Magicians, Sorcerers and Witches: Considering Pretantric, Non-sectarian Sources of Tantric Practices

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Abstract: Most models on the origins of tantrism have been either inattentive to or dismissive of non-literate, non-sectarian ritual systems. Groups of magicians, sorcerers or witches operated in India since before the advent of tantrism and continued to perform ritual, entertainment and curative functions down to the present. There is no evidence that they were tantric in any significant way, and it is not clear that they were concerned with any of the liberation ideologies that are a hallmark of the sectarian systems, even while they had their own separate identities and specific divinities. This paper provides evidence for the durability of these systems and their continuation as sources for some of the ritual and nomenclature of the sectarian tantric traditions, including the predisposition to ritual creativity and bricolage.

Keywords: tantra; mantra; ritual; magician; sorcerer; seeress; vidyādhara; māyākāra; aindrajālika; non-literate

1. Introduction

In the emergence of alternative religious systems such as tantrism, a number of factors have historically been seen at play. Among these are elements that might be called ‘pre-existing’. That is, they themselves are not representative of the eventual emergent system, but they provide some of the raw material—ritual, ideological, terminological, functional, or other—for its development. Indology, and in particular the study of Indian ritual, has been less than adroit at discussing such phenomena, especially when it may be designated or classified as ‘magical’ in some sense. The social fact of several categories of individuals either referencing themselves or being referenced by others as magicians, sorcerers, witches or seers, and pursuing livelihoods by those means in ancient, medieval and modern India is a reality worthy of investigation, given the observable contribution of these groups to the eventual emergence of tantrism in the sixth or seventh century. They do not appear to have expressed ideologies of liberation or transcendent divinity but were concerned with magical crafts of various kinds. Such groups not only preceded the formation of sectarian, lineage-based tantrism by well over a millennium, but they also continued to function outside of formal tantric structures until the present—a poorly studied and under-recognized reality of Indian social and religious life.

This paper will argue that some of the dynamics and ritual practices of Indian magicians and sorcerers were appropriated by tantric groups, so that later forms still exhibit analogous attributes. Thus, various kinds of magicians and illusionists contribute some (out of many) source streams for social and ritual praxis, as well as magical nomenclature, both of which were appropriated by the tantric traditions on an as-need basis. The intermittent and idiosyncratic nature of the appropriation seems also to be a property of the earlier groups, and perhaps contributed to the tantric predisposition toward textual or ritual bricolage.

1 Some of this material I have presented previously in various venues, including the Tantra-Agama panel at the 14th World Sanskrit Conference in Kyoto, 2009, invited by Dominic Goodall and Einoo Shingo.
2. Problematic Historical Representations

Those having even a modest familiarity with scholarly literature on the contested origins of tantrism may see that there are several problematic positions that have skewed our understanding, and in some measure these positions are related. First, and most important, there is the supposition that the origins of tantrism are grounded in elite, intellectual formulae. In this model, the renowned hermeneutists and theologians within the various sectarian orders—Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Buddhist, Jain or other—represent the authentic voices and irrefutable sources of tantrism, and the roots of this movement is best understood by examining their archive. For some scholars, this includes the model that tantrism is an intellectual project formulated in diametric opposition to the dominant paradigm, inverting it, so that antinomian or alternative practices are but contradictions of the dharmasūtra dicta.

Second, because there is by definition no surviving literature attributable to non-literate traditions, such individuals cannot be reasonably postulated (Sanderson 1994, p. 92). Third, as authentic tantric sources must be grounded only in literate intellectualist textual traditions, any reports about alternative, non-literate groups must be considered fallacious or inconsequential (Wedemeyer 2013, p. 196). Fourth, such positions have been in some measure configured by questions of lineage and sectarian ideology, predominantly focused on literate traditions that survive to this day, in which one or another of them claim priority in order to depict all others as derivative. In this model, one of the modern sectarian systems of tantrism makes the claim of first invention, and the method of dissemination is diffusion, whether textually or by some other means.

While there certainly is a relationship between tantrism and the pre-existent intellectual, theological, legal and ritual literature of India, it still may appear to those informed on the history of alternative or emergent religious movements, that the unarguably later intellectual elites constitute a second-order phenomenon, in other contexts identified as “rationalized religion” by Weber. Such rationalized functions are extremely important for the development of hermeneutics and theology, but it is difficult to identify them as the principal sources of the differing traditions, which tend to be grounded in social disruption rather than in an act of intellectual imagination. Nor can much of tantrism be understood by a simple inversion of the “Vedic tradition” or the dharmasūtras (although both are actually manifold) for that would not yield the majority of tantric practices. Moreover,
as already pointed out by Blaut (1987) and others, unsophisticated diffusionist models similar to those proposed implicitly or explicitly encode a political position and covert hegemony, and certainly this seems apparent in many scholarly appeals to diffusion as the source of tantric textual similarity. Equally, it appears to me that a single source model, as exercised, is laden with multiple fallacies of historical reasoning, assumptions concerning authenticity and other questionable suppositions. So, if all secondary forms are derivative, with the implication that they thereby are inauthentic, then the intellectual traditions could also be considered derivative and inauthentic, a curious entailment of the proposal. As a result, in order to model the rise and efflorescence of tantrism in all its manifold diversity, models positing an elite intellectual project followed by a subsequent diffusion to the lower strata are perhaps less cogent than claimed.

In terms of our available archive, I would like to argue that such models take little account of the multi-nodal form of the matrix of tantrism, the discrete socio-cultural network systems, which in my estimation were developed in the highly distributed ritual world of India from a plethora of points and sources, not just from one. An alternative multi-nodal or multi-source model could assume that pre-existent forms—which may continue on independently—have persistently contributed to tantric ideas and rituals over time. The corollary to this would be that tantric systems continued to reinvent themselves on a decade-by-decade basis, one of the reasons that an omnibus definition of tantrism per se is so elusive. Elements appropriated may be either integrated as ritual or textual pericope, but that appropriation occurs with a robust dynamic, and is neither unidirectional nor unilateral. The process resists essentialist presumptions, for the elements selectively either diffused or appropriated both change and are reinterpreted in new social and ideological horizons in the process. A multi-nodal and simultaneously emergent, distributed network system fits Indian reality more clearly than the modern Euro-American ideology of single-source independent invention, which is not even true in the Euro-American world. Specialists in the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism have arrived at similar multi-nodal models in understanding the different factors—intellectual, literary, performative, soteriological and so on—which contributed to the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism evolving in the first to sixth centuries of the common era in highly distributed networks (e.g., the essays in (Nyanatusita himi 2013)). Analogous observations have been made about the purāṇas, the gīhy-sūtras, the epics, and other genres of Indian religious literature. In general, these models are consonant with the text-critical methods of form and redaction theory as well.

In this paper, I would like to focus on one of the historiographical curiosities found in tantric studies, one that extends from the suppositions just mentioned: the desire for scholars to integrate prior religious outliers into forms known from literature of their specialization. Sometimes this is done with the relatively historical awareness that these previous outliers are not actually the later forms encapsulated in an earlier enterprise, anachronistically projected into the past. More frequently, however, we see a willingness to draw straight lines between one behavior, often of non-literate groups, and a later, generally literate, form of ritual or belief, neglecting the differences of social frame, operational function or symbolic formulation. Thus, the pattern established in a mature system is held as the standard, and the antecedent outlier system is shaped, sculpted, and sometimes forced

drinking liquor and seducing the guru’s wife are found in the same place in many dharmsūtras and even in the same rule: e.g., Viṣṇusūtra 35.1: brahmañātya sunāpānam brāhmaṇaṁsva varnavarṇaṁ gurudraṣṭaṁnaṁ iti mahāpāṭakāni || “Killing a brahman, drinking liquor, stealing the gold of a brahman, and going to the guru’s wife—these are the great crimes causing loss of caste.” Simply inverting the different, often contradictory, legal injunctions of either the dharmsūtras or the purāṇas or the gīhyāsūtras does not yield tantrism, nor has Wedemeyer done more than select a few items to promote his thesis, ignoring a great mass of data that does not support his position.

The extensive literature and quantitative model construction based on issues of nodality and network theory are beyond the scope of this paper, but its applicability to archaeology has been summarized in Collar et al. (2015) and its use in Indian agrarian governance is explored in Udayaadithya and Gurtoo (2013). Form-critical approaches are discussed in Sweeney and Zvi (2003), and historically assessed in Byrskog (2007); recent redaction-critical approaches are outlined in Tan (2001). Other text-critical approaches are emerging, but they generally presume a granulation of a text drawn from multiple sources.

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into a comfortable acquaintance in scholarly literature. This is the teleological fallacy, that the end known to us is encoded in the earlier form, a fallacy often accompanied with the quasi-Marxist idea that the earlier form embodies the seeds of its own destruction. Thus, the model is most often provided an addendum, in which the pre-existent outlier is “absorbed” into tantrism, with the inchoate presumption that Indian tantrism acted as a kind of religious singularity, operating in a manner so that nothing could escape its gravity.

Instead I would propose that these pre-existing, alternative behaviors had their own dynamics, although much is unknown based on the data available. Among my arguments will be the observation that we are often misled by Indological attachment to the lineages of the written texts, which indeed have their historical gravity precisely because they are written and conserved. Yet, when we compare Indological emphasis on literacy with the earliest remotely comprehensive census of India, the 1881 census, we may surmise how slight literacy must have been in the world in which tantrism emerged. The census concluded that, among the adult Hindu subjects, literacy was 6% range (about 12% of males, negligible females; (Plowden 1883, vol. 1, pp. 227–38)), a figure almost exactly confirmed in the 1891 census (Baines 1893, pp. 214–16). The authors of the imperial census were well aware—as we are in our census statistics today—that the disadvantaged classes were undercounted. Perhaps the actual literacy figure was in the neighborhood of 5% overall, possibly less. I cannot imagine trying to frame a history of a religious movement and not acknowledge that, in all likelihood, approximately 94–95% of the population of the period were not literate, especially given the well-known privileging of the oral episteme in India. It therefore appears a questionable use of the available data to insist that we only consider those representing themselves in the literate record, and not acknowledge how the many others were represented by those few who could actually write.

3. Cue the Magicians

This is a somewhat loquacious introduction to the problem of sorcerers, witches and magicians in ancient and medieval India. Certainly, such figures are attested quite early, and their attestation continues on to the present. Yet they do not represent specific sectarian traditions associated with tantrism, even if the behaviors are similar to or overlap with them to a degree. In this regard, we may observe that there is a difference between the social life of the individual, the professional behavior of persons allied to groups or not, and the identity of the person as a member of a specific group. At the advent of an investigation, it is useful not to conflate these.

I am quite aware of the problems of definition associated with sorcerers, witches and the like. Virtually all who have written on this issue have commented on the fuzzy category structures involved (e.g., (Goudriaan 1978, pp. 1–2, 58–59; Kapferer 1997, pp. 8–12)), but most such discussions emphasize the categories of sorcery or magic as an ideology or behavior rather than sorcerers as a social form; they emphasize witchcraft rather than witches. Moreover, Indian literature is not impoverished in their cataloging of these behaviors. The Brahmajālasutta in the Dīghanikāya, for example, mentions 115 different skills—from reading of signs to mirror divination—that might qualify as sorcery or witchcraft (Dīghanikāya I.9.1-11.22; Sumangalavilāsini I.92.9-97.19). Because we can expect that many such behaviors would have been aggregated in a single individual, we do not know from such lists how they were associated or how the aggregation would have occurred: Is prognostication via visions visited on boys and girls handled by the same individual? What about reading signs from mice or the attributes of elephants—were they related? Does one both raise vetālas and speak with yaks or are these different specialities? These are not inconsequential questions, as we shall see.

In contrast, our problem is simultaneously simpler and more complex, as we are first and foremost concerned with the activities of social, lineal, clan or caste groups operating under selective indigenous identity designations: yuttadhāna, ikṣanikā, māyākāra, aindrajālika, vidyādharā and so on. They should be differentiated, as much as possible, from the saints that acquire magical powers—siddhi or rddhi—through religious actions, such as via ascetical tapas or by meditative practices like dhyāna. That is, there is a difference in kind between claims about a saint attaining psychic powers through
meditative success or spiritual purity and claims about powers that are transmitted through groups from one individual to another, often from the communication of spells or the performance of a ritual. Even then, the distinction blurs when we see spells obtained by tapas, meditation or other kinds of virtue. However, I would at the same time argue that there is a difference in sensibility between magical power that cannot be shared—as religious ability—in distinction to a spell that can be accidentally overheard or ceremonially transferred from one to another with no loss of efficacy. We are expected to understand that siddhi or the psychic powers of abhijñā cannot be accrued by overhearing spells at night, while the sorcerer is muttering in his sleep.

To comprehend the social and ritual world of these liminal figures, we could understand that a single individual plays multiple roles, effecting multiple ritual functions and systems, much as we see from other religious agents of the period. Moreover, we also see figures described in literature without specific titles, so such category structures should be suggestive guides rather than exhaustive and closed systems. In any event, the English language category structure is, for the moment, less compelling than the Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit category structures. So I propose to look at some of these categories in their context and see what they have to tell us.

4. Yātudhānas

The history of the study of magic in India—through the work of Keith, Henry, Goudriaan, and Siegel among others—has only secondarily addressed the social issues with which I am concerned. Türsig and Grafe were the really the first to embrace fully a similar project, and Türsig’s classic article on abhicāra identifies magical rituals of death—specifically kṛtyā—as a focal point of the both Āṅgirasas (e.g., AVŚ 8.5.9) and, in particular, the yātudhānas, those enemies of Indra and of the rṣis mentioned as early as the Rgveda. The noun yātu in yātudhāna is sometimes identified with the other early term for magic or sorcery, kṛtya, although the term yātu appears sometimes to be employed as an abbreviation for the yātudhānas. (AVŚ 8.3.2c: ā jīhvaṇyā mūradevān rabbhavoc kravyādo vrṣṭvāpi dhatsvāsan | 121 |) Whitney’s translation evokes the power of the expression, “Do thou, of iron tusks, O Jātavedas, kindled, touch the sorcerers with thy flame (arcis); take hold of the false-worshipers with thy tongue; cutting off (?) the flesh-eaters, shut them in thy mouth.” (Whitney 1905, vol. 1, p. 481). Here the yātudhānas are understood to invoke a specific class of gods, the mūr/mūla-devas, a group that was important at the time, even if its identity and extension are poorly understood today.

Yātudhāna sorcerers certainly were accorded exceptional powers, which perhaps validates the extraordinary fear of them expressed, especially in the RV X.87 and eighth kan. d. a of the Atharvaveda Saunakīya. Six categories of yātudhāna action are particularly suggestive:

1. They are there identified as descending in the air—RV 10.87.6: yad vāntariṃkṣe pathibhiḥ patantam; AVŚ 8.3.5c: anarikṣe patantam yātudhānam. We might also note the mention in Atharvaveda Saunakīya 4.20.9 that describes the things that fly in the sky, contiguous to asking to see yātudhānas and the demonic piśācas.

2. They seize with spears things obtained or acquired. (AVŚ 8.3.7: ālabdhānām reśībhir yātudhānān).

3. They conduct “root” magic associated with the “root-gods” (mūradevoh) who the Vedic rṣis believe ought to be destroyed (AVŚ 8.3.10, 8.4.24, 4.28.6: śṛṇehi tredhā mūlāṃ yātudhānasya; AVŚ 4,28.6a: yah kṛtyaṇkṛn mālakṛṇyā yātudhānā). It may be seen that Mānavadharmasāstra 9.290 declares fines against anyone invoking the mūlakarmāṇī rites and pronounces that the performance of such rituals constitutes a cause for the loss of caste (Mānavadharmasāstra 11.64), suggesting the perdurance of this class of malignant ritual (Bloomfield 1913; Sen 1968).

4. They steal with speech (AVŚ 8.3.14: vācā stenam).

5. They smear themselves with the flesh of humans, horses and cattle (AVŚ 8.3.15: yah pauruseṇe vṛahiṣṭa samukte yo aśvyeṇa paśunan yātudhānāḥ |).
6. They employ sorcery associated with small animals and birds—owls, owlets, dogs, cuckoos, eagles and vultures (AVS 8.4.22: *ulakanyakutum śusulakanyakutum jahi śvayātum uto kokyātum | suparnayātum uto grhrayātum drṣādeva pra mṛṇa rakṣa indra ||*).

Atharvaveda Śāunakiya 2.24, lists eight types of *yātudhānas*, or *yātus*, and I provide the list here: śerabhaka, śevrīdhaka, mroka, sarpa, jārṇi, upabh, arjunī, bharājī. These are somehow all types of Kimīdins, apparently another kind of sorcerer about which little is known. So far as I am able to tell, many of these eight designations have eluded successful linguistic analysis. The uncertain nature of these words leads me to wonder whether they might be proper familial or place names rather than a non-clan based typology as understood by others (cf. AVS I.28.1-4, I.7.1). In Sāyana’s commentary he treats these as personal names but apparently operating within a group following the leader, with whom I would presume the group members had some consanguine relation. Since both brahmans and sorcerers are otherwise known to establish themselves in familial lineages, we may presume that *yātudhānas* did as well, and by the time of the Vāyupurāṇa (II.5.114, II.8.123), they were mythologized as snakes, rakṣasas demons and descendants of Kāśyapa. Yet they were notably also described as following the cult of the sun, wandering with the solar deity, thus placing them in association somehow with the two primary priesthoods of the solar cult, the Magas and the Bhojakas (Bronkhorst 2014–2015); even then, the parameters of this statement remain unclear as it relies on the broad strokes of the Vāyupurāṇa.

The sense that we are speaking of familial magical cultures is buttressed by intermittent references to females of the species, the *yātudhānī* who are also mentioned both in the Atharvaveda and thereafter. Beseeching Indra, the 1000-eyed god,

![Verse](https://example.com/verse.png)

As late as the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, the female *yātudhānī* were described as in the retinue of the Asura Hiranyakṣa, “O sinless one, the mountains appeared with *yātudhānī* observed residing in the directions, releasing weapons, having spears and wearing their hair loose” (Bhāgavatapurāṇa 3.19.20 *girayah pratyaḍrṣyanta nānayudhamuco ‘nagha | digvāsaso yātudhānāḥ śālingo muktamārdhajāh ||*).

As with the *yātudhānas*’ relations to most of the Vedic divinities, Indra is their primary antagonist, with other gods like Soma, Agni, Mitra-Varuṇa, and Rudra (AVS 6.32.1-3) also charged to defeat them. However, in one hymn, AVS 6.13, they are paid homage as incorporated with death, and at the same time they are loosely associated with medicine, and with mūlā magic.

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The specter of the *yātudhāna* was sufficiently dreaded that Rgveda 7.104.12-16 relates a hymn, interpreted to reflect the contest of Vasiṣṭha with Viśvāmitra. Vasiṣṭha, having had his hundred sons destroyed, is accused of being a *yātudhāna*, which he vehemently denies in an oath, cited in some Dharmaśāstras as a method for proof (e.g., Māṇavadharmaśāstra 8.110; Nāradasmṛti I.221). A similar accusation was made in the Valmiki Rāmāyana that Yadu was demonic and his progeny were rakṣasas and *yātudhānas* (Rāmāyana 7.59.14-20), part of a larger sphere of association between demons of various varieties and the sorcerers. In addition, the specter of conflict seems to shadow the demon-sorcerer relationship—the Anuśāsana-parvan of the Mahābhārata 13.3.4 portrays Viśvāmitra issuing forth countless *yātudhāna* sorcerers and rakṣasas because of his arrogance at destroying the hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha.

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Despite these and related episodes, we may still acknowledge that the magical system of the *yatudhāna* remains something of an empty set. The depiction of Viṣvāmitra in the *Anuśāsana-parvan* is already hybrid. He creates a rākṣast demoness out of the homa fire, signifying the brahmanical ritual component, yet the rākṣast’s name was *yatudhānī* and was the scourge of his enemies, the seven ṛṣis. Ultimately, however, the ṛṣis defeat the *yatudhāna* rākṣast in a riddle contest. So, other than their use of malignant magic, stealing with speech, very close association with rākṣasas, piśācas, mūradevas, animal spirits, and occasional dabbling in medicine, the early texts tell us less than we would wish about the *yatudhāna* group identity and ritual systems.

Factors like these lead me to believe that the designation *yatudhāna* operates rather as a cypher for the non-brahmanical magical threat, a brahmanical category for magicians understood to have a social and ideological location distinct from brahmanical authority and the Vedic mantra corpus. Thus, the designation *yatudhāna* in ancient and medieval India invokes nomenclature presumably referencing individuals or groups, but it is unlikely to specify the name that they would have employed for themselves as a self-identification. Part of the evidence for this is the simple observation that the designation *yatudhāna* appears nowhere in the Pali Canon. Nor does it, so far as I have been able to discover, occur in any surviving Buddhist Sanskrit records, although the *Maṇjuśrīyamālakalpa* includes *yatup* as a kind of magic associated with disease (*Maṇjuśrīyamālakalpa* 21.19ab *nara yatudhānibhir hanyate tadda*). Searches for a Prakrit or Apabhṛṣṭa equivalent to the term *yatudhāna* have equally been unsuccessful. Yet the term continues to surface in brahmanical literature like the *grhyasūtras*, largely because their invocation of the Vedic texts as authoritative voices, and *yatup* survives in modern Indic languages in its cognate *jādā* as a term for both magic and magicians (*jādāgar* (Glucklich 2012)).

5. *Iksānika/Ikṣanikā*, Their Yakṣas and Vetālas

In distinction, the other terms I hope to explore appear non-denominational, for we find variations on them in a variety of contexts, both secular and religious. For example, in part of its discussion of the means for conquering other states and creating sedition in them, the *Arthaśāstra* recommends that several classes of individuals should be employed as the fake news of the period—by propagandistically broadcasting the ‘king’s powers’ that he had displayed in a previous deceptive show of omniscience or by his agents deceptively playing the part of gods appearing in fire halls, only to announce the authority of the king.

\[\text{tad asya svavisaye kārtāntikanaimittikamūrthi\text{kapaurāṇīkeṣānika\text{gādhapuruṣaḥ sācīvyakarās taddarśinaḥ ca prakāṣayeṇuh} || Arthaśāstra 13.1.7}\]

And secret agents acting as fortunetellers, interpreters of omens, astrologers, fabulists, seers, and those imperial assistants who have witnessed [the ruler’s deceptive displays], they should all broadcast these legends in his own territory.

While the difference between some of the terms—especially the kinds of fortune tellers (*kārtāntika, naimittika*)—is not entirely clear, the person of the *ikṣanika* or, alternatively, *ikṣanika* would seem to indicate a seer, one who finds or sees objects or events distant in time and space.

Often we are informed they have assistance, and there is an old Jaina allusion to the similarity of sounds heard following the demise of a Jina to a secret request made by a female *ikṣanikā*. The early verse supplement to the *Āvasyakanirukti*, the *Mālabhāṣya*, ties a plethora of skills to the mythic lives of the Jinas. Upon the Jina’s demise we are told in the *Mālabhāṣya* that the following extraordinary sounds are heard:

\[\text{chelāvaṇam ukkīṭṭhāi bālalāvāṇam va seṇṭāī ||} \]

9 In this they are similar to the Angirasa, who were said to have had an *Āṅgirasakalpa*, containing their dark rituals. The contemporary texts under that name, however, appear later and invested with much tantric lore; see (Sanderson 2007) for the Oriya versions.
And it is true that these are sometimes grouped together, yet the range of behavior attributed to

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Despite its relatively early date, it can be noted that the Avasayakanyukty-acacri and related literature has received the attention that it is due, possibly because of the difficulty of handling the Prakrit materials. See (Leumann 2010; Balbir and Oberlies 1993; Bruhn 1998).

I would wonder if this practice is not the actual source of the yaksas well known through Jaina and epigraphic sources, Ghanakarn, generally interpreted as the yaks with “bell-ears”; see (Cort 1997, 2000) on this figure. One problem for the idea that name may be based on a ritual is that we find, for example, the Tala image, a curious and highly disputed statue, where his testicles are carved in the image of bells; see (Nigam 2000) for disparate opinions on the nature of this image. It suggests the possibility of an iconography in which the yaksas’ ears were actually understood as bells. The other problem with the ritual being the source is chronological: I have found no early, authentically pre-epigraphical source describing this ritual in that manner; see the following note.

We may believe that the iksanikas were similar to the naimittikas, those soothsayers who made a living by reading signs of various kinds and who are a bit outside of the parameters of this essay. And it is true that these are sometimes grouped together, yet the range of behavior attributed to these iksanikas is greater than finding lost items or answering obscure questions, as seen elsewhere in Buddhist literature, whether in the Sanskrit or Pali form. Perhaps our most dramatic portrayal

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of an ikṣaṇikā is in a section of the Saṁyuttanikāya, the Maṅgulīthisutta, where she is depicted in the fourteenth in a series of formulaic statements on the consequences of unwholesome action:

:idhāhaṁ āvuso, gijjhākāta pabbataṁ orohanto addasam itthim duggandhim maṅgulim veḷāsam gacchantim | Tam enam gijjhāpi dharrākāpi kulaḷāpi anupattivā anupattivā iti cacchenti, vibhajenti | Sa sudam aṭṭāsavari karoti | TASSA MAṆGAṬIŅAṬI VATA BHA, ABBHAṬAṆA VATA BHA | EVARĀPO’PI NĀMA SATTO BHAVISSATI EVARĀPO’PI NĀMA YAKSA BHAVISSATI | ... ESA BHIKKHAVE ITTHI IMASAMIṬI EVA RĀJAGHE IKKHANIKĀ AHOŚI | SAMYUTTANIKĀYA II.260

Friend, now I was descending from Vulture Peak and saw a woman, foul smelling, of jaundiced complexion, traveling through the air, while vultures, crows14 and falcons were following her, pecking at her and driving her away. For her part, she was screaming. So it occurred to me, friends, that this is really strange, quite extraordinary, that there would be a person of this kind, or perhaps there would be a yakṣa of this variety, one who would be in this particular embodiment. (then follows a discussion of the karmic causes for her affliction) I understood, O monks, that I had seen the seeress of Rājagṛha.

In the Saṁyuttāgama (T.99.2.137a16-b3) in Chinese we find the equivalent text, but there distributed by gender, describing both the seer and seeress of Rājagṛha, with curious gender-specific additions: she has an iron pestle on her head (頂有鐵磨sirasi musalām abhava?) glowing with fire and revolving; he travels as if in a whirlwind. They both delude beings by trying to find valuable things for them. There is much of interest in this description, but we should be wary, as it is strikingly formulaic, both in language and in textual placement. In it, for example, we see echoes of the Aṭṭhāvatā image of the yuttudhānas descending through the intermediate space. Yet also, in both the Saṁyuttanikāya and the Saṁyuttāgama, virtually the same description is also applied to a variety of spirits: preta, yakṣa, etc., so that it is by no means unique to the seers/seeresses. However, both the scripture and the commentary (Sastraṭṭhappakasini II.221) reinforce the consistently close association of these figures and their spirit familiars, as the same discourse structure can be applied by the Buddhists to both.

Still, there remains the visionary ability of assisting others to find lost things or foretelling the future. This specific attribute is in accord with the description of a practice found among the group of six bhikṣunīs in the Dharmaṇugatavinaya, translated by Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian between 410-412 CE.

Dharmaṇugata-vinaya-vibhaṅga T. 1428.22.774c21-775a3

The lord was staying in Jetavana, at Anāthapiṇḍadārāma in Śrīvastī. Then the group of six bhikṣunīs studied mantras to earn a living. The mantras were those of prognostication through signs (āṅgavidiya), concerning warfare (ksatratvaidya), raising the dead, knowing the signs of death, or the teaching on transformation by [rituals involving] small animals and birds, and prognostication using bird calls. All the bhikṣunīs heard [about them], and among them was one with few needs and content (*alpecchā saṃtuṣṭā), practiced in the dhītāgūnas, who enjoyed studying the Vinaya, and knew modesty and decorum. Angrily she scolded the six bhikṣunīs, “What do you say about your actions, that you have studied

14 Saṁyutta II.260.4 reads dharikā, but dharika is unattested; the refrain from the first section II.255.13 has kākāpi instead, and I have translated that.
these mantras, up to prognostication by bird calls?” She spoke to all the monks, who went to the Buddha.

The Lord for this reason called together the bhikṣu samgha, and scolded the six bhikṣunīs saying, “These are that which you should not do—this is not proper deportment, not the śramaṇaḥdharma, not brahmacarīyata, not following that which is to be done. They are not to be accomplished! What do you say, bhikṣunīs, that you studied these techniques, on up to prognostication by bird calls?”

Of course, the nuns agreed that they had studied these practices. And, despite their occurring in specifically Buddhist texts, it is certain that these are not Buddhist practices, for they would not have been so reprimanded. Indeed, some of them—like aṅgavijjā and kṣatrasārividhi—seem straight out of the list detailed in the Brahmajālasutta, and find resonance in Jain scriptures as well. Rituals using small animals and birds had already mentioned in conjunction with the yālādānas and will be examined in later contexts. As in our other instances I wish to consider, there is also no sign that this was associated with any specifically sectarian enterprise at the time, and none of the designations associated with these mantras seem dedicated to a single divinity. At most, they drift toward the broad Śārta-based vidhāna or pariśīṣṭa rituals, and the conclusion of this episode in the same Vinaya indicates that if you read laukika texts for the purpose of healing or mitigating problems, then there is no difficulty (Dharmagupta-vinaya-vibhaṅga T. 1428.22.775a11-13). Both the Buddhist and Jain problem with such practices is the issue of right livelihood more than anything else—employing mantras for profit.

We note that the mantras mentioned are wider than simply understanding the prognostication from signs, and include the mantras controlling the dead, implicating vetāla rites. The lore on the raising of the dead and conquering the creature has been described in various Buddhist Vinayas, most expressly the Sarvāstivāda and Mālasarvāstivāda Vinayas, and the agents are also represented as wayward Buddhist monks or nuns (Huang 2009; Skilling 2007).

In the Bhaisajyaguru-sūtra, the vetāla rites are equally associated with rituals dedicated to the yaksas and rākṣasas:


To. 504, fol. 278a4-b1: punar aprām maṇjuśrīḥ santi sattvāḥ ye paśyunābhārataḥ sattvānaṁ parasaṁyaṁ kalahavīrahivīdāṁ kārāpayanti | te parasparam viṇgahacitāḥ sattvāḥ nānāvyākṣam akusālaṁ abhisamsкурvanti kāyena vācā manasā anyonyoṁ ahitakāṁ nityaṁ parasparam anarthyaṁ pariṇāmante | te ca vanadevatām avālayanti vṛṣadēvatām gīridevatām ca śmaśāneṣu prthak prthah bhūtān avālayanti tiryagyonyagatāṁ ca prāṇino jīvitaṁ vyavapradyanti māṃsasarudhiḥbhākṣanān yaksarāksasān pājaṇyante | taśya satrūr nāma vā satrāpratimāṁ vā

15 Cf. also Dharmaguptaka-vinaya-vibhaṅga 1428.22.754a17-b10, under pāyaṇika #117 and restated 745b11 in pāyaṇika #118. It is possible that the six bhikṣunīs described in the Dharmagupta-vinaya-vibhaṅga were understood to be nāmaṇi, thus defeating my category restriction, but I have seen no verification of this.

16 Aṅgavijjā is no. 16 and khaṭṭavijjā no. 18 in the list of miccaḥāvīra in Brahmajālasutta at Dīghaṁkara I.9.7; Sumaṅgaliṁśaṁ 1.93.10-18. I assume the Chinese translation as if kṣatra (刹) really references kṣatra instead. A similar warning on livelihood is found in Uttarādhyayana 20.45: je lakkhaṇam suvinā paśubhāmāṃyaḥ nimittakoṇahalasamapādāḥ | khekavijāsavadārāvāni gacchati saranām tamami kale || ‘One who practices a life of deceptive spells, employing himself by [interpretation of] dreams and qualities, devoted to fraudulent statements concerning signs, will be without refuge when karma come due.’
Moreover, Mañjuśrī, there are beings who are addicted to slander and cause mutual strife, fighting and discord among beings. They are beings with minds intent on mutual belligerence and perform unwholesome acts. By means of body, speech and mind they desire injury to each other and are intent on each other’s misfortune. They invoke a forest god, or a tree or mountain god, or invoke spirits in individual cremation grounds. They deprive beings born into the womb of animals of their lives and offer yakṣas and rakṣasas food of flesh and blood. Having made an image of the body of an enemy, they accomplish terrible spells, or desire to damage beings or the destruction of [beings’] bodies by the practices of kākhordas and vetālas.

Here we find the distinctive affirmation that, first, there are cultic associations with specific local divinities and, second, as in the case of the bhikṣunīs we find the aggregation of practices associated with apparently several different groups, appropriated on an as-need basis.

Indeed, various narratives suggest that few ritual practices were tradition specific: A spell with a distinct vetāla function—raising a corpse from the dead (matakūṭhāpanamanta)—is identified in the Saṅjitājātaka (Jātaka I.510, no. 150), said to have been learned by the bodhisattva while residing in Takṣasālī. The idea of corpse revival to speak truth in response to a question is found in the story of the ascetic Korakkhattiya in the Dīghanikāya, indicating that the early Buddhists were familiar with the idea if not themselves practicing the ritual (Dīghanikāya III.8).

However, a specifically ikṣaṇikā association with a vetāla-like practice occurs in an interesting episode described by the Asilakkhaṇajātaka (no. 126) and demonstrates that these seers/seeesses were also expected to engage in charnel ground rituals. In the Jātaka story, a prince seeks to take his beloved princess away from her father, the king, who does not approve of the union. The princess is pining for her love in the melodramatic manner found in Indian amorous literature. The prince asks an ikṣaṇikā to assist him in spirited the young lady away. She agrees and reveals how it will be accomplished.

Instead of a corpse, though, the seeress will hide the prince beneath the bed, ready to take the princess away. We are informed that the plan unfolds as desired, the king agrees, and the Great Seeress (mahā-ikkhaṇṭika) gets the princess in the cart. As they proceed to the charnel ground, she warns the guards to be on their toes,

When I’ve set the princess down on the bed, that corpse underneath will sneeze, and then he’ll come out from under the bed. Then, he’ll try to grab the first person he sees—so look sharp!
The prince under the bed has been equipped with black pepper and he puts it up his nose, with the expected results—the gang of guards throw down their weapons when they hear the sneeze, the prince takes his love away to be married, and the king shrugs the whole episode off with a philosophical detachment worthy of the Stoics. For our purposes, however, it is evident that such liminal figures as this ikkhanika were invested in all kinds of witchcraft procedures. In addition, while the word vetala is not employed in the text (much as we saw with the bhiksunis above), the narrative requires that procedures for corpse reanimation were known to the audience in some manner. Jain and some magical literature similarly describe the animation of a corpse for various purposes without the vetala designation, so this use appears distributed in various ways across traditions.17

At a slightly later date—but approximately contemporaneous to the Bhaisajyaguru description above—and in an analogous vein, the Brhatsamhitā of Varahamihira will describe a maṇḍalaka figure, attendant on a specific kind of king.18

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{maṇḍalakakṣaṇam} & \text{ato rucakānu} \text{caro 'bhicāra} \text{vīs} \text{kūśalāḥ} \mid \\
\text{kṛtyāvetālādiśu karmasu vidyāśu cānurataḥ} & \mid 68.37 \\
\text{vṛddhakārah kharapuramāṇātāhjās ca sāatrāntāane kūśalāḥ} & \mid \\
\text{dvijādevayājayogaprasaktadhī strījito matimān} & \mid 68.38
\end{align*}
\]

The maṇḍalaka is an opportunist, in the entourage of a rucaka king, skilled in killing magic (abhicāra), and fond of spells relating to the rituals of the kṛtyā and vetāla spirits.

He looks old, hair rough and stiff, but skilled in the destruction of enemies. Intellectually attached to brahmans, gods, sacrifice and yoga, he is intelligent, but conquered by women.

As indicated in the verse, this unprepossing character is in the entourage of a specific kind of king, one who is himself not of the highest order, governed as he is by the planet Mars.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{subhrākeśo raktaśyamaḥ kambugrīvo vyādirghāsyah} & \mid \\
\text{śūraḥ krūraḥ śreśṭho mantri caurasvāmi vyāyāmi ca} & \mid 68.27
\end{align*}
\]

Attractive hair and eyebrows, [the Rucaka king] has a dark red visage, his neck marked with three lines, face very long in shape.

He is a warrior, cruel, a chieftain with secret counsel, the head of a band of thieves, and hard-charging.

Therefore, much as we saw the strong relationship between kings and magicians above, Varahamihira articulated the idea that there was a class of magicians who were associated with the needs of unsavory rulers, ones who themselves easily crossed the line between legitimate warfare (according to the dharmasūtra understanding) and the naked exercise of power for personal gain. The aura of vetālas and kṛtyās (here interpreted as the raising of a female evil spirit) gave the magician both his power and his liminal status as a member of the thief-king’s court.

Moreover, perhaps a word of prudence is advisable concerning attempts at a systematic survey of vetāla rites. My presentation does not even begin to touch on the manifold citations and descriptions of the vetāla or half-vetāla or corpse reanimation rites found in the Buddhist documents in Chinese and Tibetan, very few even identified and fewer critically evaluated.19 In aggregate, such evidence would suggest that vetāla rites were recognized as equipment of various kinds of magicians, seers

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17 Brhatkalpabhaṣya 5540-46 and Dattātreya 11.25 are examples.
18 These verses were noted by Dezso (2010, pp. 398–99), for other purposes.
19 Huang (2009) and Skilling (2007) have explored some of the rich materials available in the Vinayas, but they have only scratched the surface, as this episode indicates. Dezso (2010) explores two types of vetālasaṃāna, one raising the deceased and the other based on a homa, but seems not to see that the employment of the homa fire rite must be an overlay or a hybrid system, compounded with the indigenous rite of corpse animation.
and sorcerers prior to the Gupta period and continued to exist down to the present as an optional ritual behavior widely distributed through Indian traditions outside of textual lineages or sectarian affiliation. Attempts to identify early statements of these practices as necessarily associated with the later sectarian tantric lineages should be treated with much caution.

6. All in the Family: Ḍākās, ḍaṅkins, Vidyādhāras and Vidyādāris

The evidence available suggests that one facet of the role of magician or sorcerer entails familial relations, so that in a very familiar South Asian manner, there seems to have a hereditary component observable in some instances—families of sorcerers, handing the spells down over the generations. An example of this is in the story of miraculous powers (ākāhānutā) possessed by all the members of the family of a layman called Menḍaka, living in the town of Bhaddiya-nagara, related in Mahāvagga section of the Theravāda-vinaya (Vinaya I.240). The father could fill his granary with showers of grain; his wife had an inexhaustible pot; his son an inexhaustible bag of money; his daughter in law an inexhaustible basket; even the slave had the magical power to plow a field and leave seven furrows for each one plowed. The many, later versions in Buddhist literature (Ch’en 1953) tie these powers into a story of previous merit (prāvyayoga) accrued by members of the family, generally by feeding a pratyekabuddha in a time of famine. However, the Mahāvagga makes no such allusions, and its commentary (Samantapāsādikā 5.1101) is silent on a karmic Buddhist rationalization of a family of magicians. It appears that, being a Buddhist partisan, the family was branded with the language of spiritual powers, so that claims about their magical assets were placed in a Buddhist moral cosmos, with the subsequent creation of a prior life of merit to validate the magical attributions as generated by virtue and not from some other source.

That was not the case for those not being part of the Buddhist patronage system, who were given less than honorable designations, merited or not. In addition, the extraordinary abilities attributed to them consequently placed these persons in a liminal sphere, on the social margins where figures of power are considered to have divine/demonic extensions. This is a familiar trope in Indian literature, how one or another category of magical beings—vidyādhāras, ḍaṅkins, yaṃs, etc.—will have both a human and non-human community, and were able to pass seamlessly between the two forms. In each dimension, they were often considered to have familial or geographical associations, especially notable in the female of the species. The earliest female magical persona, as we saw, was the case of the yātudhānis, the females occasionally identified along with their male counterparts, but other designations were employed at a later date, ones that invoked narratives of familial descent.

Most Indologists are aware of the Gaṅgādhār inscription, that provides the earliest epigraphic evidence for the term ḍaṅkin, and Bruce Sullivan’s discussion of this inscription treats it judiciously (Sullivan 2006). Yet other, approximately contemporary, information is available in textual sources, verified as to their date by their translations into Chinese.20 The most important is the Laṅkāvatārasūtra, translated by Guṇabhadra in 443 and again by Bodhiruci in 513, for this text provides a series of morality tales on the eating of meat. So the king Simhasauddāsa lost his kingdom because of his desire for flesh, and Indra experienced misfortune after chasing the pigeon in the Śivi-jātaka. However, it is one description that interests us:

\[
\text{anyesā} \ \text{ca} \ \text{mahāmate} \ \text{narendrabhūtānāṃ} \ \text{satām} \ \text{aśveṇāpaḥṛtānāṃ} \ \text{atavāṃ} \ \text{paryātamanātāṃ} \\
\text{siṃhāḥ} \ \text{sahā} \ \text{maithunāṃ} \ \text{gatavātām} \ \text{jīvitabhāyād} \ \text{apatyāni} \ \text{cotpādita} \ \text{avatāh} \ \text{siṃhasaṃvāśāvāyāt} \\
\text{kalmaśa} \ \text{paśupratrāḥ} \ \text{prāya} \ \text{janamamāṃsādādavatāt} \ \text{sahuraśā} \ \text{mangṣādā} \ \text{abhātāvā} \ \text{iva} \ \text{ca} \ \text{mahāmate} \ \text{janmani} \ \text{saptaktuṇḍrake} \ \text{pi} \ \text{grāme}
\]

20 Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt’s (Herrmann-Pfandt 1996) article was the first, in my estimation, to treat this section intelligently. Unfortunately, her article has been left out of the scholarly discussion, so I thought to treat the Laṅkāvatāra section again, in part because she does not verify the Chinese translations.
And other kings, Mahāmati, carried away into the forest by their horse(s), wandered until, out of fear of their lives, had sex with a lioness, and progeny were born. The princes, beginning with Kalmāṣapāḍa, through the consequence of [their fathers’] cohabitation with the lioness, and because of the offending karmic outflow of eating meat in a previous life, they continued their carnivorous practices even once they had become kings. And thus in this birth, Mahāmati, in the village of Seven Huts (Saptakūṭṭiraka), [these princes] were born residing as ferocious cannibalistic warlocks and witches, because of an excessive attachment and greed for quantities of meat.

As is usual for Mahāyāna sūtras, the verse summary—which is in this case older than the prose—restates the issue:

\[
\text{cāṇḍālapukkasakule đomboṣu ca punah punah} \quad \text{| || \text{Lāṅkāvatāra-śūtra 8.14}} \quad \text{| ||}
\]

\[
dākinījātiyonyāṣa mãṁśade jāyate kule
\]

Again and again, he is born into a carnivorous family, of wombs in the category of witches, in a family of the cāṇḍālas or pukkasas, or among the đombas.

Here it would seem most specifically, that dākas and dākins were understood to reside in specific villages and were human beings, or at least appear as such. The 513 CE translation of Bodhiruci simply glosses dākas and dākins as men and women who end up as rākṣasas. (T. 671.16.563a24-25: 生諸男女盡羅). Yet it is relatively clear that the author of this short story understands the rebirth of the princes as dākas and dākins in this village of Seven Huts, wherever that may have been.

The representation of female spirits in a family-modeled relationship to sorcerers is the subject of the yaks. in.ā-sādhana studied by Yamano (2013). Going back at least as early as the Amoghapāsāmaḥakalparāja, the yaks.ī is controlled by various means, so that the vidyādhara will command her to perform functions, depending on the configuration of their familial relationship:

\[
\text{vidyādhareṇa vaktavyaṃ tṛṣṇaḥ kāryasādhanaṃ me kuruṣva iti mātā bhūryā bhagini} \quad \text{| yadi mātā}
\]
\[
\text{putravat pariṇāyati annapāṇaśayanaśvasthādvānadhānyāth} \quad \text{| bhūryā sarvopakaraṇaṃ aś Sarasvādhipatīn dādāti krīḍenānuvīcarati} \quad \text{| yadi bhāgīṇa sarvākāmikamanorathāni}
\]
\[
\text{paripāryayatī sarvakāryāni kāriṣayati sarvavatāvātī punār āgacchati dine dine} \quad \text{| ābhārana-vāsthrāṇi[va]lābharaṇa-lāṅkārthāni}
\]
\[
\text{dādāti dine dine anyāni divyastriyam ānyayati krīḍarthe} \quad \text{| Amoghapāsāmaḥkalparāja ms. 30a5-7.}
\]

Then the vidyādhara is to say, “You are to perform three kinds of actions for me!” These are, like a mother, a wife and a sister. If [the yaks.ī] is to be like a mother, then she is to treat the vidyādhara as a son, protecting him with food and drink, bed, clothing, money and grain. If like a wife, she is to render all services to her lord and master, and to follow his lead in sexual play (krīḍenānuvīcarati). If like a sister, then she is to fulfill all his desires as they occur. She will do everything that is to be done. She will run everywhere for him, and having returned, she will give him every day every variety of ornament and clothing. Each day, she will bring to him other heavenly women for the purpose of sexual play (krīḍārthe).

Thus, the relationships between the sorcerer/witch and his/her familiar were in some sense configured through the understanding of Indian family structure, and it would be curious if this family structure were not continued in the sorcerers’ physical lives.

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21 This is part of a larger section: Amoghapāśaḥkalparāja ms. 30a2-b1; To. 686, ma: 54a1-55a1; T. 1092.20.258c13-259b4.
22 Recent studies on the yoginis seem to suggest a similar phenomenon may have been at play; see (Serbaeva 2013; White 2013).
These fifth through seventh century descriptions were not exceptionally different from either the iks.an. ¯ık¯as mentioned above or the tribal (mata˙nga) witch (vidy¯adhari) who is at the center of the early story of Ánanda’s attempted seduction by the witch’s daughter Prakr.ti, who had fallen hopelessly in love with the Buddhist saint (Śárdalaka¯rṇa¯tavdána pp. 1–12). Her mother, the vidy¯adhari, prepares a homa of 108 arka (Calotropis gigantea) flowers and sends a spell that would fall squarely under the later tantric karma of magical attraction (taśikaraṇa). That such magical behaviors might have some familial base is suggested by the Dhanáidakha copper-plate inscription of Kumáragupta I describing a familial lineage (sákha) of a vidy¯adhari or from a vidy¯adhari, one that applies the curious Vedic metaphor of branch (sákha) to the description.

The old Br.hatkath¯a story literature, like the Vasudevahin. and the Br.hatkath¯a´ slokasam. graha, mentions the hereditary nature of vidy¯adhara families and their spells. So in one episode, a young vidy¯adhari named Vegavat¯ı is humiliated by her playmates because she cannot simply fly up the mountain; she replies that she has yet to receive the spells of her family (Br.hatkath¯a´ slokasam. graha 14:33: alabdhakulavidyā). Jambhakar (1984, pp. 225–33) has combed through the Vasudevahin. stories of vidy¯adhara sorcerers, and described the way in which the lineage stretching back to mythic descendants of the Jina R. s.abha, descendants named Nami and Vinam¯ı, eventually produced sufficient descendants of their own to populate cities of either eight, sixteen or sixty-four groups (nik¯aya) of vidy¯adharas, depending on the description. Accomplishment of the spells entailed various kinds of temporary religious activities: fasting, recitation of the mantra, various painful penances, to name but the most important. However, receipt of the vidyā might simply be performed by securing marriage into the family of sorcerers.

7. The Illusionists: M ¯ay¯ak¯ara, Aindraj¯alika

Different from the seer or seeress in some ways was the illusionist, variously identified as a mágakára, one who creates illusions, or aindraj¯alika, one involved with phantasms. Both Buddhist and Jain literature feature interesting vignettes of such figures, who are usually represented as creating trouble for people or encountering the respective founders of the religions under contentious circumstances. One Buddhist scripture, named after the illusionist Bhadra, describes his situation.

At this time in the city of Rájaýgra lived an illusionist. Skilled in mantras, skilled in the knowledge of crafts (*śilpavidyā), he had completed tasks (*kr.takarm¯anta), finished presentations and was famous. Among all the illusionists in Magadhá, or among all their disciples, he was known as the finest, renowned as eminent. Having delighted, deluded and confused all the groups of people in all of Magadha, he performed wondrous feats.
Only those who saw the truth and had faith, those following the Dharma—the upāsakas and upāsikās—were exempt (from his deception). Yet he received extraordinary wealth, acclaim and verses of praise, all produced by the power of his deceptive spells of illusion.

Here the description is fleshed out: Our person is an illusionist, a tradition in India to this day, and studied in some depth by Siegel (1991) and Shah (1998). Illusionists—whether designated as māyākāra or aindrajalika—have been a metaphor in Buddhist philosophical texts, like the Bodhicaryāvatāra 9.31, describing the idiocy of the illusionist falling in love with a woman conjured by his own illusion. Or the Ayoghara-jātaka, which in the canonical verses (XV.337) points out that the illusionist who is capable of deluding the crowd’s vision while on stage, even then cannot obtain release from death.

And it is true that Buddhist literature does not favor such figures generally. The Candraprabhabodhisattvavacarīyāvadāna of the Divyāvadāna (pp. 314–28) features the narrative of the magician (indrajalavidhiṇa) Raudrākṣa, who is a brahman living on the holy mountain Gandhamādana. Raudrākṣa conspires to request the head of the king Candraprabha, who was a previous embodiment of Śākyamuni; Raudrākṣa, of course proved to be a previous embodiment of the Buddha’s evil cousin, Devadatta. In another Divyāvadāna section, the Prāthivārasūtra, a similar conspiracy is launched in Śākyamuni’s own time by the parivrājakā Raktakṣa, also an illusionist. He is charged by the Buddha’s ascetical opponents to rally followers and disgrace the Buddha in Śravastī, where he is preparing his great miracle (Divyāvadāna, pp. 151–53). With substantial literary flair, the ruse does not work and the Buddha engages in a series of miracles (pp. 155–66), clearly posed to demonstrate his superiority over the false claims to magic from the ascetic teachers of the period.

Other descriptions of such illusionist figures are found, sometimes in Jain literature. One occurs in the sixteenth chapter of the Nāyādharmakālaṭo, one of the twelve aṅgas of the Śvetāmbara Jain canon (Schubring 1978). Chapter sixteen is devoted to a Jain version of the previous existence and one episode in the life of the Pāṇḍavas, Draupadi and Krśna Vāsudeva. Most interesting for our purposes is the figure of Kacchulla Nārada, who precipitates much of the action in this section. Kacchulla Nārada seems to be the Jain appropriation and reformulation of the persona of the old rṣi Nārada of Vedic fame, and has been mentioned elsewhere in Jain literature as a magician of note (Balbir 1990, p. 54). He is described as an ascetic with both formulaic and distinctive language employed:


There was Kacchulla Nārada, very good to look at, educated, playful but internally concealing his corrupt intent (kalusā), unbiased between factions, displaying friendliness and determined pleasantness, well-built, his clothing stainless, his chest covered with an outer cloak of a black buck skin, staff and water pot in his hand, his head ablaze with a dreadlocked crest, wearing a sacrificial thread, a rosary, grass girdle and bark clothing, holding a lute in his hand (tiṇāpāti, a name for the rṣi Nārada). He was loved [for his song] like the Gandharvas, avoiding [walking on] the domain of the earth [as he was

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25 Schubring (1978, p.58), reproduces this description but does not translate it; he separates some of the lines in a manner inconsistent with the itka. Dīpatarasāgar’s Āgomasuttāṇi, edition includes Abhayadevasūri’s 11th century itka, which understands a anta to be repeated; p. 221.5: ‘vinīte anto anto ya kalusahiyay’ antarantarā duṣṭācātāh keś-paramāvagāvad ity arthabh. For Abhayadevasūri takes vaccha as vatsa, chest, although it could also be read as vatsa, which may also be understood as the chest; the reading vatte for vacche given in the Dīpatarasāgar edition (p. 220.22) seems in error. Abhayadevasūri provides a verse in his colophon that indicates he completed his commentary on vijjayadaśamśi, the tenth day of the month of Asvin, in VS 1120, i.e., 1063, in the town of Anāhitapāṭaka: ekādayasa śateṣa ati viṃśatadvihakesu vikramasamanānānāni anāhitapāṭakanagare vijjayadasamyāṃ ca saddheyaṃ.
always flying]. He was understood to be famous for his spells of the *vidyādharas*: spells of concealment (*saṃvarana*), of cloaking (*āvarana*), descent (*avadāraṇa*), ascent (*utpātana*), affixing someone to his seat (*ślesaṇa*), entering another’s body (*sankrāṇaṇa*), control over another (*abhiyoga*), making hidden things known (*prajñapti*), magical flight (*gamana*), and immobilization (*stambhana*).

And even though he was praised by Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva and the other Yādava princes, his inner nefarious quality (*dusṭācitta*) was manifest by his desire for conflict,

kalahauyādākohalathappie bhamdoṇābhilāst bhāttsa ya saṃbarasayamārāstesu daṃṣaṇarae
saṃmatao kalaham sadakkhinaṃ anugavesamāṇe | Nāyādhammakaḥāo 16.127

He loved conflict, war, verbal disputes, addicted to witnessing the many hundreds of clashes of armies, ardently sought out everywhere the conflicts with their remuneration [for his services].

As a consequence, Kacchulla Nārada enticed the ruler of Amarakaṇḍa, Padmanabhā by name, to kidnap Draupadī from the Pāṇḍavas and create warfare between Hastināpura and Amarakaṇḍa. Curiously, for Jain texts, Kacchulla Nārada escaped from this conflict with no specified karmic consequence, even though the sixteenth chapter of the *Nāyādhammakaḥāo* is the perhaps the longest in the scripture.

Now this personality profile represents Kacchulla Nārada in the guise of a *tāpasa* or a *rṣi*, and reflects the ideology of the Śmārtas assumption that those in positions of authority are entitled to it, and not necessarily subordinate to other authority. It also again reflects the expectation that kings are to have strong association with a magical *siddhatāpasa*, as in the *Arthaśāstra*, which enjoins kings to secure the presence of illusionist ascetics in a kingdom for protective purposes (4.3.44ab: *māyāyogavīdas tasmād viṣaye siddhatāpasah*). The image is in line with the kind of coercive magic often witnessed in texts featuring the *vidyādharas*, apparently from whom Kacchulla Nārada obtained his spells. In addition, as we know, the designation *vidyādha*ra represents a crossover human/divine kind of sorcerer, given several descriptions in the *Jātakas* and Jain literature.

However, it is germane to observe that obtaining spells via *tapas* or other means, most generally from the *vidyādharas*, is a theme as far back as the Vālmīki Rāmāyana (Grafe 2001, p. 75, referencing Rāmāyana 1.21.10-19). And long before any evidence for the emergence of tantric rites, we find various mentions of *vidyādharas* in literature and inscriptions, occasionally transmitting their spells to others, as is seen in the Jain story of Vasudeva’s study of spells from an illusionist (*indajāliya* *vidyādha*ra) (*Vasudevahinī* 1.195; Jain 1977, p. 338), from whom he obtained the spells Sumbha and Nisumbha, and who are otherwise known as demonic figures in the *purāṇas*. Grafe (2001, pp. 339–50), building on the studies of Van Buitenen (1958), Lüders and others, has given this terminology the most extensive study, and has argued that the *vidyādharas* were initially humans practicing various spell rituals for magical purposes, particularly evident in Theravāda sources. One canonical *Jātaka* verse seems to validate this perspective:

*vidyādharā ghoram adhiyāmānā adassanaṃ osadhehi vaijanti
na maccurājassa vajantaddassam tam me māti hoti carāmi dharmam || Jātaka XV.341*

*Vidyādharas* study ferociously, so that they can move invisibly by means of medicines.
Yet they cannot travel while invisible to the King of Death;
So it occurs to me that I will travel with the Dharma.

This *Jātaka* verse represents the *vidyādharas* engaged in techniques of invisibility, which becomes one of the *siddhis* at a later period, as well as a means for thieves and others of nefarious purposes, and we see that it is among the most important qualities listed for Kacchulla Nārada. The nefarious potential for invisibility spells is already noted in the descriptions of the *māṇavas*, the thieves of the *Arthaśāsta*, who are noted as having employed them in service of a ruler:
Let the [secret agents] have the māṇava criminals walk right through the wide-awake security personnel by means of the invisibility mantra.

Little wonder that the invisibility spell is an enterprise featured in the thieves’ manual, the Śaṅmukhakalpa §2.

However, it may be noted that our focus strays a bit in this regard. We should understand there to be a distinction between those who employ spells exclusively for the goals of violating the social compact, and those whose employment of spells is for personal support. This latter may entail a drift to behaviors outside of polite society but is not inherent in their goals, which are more frequently opportunistic but not necessarily nefarious. Magicians, I would argue, are represented in the available literature as dedicated to opportunistic gain, even if they are sometimes framed as pathological predators. Nonetheless, it is germane to observe that the roles may be reversed, and the stories about the duplicitous magician or evil ascetic should be one reference point for all those concerning themselves with Indian religion, as White has persuasively argued (White 2009).

8. Śaṃvara, Indra and Prakrit Sociolinguistic Evidence

Some at least of the notices concerning such magicians in the classical or medieval period appear to me to be found in Buddhist or Jain literature, as we have already seen. Brahmanical religious literature tends to occlude these figures for reasons that are not entirely clear, although much speculation is possible. Indeed, we will see later that the Mālasarvāsitvādā-vinaya provides one answer even if it is probably not the only position possible. In any event, the reality is that some of the earliest descriptions of magicians outside of the Vedas are located in a Prakrit register, and an avadāna in a collection from Gandhāra, dated to the first half of the first century C.E. is of especial interest.

Lenz (2010): Avadāna 6

Lenz translates this (p. 74)

Thus, it was heard. In the city of Pātaliputra, a magician displayed magic. There were two kinds of magic: the magic of Śambara and the magic of Indra. Then, that person displayed the magic of Śambara. And another magician arrived in that place. He (*displayed) the magic of Indra . . . He said: “Do you have a desire (*to see a magic display)?” Magic was seen: (*it was) excellent. Mount Sumeru was bought into view by him. In detail, all (*should be said) up to “the darkness overshadowed the sun by the power of magic.” The complete expansion should be according to the model.

Lenz notes, both in his discussion of this text (Lenz 2010, pp. 3–14) and analogous ones in the Gāndhārī corpus, that the specialists in the Avadāna literature employed abbreviated notes to preach from, so that the text available to us references a well-known narrative that would probably have been memorized. The notes appear to have been mnemonic devices to prompt the preacher, whose audience would have been familiar with the story, or minimally the types of characters involved.
Even given its brevity, it is an important early statement about a magical contest in Pāṭaliputra, where two magicians (G: mayāgra Skt: māyākara) engaged in a test of wits, one employing magic derived from Indra, the king of the gods, and the other invested in magic from Šāmbara, Indra’s nemesis in the Vedas, who was noted with his skill in magic (Parpola 1988, pp. 227, 259–64). Such stories of magical ability versus the ability of the spiritual adepts is not unusual, and frames the Buddhist Prāthīrāyasyāitra in the Divyāvadāṇa collection as has already been mentioned (Divyāvadāṇa, pp. 89–103). And, as in the Gāndhārī story, we may observe that such figures, if they are given a quotation, are sometimes depicted as speaking in a Middle Indic language. This is either because the text is written in such a language, as in the instance of Jain texts in Ardhamāgadhī or Mahārāṣṭrī Prakrit, or in the case of dramatic texts they are provided with that linguistic register as their level of discourse, on a par with women, Buddhists and other second-class citizens.

The Ratnāvalī—one of the three surviving dramas attributed to the Puṣyabhūti emperor Harṣa Vardhana—is a case in point, and provides a later moment in the image of magicians dedicated to Indra and Šāṃvara. The plot of the drama, and its resolution, requires the activity of an illusionist, an aindrājālīka, named Šāṃvarasiddhi, one who obtains his accomplishment from the god Šāṃvara. As with other lower caste actors, Šāṃvarasiddhi speaks in the Prakrit of the dramas. He is from Ujjain, and introduces himself to the king by giving a homage to his divinities:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{panamaha calana indrassa indajālā-apinādhanāmassa} \quad & 4.7 \\
\text{taha jjeva sambarassa māpsuparīṭhīdajāsassa} \quad & 4.7 \\
\end{align*}
\]

We bow down to the feet of Indra, whose identity is bound up into his illusory powers, and as well to Šāṃvara, whose fame is established by his phantasm.

King Udayana is intrigued by the magician, and the Queen Vāsavadattā is supportive, as she is also from Ujjain, so Udayana asks the peripatetic magician what illusions he can perform. Šāṃvarasiddhi replies,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kim dharaṇe māṅko āse mahiharo jale jalaṇo} \quad & \text{4.8} \\
\text{majjhañhammi paaso dābijjai dehi āṇattim} \quad & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.8} \\
\text{Do you wish to see the moon on earth, or a mountain in the sky, or fire in the water or twilight at noon—whatever you command!} \\
\text{kim jappidenā bahunā ihasi hiāena jam jaṃ devaṇa datṭhum} \quad & \text{4.9} \\
\text{tam tam dāṃsemi aham guruṇo mantappasadeṇa} \quad & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.9} \\
\text{Well, enough of this blathering on. Whatever god you wish in your heart to see, that god I will show to you, by the grace of my guru’s mantras.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, notwithstanding the agonistic relationship between Indra and Šāṃvara described in the Vedas that carried over into the Gāndhārī Avadāṇa, by the time of the Ratnāvalī, their lineages of

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26 The manifold discrepancies between the editions of Ratnāvalī 4.7-9 appear indicative of the problems of the transmission of Prakrit texts in general. Carpenter p. 361 reads:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{panamaha calana indassa indajālāmmi laddhanāmassa} & \text{4.7} \\
\text{taha ajjasambarassa vi māsuparīṭhījāsassa} & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.7} \\
\text{kim dharaṇe māṅko āse mahiharo jale jalaṇo} & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.8} \\
\text{majjhañhammi paaso dābijjai dehi āṇattim} & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.8} \\
\text{kim jappidenā bahunā ihasi hiāena jam jaṃ devaṇa datṭhum} & \text{Ratnāvalī 4.9} \\
\text{tam tam dāṃsemi aham guruṇo mantappahāvēna} & \text{Kale (1921, pp. 95–96): panamaha calana indassa indajālāapinādhanāmassa} \\
\text{taha jjeva sambarassa māsuparīṭhījāsassa} & \text{Kale (1921, pp. 95–96):} \\
\text{kim dharaṇe māṅko āse mahiharo jale jalaṇo} & \text{Kale (1921, pp. 95–96):} \\
\text{majjhañhammi paaso dābijjai dehi āṇattim} & \text{Kale (1921, pp. 95–96):} \\
\text{tam tam dāṃsemi aham guruṇo mantappahāvēna} & \text{Kale (1921, pp. 95–96):} \\
\text{[aham vā kim bahunā jappidenā]} & \text{majja paṇ. n. a esāṃ jaṃ jaṃ hiāena ihasi samadṭhum} \\
\text{tam tam damṣeṇi aham guruṇo mantappahāvēna} & \text{majja paṇ. n. a esāṃ jaṃ jaṃ hiāena ihasi samadṭhum} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Similar variations are found in Bhattacharya and Kavyatirth, pp. 342-43, Chakravarti, p. 104 (2nd half). I have, for the most part, followed Kale’s text, excepting in 4.9, where I follow Chakravarti.
magic had come together into a single person. Whether this was because Indra had been moved from the center to the periphery with the rise of the new gods of Hinduism, or for some other reason it is difficult to say.

Yet we note that the protagonist Śamvarasiddhi, both in his homage and his name, indicates his devotion to the magical deity Śamvara, the devatā who will be prominent in the Buddhist yogini tantras a hundred years hence, and that he claims to belong to some kind of lineage, exercising his art by the grace of his guru. As with the māyākārasya of the Gāndhārī story, he is an illusionist, and in the Ratnāvali, his activity is required by the plot—he must kindle an illusionary fire so that the members of court believe the domestic apartments to be ablaze and release the imprisoned princess Ratnāvali, for whom the drama is named. In some sense Śamvarasiddhi is a key to a conundrum I could not solve previously (Davidson 2002, p. 214), how Śamvara, the old illusion-related divinity of the Vedas and Brahmanas should end up in the Buddhist canon. Indeed, the evidence from the Gāndhārī Avadāna leading up to the Ratnāvali suggests that a vernacular language based tradition of magical practice thrived around this god, to be appropriated by the Buddhists at a later date.

9. Caste Again

One cannot explore such topics without continually bumping into the issue of caste and class—even Śamvarasiddhi is referred to as the [illegitimate] son of a slave girl in Ratnāvali (Carpeller p. 362.23: dāstī putta indra¯aliä)—and we saw that various figures like the iksanikās have been described in outcaste or lower caste terms. But one episode brings together many of these elements and is, because of its entertaining nature, worthy of relating in extensio. The Mālasarvāstivāda Saṅghahedavastu, in its narrative of the great schism precipitated by Devadatta, relates how the schismatic monk subsequently lost the psychic power (rddhi) that he had previously gained when he studied under the eminent Daśabalaśyapa and had attained the first contemplation (dhyāna): 27

Previously, O monks, Brahmadatta reigned in Vārānasi, and the town was filled with prosperity, the many people scattered about the city. There, resided one outcaste (candāla), possessed of vidyamantras, skilled in vidyamantras, and by invoking the Gāndhārī spell, through his magic power he would bring from Mt. Gandhamādanā each day flowers and fruit out of season, and present them to King Brahmadatta. King Brahmadatta, pleased with the outcaste magician, [each day] bestows on him a present.

Now one [brahman] boy (mānava) [Somasarma] among many desired mantras, was in search of mantras. He heard by word of mouth [about the candāla] and leaving his country

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27 This story has been translated by Von Schiefner (1906, pp. 288–91) from the Tibetan Mālasarvāstivādavinaya.
made his way to Vārānasi. Having recovered from the toils of the road, he proceeded into the company of the caṇḍalas who possessed the spells. Having come before him, he said, “I would like, O Master, to perform service for you?” “For what reason?” “For the spell.” He [the caṇḍala] then recited this verse:

The spell is not to be given to anyone; one should die with the spell.
Or one would exchange the spell for [another] spell, or service or wealth.

The brahman inquired, “Master, if thus I am to render service [for the spell], for how long does it need to be done?”
The outcaste responded, “With twelve years of service, I will see if the spell is to be given, or not!”

Thus, because the brahman was excessively dedicated to obtaining the spell, he agreed to these terms. From then on, he was dedicated to service, and having paid homage to the outcaste, he began to provide service to the guru.

This went along until, on another occasion, the outcaste came home dead drunk on spirits, and the brahman thought to himself, “The teacher is totally drunk, so I should set his bed at my side.” [in case he could overhear the spell spoken in his sleep] So then the outcaste began to turn over in his sleep, and while he was doing so, the leg on his bed shattered [so the teacher started to fall off]. The brahman boy heard it and woke up. Then he thought, “The teacher will be sleeping with discomfort. So I should set it so that the legs of the bed are on my back.”

Naturally, anyone who has drunk a lot of spirits will vomit, and so in the first watch of the night that booze came back up. And because of the intensity of the spirits, [the caṇḍala] vomited onto the back of the brahman boy. And the boy thought, “If I move my body or utter a sound, then it will be the basis for the teacher, having heard the sound, to wake up. Moreover, if he wakes that way, he won’t let me have my bed by him anymore.” So he just sat there and ruminated on his situation.

In the meanwhile, the outcaste woke up just on his own and saw the brahman there contaminated in that way. “Who are you?” he asked. “Master, it is I, Somaśarman.” “Boy, what are you doing there?” So the brahman recounted the story, just as it happened. The teacher was very pleased and exclaimed, “Boy, I am very pleased with you! Go take a bath,
and then return. I will bestow on you the spell you desire.” Somaśarma did as instructed and returned, and the spell was conferred on him.

capalā brāhmaṇaḥ bhavanti; sa vegam asahamānaḥ cintayati; ihaiva tāvad evaṁ vidyāṁ jihṭāsyaṇi, tato ‘nyatra gamisiṇi iti; tena sā vidyā parivartitaḥ; bhavanatalam utpayata, āśo eva
gandhamādanam parvatam gataṁ; akālartukāṇi puspāṇy ādāya āgatalaḥ; tena tāṇi rājyaḥ purohitāya
dattāṇi; tenāpi rājye brahmadattāya; rājā kathayati: kutas tavaītāṇi;

Yet, we know that brahmans are fickle. Unable to contain himself, he quickly thought, “I have to try out this spell that I have just here received! I will travel elsewhere.” So he cast the spell and ascended from the surface of the earth. 28 Having gone to Mt. Gandhamadana, he seized some flowers that were out of season (back in Vārānasi) and then returned (to the palace) and gave them to the King’s chief priest (purohita), who in turn gave them to King Brahmadatta. The king exclaimed, “From where did these come?”

The Purohita replied, “A boy came from a distant place, and he gave these to me. Moreover, he is an extraordinary possessor of vidyāmantras, and a brahman who will not be disappointing. Why do we put up with this can driveway, who is despised by the world? Withdraw this position from him, and give it to this boy!” The king replied, “Let it be so!” Then the chief priest withdrew the position from the outcaste and gave it to the brahman youth. However, because of his ingratitude to the outcaste magician, his magical spell ceased to function.”

Yijing’s Chinese translation is even more explicit in the Somaśarma’s denial of the relationship with his can driveway teacher:

T.1450.20.173a28-b2:其旃茶羅報國王曰。此摩納婆是我弟子。法可過勝我。時國王問摩納婆。汝今法。可與旃茶羅教不。時摩納婆答大王曰。我自苦行一年日夜不。求得此法。旃

The engaging narrative rings a bit dissonant in some ways, as it tries to identify Somaśarma’s loss of the power of a spell with Devadatta’s loss of power from his initial obtaining success in the first contemplation (dhyāna). Thus, it sets in analogy two different systems: the one narrative involves a spell that could be overheard by accident and bestows power immediately, while the other story investigates a psychic power gained through assiduous meditative effort over a lengthy period of practice. In some sense, the episode appears to echo the hermeneutic tension found within the Meṇḍaka family story, mentioned above. Moreover, the peculiar structure of the Saṅghabhedavastu narrative is clearly artificial, as the text depicts Devadatta as having already lost his power once before, explained in an entirely different manner (Saṅghabhedavastu 2.72). As the second story on his loss of

28 Reading bhuvanatalat instead of bhavanatalam, but neither is attested in the Chinese or Tibetan, both of which eliminate the phrase: nam mkha’ la ‘phangs nas; T1450.24.173a19: 空騰已起.
power is both redundant and discordant, so we may assume that this candāla pericope as an editorial intrusion into the earlier narrative of Devadatta’s grievous missteps. It appears to be an attempt to identify inter-caste rivalry and brahmanical hubris, with the corruption of spirituality in Devadatta’s association with Ajātaśatru and his usurpation of authority over the members of the Samgha, in order to divide the Samgha and displace the Buddha himself.

Yet the engaging narrative certainly has some truth to it, part of the reason it resonates so strongly and is expanded within Yijing’s translation. There can be little doubt that we see in Buddhist and Jain literature various outcaste or tribal peoples attributed the possession of spells at different times and places. Yet we seldom find such a distinctive display of caste prerogative as in this instance, a bald-faced subversion of his teacher by Somaśarma to deny the source of his spells and displace his master as the king’s own sorcerer. Moreover, the collusion of the royal purohita is emblematic of the community scope of Somaśarma’s subversion, for the brahman boy’s ability to secure the coveted government sinecure is entirely dependent on the active complicity of his fellow brahman, one who would much rather deal with the high-status personality of Somaśarma than having regular involvement with a polluting outcaste. The king’s agreement is a function of the royal-religious/ksatriya-brahman relationship, and the king’s only qualms emerge when received systems of authority (guru-disciple) might appear to have been subverted by Somaśarma.

I would submit that much of this kind of behavior actually occurred, perhaps as episodes in the courts of classical and medieval India, but also within the public consciousness, both in the early medieval period and now, with the current defense of received traditions over critical historical inquiry. As Glucklich observed in the modern period, “They [magicians] may imitate the elite traditions, and they may contest elite power, but the reverse is often true as well. Priests in major temples (e.g., Viśvanāth Mandir in Banaras) often utilize magical practices . . . ” (Gluchlich 814). Once the well-placed brahmans—or Buddhist elites—obtained mantras employed by the mīttāṅgas or the candālas, in collusion with purohitas and other agents of caste Hindu practice, they then sometimes would perform what we now recognize as historical erasure: they would simply eliminate their sources from public consciousness by writing them out of their Sanskrit texts. Others might appropriate the spell at the expense of living representatives, even while acknowledging the tribal origins to establish an aura of authenticity. Consequently, we find texts ostensibly with a tribal/outcaste connection represented in the title, yet entirely under the aegis of brahmans, sadhus or Buddhist monks.

10. Ancient to the Modern

That there is some measure of continuity in magicians’ conduct—whether simply within ritual or exhibited in a larger behavioral vein—extending from the ancient into the modern period is both evident and interesting. Some of the nomenclature reaches back to that reported in the early Buddhist and Jain textual traditions, and the designation of magicians as “tricksters” (kautuka, kulaka, kōtya) is an enduring theme. Cognate with and—in Sanskrit at least—derived from the word for curiosity or amazement (kutuka), things that are kautuka are big displays that incite wonder, and this use is found throughout Sanskrit literature. However, kautuka and related words also signify those who put on a deceptive show, and this use is mentioned as an unacceptable lifeway in the Brahmajālasutta (Dīghanikāya 1.8.29; Sumanagalavīlāsī 1.91.28-29), but neither it nor the commentary provide much information. Obscure but better in many regards is the Bhṛhatkālpubhāṣya (1309), which defines those earning a living by kautuka methods as:29

29 Bollée (1998, vol. 3 s.v.) deals with the peculiar vocabulary of this list, explanations drawn in some measure from the Brhatkalpabhrsya, vol. 2, p. 403bāliaṁ raksātinimittam striyāva saubaḥyādīsamāprānayā yad viśeṣena snapanam tad viṣapanam | homah sāntikādhitor agnihavanam | śraua pariraya karabhramanābhimantranam adīśabādah svagataṅkahadāsucakah kṣaṇadāhānanī tathāvādyādīsamāprānayāgau lavanapraśeṣapāpani dhūve a tī tathāvādyādīsamāprāpani dhūpeṣa samarpanam | asadrāvasagrananam nāma svayaṁ āryah sann ānāyarvesaṁ karoti puruṣo vivaṁ rápan antarthāya śrīveṣaṁ vidadāhityādi | avayāsanam vṛkṣādīnaṁ ālingyanam avastobhanam anistopāśaṁyate niṣṭhitavane thuthukaranāṁ bandhāḥ kaṇḍakādiṁbanhānāṁ etad sarvam api kautukam ucyate ||
Sprinkling, fire sacrifice, [sanctification by] the circulation of the hand around the head, etc., burning caustic salt and so on, applying incense,

Adopting an inappropriate appearance [e.g., appearing low class/different gender when not], embracing [trees, etc.], spitting [to ward off evil], binding [protective items on the body]: [these are ‘tricky’ forms of livelihood].

The disparate nature of these behaviors seemed to have led to the term kautuka being applied in two ritual ways. One is found in some of the late grhyastras and vidhana literature and extends from the “binding” (bandha) application mentioned in this verse. There, kautuka identifies a thread bound on the wrist, either in the case of marriage (Agniśayagṛhyaśātra 2.3.5) or in the case of a protection ritual for a king involving a thread of gold (Śaunaka 2.11.5: sauvarnaṃ brahmāsūtrakām). This was perhaps understood as a ‘amazing/miraculous thread’ and the binding of the kautuka becomes a trope in some dramatic literature, so that the Raghuvamśa 9.1 mentions the vidhākautuka, and Šaparnāvasavadatta at the end of act two employs it as a sign for the completion of the marriage rite (p. 68: koduṃmangalam kādaṃvam). In the Mānavagṛhyaśātra 1.9.30 and elsewhere kautuka is understood to designate some kind of room or building, wherein the thread ceremony is to take place (Dresden 1941).

More significant for our purposes is the magical-ritual semantic value, so that in several tantric or sectarian sources, the term is united with “illusion” to form a compound: illusion-magic (indrajālakautuka). Given the conduct of illusionists we have seen, we would expect that the compound would indicate sleight of hand, or the creation of illusions by suggestion. However, that is not what the texts do, by and large. The corpus of illusion-magic consists of innumerable small rituals with immediate outcomes: protection from animals or humans, the ability to be invisible, control of all kinds of people, the use of plants and animal parts for these purposes, the expulsion of enemies and generally the manipulation of the nature of things. Their structure strongly differentiates them from the later Vedic optional ritual literature, the vidhana texts. In this latter category, for each specific ritual action, there is generally a different mantra invoked, and often a different god. In distinction, here there is most often a single mantra identified, and the ritual applications of this mantra are extraordinary, with a plethora of additions depending on the text, and few specific gods invoked at all.

Moreover, they operate in a coercive universe, in which the sādhaka is supreme. He does not propitiate gods or spirits in advance of the rite or make offerings or beseech the divinities to hear his petition. There is no panegyric to the god or laudatory hymn that was in an earlier generation termed henotheism, so that each god is said to be special. Here, the magician simply performs the ritual, makes the offending element/spirit/person change course and then is done with it. There is a hard core engineering element to the rite: Squeaky wheel? Grease. Mechanism out of kilter? Mantras to the rescue. Patron needing victory? Perform the rite so that he gets victory and at the same time is brought under the magician’s sway (vaśikaraṇa). Occasionally, in the aftermath, the sorcerer may offer to the

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30 Sections devoted to this topic are found in Uddānareśvaratāntra, pp. 165–72 (apparently an appendix to the text), Brhat-indrajāla, pp. 63–64 (the introduction to Dattatreya ch. 11 and mantra), Uddānataṅtra, pp. 97–123 (chapter 10). In the Kakasaptāta attributed to the siddha Nāgarjuna, the terms are unbound, so that chapter 13 (pp. 338–48) in the printed edition is the indrajāla chapter, whereas two chapters of the vulgate edition are entitled as devoted to kautuka—chapter 12 (pp. 335–38) and chapter 20 (pp. 384–90) but this last is actually listed in its chapter colophon as sarvasamākhyaśadhana; for the manuscript chapters see (Yamano 2013, pp. 63–64; Wujastyk 1984).

31 The Amoghapāśaṇahātakaparāja operates in much the same manner, constantly referencing the Amoghapāśaḥsṛdrāya as its basic mantra recitation to be employed in a wide variety of means. The list could be expanded, for many tantric texts do the same. The primary place where this structure is not observed in the indrajāla texts is in the invocation of the many yakṣinis, each of which has their own mantra; e.g., Dattātreyatāntra chapter 12, pp. 159–62; Uddānareśvaratāntra, pp. 88–106, etc. Even the Niśvītattvataninhitā’s oldest section, the Mālasūtra, affirms the multiple use of a single exceptional mantra: paramantraprayogena sarvakarmān kārayet || 7.15cd.

32 Davidson (2017) studies the sorcerers and coercive magic in the context of an early pre-tantric Buddhist text propitiating the nāgas for the purpose of rain.
spirit in question, but this is a reward at the conclusion rather than a request at the beginning. We get little sense of the theology of the śādха’s relationship with divinity (tattva, kalā, vṛuḫa, etc.), the yoga of identity, the emotional or yogic or meditative relationships that lead into bhakti at a later date. Here, it is sorcerer to the rescue, with the proper tools at his disposal, which is why the ritual literature is so specific concerning the materials to be employed, much as a physician is specific in medical practice: this herb/animal-part/element, not some other item, is to be used.

These later texts are in need of extensive study, and vary widely one from the other but a small sample from the Illusion-magic chapter (chapter 11) of the Dattatreyatantra will suffice.33 For the mantra at the head of the chapter—OM NAMO NĀRĀYAṆĀYA VIŚVAMBHĀṆĀYA INDRAJĀLAKAUTUKĀṆI DARŚAYA DARŚAYA SIDDHĪṂ KURU KURU SVĀḤĀ—several dozen rituals are provided, depending on the textual recension.34 One ritual is simple:

ulākasya kapālana ghṛendhṛtakajajalam | 11.8

tena netrāṃjanam kṛtvā rātrau pathati pustakam |

Having made a salve for the eyes with lampblack mixed with ghee in the skull of an owl, he can read texts at night.

If reading texts at night is not desired, and the śādhaka does not actually wish to recite the mantra, then another source of accomplishment is available.

sarpadantam grhitvat tu kṛṣṇavrścīkakantakam |
kṛkalāsaraktyacakantam śūṣmacūrṇam tu kārayet |
yasyāṅge nīkṣīpe cūrṇam sadyo yāti yamālayam |
vīṇā mantreyā siddhiḥ sṛtā siddhīyoga udārtham |

Having taken a snake’s tooth, and the stinger of a black scorpion together with blood of a chameleon, make a fine powder.

If you put this powder on someone’s limbs, then he will immediately go to the abode of Yama (i.e., he will die).

Let this be siddhi without the mantra, and let it be designated ‘siddhayoga’.37

As is clear, the mantra is derived from Nārāyaṇa, even though the Dattatreya tantra is nominally Śaiva, as most of the later texts are. However, there is actually precious little Śaivism in many of them, and in reading them we are reminded of the multi-faceted personality of Dattatreya in Indian history overall (Rigopoulos 1998). In the tantra sporting his name, he seems to have become a ritual category for the aggregation of magical rites.

What is notable in these works is that they reflect much of the early descriptions of the substance of the sorcerers: the use of birds—especially crows, peacocks and owls—the emphasis on small images

33 The numbering is from the Indrajālāvidyāpāmāṇya edition, (pp. 132–65); the organization and most of the readings from this edition are verified in Dattatreypatālaḥ fol. 26b-39b3. The Tripāṭhī edition and Hindi translation is from an entirely different recension, and it is not clear to me whether this is bowdlerized or a simple series of eye-skips. The sense that this chapter might not be entirely acceptable in some circles is supported by the Dattatreya, Dharmarthī Trust ms. 4913, fol. 8b concludes chapter 10, whereas fol. 9a begins chapter 12, thus dropping out the entire chapter.

34 Lest the use of the term kautuka is considered anomalous in this chapter, the tantra concludes its first chapter with a mantra that is to stand as the basic one: om. param brahma paramātmene om namah utpattisthitipralayakaraye brahmaharihare trigunātmante sarvakautukāṇi darśaya dattatreya namah tantrāṇi siddhiḥ kuru kuru svāḥā. Moreover, statements about the applicability of kautuka are repeated throughout parts of the text, starting with the outline of the text, chapter 1.14-17, to which this mantra is to be applied.

35 Tripāṭhī (1995, p. 152) reads: ulākasya kapāle tu gṛhaltāpene kajajam | pāṭayitvāmāya netre rātrau pathati pustakam | After the kautuka, the version puts the mantra on the page instead of it being repeated at the start of the text.

36 Tripāṭhī omits this verse, jumping from Indrajālāvidyāpāmāṇya p. 155, vv. 35 to 40, omitting vv. 36–39.

37 This line about this or that ritual being siddhayoga is often encountered in the Dattatreya; e.g., pp. 138, 139, 141, etc., so that this one verse should not be considered definitive of that category in this text.
of demons and planets, the use of rural ingredients, all are in accord with the suggestions about the *yatudhānas* in the Vedic corpus and their ritual afterlife. The fact, demonstrated long ago, that the term *yatu* survives in the modern North Indian *jāḍu* would seem to indicate some kind of tradition that survived outside of the literate sphere *per se*, even if it was included in ostensibly sectarian literature at some date.

Perhaps just as important as substance, is the issue of style, which I would argue is one of the magicians’ contributions to the tantric ritual and literary practice. Because so many of these rituals are without any specific moral imperative, they may be employed for all kinds of purposes. And because they are tools to various ends without a theological architecture, they may glide into a variety of sectarian frameworks: changing the mantra, visualizing the deity, dedicating the merit, requiring *dīkṣā* (which most do not even mention let alone describe), invoking vows, etc. Yet they also may be vehicles to allow aggregation from other sources—folk traditions, new inventions, rumors of power elsewhere. In the most extensive study of a South Asian sorcerer tradition, Kapferer emphasizes its simultaneously creative and appropriative style among the sorcerers he knew.

There is a widespread view that innovative or foreign sorcery practice is more likely to achieve desired results. This is because antidotes to its poison (*vasa*) are not developed. There is a great tension to innovation and borrowing in sorcery practice: it is the space of the bricoleur par excellence . . . The culture of sorcery is alive to borrowing and invention, and the more foreign or strange the practice, the greater its potency for death and destruction. (Kapferer 1997, p. 46)

I believe we see all of these activities in medieval Indian tantrism, with its cross-tradition borrowing, its emphasis on power, its desire for the foreign, tribal or extra-terrestrial aura and so on. The references to *mātāṅga* or *rābara* tribal peoples in the tantras are analogous to the modern appropriation of tribal charisma by non-tribal sorcerers, most evident in the designation ‘*baiga*’ in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Some of these elements, to be sure, become rationalized in selective texts and traditions, and in many instances we find a strong moderation of the magical element merging into the religious element, with its distinctive emphasis on the dynamic relationship between deity and devotee. Yet this is most often accomplished via an elaborate, elite hermeneutic that is not encoded in the basic ritual action but operates as a symbolic frame of reference, one that can be modified even while retaining the ritual event. That is not to say that the symbolic frame is insignificant, nor is the community supporting it an afterthought. Rather, it is to acknowledge that rituals of power tend to operate in a value-neutral moral ground, and those adopting that ground must furnish it with a system of value predicated on their own traditions.

11. Conclusions: Sorcerers as Continuing Sources for Tantric Systems

If the above treatment is somewhat superficial—and in the face of the very sophisticated discussions of Kapferer, Tarabout, Nabokov and others, I certainly acknowledge that it is—this is in part because the volume of evidence is enormous and the intellectual challenges in unpacking and interpreting that evidence are daunting. Unlike anthropologists, textual scholars do not have the luxury of interrogating our informants about their intentions or other aspects of their performances. Here, I do not presume to have done more than bring to the attention of my colleagues some of the materials available.

Yet the evidence suggests—both from the examples given and from the many others for which space prohibits discussion—that there existed in India from the ancient to the modern period various

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38 On tribal sorcerers, representative are Fuchs (1973), Sinha (2006) and Rahmann (1959), but the bibliography is quite lengthy; on the Baiga magicians in particular, Elwin (Elwin 2007, pp. 305–407) and Babb (1975, pp. 197–208), demonstrates that, in the communities he studied, *baiga* is no longer a tribal designation but a form of employment, exclusively engaged in by non-twice born castes.
groups and individuals operating under a variety of designations; these people pursued avocations we would recognize as sorcery, magic or other ritual forms of the manipulation of reality for personal or professional reasons. The categories we find—yattudhana, ikṣanika, vidyadhara, ṣaktint, aindrajalika, māyākāra—cannot be expected to reflect precisely the fluid categories and reality on the ground while the texts were in the process of formation. Instead these designations most likely represent the literary reification of a bewildering variety of pursuits, often outside of our received lineal or ritual categories. That is because these individuals were not necessarily based in a lineage or literature themselves, and most of them are depicted as operating outside of the aura of polite society or of received linguistic norms, even if some were patronized by king and court. Like their modern successors—jadagār, ojha, dāin, baiga, mantraśādi, cânis, etc.—they did not hold themselves aloof from the gritty necessities of making a living. Instead they pursued their claim to the manipulation of the cosmos in service of either personal promotion or their patron’s goals. We may suspect that their employment of various kinds of lethal rituals in the ancient and medieval period was accompanied with other forms of lethality less metaphorical and more physical, but this is a suspicion that requires further investigation, as do virtually all aspects of their activity. Certainly, sorcerers are occasionally depicted as creating and enjoying conflict, whether between friends or enemies, so we may assume that they were part of the predisposition to interpersonal drama in Indian social life.

Some of them evidently saw themselves as operating in a lineage, obtaining some kind of initiation from a teacher, even if we suspect (as the modern evidence supports) this may have been secondary or tertiary to their motives for the pursuit of their vocations. It is also entirely possible that “initiation” or guru-disciple relationship may have been the stuff of visions, dreams, or just fabricated out of the thin air of the mountain regions said to be inhabited by the vidyadhāras in Jain narratives. Some, to be sure, felt called through some kind of personal crisis or psychological event (Nabokov 2000, pp. 149–51). However, just as likely, others simply understood a possibility and pursued a livelihood where none was otherwise available, relying on their social skills, understanding of patronage and motivation, and verbal wit to pull them out of uncomfortable situations. Moreover, because this is a function of human behavior, we may surmise that others came to their calling at a time of social dislocation and economic uncertainty, when no other form of economic support was available. Irrespective of cause, the documents invariably speak of the search for control, of the need for sustenance, of the understandable desire for the basic elements of human life.

It is also clear from the available evidence that identifying any of these as necessarily “Buddhist,” “Śaiva,” “Vaishnava,” “Jaina” or “Śākta” is to misrepresent our sources, for the many instances of the lifeways delineated in the literate record seldom identify these magicians with any sectarian system of allegiance that is the sine qua non of modern Indological narrative. We may reflect on the fact that the literate archive is not so transparent, not immediately evident, not uncritically accessible as it has been occasionally treated in scholarly literature. This appears perhaps a weakness of some Indological understanding, based on a limited vision of what constitutes admissible categories. However, it is not a misrepresentation within the sources themselves, which consistently maintain a complex understanding of their own periods.

At no time for which we have evidence in India do we see magicians or sorcerers as relinquishing the field, nor are they ever under the domination of any single sectarian lineage. Indeed, in the modern period, they cross religions as well as traditions, with some coming from Islamic disenfranchised social groups, employing the opportunities available (Shah 1998; Tarabout 2000). Thus, we must take into account that these figures were invested with spells that were claimed to allow them supernormal powers, raise the dead, heal the sick, cast spells of benefit and destruction and counter other sorcerer’s spells for own patrons. They left us only tantalizing clues of their existence, they generally came from a vernacular background, and were dedicated to their own welfare as much as their promulgation of alternative rituals.

And yet these clues equally raise the specter of historical erasure: the intentional or unintentional occlusion of non-elite or non-brahmanical elements, all in service of the dominant paradigm. The
hostility of some brahmanical representatives to even discussing the religious traditions of those on
the margins of society has been expressed to anthropologists. As Sax was told when he tried to present
some outcaste data on ritual healing in Delhi, “How dare you conduct research on such a topic? . . .
You should be spending your time stamping out this sort of thing, not conducting research on it!”
((Sax 2009, p. 232); see also (Nabokov 2000, p. 149)) So non-literate magical rituals among marginalized
communities continue to be eliminated from discussion right into the present, much as they have
been within India’s past. If there is a critical imperative, we might acknowledge that the forces of elite
privilege did not only arise as a result of capitalist commercial or post-colonial forces, but equally stem
from deeply seated symbol and social systems that have been reiterated throughout Indian history.

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Abbreviations

AVŠ. Atharvaveda Śaunakīya.
RV. Rgveda.

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