age can attain *mokṣa* or final emancipation from transmigration.<sup>1)</sup> We can generally recognize in Tantric practices some aspects that are inherited from traditional Brahmanism or Hinduism and at the same time other elements different from them.<sup>2)</sup>

Each of Hindu Tantric works, the number of which is enormous, includes various ideas or thoughts. We can sometimes find contradictory ones even in a single text. Moreover, many written sources of Hindu Tantrism to be directly based on yet remain to be edited critically in the strict sense of the word. Then the purpose of this paper is, taking up comparatively popular texts considered to belong to the Śākta or the Kaula that have several editions respectively: the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* (=Mnt), the *Kulārṇavatantra* (=Kt), the *Jñānārṇavatantra* (=Jt), and the *Rudrayāmala-Uttaratantra* (=Ry-Ut)<sup>3)</sup>, to consider what they describes concerning what is called untouchables.

## 2

As to the view on the *varṇa*-system, first of all, it must be noted that in addition to the traditional four—that is, *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*—Mnt acknowledges the fifth *varṇa* called *sāmānya* for the Kali Age when humanity is held to become corrupted.<sup>4)</sup>

Although we are not quite certain what this *sāmānya* precisely means, there seem to be good reasons to accept an observation that it is the name for the class of people who are born as a result of intermarriage between different *varṇas* or the out-castes.<sup>5)</sup> Those people have been excluded from the *varṇa*-system.<sup>6)</sup> Mnt gives the name, *sāmānya*, to them and pulls them up into the *varṇa*-system.

It is not *a-varṇa* but indeed one of *varṇas*.

### 3

Hindu Tantrism, as mentioned above, denies caste discrimination and makes the practice of its doctrine open to people all castes. We can find quite a few verses in Hindu Tantric works that forbid any caste discrimination in the worship, eating and drinking, marriage, and so on.<sup>7)</sup> There are, at the same time, many other verses in Hindu Tantric works telling that 'untouchables' should have possibility or opportunity to attain *mokṣa* and that they also should be *adhikārins* or eligible people for the doctrine described in those texts.<sup>8)</sup>

All human beings including *antyajas* are *adhikārins* for the way of the Kaula<sup>9)</sup>, those who will not lead a *caṇḍāla* or a *yavana* to the Kaula doctrine fall on the downward path.<sup>10)</sup> Even a *caṇḍāla* attain *mokṣa* through the initiation (*dīkṣā*).<sup>11)</sup> There is no distinction among any castes even *caṇḍāla* or *paulkaso* when the rejoice of unifying with the Brahman is attained.<sup>12)</sup>

The doctrine of worship or conduct described in Hindu Tantric works, in principle, transcends any discrimination of castes. The idea that all human beings are eligible for their *dharma*s or *ācāras* stands in clear contrast with the *Manusmṛti*'s limitation of eligibility for its *dharma* to the upper three *varṇas*.<sup>13)</sup>

### 4

Presumably, however, these Hindu Tantric works at the same time show the recognition that untouchables are impure and humble beings.

The food brought by a *śvapaca* is referred to as good as the one slipped away from the mouth of a dog<sup>14)</sup>, it is prescribed that one who does not properly respect his *guru* becomes a *caṇḍāla*<sup>15)</sup>, and *caṇḍāla* is crudely expressed of humble birth (*nīcajāti*).<sup>16)</sup> It seems reasonable suppose from these verses that untouchables are

often referred to in order to emphasize the absolute superiority of the doctrine revealed there.<sup>17)</sup>

There remain lots of unelucidated questions concerning Hindu Tantrism : What kind of people did those sects consist of? Did they actually include people from *brāhmaṇa* to *sāmānya*? How did the sects develop or did the members change? What kind of people, under what social circumstances, with what intention, did write those texts? We may be able to expect to answer these questions more or less through considering the expressions concerning untouchables found in Hindu Tantric Literature.

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### Abbreviations and Texts

HB=Hariharānanda Bhārati's commentary on the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* included in the edition given below.

Jt=Jñānārṇavatāntra (*Īśvaraprokṭam Jñānārṇavatāntram* (Ānandāśrama Sanskrta Granthāvaliḥ Granthāṅkaḥ 69), 2nd ed., Poona : Ānandāśrama-Mudraṇālaya, 1977 (first ed. 1952))

[(a) *Jñānārṇabatāntram (mūla ṭippani baṅgānubāda o yantracitrādi saha)*, Kalikātā : Naba-bhārata Pābaliśārsa, 1992. (b) Mālavīya, Rāmaramjana (ed. and Hindī tr.), *Īśvaraprokṭam Jñānārṇavatāntram (Śrīvidyāvivarāṇātmakam)* (Viṭṭaladāsa Saṃskṛta Series 7), Vārāṇasī : Kṛṣṇadāsa Academy, 2001].

Kt==Kulārṇavatāntra (Tārānātha Vidyāratna (ed.), *Kulārṇava Tantra*, reprint, Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1975 (first ed. Madras 1965)).

Mnt=Mahānirvāṇatantra (Arthur Avalon (ed.), *Mahānirvāṇatantra with the Commentary of Hariharānanda Bhārati*, Tāntrik Texts Vol. 13, rpt., Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1989 (1st ed., Madras, 1929)).

Ry-Ut=Rudrayāmala-Uttaratantra (Ram Kumar Rai (ed.)), *Rudrayāmalam (Uttaratantram)*, (Krishnadas Sanskrit Series 86), Varanasi : Krishnadas Academy, 1986).

- 1) See, for example, Goudriaan [1979] 31-34.
- 2) See, for example, Goudriaan [1981] 19-22.
- 3) Mnt is one of the texts considered to belong to the Vāmācāraśākta and presumably written in the late eighteenth century (see Goudriaan [1981] 98ff. and Derrett [1968] 147-168). Kt is the most important text of the Kaula sect. An estimation of its date is between AD 1000 and 1400 (see Goudriaan [1981] 93ff. and Carlstedt [1974] 15). It has obtained a relatively great popularity and has often been quoted. Its date has been considered before the sixteenth century (see Goudriaan [1981] 67ff). Ry-Ut is one of the Hindu Tantric texts which is earlier than Mnt (the exact date has been unknown) and has the great influence on later Tantrism widely (see Goudriaan [1981] 47ff).

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4) Mnt, 8.4-5 :

*catvāraḥ kathitā varṇāśramā api suvrate /*  
*ācārāś cāpi varṇānām āśramānām prthak prthak // (4)*  
*kṛtādaḥ kalikāle tu varṇāḥ pañca prakīrtitāḥ /*  
*brāhmaṇaḥ kṣatriyo vaiśyaḥ śūdraḥ sāmānya eva ca // (5)*

5) HB: *varṇasaṅkaraḥ*. See Watanabe [1994] 120. *A Dictionary Bengali-Sanskrit-English* gives an explanation : ‘of the lower class of people’ as one of meanings of *sāmānya*.6) Traditional *Dharmaśāstras* such as the *Manusmṛti* clearly denies the existence of the fifth *varṇa* (10.4). See Watase [1990] 19-20.

7) See, for example, Mnt, 3. 92, 6. 4, 8. 151, 8. 180, and Kt, 3. 74ff.

8) Halbfass [1988] 193ff. and 204ff. argue the extension of *adhikāra* (-in) in Tantrism in connection with Rammohun Roy’s thought. See also Watanabe [2000] 1139-1138.

9) Mnt, 14. 184 :

*viprādyaṇṭyajaparyantā dvipadā ye ’tra bhūtale /*  
*te sarve ’smin kulācāre bhaveyur adhikāriṇaḥ //*  
 Cf. Mnt, 8. 80 :

*śūdrasāmānyajātīnām adhikāro ’sti kevalam /*  
*āgamoktavidhau devi sarvasiddhis tato bhavet //*

Can we guess that *śūdras* and *sāmānyas* were the original members of the Śākta or the Kaula?

Cf. also Mnt, 8. 224 :

*brāhmaṇaḥ kṣatriyo vaiśyaḥ śūdraḥ sāmānya eva ca /*  
*kulāvadhūtasamskāre pañcānām adhikāritā //*

10) Mnt, 14. 187 :

*cāṇḍālaṃ yavanam nīcam striyam avajñayā /*  
*kaulam na kuryāt yaḥ kaulaḥ so ’dhamo yāty adhogatim //*

11) Kt, 14. 80 ab :

*dīkṣayā mokṣadīpena caṇḍālo ’pi vimucyate //*

12) Jt, 23. 28-29 :

*brahmānandamayam jñānam kathayāmi varānane /*  
*na brāhmaṇo brāhmaṇas tu kṣatriyaḥ kṣatriyas tathā // (28)*  
*vaiśyo na vaiśyaḥ śūdro na śūdras tu paramēśvari /*  
*cāṇḍālo naiva cāṇḍālaḥ paulkaso na ca paulkasaḥ // (29)*

Both of the Bengali commentary in the edition (a) and the Hindi translation in the edition (b) explanatorily supplement some words like ‘if brahmānada is attained.’

13) Cf. the *Manusmṛti*, 10. 126 :

*na śūdre pātakaṃ kiṃcin na samskāram arhati /*  
*nāsyādhikāro dharme ’sti na dharmāt pratiṣedhanam //*

14) Mnt, 3. 84 :

*ānītam śvapacenāpi śvamukhād api niḥśṛtam /*

*tad annaṃ pāvanam devi devānām api durlabham //*

15) Kt, 11. 74 :

*ekākṣarapradātaram yo guruṃ cāvamānayet /*

*śvānam yoniśatam gatvā caṇḍālatvam avāpnuyāt //*

16) Ry-Ut, 48. 131 :

*yadi jñānī bhaved eva sa devo na tu mānuṣaḥ /*

*caṇḍālādinīcajātau sthīro vā brāhmaṇottamaḥ //*

17) We should not overlook 'api' used in, for example, Mnt, 3.84 (See Note 14)).

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(Specialist, Agency for Cultural Affairs)