

Geoffrey Samuel, *Tantric Revisionings: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005, x + 384 Pp. Rs. 495. (Hardback)

Civilized Shamans (1993), as articulated by the author himself, was the starting point for several essays of this book. In the previous book, Samuel argued for the shamanic approach to Tibetan Buddhism, although the use of the term 'shaman' in reference to lamas and other Tibetan Tantric practitioners is problematic according to many text-based Buddhologists. It is remarkable that Samuel, who belongs to the lineage of the great anthropologists of Buddhist religion, has been aware of the huge gap between Buddhologists' and anthropologists' works. The contents of this book are as follows:

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The introduction contains a brief summary of *Civilized Shamans* as well as a useful survey of chapters. The author also puts forward the question of Shamanism in the context of Tibetan Buddhism and views religion in Tibet as having shamanic and clerical elements. Chapter Two (1982), which was written much earlier than *Civilized Shamans*, is intended here as a general comparative framework. The differences and similarities between Buddhism in Tibet and in

Thailand, between Tantric Buddhism in Tibet and Tantric religion in Bali and Kathmandu Valley, etc. are carefully examined.

Among Chapters Three to Eight, the first three chapters are explorations into Indian Tantra and its transformations in Tibet from the historical perspective. Chapter Three examines the ways in which Tantra became normalized in Tibet. Chapter Four deals with the synthesis of contrasting components of Tantra in the Tibetan soil. Chapter Five explores the transformation in Indian religions and the radical reshaping of religious practices relating to local deities. Chapters Six and Seven deal with Bon religion as an alternative stream of Tibetan Tantric religion and emphasize its own integrity. Chapter Eight, which is one of the author's several papers on the Ge-sar epic, has a unique interpretation on the epic hero as the embodiment of political and spiritual authority, i.e. a Tibetan confluence of Buddha, shaman and tribal chieftain.

Among Chapters Nine to Twelve, the first chapter deals with the author's serious question as to why many Tibetan studies have a general tendency to treat Tibet as an isolated island of discourse. Chapter Ten stresses the importance of the folk religions of the Himalayan peoples for understanding the difference between the Tibetan version of Vajrayāna and those of the Newars and Balinese. Chapter Eleven develops a theme in Shamanism, which is particularly related to how we can make sense of discourse of spirits. Chapter Twelve focuses on the disagreement between the high status of Hindu female deities and a high status for Hindu women.

The last three chapters are concerned with Asian religious traditions in the global context. Chapter Thirteen examines the changes resulted from the global context at the networks of Buddhist centers built up by Tibetan refuge lamas. Chapter Fourteen focuses on the Western communities that follow Tibetan Buddhism as well as its centralized and decentralized Western versions. Chapter Fifteen deals with an important theme on "how Tantra has been interpreted in the West as primarily about the transformation and spiritualization of the sexual and erotic aspects of life."

Although Samuel is a first-class anthropologist of Buddhist religion, he is undoubtedly well-informed about textual studies of Buddhism. An inevitable question, however, arises: which aspect, 'shamanic' or 'clerical,' has provided the 'master narrative' in shaping the Tibetan version of Vajrayāna, absorbing and controlling the other aspect? I am not sure whether Samuel, who may think that 'shamanic' aspect has provided the 'master narrative' in this case, is right. The reverse seems to be true for many Buddhologists. In either case, it is certain that text-based Buddhologists should be well-informed about anthropological studies of Buddhism for its more integral understanding.

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