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The Ferocious Consciousness:

Spirit Subjugation and the Dissolution of Otherness in the Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra

Swastik Banerjee
University Research Fellow
Department of Philosophy
University of Calcutta.

Introduction:

The *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* is an esoteric t̄āntric text that focuses largely on spirit-magic. In this tradition, the practitioner conjures, binds, and commands spirits to carry out their wishes. These spirits mainly include *yakṣas*, *piśācas*, *vetālas*, *nāgas*, and other liminal beings, who are summoned to provide protection, wealth, and success in worldly matters. At first glance, the text resembles a ritual manual of conjuring. Yet, woven into its layers is a recurring urge for *mokṣa*, which stands in juxtaposition to pragmatic spirit control and the language of absolute freedom. It is commonly held that the idea of moksha is equated with self-realisation, while conjuring deals with the material world. Furthermore, spirit-magic is supposed to lead to the realm of spirits, and not the higher planes. This raises a fundamental question: How can a system grounded in the forceful manipulation of supernatural agencies claim to deliver the radical non-dual liberation as found in the *Kaula Tantras*?

This paper takes this tension as its starting point. It asks: How does the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* reconcile the apparent contradiction between coercive ritual magic and the dissolution of Otherness inherent in *mokṣa*? To address this issue, the argument is derived from the Trika doctrine, redefining *Bhairava* not as an external wrathful entity, but as non-dual active Consciousness¹.

The paper first situates the paradox in its textual context and then attempts to examine the name *Krodha Bhairava* as indicative of the ‘ferocious’ aspect of ‘Consciousness’. To further understand the spirits conjured, a Jungian framework is employed, reading

¹ Consciousness, with a capital ‘C’, indicates *caitanya*. This is different from the consciousness of a human produced in the brain, with a small ‘c’. This Consciousness indicates the absolute *Being*.

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these entities as archetypal projections of the subconscious. It is then argued that these arise from absolute Consciousness, and are not something external to it. Finally, it is argued that the spirit-magic is best understood as a ritualised confrontation with the innermost esoteric aspects of Consciousness, appearing as shadows, which, when faced and ferociously dissolved, establishes one in the highest state.

Framing the problem: Liberation vs Conjuring

The central problem follows from the question raised in the beginning. It raises a concern of the contemporary times where one is incapable of austerities but needs the magic to fulfil their material needs. In contrast, it is further added that one also needs to attain *mokṣa*². To establish this, the mantra of the presiding deity who binds and strikes fear in the entities is provided, which is *Krodha Bhairava*.³ Acting as a means to an end, this deity is first invoked to protect and command over spirits, which follows the rest of the text. The text, therefore, provides a clear power dynamic where the spirits are meant to be controlled, threatened, or even destroyed if they disobey.

Furthermore, towards the end, it is stated that such knowledge is for the worshipper of the *Devi*⁴, and not for those who worship the *Brahman*⁵. Which raises a further issue, as to why use the term *mokṣa* in the first place? On one hand, woven into this practical system of spirit-magic is the promise of *mokṣa*—ultimate freedom from fear and bondage. On the other hand, the text makes a clear restriction about who may receive its teachings by stating its powerful rites are not to be shared with those who seek only the formless *Tāraka Brahman*, but are meant solely for the devotee who remains devoted to the *Devi*.

A possible reason for this boundary might be that liberation is not about dissolving into an empty transcendence but about attaining fearless mastery within the vibrant, relational presence of the Goddess herself, as we see in *vīrabhāva*⁶.

² *Kenopāyena naśyanti kalu kalauduṣṭagharāśayaḥ/
Labhyante sidhayaḥ sarvvā mokṣapadhatayaḥ śubhāḥ//
Sidhayo 'pyanimādyāśca mahāpātaka nāśikāḥ// Bhūtaḍāmara: 1.5*

³ Alternately Vajrapāni, Krodhīśa, and other names are found.

⁴ The name “Devi” is derived from the root ‘div’ which means to sport. Implying a dynamic nature of Consciousness, than an entity

⁵ *Tārako brahmaṇo bhr̥tyaṃ bināpyatrādhikāriṇa, Bhūtaḍāmara: 16/12*

⁶ *Vīra bhāva*, is indicative of the state where one is fighting to transcend duality, and establish in

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This gives rise to the central question this paper explores: *What does it mean for a ritual tradition so invested in subjugating the ‘other’—the spirits that populate the world—to also claim to dissolve ‘otherness’ altogether?* How does *Krodha Bhairava*’s fierce nature hold together the aims of dominating spirits and realising non-dual liberation? To examine this, the following sections situate the text in its doctrinal context, unpack its key symbols, and approach its spirits not merely as external beings but as vivid expressions of the mind’s hidden projections, which ultimately serve as a method of approaching the state of non-dual being for a *vīra sādḥaka*.

Exegetical context:

The text *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* occupies a distinctive position within popular tantric literature. The recovered version, which is predominantly a Hindu text, seems to bridge elements found in both Hindu and Buddhist esoteric traditions, while in some manuscripts it appears mainly as a Buddhist text. The central wrathful figure is identified as *Vajrapāni* and also as *Krodha Bhairava*⁷. *Vajrapāni* is a fierce protector prominent in *Vajrayāna* Buddhist practice, while *Krodha Bhairava* is one of the eight principal *Bhairavas* recognised in Hindu tantric rituals⁸. Despite these differing views, the text’s main content and ritual structure remain consistent: a diverse assembly of spirits is brought under the strict authority of a wrathful lord whose fierce presence guarantees their submission.

Regarding the name of the text, the word *bhūta* may be understood in two senses: one denoting “spirit” and the other as “past,”⁹ referring to the residue of past actions and impressions that shape a person’s psyche. The word *ḍāmara* simply means ‘fearsome’, or “that which strikes fear in one’s heart,” referring to the objects of fear, which are spirits and the past. Taken together, the *Bhūtaḍāmara* can be read in two ways: first, as referring to spirits which cause fear, and second, as pointing to

non-duality, thus facing off the fear arising from duality.

⁷ Text uses both the names.

⁸ List of name varies, but *Krodha Bhairava* is somewhat common.

⁹ Giriratna Mishra makes this note in his edition.

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repressed traumas of the past that create unease in one's psyche. Considering both meanings, the text becomes more than just a handbook for controlling unruly spirits; it also offers, in coded form, a method for confronting and dismantling the deep-seated fears and conditioned patterns that persist within the practitioner's awareness.

Doctrinally, the text strongly resonates with the widespread image of Tantra as an occult tradition. The content reflects discussions that align with popular understandings of tantric lore. This involves acts like exorcism, where the occultist invokes legions of powerful entities to force the undesired spirits out. To such practitioners, the deity *Bhairava* stands as a fierce and protective presence, whose blessing and power support them along this demanding path. Yet *Bhairava* is not simply a terrifying guardian; he is equally revered as the fullest expression of Consciousness itself, utterly sovereign, fearless, and capable of granting the same fearlessness to a mind burdened by the anxieties of worldly life. He who sounds the drum is the master of the assembly of accomplished yogins—this *Bhairava*, who sustains and governs the entire universe, triumphs as the supreme one in the form of pure consciousness. This suggests that the spirits become a spontaneous expression of *Bhairava* himself, acting out his will and not otherwise.

Krodha as Consciousness is intense:

To unravel the paradox at the heart of the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra*, it is necessary to dwell on how the text itself portrays Krodha Bhairava: not merely as an exorcistic deity but as the very ferocity of awareness refusing to be deceived by its projections. A key verse from the Trika tradition succinctly encodes this:

*bhīrūṇām abhaya-prado bhava-bhayākrandasya hetus
tato hṛd-dhāmnī prathitāś ca bhīravarucām īśo 'ntakas yāntakaḥ |
bheraṃ vāyati yaḥ su-yogini-vahas tasya prabhu
bhairavo viśvasmin bharaṇādi-kṛd vijayate vijñāna-rūpaḥ paraḥ ||¹⁰*

¹⁰ *Stuti-candrikā*, Ishvar ashram Trust

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The deity is praised as “the giver of fearlessness to the fearful, the cause of ending the cry of worldly dread, manifest in the heart-space, destroyer of death itself, and supreme in the form of pure consciousness.”

First, fearlessness is not mere bravery but the experiential dismantling of the subtle tremor—*kṣobha*¹¹—that arises when awareness forgets its plenitude and imagines Otherness as a threat. The text insists that Bhairava’s ferocity is not projected outward alone; it is *hr̥d*¹²-*dhāmnī prathitaḥ*—residing in the heart-centre, the innermost sanctuary of *prakāśa-vimarśa*, self-luminous self-awareness.

Secondly, *Bhairava* is the destroyer of death—*antakasya antakaḥ*. In Trika exegesis, death represents the ultimate *other*: the final negation of the self’s continuity. *Krodha Bhairava*, by radiating absolute presence, reveals that even death is not alien but an appearance within the unbroken field of consciousness.

Furthermore, the image of the drum and *Yoginīs* (*bheraṃ vāyati yaḥ su-yogini-vahaḥ*) intensifies this phenomenology: the drum signifies the primal pulsation (*spanda*) that awakens mind from torpor; the *Yoginīs* are the dynamic energies dancing within the same field, ensuring that awareness remains fluid and not fossilised into rigid duality.

Finally, the verse’s closing affirmation—*viśvasmin bharaṇādi-kṛt vijayate vijñāna-rūpaḥ paraḥ*—places *Krodha Bhairava* as the supreme consciousness that both sustains and dissolves the universe. His ferocity underlines the last function: the power to dissolve the stubborn residue of Otherness that fear gives rise to.

Taken phenomenologically, this means that the wrathful aspect of Bhairava is not about emotional aggression but about an epistemic act: the Self recognising itself so intensely that no projection stands apart. Thus, in the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra*, ferocity is an ontological mode—Consciousness refusing to abandon its sovereignty.

¹¹ Indicating agitation, of Consciousness.

¹² *Hṛdaya* is a technical term which indicates the centre of awareness where the duality dissolves in non- dual Consciousness.

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Spirits of the Subconscious:

While the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* treats *yakṣas*¹³, *piśācas*¹⁴, *vetālas*¹⁵, *nāgas*¹⁶, and other beings¹⁷ as spirits to be summoned, threatened, and compelled, a psychological reading interprets them as archetypal facets of the practitioner’s psyche. From a Jungian perspective, each spirit-type symbolises a recognisable function, energy, or complex that the ego often disowns—until it returns as an autonomous force that seems alien. The *Yakṣas* represent the Guardians or Provider archetype: protective instincts tied to prosperity and rootedness, which, unchecked, can evolve into greed and misery. The *Piśācas* and *Vetālas* represent the darkest parts of the mind: raw desires, hidden anger, and forbidden cravings. The *Vetāla*, known for possessing corpses, shows how buried instincts can take over one’s conscious mind. Facing these spirits is really about facing and taking back control of these rejected parts of oneself. *Bhūtas*, as restless ghosts, symbolise the lingering residues of unresolved memories or traumas—fragments of the personal unconscious that disturb present awareness—so the tantra’s injunction to transform the *bhūtinī* into a wife, sister, or mother suggests a ritual domesticating of haunting memories: converting fear into intimacy with one’s past. *Rākṣasas* function as the Trickster Shadow: hostile deception, unchecked destructive power, and cunning illusions, the shape-shifting aspects of mind that confound moral certainty; their wrathful binding represents psychic discipline over self-sabotaging trickery. *Nāgas* are serpentine beings, archetypally linked to deep instinctual wisdom and life-force (libido); they guard hidden treasures beneath the conscious threshold, so by ritual marriage to a *nāginī*, the practitioner symbolically unites with buried vitality and intuition—an act of anima integration. *Kinnaras* and *gandharvas* stand for the Lover or Muse: the enchanting voice of art, music, romance, and ecstatic play, which must be tamed not because it is evil but because ungrounded aesthetic allure can unground the yogi; conscious channelling turns their song into a

¹³ Similar to gnomes, to preserve wealth

¹⁴ Entities that are supposedly daemonic, intermediates, who preside on flesh and blood.

¹⁵ Ghouls

¹⁶ Reptilian serpent beings

¹⁷ Ghosts, servitors, yoginis, yākṣini-s and so on. This also involves spells to perform acts of binding, banishing, suppression and others.

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hymn to the Heart. *Pretas*, or hungry ghosts, illustrate archetypal insatiable craving, addiction, envy, and the anxiety of lack; protective mantras sever this cycle by confronting the illusion of endless want. *Apsaras*, the heavenly seductresses, personify the sensuous, tempting side of the anima projection: the fantasy of beauty which distracts or entraps unless recognised as an inner force. *Mahoragas* and *garuḍas*, finally, express the tension between primal serpent energy (earthly instinct) and soaring eagle-like vision (spiritual will); *Krodha Bhairava*'s dominion over both embodies the harmonisation of instinct and intellect within a sovereign self. Thus accordingly, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* emerges as a psychic map for how the conscious self must confront, bind, and reintegrate these archetypal energies, with the ferocious deity standing as the unwavering presence that ensures none of these forces run riot as unconscious projections but instead serve as disciplined allies within the integrated heart of awareness.

Spirit Magic as a Phenomenological Activity:

Having clarified both the phenomenology of *Krodha Bhairava* and the archetypal nature of the spirits, we can now see that the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* uses ritual magic as a deliberate, embodied strategy for bracketing 'otherness' within the field of awareness. If we think in Husserlian terms, by bracketing (*epoché*) the natural attitude towards a phenomenon's supposed externality, revealing its structure within consciousness, and treating the spirit invocation in the *Bhūtaḍāmara* likewise. Then it would be observed that it is not merely the manipulation of literal ghosts; it is the ritual intensification of psychic contents that normally lurk half-seen at the edges of the mind.

The process is precise: spirits are summoned deliberately into presence, their threat is subsumed through invocations, and their resistance is broken by the commanding ferocity of *Krodha Bhairava*. Thus, forcing them to swear an oath for the time being, binding them to the practitioner's service, or face symbolic annihilation through burning by the wrathful thunderbolt. This performative coercion mirrors what Jung describes in analytical therapy: when a complex is made conscious, its autonomous

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power to “possess” the ego is neutralised and redirected as usable psychic energy. This ritual bracketing, however, is not a gentle invitation but a ferocious confrontation. The practitioner becomes *Krodha Bhairava* in visualisation and mantra, embodying a field of consciousness so fearless that no repressed energy—however ghastly—can hold an independent seat. Like ceremonial magic elsewhere, where angels bind demons under divine Names, here the wrathful mantra and fierce iconography force the spirit-as-shadow to submit. Each entity’s destructive or distracting potency is transformed into protective or creative power once brought under the Heart’s sovereignty. The practitioner thus moves from naive fear of the *other* (whether ghost, trauma, or desire) to an assertive recognition: “This, too, arises in my field of awareness; it shall not master me—I shall master it.” Spirit-magic becomes a rigorous experiential method for dismantling projection and reclaiming the fragmented energies of the psyche. To put it otherwise, it is an enactment of *pratyabhijñā*¹⁸—the recognition that no ‘other’ ultimately stands apart from the Self’s luminous pulsation¹⁹.

Resolving the paradox:

Now to address the central paradox: How does the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* reconcile the promise of liberation (*mokṣa*) with its seemingly worldly programme of spirit coercion?

The resolution lies in seeing that the entire ritual economy through the lens of *Kaula-Trika* doctrine: fear and bondage arise when consciousness projects a residual ‘other’, mistaking its dynamic energies as alien forces to dread or appease. The spirits catalogued in the *tantra*—*yakṣas*, *piśāacas*, *vetālas*, *nāgas*—are named and addressed precisely because naming brings the hidden into the circle of awareness. The mantric threat, the binding oath, and the threat of annihilation enact a refusal: the practitioner

¹⁸ This the name of the philosophy, based on the methodology, which is the act of recognition, through an observation and analysis of the inward movement of Consciousness, where the triad of subject cognition and objects, becoming one.

¹⁹ Since the system holds Self as self revealing, so once the duality is removed, the Self shines forth as everything that is.

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will not let these energies remain shadowy tyrants. Instead, they are incorporated as conscious extensions of the Heart.

This explains why the text prohibits its use by those seeking the formless *Taraka Brahman*. The aim here is not to dissolve the play of energies into an abstract void but to master and delight in them as *Śiva*'s dance²⁰. Trika doctrine upholds that *prakāśa* without *vimarśa* is inert²¹: pure light must know itself reflexively, and independently. *Krodha Bhairava*'s wrath is precisely this reflexivity in its fiercest mood—burning away forgetfulness and establishing the Heart as sovereign even amid spirits, desires, and fears.

From a phenomenological standpoint, then, spirit subjugation is the means; fearless non-dual awareness is the fruit. Each spirit that bows to the practitioner symbolises a psychic knot untied, a projection reabsorbed, a fear undone. Liberation (*mokṣa*) here is not flight into formlessness but an unshakeable recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) that nothing can stand outside the radiant Heart.

To conclude in the spirit of a Trika logician: fear arises because the mind forgets its inherent plenitude and, in that forgetfulness, projects an alien Other that seems to stand apart. *Krodha Bhairava*'s ferocity obliterates this imagined Other by refusing to grant it any objective foothold in consciousness. The myriad spirits described in the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* are thus symbolic condensations of this projection—manifestations of fragmented energies that appear threatening precisely because they are misrecognized as separate. Through the tantra's fierce ritual choreography, spirit-magic becomes the method for bracketing these projections and reintegrating them within the sovereign field of awareness. The final fruit is *mokṣa*, not as an abstract void but as an unbroken recognition that all appearance is the Heart's dynamic play. Such a state is irreconcilable with the pursuit of a static, formless *Brahman* severed from the living Goddess who embodies this plenitude. In this light, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* stands revealed as a ferocious soteriology: a

²⁰ *Śiva* is called as the *Nartaka*, or a dancer, in the *Śiva Sūtra*- 3.9. This form being in motion, represents the inseparable dynamism.

²¹ A major point of critique against bare Consciousness, as Consciousness has to be intentional, and thus possess a minimal uncaused subjectivity, *akṛtm aham*.

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fearless path that trains the practitioner to remain unafraid amidst the world's terrifying diversity, mastering it not by withdrawal but through unwavering sovereign awareness.

Conclusion:

The *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra*, often misread as a mere manual of spirit exorcism and occult acquisition, emerges—when approached phenomenologically and through the lens of Jungian depth psychology—as a profound soteriological map for reclaiming the Heart's sovereignty over fear and fragmentation. Its central figure, *Krodha Bhairava*, is not wrathful in the ordinary sense of rage directed outward; rather, he personifies a ferocity inherent in Consciousness associated with objectivity itself: the luminous refusal to abandon its completeness in the face of projections that appear alien and threatening, where each spirit subjugated is a knot of subconscious energy untied, no longer a source of fear but a resource aligned with the practitioner's fearless awareness.

What appears on the surface as coercive spirit-magic is, therefore, an enacted phenomenology: a deliberate ritual of facing, naming, and dissolving the projections that the mind habitually casts as external threats or temptations. In this light, the *Bhūtaḍāmara Tantra* testifies to a radical vision of freedom: the end of fear does not lie in withdrawing from the world but in dissolving the residual belief in Otherness altogether. *Krodha Bhairava's* wrath thus reveals itself as the heart's vow never again to tremble before its reflection. The practitioner who embodies this ferocious consciousness becomes master of all spirits, all fears, and finally, of themselves, which establishes them as a *vīra sādḥaka*, realising that the true magic lies not in commanding the spirits but in realising that they were never truly separate to begin with.

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