Fudo's Sword
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GLIMPSES INTO JAPAN'S SHAMAN PATH AND THE KUNDALINI DEITY FUDO MYOO

"On an afternoon in November, 1963,1 went to the Kurama temple with the intention of walking over the top of the mountain and down the other side to Kibune," chronicles British professor of Japan studies Carmen Blacker in The Catalpa Bow. "A little way down from the summit I heard from among the trees a strong hard voice reciting what sounded like mantras. I left the path and followed the voice until, in a clearing in the forest, I saw an enormous cryptomeria tree, its huge trunk girdled about with the belt of straw rope, and before it, with her back to me, a woman seated on the ground reciting. The hard base voice continued for several minutes, through a number of invocations, while the woman sat perfectly motionless with a long rosary in her hands.

Venturing to approach her, I asked if there were still a good many tengu (half-bird, half-hawk spirit) to be found on the mountain. She turned to face me, a brown face peculiarly like an old bird, with an expression fierce yet remote and a pair of extraordinarily glittering eyes, brightly sparkling like steel. 'If you do gyo [austerities] like me you can see them,' she replied abruptly. I asked again if the kami (god) in the great tree was very strong. 'Ask it. The tree is more than a thousand years,' she replied, and without another word, and without looking behind her, she plunged rapidly down the mountainside until she disappeared among the dark green trees and yellow leaves."

This wilderness mystic - a modern day miko, Shinto priestess - peacefully haunting the sacred hill valleys of Japan is not different from the revered Hindu shamans of Nepal or India. Both can ply the palpable pure energy that interconnects all form - nagare in Shinto texts and Satchidananda in Sanskrit. Both use it to heal. The Indian shaman and Japanese yamabushi mountain ascetic both perceive the many planes that invisibly interpenetrate ours. The miko plucks a koto lute; the Hindu shaman claps a bell - by sound, both alert those who live beyond. Each know how

the magic of fire, mantra and meditation further stretches open the veils between these worlds for communication with the beings that reside there - kami in Japanese and devas in Sanskrit. Both understand how a mountain - or lakes, trees or rocks - can be the home of celestials. Hindus trekking along the pilgrimage pathways of Japan would naively marvel at all the "Siva lingams." Oval boulders girdled with straw bands speckle sacred hilltops, drawing the pilgrim to halt and worship. Japanese refer to the physical portal to the deity's consciousness yorishiro, "vessel" - murthi in Sanskrit.

Fudo My oo: A Japanese Siva Reflection

Overwhelmingly a one nerve current cavernously flows beneath the Orient landmass, welling up at different points and periods as yogis - Indian, Chinese, Japanese - plumbed the uniquely Asian akasha of consciousness. Cruder overland intercourse and dispersion of ideas by trade and travel mirrored the subtler mind routes. Today religious similarities, sympathies and sensibilities wed snow-capped Fuji to icy Kailas in an unearthly way. Examples abound. Esoteric Tendai Buddhists believe Maheshwara (Siva) taught them Yorigito, mediumship and at the secluded mountainside temple of Ryosanji, in Okayama, an ichiko, priest, wears large white swastikas, the ancient Hindu symbol, embroidered on front and back of his indigo gown.

The Shiva-like Japanese Deity Fudo Myoo re-echoes this pan-Asian interlacing. Like Shiva, Fudo Myoo specially befriends the recluse, mystic and mountain hermit, granting boons and powers. Fudo Myoo, explains Dr. Carmen Blacker, is the "central and paramount figure in the group of divinites known as the Godai Myoo or Five Great Bright Kings, who in esoteric Buddhism stand as emanations, or modes of activity, of the Buddha. His long hair hangs in a coil over his left shoulder." Like Siva Nataraja, He is always ringed with fire. The ichiko or Japanese shaman sees Fudomyoo as his own most interior Self and meditates on this essential oneness just as the Saivite tantric seeks to merge with Shiva-ness within. "Fudo is frequently represented by his attribute, an erect sword," continues Dr. Blacker, "twined about by the dragon Kurikara," not unlike Shiva entwined by a serpent and often represented by his trident alone. "The halo of flames which surrounds Fudo is the same fire which the ascetic must kindle in himself. Here again is surely a reminder of the kundalini snake which as it rises up the spine of the yogi confers upon him heat and transformed sexual energy. As it writhes spirally upwards round Fudo's erect sword, we see the shakti or feminine energizing force in its traditional serpent aspect. Once again we meet with this mysterious coincidence of images, so far unexplained, between India and Japan."

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