

Chapter 1

Doctrinal and Structural Premises for Śaiva Tantric Funerary Practices

1. The conundrum of Śaiva death rites: liberating the already liberated

Rituals related to the event of death and the afterlife hold a somewhat ambiguous position in the ritual world of early medieval tantric Śaivas. This has to do with one essential question: what could be the purpose of any kind of post-mortem ritual targeted at rescuing and guiding the soul after death, since the basic paradigm of tantric Śaivism is that initiation (*dīkṣā*) itself bestows ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*) on the individual directly at the time of initiation? After all, one of the central claims of tantric Śaivas – unlike in the Vedic context – is that initiation is not merely a rite of passage, a *samskāra*, that advances the initiate socially and grants him access to a new level of spiritual practice. Rather, it is an act that transforms the soul itself, purifying it of its impurities and bonds so that it can attain ultimate liberation.¹ Thus, at the end of the full tantric initiation, the *nirvāṇadīkṣā* (lit. the “initiation that bestows liberation [*nirvāṇa*]”), the *ācārya* guides the soul to the supreme Śiva state, enacting the initiand’s liberation by union with this Śiva-hood.²

Theoretically, one could argue that the principle of liberation at the time of initiation cancels the need of any kind of practice essential to the soteriological path performed after that initiation. Indeed, in the *Kiraṇatantra* (Kir), Garuḍa – who in this scripture is the interlocutor in a divine dialogue with Śiva – questions the existence of the newly initiated after he has undertaken the liberating initiation, arguing that if the liberation were really

¹ See, for instance, *s.v.* *dīkṣā* (by Goodall) in TAK 3: “Arguably this is the defining feature of early tantric Śaivism, for it is this that sets it apart from the religious traditions from which it emerged: *dīkṣā* is no longer merely a preparation for a particular religious undertaking, but has become also a transformative rite that purifies the soul [...]” Further, see Brunner-Lachaux’s introductory notes, translation and annotations of the *dīkṣā* chapters in the *Somaśambhupaddhati* (SP 3, Brunner-Lachaux 1977).

² For a summary of the *dīkṣā* ritual in the SP, see Brunner-Lachaux 1977, pp. xxx–xliii.

effective and *mokṣa* attained, the initiate's body should not continue to exist.³ The answer to this question is that even though the initiation ritual destroys all karmic fetters that would keep the candidate's soul bound to the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), the karmas that have already been activated (*prārabdha karman*) and determine the candidate's current life are not destroyed. Thus the initiate continues to live until the end of his present existence. Then, at the moment of death, the soul realizes its true divine identity and liberation manifests itself. In order to gradually reduce this experience or karma that has been left intact, the initiate is required to follow certain post-initiatory rules (*samaya*), such as performing daily Śaiva worship. These ritual actions are believed to gradually consume all the karma until none is left at the end of the individual's present existence. Thus, according to this doctrine liberation manifests itself at the time of death and the transition of the soul to its final destination is considered completed. In the scripture's own words, the essence is as follows:

“The action of many existences has its seeds burnt, so to speak, by mantras [in initiation]. Future [action] too is blocked; [but] that by which this body is sustained can be destroyed only by experience. [Only] when the body collapses, [does the soul attain] liberation.”⁴ (Translation Goodall 1998, pp. 383–384.)

While this doctrinal reasoning thus explains the need for the Śaiva initiate to maintain post-initiatory practices, this logic cannot be applied to anything that happens after death, when the soul is explicitly said to realize its ultimate liberation. In fact, no sound doctrinal position was fully developed for death rites, reflecting their problematic status within the Śaiva tantric

³ Kir 6.18: *aśeṣapāśaviśleṣo yadi deva sa dīkṣayā | jātāyām arthanīṣpattau katham syād vapuṣaḥ sthitiḥ* || “If, Lord, all the bonds are removed by initiation, then, once the accomplishment of that object is attained, how can the body remain?” (translation Goodall 1998, p. 382).

⁴ Kir 6.20–21a: *anekabhaviḥ karma dagdhavījam ivāṇubhiḥ | bhaviṣyad api samruddham yenedam tad dhi bhogataḥ || dehapāte vimokṣaḥ syāt.*

ritual world.⁵ Nonetheless, early in Śaiva tantric history, death rites appear in Śaiva scriptures as well as in ritual manuals and constitute a clearly defined area of practice in the Śaiva ritual repertoire. It was not one that grew from an internal doctrinal need, however, but rather reflected the ritual needs of the communities that the Śaiva tantric initiatory traditions had started to engage with, foremost of these, as we have seen in the introduction, mainstream brahmanical householders. As such, the development of Śaiva tantric death rites is fundamentally linked to Śaivism's move from its ascetic origins outside of society to an increasingly public domain. Thus Śaiva tantric funerary practices constitute an ideal case study for exploring the larger mission occupying Śaiva ritual specialists at that time, namely to adjust their ritual repertoire to accommodate a wider range of ritual needs in order to facilitate the incorporation of a diverse clientele into the tradition. The increasing presence of Śaiva tantric communities allows us to trace the development of an increasingly elaborate system of death rites, a system that in the end mirrored the structure, timing and socio-religious function of brahmanical rites. As mentioned above, this social openness towards the brahmanical mainstream was a strategy that contributed to the Śaiva traditions securing a dominant position within the socio-religious and political world of the early medieval period. As history shows, this project was successful, with Śaivism establishing firm roots in Indian society.⁶

However, when examining the textual sources closely, we also see that in some cases, one price of this development was the compromising of the very beliefs that had justified the separate existence of the Śaiva system. As a result, discrepancies arose between Śaiva doctrine and practice. As already mentioned, nowhere is this as evident as in the case of death rites, and it is precisely at this point of juncture and rupture that we can sometimes glimpse the social reality within which Śaiva tantric communities moved.

⁵ See pp. 34ff., p. 62 and pp. 73ff. for attempts to formulate emic doctrinal positions on the purpose of Śaiva *antyeṣṭi*.

⁶ For an extensive discussion of Śaivism's success in the early medieval period, see Sanderson 2005, pp. 231–233 and 2009.

2. Śaiva funerary rites: A tantric upgrade of the brahmanical model

Of the brahmanical *saṃskāras*, that is to say the transformative rituals that advanced twice-born males through the various stages of their religious life, only the final rite, the *antyeṣṭi*,⁷ takes place after initiation. Of the preceding *saṃskāras* – the ceremonies performed around birth, from conception to the first feeding, the rituals of investiture and religious observance and, for married householders, the rite of marriage – none features in the ritual life of a Śaiva initiate. This is because a candidate for initiation is specified as being either a male ascetic student (*brahmacārin*) or a married householder (*gṛhastha*). In either case, prior to initiation they would have undergone the *saṃskāras* up to the rite of investiture (*upanayana*) or, optionally, marriage.⁸

In other ritual areas that can be traced as having been gradually adapted from the brahmanical sphere – rites of incidental worship (*naimittikakarman*), penance (*prāyaścitta*) and regular daily worship (*nityakarman*) – the process of adaption consisted simply of using Śaiva mantras, deities, visualizations and maṇḍalas instead of their Vedic equivalents while nonetheless maintaining the basic structure and function of the Vedic rituals.⁹ The transformation was straightforward because these rites did not involve premises based on either the brahmanical or Śaiva doctrine of the soul, but functioned merely as rites of obligatory worship and expiation of transgres-

⁷ Note that the alternative spelling *anteṣṭi* is also found in manuscripts, most commonly in old palm-leaf manuscripts preserved in Nepal.

⁸ To this effect, the *Sarvajñānottara* (*Liṅgoddhārādīprakaraṇa* 24) teaches: “[Moreover,] O Skanda, it is only after he has gone through all the brahmanical rites from that of conception to that of marriage that he may [take initiation and then] devote himself exclusively to the teachings of Śiva” (translation by Sanderson in his forthcoming article “Śaivism and Brahmanism”). Sanderson (2006, pp. 4–10) points out that this was of course only the case for the married householder, not for the unmarried student (*brahmacārin*), whose last rite of passage would have been the *upanayana*, his initiation as a celibate student of the Veda.

⁹ An analysis of this transformation of *smārta* rites into Śaiva versions is presented in Sanderson 1995. These rituals must be distinguished from those that fulfil ritual needs unique to Śaiva theology and ritual logic, such as the initiation ritual (*dīkṣā*), rites of consecration to Śaiva offices (*abhiṣeka*), rites for installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) of substrates of Śaiva worship, and those accompanying Śaiva meditative practices (*yoga*, *dhyāna*).

sions through ritual practices. It was therefore easy to adjust them to fit Śaiva ritual terminology.¹⁰

However, unlike these ordinary obligatory rites, the brahmanical cremation ritual (*antyeṣṭi*) has clear implications for the ontological state of the deceased person's soul. This model therefore required a fundamental restructuring, one that did more than merely substitute mantras and materials. On such an important point, the Śaivas could not defer to the brahmanical practices; they had to make the ritual more meaningful in a Śaiva sense, despite apparent doctrinal inconsistencies.

2.1. Brahmanical death rites: A brief overview

The origins of cremation and ancestor worship go back as far as the Vedic period.¹¹ They were always associated with ritually active householders, or more exactly, twice-born males wealthy enough to sustain a family household and – intrinsically connected with that – a ritual life of regular (*nit-yakarman*) as well as incidental (*naimittikakarman*) worship and prayers. The cremation rite (*antyeṣṭi*) itself is considered the sacrificer's own final oblation (literally the “last [*antya-*] sacrifice [*-iṣṭi*]”),¹² which is carried out by the chief mourner (typically the eldest son) on his behalf. While there are countless variations regarding details of procedure, in essence we find the following structure:¹³ The chief mourner offers the corpse together with

¹⁰ Sanderson 1995.

¹¹ The Vedic period is usually defined as the era when the Vedas were composed, around the middle of the second millennium BCE until the 6th century BCE. Vedic treatments of funeral rites are outlined in Caland's *Die Altindischen Todten- und Bestattungsgebräuche* (Caland 1893). Sayers 2013 discusses the connections between the Vedic *pitryajña* and later *śrāddha* practices.

¹² The theory that cremation is a sacrifice is based on the ancient cosmogonic myth of the *Puruṣasūkta* (*Rgveda* 10.90), in which the cosmic man (*puruṣa*), the first born encompassing everything that exists, performed the first sacrifice. For this sacrifice, he made his own body the offering material (*havis*) and through it, all visible and invisible things were created. At some interpretative level, the cremation ritual is considered a microcosmic repetition of this self-sacrifice. Cf. Evison 1989.

¹³ Material on funerary rites is found throughout brahmanical religious literature, especially in the *Śrautasūtras*, *Grhyasūtras*, *Dharmasūtras*, and *Dharmaśāstras*. Until now, the most widely consulted have been the texts on death rites in the *Garuḍapurāṇa* and *Garuḍapurāṇasāroddhāra*, of which the latter has been translated in *Der Pretakalpa des Garuḍa-Purāṇa* by Abegg (1921). Mueller (1992) presents a detailed treatment and transla-

the ritual implements of the deceased into the consecrated fire that was used for daily offerings and worship during his lifetime. He lights the funeral pyre on behalf of the deceased, and cracks open the skull in order to enable the soul to exit the corpse. When the deceased person's soul (*preta*) leaves its former body, it is believed that it enters a ghost-like state, in which it is tormented by hunger and thirst.¹⁴ This ghost is considered an extremely dangerous entity. In order to appease and sustain it, offerings of rice balls (*piṇḍa*) and water are made immediately after the cremation, as well as during the first days after the death. Through these offerings it is believed that the ghost can gradually build a post-mortem body, with which he completes his journey to the world of Yama (i.e. the deity of death) and then, to heaven or hell.¹⁵

At a certain time after the death – ranging from twelve days to a year, depending on which Vedic school is followed – the soul is then incorporated into the line of ancestors by means of a ritual called the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*,¹⁶ in which three rice balls are offered. These represent the three ancestral generations: the father (*pitṛ*), grandfather (*pitāmaha*) and great-grandfather (*prapitāmaha*). A fourth *piṇḍa* is made to represent the deceased; this is divided into three parts, and these are combined with the

tion of the South Indian 16th-century *Antyeṣṭipaddhati* of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa in *Das Brahmanische Totenritual nach der Antyeṣṭipaddhati des Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa*. A helpful overview of death rites in Vedic, Dharmic and Purāṇic sources can be found in Kane's *History of Dharmaśāstra* Vol. IV (Kane 1953). Another work providing an overview of death practices is Evison's doctoral thesis *Indian Death Rituals: The Enactment of Ambivalence* (Evison 1990), which presents three accounts: one based on recent material from Indian gazetteers, another on the *Garuḍapurāṇa*, and the last on Caland's material on Vedic death rites. An overview of brahmanical rites of ancestor worship is offered by Sayers (2013) in his *Feeding the Dead: Ancestor Worship in Ancient India*. Contemporary accounts of Indian cremation rituals are found in Parry's extensive account on the funeral business in Benares in *Death in Benares* (Parry 1994) and Michaels' *Der Hinduismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Michaels 1998, pp. 148–175) and *Handling Death* (Michaels et al. 2005). The latter describes Nepali death rites in great detail. A close examination of archaeological evidence of North Indian funerary monuments is found in Bakker (2007), in his article "Monuments to the Dead in Ancient North India".

¹⁴ See Michaels 2016, p. 203–204, for a characterization of the *preta*.

¹⁵ The topic of the various hells is very popular in *purāṇic* sources. For instance, a very early account is found in the old *Skandapurāṇa* (Bakker et al. 2014). However, it was also already part of the *Mahābhārata* narrative, and may have originally entered the Indic world of beliefs from Buddhist circles.

¹⁶ See Sayers 2013 and Michaels et al. 2005.

three rice balls of the three generations of fathers. The deceased person's soul is now considered to have entered the first stage of ancestorship as the *pitṛ* (father). The previously deceased male ancestor moves up a level in the hierarchy, so that the former *pitṛ* becomes the *pitāmaha* (grandfather), and the former *pitāmaha*, the *prapitāmaha* (great-grandfather). The former *prapitāmaha* now leaves this threesome and joins the group of undifferentiated ancestral deities called Viśvedevas that reside in the ancestral heavens. The souls remain in these positions until the next male descendant dies and is incorporated.¹⁷

The *śrāddha* rites constitute the worship addressed to these ancestors. They are performed regularly: on dates related to the individual's death, on fixed days in the calendar, on auspicious occasions such as the birth of a son, and during pilgrimages to holy places.¹⁸ Their performance is obligatory for the orthodox Brahmin and is even included in the list of the three debts from which any twice-born man must free himself during his lifetime.¹⁹ It is taught that failing to perform them incurs a great sin – not only for the ritualist himself, but also for many generations above and below him in the patriline.

It is evident that these death rites imply somewhat conflicting ideas about life after death: the soul is first believed to travel to the world of Yama and enter a heaven or hell, but at the same time it is worshipped soon after death as an ancestor in the eternal ancestral heavens. Further, though not ritually represented, but nevertheless a major feature of brahmanical ideas concerning the afterlife, there is the belief in the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), which is incompatible with the soul's eternal status as one of the Viśvedevas after death. These inconsistencies were the result of two theologies being merged into a single doctrine during the evolution of the brahmanical religion – namely that of the original Vedic system, which was

¹⁷ Should someone in the younger generation die before the older, there are special rites for ensuring the correct order of ancestorship.

¹⁸ For more on *śrāddha* rituals, see below, chapter 5.

¹⁹ The three debts with which men are born are those to the sages (*ṛṣi*), gods (*deva*) and ancestors (*pitṛ*). During his lifetime, the individual must fulfil the debt to the sages through learning, to the gods through worship, and to the *pitṛs* through post-mortem ancestor worship. For a detailed discussion of the origins of this concept, see Sayers 2008, p. 61–75; for the Śaiva *śrāddha* rites, chapter 5 of this volume.

strictly ritualistic, and that of a more philosophically motivated system based on the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*), which was introduced around the time of the Upaniṣads' composition.²⁰ In the former, the ritualist is solely concerned with correctly performing the ritual action, on whose execution the maintenance of the entire universe depends. The reward for adhering strictly to the rituals was access to heaven after death, ensuring the soul's eternal state of bliss.²¹ In the latter, this eternal existence at one level of reality is replaced by the concept of the eternally wandering soul that moves up and down the cosmic scale, a scale reaching from various hells, through earthly existence to a variety of heavens.²² It was in this system that liberation-based theologies offering ways to escape this endless cycle emerged for the first time.²³ The fusion of these two concepts had far-reaching consequences on the brahmanical belief system. This was particularly visible in the beliefs and practices related to death, with a multitude of implied beliefs and simultaneously enacted practices. Thus, the Śaivas adopted a system of funerary practices that in itself was already inconsistent in its implied theological and ontological notions. These notions, however, were so deeply embedded and essential to mainstream society that they are still in place today.

2.2. The Śaiva upgrade: (Re-)initiating the dead

The basic structure of the Śaiva funeral ritual as we find it in ritual manuals from at least the eleventh century onwards is very similar to its brahmanical counterpart, namely the dead person's body being cremated with his ritual implements in a consecrated fire, followed by offerings of *piṇḍas* and water

²⁰ See, for instance, the remarks in Michaels 1998, pp. 148–175.

²¹ Cf. e.g. Bodewitz 1994 on Vedic perceptions of afterlife.

²² Cf. Michaels 1998, pp. 164–165 for contradictory ideas about afterlife in “Hinduism” and their insignificance in the light of ritual practice.

²³ For example, Olivelle (1993, p. 66) cites the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* 5.10.1–10, which prescribes the stages of the path of the soul after death: ritualists eventually arrive at the moon, where they live until their merits are exhausted and return to earth by the same course along which they came. But the soul of the deceased ascetic escapes this cycle and follows a path leading up to Brahman, the highest universal principle that is the ultimate reality of the cosmos and existence, at which level it resides from then on. The *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 6.2.15–16 presents a similar view.

and the rite of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*.²⁴ Vedic mantras and materials are replaced by their Śaiva equivalents.²⁵ But even though the timing, structure and socio-religious function remained the same, the Śaiva version was thought to operate at a different and much more powerful level, namely, as a form of liberating initiation.²⁶ Richard Davis sees this as an example of old ritual structures being innovatively re-thought.²⁷ For this purpose, an additional ritual was performed before the incineration of the corpse. Here, the soul (*jīva*) is envisaged as being caught and placed back into the corpse, after which an initiation ritual is performed for it, which secures the individual's final liberation. In this way, the cremation rite, which in the brahmanical tradition served as the ritual processing (*saṃskāra*) and disposal (*pratipatti*) of the sacrificer's body and implements, was rendered more meaningful and effective in Śaiva terms. The focus now shifted from the burning of the corpse to the initiatory destruction of the soul's bonds in the Śiva fire (*śivāgni*), that is to say a fire that had been transformed into Śiva by ritual means.²⁸

Similarly, the subsequent offerings to the ancestors (*śrāddha*) were infused with the language of liberation. Instead of being incorporated into a line of ancestors, the deceased Śaiva initiate is manifested in increasingly potent forms of Śiva that signify stages on his path to liberation (see chapter 5). First the deceased turns into Śiva in the form of Rudra in the period between death and the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* – corresponding to the ghost (*preta*) state – and then he is incorporated into the hierarchy of the Śiva clan (*gotra*), whereby he successively assumes the identity of Īśvara, Sadāśiva and Śiva. This is in place of, respectively, his father, grandfather

²⁴ For details about these ritual procedures, see chapter 4. See also Brunner's richly annotated translation of the SP (Brunner-Lachaux 1977), which explains many puzzling points on aspects of the procedures in its detailed footnotes and the rich citation apparatus.

²⁵ On the creation of Śaiva equivalents of brahmanical rituals by substituting Vedic *mantras* with Śaiva ones, see Sanderson 1995.

²⁶ See also Davis 1988 and Sanderson 1995, p. 32.

²⁷ Davis 1988.

²⁸ This fire is produced through a series of rites collectively referred to as *agnikārya*. Cf. SP, *Samayadīkṣāvidhiḥ*, 47b–78 (Brunner-Lachaux 1977). It is an elaborate ritual in which the fire is born, preceded by a series of *saṃskāras*: the conception of fire, the development of its embryo, its being given a name, and then its transformation into a Śiva fire by giving it five faces and so forth.

and great-grandfather.²⁹

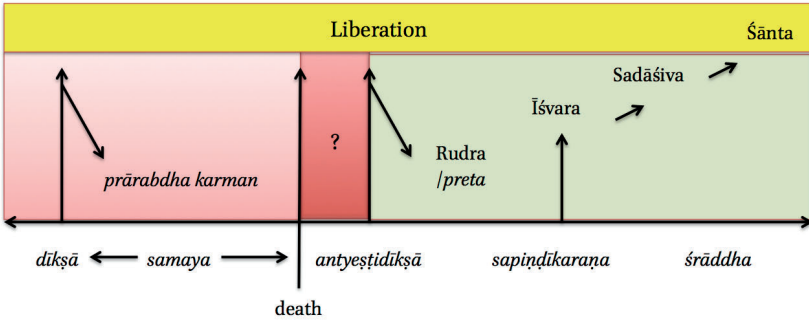
The following table shows the main structural changes in Śaiva funerary rituals:

Brahmanical cycle of funeral and post-mortem rituals	Śaiva additions and conceptional changes
Rites at the site of death	
Funerary procession	
Preparation of the cremation ground and the pyre	
	Funerary initiation: Preparation of the corpse for initiation; Capturing the deceased person's soul; Fixing the consciousness in the corpse; Destruction of all the soul's bonds; Liberation of the deceased person's soul
Preparation of the corpse for incineration	
Lighting of the funeral pyre	
(Skull cracking and/or pot-breaking)	
Departure of funeral party from the cremation ground	
Mourners' bath and water offerings to the deceased	
Return home, rite of purification	
Start of the series of post-mortem offerings to the deceased (<i>navaśrāddha</i> and <i>ekoddiṣṭaśrāddha</i>)	
Integration of the deceased into the ancestral line (<i>sapinḍīkaraṇa</i>)	> Integration of the deceased into a line of increasingly potent Śiva manifestations
Post-mortem food offerings to the group of ancestors (<i>śrāddha</i>)	> Post-mortem offerings to the group of increasingly potent Śiva manifestations

²⁹ See Sanderson 1995, p. 35 and Mirnig 2013.

3. Theoretical problems in terms of Śaiva doctrines³⁰

From this account, we see that the cycle of Śaiva funerary rites combines two functions: an initiation of the deceased person's soul, and an originally brahmanical ritual that processes the corpse and ritually guides the deceased to a post-mortem sphere resembling the brahmanical ancestral heavens. This twofold purpose of liberating the soul and guiding the ghost makes it difficult to detect a coherent structure in the rituals. Between the moment of death and the incorporation into a stable environment during the rites of *śrāddha* there are several occasions on which the soul might be considered as having transformed and reached the state of ultimate liberation. First, at the demise of the body (*dehapāte*); secondly, at the guru's enactment of liberation during the initiation before cremation; and thirdly, in the period in which the soul gradually ascends to Śiva-hood during the rites of post-mortem ancestor worship.



In terms of ritual structure, the first and second moments of liberation are bridged by the theory of the *prārabdha karman* being removed through post-initiatory practice, or in other words – as discussed above³¹ – the gradual removal of the karma that was responsible for the present life. Without this *prārabdha karman*, the unattractive alternative would be the initiate dying immediately after liberation is achieved at the end of the initiation procedure proper, the *nirvāṇadīkṣā*. As a consequence, the event of death

³⁰ Parts of this section have been drawn from my article “Hungry Ghost or Divine Soul? Postmortem Initiation in Medieval Śaiva Tantric Death Rites” (Minnig 2015).

³¹ See, p. 24.

becomes an important moment in the transition from the ordinary to the divine, as was made explicit in the above-quoted passage from the *Kiraṇa*.³² At the same time, the rituals after cremation imply that the soul remains a ghost-like entity that needs appeasing and being sustained by feeding, a state certainly not befitting a liberated soul. Thus, there are *de facto* two transitional periods with a single destination for the initiate: one that ends with death and one that begins with death, the two bridged by the funerary initiation.

This raises a number of theoretical problems. The fundamental issue concerns the ontological state of the deceased person's soul. Whereas the brahmanical model operates on the premise that the soul passes through several stages of post-mortem existences, from a hungry ghost to an ancestral deity, the soul of a Śaiva initiate supposedly transcends this system. After all, we have seen that the core doctrine of tantric Śaivism is that Śiva grants liberation from an individual's cycle of rebirths through the liberating rite of initiation (*nirvāṇadīkṣā*). Strictly speaking, this claim renders rituals such as cremation and post-mortem ancestor worship superfluous: there would be no need to cremate a corpse if the soul has already attained liberation, since this renders the corpse itself meaningless. And even if one were to ignore the doctrinal inconsistency of liberating the already liberated and accept the function of Śaiva cremation as claimed, performing rites addressed to a hungry ghost that travels to the underworld and finally becomes an ancestor after its liberation by cremation presents a further contradiction.³³

This paradox is seen even from an emic point of view. Theoretical expositions accounting for the funerary initiation are rare, regardless of the fact that a claim as major as liberation is at stake. In order not to fundamentally undermine the efficaciousness of the original initiation rite while alive, or to pass off the funerary initiation as a mere formality, some sources present the notion that the rite acts as some sort of expiatory ritual (*prāyaścīta*) which counteracts transgressions during post-initiatory practices or oth-

³² See, p. 24, Kir 6.20–1a; for the text and translation, see Goodall 1998, pp. 152–3 and 383–4.

³³ See also Sanderson 1995.

er impurities incurred at that time.³⁴ However, we never find this explanation pressed too far. Reasons for this may be that from a doctrinal point of view, it would seem surprising that an individual who was initiated into such a sanctified state would be capable of falling from this status – that the religion’s core ritual of bestowing liberation through initiation while alive could be threatened by comparatively trivial errors or that these could not be taken care of by common expiatory rites during his lifetime. It appears to be this type of criticism that Nirmalamāṇi, a South Indian Śaiva of the sixteenth or seventeenth century³⁵ who wrote a commentary on Aghoraśiva’s twelfth century manual *Kriyākramadyotikā* (see chapter 3), had in mind when he postulated that the stumbling blocks on the path to liberation concern only transgressions that the individual performs *without* being aware of them:

[The objection is] that the purification of all karmas is [supposed to be] achieved through such things as [their ritual] experiencing and consummation [that is, accomplished by pouring offerings into the ritual fire at the time of] the *nirvāṇadīkṣā*. And the karmas that are already active [as the cause of the initiate’s current life] (*prārabdha karman*) are destroyed through experiencing [them during this lifetime]. Every day some part of this impurity that comes about as a result of this [process] is destroyed through [the performance of post-initiatory] rites (*samaya*) such as bathing, visualizations, worship and oblations. [Any impurities that may result from] forbidden practices or impious conduct performed knowingly are destroyed by the performance of expiatory rites (*prāyaścitta*) [during the initiate’s lifetime]. What, then, is the purpose of cremation? [This objection is] true. [But] the purification of [impurities resulting from] forbidden practices and impious conduct that were performed unknowingly is achieved by [performing] cremation.³⁶

³⁴ Thus, see SārK 26.6c–8b (see p. 62), SJU 13.1, and 13.22 (see p. 66) and DīU 16.32cd–33ab (see pp. 73ff.).

³⁵ See Sanderson 2014, p. 25, for Nirmalamāṇi’s dates.

³⁶ Nirmalamāṇi’s commentary on the *Kriyākramadyotikā*, Sanskrit text quoted from Brunner 1977, pp. 569–571: *nanu nirvāṇadīkṣayā bhogabhōjanādīdvāreṇa samastānām karmanām śuddhiḥ kṛtā | prārabdhasya tu bhōgena kṣayaḥ | tatsahakāribhūtasya malāmśasya pratyahaṃ snānaśivīkaraṅcānahomādīnā kṣayaḥ | buddhipūrvaprāptavihi-*

Thus, we see that a certain ambiguity regarding the performance of these rites remained through the medieval period and at least until Nirmalamaṇi's lifetime. The reasoning that *antyeṣṭi* is a purificatory ritual also implies that theoretically initiates exist who are not in need of such ritual rectification, a possibility that is acknowledged in the systematizing work of the authors of ritual manuals (see chapter 3). By this time, for instance, the JR teaches the option of performing a Śaiva cremation without initiation if the deceased person's spiritual state allows it, that is, if he is so spiritually advanced that he does not need an expiatory ritual.³⁷

The most striking part of this development is the later inclusion of rites for post-mortem ancestor worship (*śrāddha*). As described above, practitioners worship a deceased initiate as embodying differentiated and increasingly potent divine Śiva identities in place of ancestral deities,³⁸ regardless of the fact that at this point, theoretically, the deceased person's soul has been guided to the goal of ultimate liberation already twice. Further, structurally closely intertwined with the performance of *śrāddha* rituals are the rites that govern the period between the death and the incorporation of the deceased person's soul into the line of ancestors. Since tantric ritual specialists adopted the original structure of *śrāddha* rituals without any changes, they thus also – perhaps inadvertently – accepted the performance of rites operating on the premise that the individual is a ghost during this period. However, this ritual cycle of post-mortem ancestor worship is deeply embedded in the socio-religious structure of the brahmanical householder society, since it implicitly functions as a ritual for securing the patrilineal structures that regulate inheritance.³⁹ The chief mourner, whose task it is to

tānācaraṇaṇiṣiddhācaraṇayoḥ prāyaścittena kṣayah | tataḥ kim artham antyeṣṭiḥ? satyam | abuddhipūrvam dīkṣottarakālakṛtayoḥ vihitānācaraṇaṇiṣiddhācaraṇayoḥ antyeṣṭyā śuddhiḥ kriyate.

³⁷ See pp. 108–109.

³⁸ See p. 31.

³⁹ Also much of Indian mythology is concerned with the paradigm that a person needs offspring – ideally male – in order to be saved from the tortures of hell, since only one's own descendants can perform the necessary rites to avert such misery. See, for instance, the story in the *Mahābhārata* (e.g. 1.13.9-22) of a Brahmin who has taken a vow of chastity. One day he finds his ancestors hanging upside down from a tree, dangling over the hole that

carry out the post-mortem rituals for the deceased, is also defined as the person who will inherit his property.⁴⁰ Catering for an audience of householders, for whom death also implied socio-economic restructuring, we see that Śaiva ritual specialists were even willing to accept and integrate the contradictory notion of ghost-hood governing the rites after cremation. Nonetheless, we also see that for some authors of prescriptive literature, the underlying paradoxes were too pronounced to ignore, and thus in some texts it is possible to sense a certain pragmatism. For example, Jñānaśiva, the author of the major twelfth-century Śaiva Siddhānta ritual manual *Jñānaratnāvalī* (see chapters 3 and 5), declares that the rituals performed in the period in which the deceased is treated as a ghost – namely between cremation and the integration of the deceased into the ancestral line in the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual – are to be carried out merely for the sake of conformity:

Up to the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* the rites are taught to be Vaidika (i.e. according to the traditional brahmanical ritual system) for the purpose of worldly interaction. After this [point], the *śivaśrāddha* (i.e. the post-mortem offerings given to the Śiva manifestation rather than the ancestors) is to be performed for *putrakas* (i.e. full initiates) and the like who adhere to the Śaiva teaching.⁴¹

Even from this emic point of view, we thus find an almost open declaration that the needs of the orthodox brahmanical householder society were too pressing to be ignored, even in the light of doctrinal claims of Śaiva superiority. An even stronger statement to this effect is found in the section giving instructions for observing days of death impurity. As will be discussed in chapter 4, from a Śaiva doctrinal point of view, impurity for the Śaiva initiate should not have been an issue given the advanced spiritual state brought about by Śaiva initiation, where ultimate god-hood is at stake. Jñānaśiva thus stresses that the period of impurity is merely determined by

is the entrance to hell. In distress, they appeal to him to take a wife and produce offspring so that they can be saved from hell.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Olivelle 2009.

⁴¹ See JR ŚP 5c–6. For an edition and an annotated translation, see the appendices.

the individual's social position in society; it is not related to any Śaiva hierarchy:

A householder must not transgress the ordinary religion (*lokamārgam*) even in his thoughts [and therefore] the period of impurity arising from one's caste is in accordance with the practice of the ordinary religion (*laukikācārarūpeṇa*).⁴²

Such sentiments are not an isolated phenomenon, and Sanderson has shown that this attitude of adhering to the brahmanical order was a major concern in early Śaiva tantric scriptures.⁴³ However, in the sphere of death rites, it is striking that the issue goes beyond merely adhering to the brahmanical order, including also Śaiva equivalents of rituals that are fundamentally incongruous with the basic doctrines of Śaivism.

4. Conclusion: Ascetic values in the householder context

The quotation cited above from the *Jñānaratnāvalī* provides us a key to a central issue at stake here, namely the “ordinary path” (*lokamārga*), or the “practice pertaining to worldly life”, as a more literal rendering of the Sanskrit term “*laukikācāra*” might read. This notion is in contrast to the sphere of renunciators or ascetics who have rejected all aspects of worldly life and society. To some extent, it is this opposition of ideals in the tantric context that is at the core of the conflicting yet simultaneous representations of the deceased person's soul as a hungry ghost and as a liberated soul. We repeatedly encounter this conflicting value system in the sphere of death rites. The socio-religious functions of classical Śaiva funerary rites, as we have seen, are structured around the communal needs of brahmanical mainstream society, but the proclaimed outcome of these rituals is ultimate liberation, a claim that originally represented the result of ascetic practices based on the rejection of worldly life. We know that this notion of libera-

⁴² See JR AP 114. For the text and translation of the passage, see the appendices.

⁴³ Sanderson (forthcoming b) particularly addresses emic attitudes towards the relationship between Śaiva and Vedic scriptures and the socio-religious implication in terms of practice for the Śaiva initiate.

tion – *mokṣa* – has a long history in the Indic context, with its beginnings found amongst the renouncer movements (*śramaṇa*) of the late Vedic period. *Mokṣa* is characterized by transcending worldly desires such as life, reproduction and material pursuits, as well as the attainment of mystic knowledge about the true state of things; ascetics are also considered ritually dead to society. In these renouncer movements, as Patrick Olivelle has pointed out, “the householder is replaced by the celibate ascetic as the new religious ideal”.⁴⁴ This had wide-reaching repercussions for the socio-religious order, resulting in the formation of the *āśrama* system.⁴⁵

As we have seen, Śaivism also originated in a purely ascetic milieu on the fringes of society, although at a much later date than the *śramaṇa* developments of the late Vedic period. In this ascetic milieu, meditative and yogic procedures were practiced in the belief that they spiritually advanced the individual towards liberation. With the shift towards tantric Śaivism, the importance of mystic knowledge and ascetic lifestyles were substituted by the power of mantras and ritual, a move that made it possible to offer these originally ascetic values and spiritual benefits to householders active in society. In this way, even though the ascetic remained at the higher end of the spiritual hierarchy, the householder was theoretically able to attain the same spiritual results without having to withdraw from society and undertake severe yogic and meditative practices. It is thus not surprising that the tension resulting from originally ascetic values meeting worldly needs for mourning and regeneration were not immediately resolved and that theoretical repercussions remained visible in inconsistencies between doctrine and practice.

⁴⁴ See Olivelle 1993, p. 65.

⁴⁵ Olivelle 1993. See, in particular, pp. 64–67 on the topic of the householder and the ascetic ideal in the formative phase of the *āśrama* system’s development.

