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GIUSEPPE TUCCI'S BUDDHIST, INDIAN,  
HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

Edited by  
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PETER FRIEDLANDER

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE  
MANDALA: RITUAL AND IDENTITY IN  
THE KABĪR PANTH

## INTRODUCTION

Giuseppe Tucci's *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala with Special Reference to the Modern Psychology of the Subconscious* (hereafter *Theory and Practice of the Mandala*) was first published in Italian in 1948 and in an English translation in 1961. In this work Tucci proposed that the maṇḍala could be seen through the perspective of Jungian psychology as having universal significance as a personal transformative psychological practice. A second and complementary approach to understanding the significance of *maṇḍala* rituals is as key rituals in defining group identity. This will be illustrated here through descriptions of the ritual practices of the followers of Kabīr, a North Indian religious movement, in which forms of *maṇḍala* practice play a critical role in defining group identity. I then argue that Tucci's views on the *maṇḍala* in his book stressed the experience of personal transformation in *maṇḍala* rituals as his interest was in speaking to a Western audience who were looking for universal factors which lay behind different forms of religious experience.

However, I propose that this needs to be balanced with an approach which acknowledges the communal social element in *maṇḍala* rituals which relates to group identity rather than personal transformation. My conclusion is that while Tucci's work on the *maṇḍala* has had a beneficial influence on studies of *maṇḍala* practices and rituals it needs to be complemented by an approach that looks at the social context in which *maṇḍala* rituals are practised.<sup>1</sup>

#### TUCCI AND THE UNIVERSAL MYTH

I will argue that a prominent feature of Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala* is that in it he sought to present the *maṇḍala* as a representation of a universal truth. In order to do this I will first briefly examine the development of the idea of universal truths underlying religious phenomena.

In relation to Buddhism, the roots of such ideas relate to an antiquarian desire to draw links between different religions, an early form of comparative mythology. Such ideas can be found in an early work (1854) by Alexander Cunningham, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India. Cunningham's motivations seem to have been a mixture of a desire for knowledge in itself, and an attempt to demonstrate to his fellow nineteenth century Christians that religious cultures of other traditions contained ideas of value. In the introduction to his account of his excavations of the *stūpas* at Sanchi published in 1854 he advanced a theory on the origin of Buddhism that identified the Buddha as a Druidic deity and produced a number of arguments to support his view.

the Brahmans, Buddhists and Druids all believed in the transmigration of the soul; that the Celtic language was undoubtedly derived from the Sanscrit; and the Buddha (or Wisdom) the Supreme Being worshipped by the Buddhists, is probably (most probably) the same as the great god Buddhwas, considered by the Welsh as the dispenser of the good. These coincidences are too numerous and too striking to be accidental (Cunningham 1997:v-vi.).

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Tucci Conference in Melbourne in September 2010.

This universalising tendency in the study of religion received a vital stimulus from the work called *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* by James Frazer (1854–1941) which was first published in 1890. A critical feature of the approach Frazer took was to show how one idea could be traced in many cultures and a theory of the underlying features of all myths and legends could be developed.

The Theosophical movement also put forward the view that Indian traditions contained versions of what they called “The Great Tradition”, a universal human tradition which has continued since the dawn of humanity, and that esoteric Hindu and Buddhist traditions can therefore be seen as expressions of a universal human tradition (Besant 1898).

#### TUCCI AND THE *MAṆḌALA*

Western interest in the notion of the *maṇḍala* came about due to Jung’s linkage of the idea of the *maṇḍala* and the subconscious. In 1929 the German sinologist Richard Wilhelm translated the Chinese Taoist text *The Secret of the Golden Flower* into German. Jung then wrote a commentary in which he lamented that previously “even learned sinologues have not understood the practical application of the *I Ching*, and have therefore looked on the book as a collection of abstruse magic charms” (Wilhelm & Jung 1931:82).

For Jung though, the *maṇḍala* was a universal symbolic representation of the process of the unification of conflicting forces in the psyche into a harmonious whole. He wrote “Mandala means a circle, more especially a magic circle, and this form of symbol is not only to be found all through the East, but also amongst us; *maṇḍalas* are amply represented in the Middle ages” (Wilhelm & Jung 1931:96). He linked *maṇḍala* designs from India to circular designs from all over the world, from medieval Europe, to ancient Egypt, from the Pueblo Indians to his own patients and to Tibetan Buddhism. He even suggested that the *maṇḍala* related to the deepest level of the subconscious, as “the oldest mandala known to me, is a palaeolithic so-called “sunwheel”, recently discovered in Rhodesia” (Wilhelm & Jung 1931:105). In order to argue for the universality of the truths behind the *maṇḍala* Jung ignored its cultural and social context, as these limited its universal relevance. This separation of the *maṇḍala*

and its context was also a feature of Tucci's approach to this topic. Thus it appears that in order to appeal to a Western audience at that time Jung had to argue that the *maṇḍala* expressed a universal truth, which meant that the study of its particular social and cultural contexts had to be largely ignored.

This approach also pervades Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala* which contains numerous references to Jung's commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. During the period Tucci was writing this book he was greatly influenced by a universalising Jungian view of spirituality, seen through the lens of his encyclopaedic interest in religious traditions of India, Tibet and the world. The influence of Jung was apparent to readers and in a review of it Bharati noted that "The book often reads as though it had been written by C. G. Jung or one of his votaries" (Bharati 1962:130).

There is an extraordinary degree of eclecticism in the work, moving on the same page from references to India, Tibet, and "Mesopotamian zikurrats" to references to the "Iranian rulers' imperial city". At one moment he would propose ideas like the Mesopotamian origins of certain ideas and at the next he would attribute them to "primitive intuitions", by which he presumably meant from a sort of unspecified original human culture or the Jungian collective unconscious (Tucci 1974:25).

The shamanic basis for religion is also in an image he presents of the cosmic *axis mundi* as the aperture at the top of a tepee of which he says "in the tents of the shepherds of Central Asia, and certainly of the earliest Tibetans, the hole at the top through which the smoke passes corresponds with the "orifice" of the sky, the Pole Star, in a cosmical system thought of as a giant tent" (Tucci 1974:26). This image is also found in Eliade's *Shamanism*, originally published in 1951 (Eliade 1974:260–261). Tucci's thoughts were part of the shared heritage of comparative mythologists who sought to relate the development of spirituality to shamanic traditions of hunter-gatherer peoples, which is also the central theme of Eliade's *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (1969). That Eliade was influenced by Tucci is clear from the references to Tucci in Eliade's works. In regard to the significance of the staircase motif in *Shamanism* he referred to Tucci's *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949) (Eliade 1974:430). Moreover, in a detailed exposition on the symbolism of the *maṇḍala* in his *Images and Symbols* (1952) he referred directly to Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala*

and to Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (Eliade 1991:52). In an obituary for Tucci written in 1984 Eliade ranked Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala* as his third most prominent book and noted that he had first met Tucci in Calcutta in 1930 and had last visited him in 1982 (Eliade, 1984).

Tucci noted in his *Theory and practice of the Mandala* that there was one idea from Jung's commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower* which was particularly important. Jung's greatest contribution was to realise that "visions and flashing apparitions occur through some mysterious intrinsic necessity of the human spirit. It is to Jung's honour that he was the first to recognise this" and that men "by introspection, discovered these things and by reflecting on them, and by combining them with cosmological conceptions, fixed their pattern in regular paradigms" (Tucci 1974:37).

The appeal to Western audiences of Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala* is that it contextualised the *maṇḍala* within a universalist approach. This has been commented on in an article on Western interpretations of Tibetan art by Donald Lopez who noted that there had been a trend in the twentieth century towards divorcing the *maṇḍala* from its ritual use and instead seeing it through what he called "psychologisation". He identified this trend in a number of authors, such as John Blofield (1970) and Pratapaditya Pal, and in particular singled out Tucci's *Theory and Practice of the Mandala*. It was, he suggested, part of an attitude that ignored what was Tibetan in Tibetan art and instead saw it as a "symbol of something ancient, universal and timeless" (Lopez 1998:147).

The universalist approach minimises the differences between cultures and traditions and draws parallels between all Indo-European cultures. An important mid-twentieth century exponent of this view was Dumézil, whose influence on contemporary Indo-European studies has been highlighted in a study by Scott Littleton (1973). In his *Rituels indo-européens à Rome* (1954) Dumézil stressed that all aspects of ritual were subordinate to an ideology which was concerned with "*des grandes forces qui animent le monde et la société*" (Dumézil 1954:7). Dumézil was appealing to a universalist rhetoric to explain the relevance of Indo-European rituals to his mid-twentieth century Western European audience. Many of his followers also applied a similar universalist approach to different Indo-European cultures. Alyn and Brinley Rees writing on ancient Ireland in

1961 related the existence of five provinces of Ireland to an idea from the *R̥gveda* (Rees 1961:187).

For many later authors also Tucci's book on the *maṇḍala* itself became a canonical text which validated interpreting the *maṇḍala* through a universalist psychologising paradigm. Jose and Miriam Argüelles, students of Chogyam Trungpa, in their 1972 work on the *maṇḍala* cited Tucci as the first of their "basic references" for the "Oriental traditions" concerning the *maṇḍala*. Tucci's Jungian psychologising approach to the *maṇḍala* had thus become a vital link for a universalising approach in which the role of the *maṇḍala* ritual in society receives scant attention in comparison to the role of the *maṇḍala* in personal transformation.

To examine the issues involved in seeing ritual through a universalist and a contextual approach I will now turn to a discussion of *maṇḍala* type rituals in a quite different Indian religious tradition which shows how important it is to see religious phenomena in relation to their cultural circumstances.

## KABĪR

Kabīr (ca. 1398–1518) was a medieval Indian religious teacher who was born and lived most of his life in Varanasi. From his name, which is Islamic in origin and means "The Great", it is apparent that he was in some sense from a Muslim background. However, in the verses which circulate in his name there is a mix of Hindu, Muslim and Yogic ideas which shows that he was not a conventional Muslim as we now understand the term. Rather, he is remembered for a teaching that all exterior religious rituals and forms of religion were false and that the true nature of the divine was that it is without shape or form and could be found by anybody if they would just search for it within their own self.

### The origins of the Kabīr Panth

There are a number of religious traditions which regard Kabīr as their founder and such traditions describe themselves in Hindi as a Kabīr Panth (a "Kabīr path") and a follower of such a tradition is called a Kabīr Panthī. According to many Kabīr Panthī sources the original Kabī Panthī tradition



was established at a monastery in Varanasi called Kabīrcaurā at the site of Kabīr's house. The Panth consisted of lay householder followers and ascetics (called *sants*) who followed Kabīr's teachings. The *sants* spent part of the year wandering and part of the year living together in monasteries under the leadership of a senior monk who was called the Mahant (abbot). Gradually over time the followers of Kabīr split up into numerous branches. The reasons for the splits were not always clear but were partly over issues related to practice and belief and partly due to the development of different monasteries over a broad area including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. However, the majority of these branches of the Kabīr Panth held that the true teachings of Kabīr were to be found in an anthology of verses attributed to Kabīr called the *Bījak*. The word *Bījak* means essence, or seed, or an account book, or a guide to how to find a hidden treasure. The earliest print editions of this work began to appear in 1868 and it has been in print ever since in one form or another. Monks from the Kabīrcaurā monastery have traditionally been closely identified with the idea that the only true source of knowledge about the teachings of Kabīr is to be found in their sacred text the *Bījak*.

#### Dharamdās and the Chattisgarh branches of the Kabīr Panth

In the early eighteenth century a rich merchant from Chattisgarh in the east of Madhya Pradesh became a follower of the Kabīr Panth and took the name of Dharamdās ("servant of the *dharma*"). In Dharamdās's works he described how he had visions of Kabīr in which new teachings were revealed to him (Caturvedī 1972:282). Three prominent aspects of these new teachings were major innovations. First, Kabīr revealed to Dharamdās that he was an incarnation of the divine, called the *satyapurūṣ* ("the true being") who had been reborn in each age of the world in different incarnations. Second, Kabīr prophesied that 42 generations of Dharamdās's descendents would form a hereditary married lineage of chief abbots for the tradition. Third, Dharamdās created a new genre of works called *sāgar* ("oceans") which contained both accounts of Kabīr's new teachings and also of a new set of ritual practices called *caukā* which were to be practised by the followers of the Kabīr Panth. This tradition rapidly followed the pattern of the earlier incarnations of the Kabīr Panth and numerous branches developed over

time due to disputes over succession and other issues (Caturvedī 1972:317–20). However, traditions which traced their origins back to Dharamdās’s version of Kabīr’s teachings were very successful in attracting followers and appear to have become some of the most popular branches of the Kabīr Panth.

### The Kabīr Panth

The first attempt to enumerate the number of followers of the Kabīr Panth was made in the census of India for 1881 in which the Kabīr Panth was regarded as a distinct religion. According to this census some 347,994 people described themselves as “Kabīr Panthī” (Chichele Plowden 1883:23). By the 1901 census the number of Kabīr Panthīs was around 850,000 (Risley & Gait 1903:362). The 1901 census was the last census which gave any data on the Kabīr Panth so there is no more recent census data on the number of Kabīr Panthīs.

In 2003 one estimate of the number of followers of the Kabīr Panth was published which counted the followers of various branches of the tradition and estimated that there were about 9.6 million followers of the Kabīr Panth at that time in India (Mahapatra 2003).

According to a recent estimate of the number of Kabīr Panthīs on the website of the Kabīr monastery called the *Sadguru Prakatya Dham* in Lahartara Varanasi there are “an estimated 25 million Kabīr Panthīs world wide and over 3000 Ashrams world wide” (“Pamphlet,” nd).

David Lorenzen (1981) made a study of the organisation of the Kabīr Panth based on field work done in the winters of 1976 and 1979, during which he visited a large number of Kabīr Panthī monasteries in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Chattisgarh. His research indicated that in general the monasteries had affiliations with either the Kabīrcaurā branch of the Kabīr Panth or the followers of Dharamdās. However, he found that there were other groups which did not align with either main branch, or which regarded themselves as independent, but were claimed as offshoots by one or both of the main branches.

The Kabīr Panth is also active outside of India and in particular in the Indian diaspora in countries such as Trinidad, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana and Dutch Guiana (Surinam). During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

around half a million Indians, mostly from poor lower caste communities from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, moved to these areas as indentured labourers and there were among them a number of followers of the Kabīr Panth (Vertovec 1992:4, 232–243).

#### THE CAUKĀ RITUAL

The *caukā* ritual is an important ritual practised in the Kabīr Panth in India and in the diaspora. In a study of ritual in the Kabīr Panth David Lorenzen has argued that there is no evidence that this ritual formed part of Kabīr's practices and that it seems to have been widespread not just amongst Kabīr Panthīs but also other Eastern Indian low-caste movements. Lorenzen argued the only major parallel to the *caukā* rituals appeared to be amongst domestic Hindu practices such as the *satyanārāyan vrat* observances (Lorenzen 1996:238).

In his view the earliest reference to it can be found in a work, undated but probably from the eighteenth century, called the *jñān gudrī*, "The quilt of knowledge", which appears to be associated with Dharamdās in the mind's of many Kabīr Panthī followers. Whatever its origins may have been it is clear that all sections of the Kabīr Panth practised the *caukā* ritual in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it remains the central practice of the followers of Dharamdās and was also practised, as a periodic observance, by the Kabīrcaurā branch of the Kabīr Panth.

The main features of the ritual are that it is a communal observance at which offerings are made to the Mahant who is considered during the ritual to embody the spirit of Kabīr, which is also the spirit of the *satyapurūṣ* himself. Lorenzen (1996) described nine stages to the ritual. It starts with the drawing a pattern which resembles a *maṇḍala* of five squares and diagonal lines on the ground using flour and setting up in this locations for various items such as a *kalaś* (a water pot), a lamp, a banana plant, and coconuts as well as seats for the Mahant and a minister (the *dīvān*). The next stage is accompanied by music and the singing of devotional songs and in it the Mahant arrives and takes up a special seat in the ritual area. The third stage is the lighting of the lamp and the recitation of various verses. The fourth stage is the making of offerings of coconuts and other

material gifts to the Mahant whilst a range of traditional songs about the ending of life in *samsār* and the attainment of liberation are sung. The fifth stage is when the Mahant breaks the coconuts which have been offered. This leads to the sixth stage which is where the coconuts and other food offerings are offered to the *satyapuruṣ*, the divine spirit. After this in some branches of the tradition new followers can be initiated into the Panth. In the seventh stage the sprinkling of sanctified water is followed by the eighth stage, the climax, which is an *āratī*, a lamp offering, which is followed by the distribution of the *prasād*, the blessed food offerings, which forms the ninth stage of the ritual.

Kedarnath Dvivedi published a study of the Kabīr Panth (1965) in which he noted that the *caukā* ritual can also be called a *satvik yajña* (“pure fire sacrifice”) and distinguished four main types of *caukā* ritual associated with four types of aims. The *ānandī caukā* is celebrated on the initiation of new members of the Panth. The *janmautī caukā* is celebrated with the intention of gaining male offspring or on the birth of a son. The *calāv caukā* which is performed on the occasion of a death and the *ekottarī caukā* which is celebrated in order to gain peace for 101 generations of one’s ancestors. The differences between these forms of *caukā* ritual relate in part to the amount of offerings needed to celebrate them. For instance, whilst for the *ānandī caukā* only five to seven coconuts are needed, for the *ekottarī caukā* 101 coconuts are needed (Dvivedi 1965:198).

#### CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC CAUKĀ RITUALS

The celebration of *caukā* rituals continues to be a key element in the contemporary Kabīr Panth and there is an increasing trend for them to be celebrated as part of large scale public events. A search of Hindi newspaper reports from 2010 indicated that a number of such events had taken place on such a large scale as to be newsworthy.

On the first of January the Hindi newspaper the *Dainik Bhāskar* reported that crowds flocked to celebrate a *caukā* ritual at a place called Navagarh in Chattisgarh at which the main Mahant was Prakashmuni Nam Saheb, the leader of the followers of one of the main branches of the followers of Dharamdās. The ritual was described as being both a *Mahāyajña* (“great

fire sacrifice”) and an *ekottarī caukā* ritual and was celebrated by 101 Kabīr Panthī Mahants. The scale of the event was also reported as being vast, as the main ceremonies were followed by a meal at which food was given to 600,000 people from all corners of the country. The report also notes that the planning for the event had taken nine years to complete and it was on such a scale that a school holiday was declared and the health department put into place temporary arrangements for drinking water and sanitation for the large numbers attending the event (“Ekottarī caukā ” 2010).

A second notable *caukā* ritual in 2010 was held on the occasion of the Kabīr *Jayantī*, the annual celebration of Kabīr’s birth, which in 2010 was celebrated on June 26. The *Dainik Bhāskar* reported on a *caukā* ceremony which was held under the leadership of Mahant Venidas of the Kabīr temple in Banswara Rajasthan. The Mahant was reported as saying that Kabīr’s message was one of truth and it would be celebrated by the performance of a *satvik yajña* (a “pure fire sacrifice”) and an *ānandī caukā* ritual combined with the singing of devotional songs and the telling of the story of the life of Kabīr. A further feature of the celebration was that numerous *sants* from the Kabīr Panth from surrounding districts would gather together at a *sammelan* (conference) to celebrate the event and there would be a communal meal (“Ananda Caukā,” 2010).

These two examples alone point to the centrality of the practice of the *caukā* ritual for large numbers of followers of the Kabīr Panth who follow the traditions which are derived from Dharamdās. I would argue then that whilst the experience of personal spiritual transformation does lie within the practice of the *caukā* ritual, for the followers of Kabīr it is subsumed within the significance of the *caukā* ritual as a public affirmation of group identity. This raises the question of whether there are any similar circumstances amongst Buddhist traditions such as those Tucci was studying.

#### BUDDHIST MAṄḌALA RITUALS AND GROUP IDENTITY

I would argue that just as membership of the community of Kabīr followers is defined through taking part in publicly celebrated *caukā* rituals, so too in the case of Tibetan Buddhism public *maṅḍala* rituals can be key public

affirmations of group identity. The most notable example of this is the ritual of the *Kālacakra tantra* which has been widely promulgated by the present Dalai Lama. For instance some 200,000 people attended such a ceremony in Bodhgaya in 2003 (“Record 200,000”, 2003). These rituals embed within them the *maṇḍala* of *Kālacakra* and have often been held as large scale public events at numerous venues around the world (Gyatso 1989). This example alone shows a clear analogy between the public celebration of a *maṇḍala* ritual in a Buddhist context and a *caukā* ritual amongst the followers of Kabīr.

I would further argue that rituals such as the *maṇḍala* ritual and the *caukā* ritual play a vital role in India as public events celebrating group identity. Examples of this include the ways in which periodic festivals such as *Durgā Pūjā* act as foci for local Hindu community activities. This comes about in part as the celebration of such rituals necessitates the formation of committees to raise funds and construct temporary shrines in which images of the goddess are installed and worshipped. The focus on the formation of community groups also points to the ways in which communal rituals in India act a factor in social organisation. Participation in the organising groups is based on local communal identity, such as those Bengalis who live in a particular area, but also then includes the larger Hindu community of those who participate as the audiences for the rituals, and together these factors influence perceptions of who is a member of the Hindu communities that celebrate *Durgā Pūjā* (Hillary 2003:292).

In a quite different example, in 1956 at a public mass conversion ceremony attended by around 400,000 people in Nagpur, BR Ambedkar and his followers became Buddhists. At this ceremony Ambedkar took refuge in Buddhism from a monk and then administered a set of 22 vows to his followers which included that they would no longer celebrate any forms of Hindu rituals (Omvedt 2003:262). Ambedkar’s followers then set about a process of actively reinventing ritual activities for New Buddhists in India. Participation in the new rituals of Ambedkarite Buddhism is thus a defining feature of membership of the New Buddhist community and separates New Buddhist Mahar Caste members from those who continue to regard themselves as Hindu. However, in a study of this phenomenon Johannes Beltz (2005) points out that in many cases what has happened is that new forms of ritual have been created which share many features

in common with Hindu rituals, even recitations of verses in praise of Ambedkar which in “their language, structure and some imagery resemble the Hindu *stūtis*” (Beltz 2005:166).

This points to a paradox in how we can understand the ways in which rituals function in India. It is the communal performance of a ritual that determines membership of a community, more than the actual content of the ritual. One explanation for this has been proposed by Frits Staal (1989) who argued that it is the performance of ritual, not its actual meaning that is important: “Rituals have very little or nothing to do with ideology and beliefs” (Staal 1989:28). This position is of course almost the complete antithesis of the position taken up by Jung, Tucci, and Dumézil, outlined above, that it is the inner meaning of the ritual that is paramount, rather than how its performance relates to society.

I would argue though that whilst these poles in the debate on ritual both have points in their favour, they also reveal a number of presuppositions which are open to question. Firstly, Jung and Tucci appear to take it as a given that there is such a thing as the self. This was taken as a given by the influential late nineteenth century American psychologist and scholar of religious experience William James. However, not all Western psychologists accepted this premise and Spinelli points out that most contemporary phenomenological psychologists do not accept the idea of a unitary self (Spinelli 1989:78). This points then to a problem with the characterisation of the approach taken by Tucci as being a psychologising approach (see above), as in fact it is necessary to determine which sort of a psychologising approach is being followed. One factor in this, Marcuse argued in a 1951 publication, was that in the post-First World War revolutionary period in Europe there were two factions in European psychology, a left faction which drew on Freudian theory on the psychology of the individual in relation to society and what he called the “right wing” in relation to which he says “Carl Jung’s psychology soon became an obscurantist pseudomythology” (Marcuse 1985:239). Reflecting on these different views the American existential psychologist Rollo May (1909–1994) wrote that myth was not only a “means of discovery” but also “that these myths discover for us a new reality as well” and that by “drawing out inner reality they enable the person to experience greater reality in the outside world” (May 1991:87).



I would also argue that seen from a phenomenological perspective, the role of rituals such as *maṇḍala* rituals or the Kabīr Panthī *caukā* ritual cannot be seen solely through any one perspective. From the Buddhist viewpoint, it could be argued, the *maṇḍala* cannot strictly be a journey into the essential self, the focus of Tucci's interest in the *maṇḍala*. This is because the very concept of the self is challenged by Buddhist ideas of *anatta* (selflessness) and Jung's psychological theorisation of it is also contested by existential psychological theories. However, to see ritual as basically significant only for its performance, and not its content, as Staals does, also appears to me to be problematic. Rather I would adopt a position akin to that of May on myth. *Maṇḍala* rituals are significant for their practitioners both on the level of inner personal spiritual exploration and on an outer level as part of how individuals create communities in the world.

This raises the question then of to what extent did Tucci acknowledge and depict this outer aspect of *maṇḍala* practice in his work. The answer is very little, it seems. Tucci constrained what he was going to do and excluded the social significance of *maṇḍala* rituals by focusing almost solely on the personal, philosophical and psychological aspects of *maṇḍala* practice. He did, of course, refer to the role of the *maṇḍala* in relation to initiation, and to the initiate, but in all cases this was seen in relation to the individual not the community. He also gave elaborate detailed and insightful descriptions of the elements which make up the *maṇḍala*, but again these were seen in terms of their universal significance, not in relation to specific events. The clearest contextualisation of the *maṇḍala* and its rituals is in the beginning of chapter four of the work where he wrote of how the ritual can only be performed by a competent master who has "one or more disciples who have asked to be initiated in the mysteries revealed" (Tucci 1974:85). This was a vital feature of the way Tucci constructed the *maṇḍala* ritual – he stressed the element in which it initiates the individual into the mysteries, rather than forms part of the life of a religious community as a whole.

Tucci also made another concrete reference to *maṇḍala* practice when he quoted an unnamed authority as indicating that "great care must be taken in choosing the place and time. A propitious day must be selected and a place near a river's bank or the seashore, to the north of a town, or



the proper chapel in a temple *and it should be secluded*<sup>2</sup> (Tucci 1974:86). The notion of the ritual as an initiation into mysteries held in a secluded place is evidently very different from that of the public celebration of the *maṇḍala* as a public event. Whilst both private and public forms of *maṇḍala* rituals exist in Buddhism it is interesting that Tucci did not seem to pay any attention to these aspects of *maṇḍala* rituals in his book. The reason seems to be related to his own personal experiences of *maṇḍala* practice. In particular he mentioned circumstances related to an event in 1939 when he sought initiation into the Sa skya pa sect at the Sa skya monastery, concerning which he noted issues related to dream augury and how the duration of the initiation rituals lasted for several days (Tucci 1974:92). However, he does not then describe the circumstances surrounding the holding of a *maṇḍala* ritual at that place and time, or the role that it played in the religious life of the monastery. So whilst Tucci was clearly aware of the social context of *maṇḍala* rituals and their significance as defining membership of particular groups, such as the Sa skya pa sect, he showed no interest in this aspect of the *maṇḍala* ritual in his book as his sole focus is on the inner significance for the practitioner of the ritual.

## CONCLUSION

I started by suggesting that there are two modes of understanding religious experience, a universalist and relativist model. Jung, Eliade and Tucci in the mid-twentieth century stressed the universal truth of certain values, and their importance for Western audiences, by drawing on the cultural traditions of people in Asia. However, I then argued that there was a need to also study the context in which ritual events take place and to complement the universalist approach by a relativist approach that acknowledges the importance of *maṇḍala* rituals as constituent elements in defining particular religious communities. I illustrated this with the example of the rituals of the followers of Kabīr. For them, I argued, the main function of their *caukā* ritual, which I maintain is analogous to a *maṇḍala* ritual, is the public affirmation of initiation into and membership of the community. This parallels I suggest in contemporary Tibetan Buddhist practice the

2 I have added the italic emphasis.

celebration of the *Kālacakra* tantra, which seems to serve a very similar function. My conclusion is that Tucci's contribution to understanding *maṇḍala* practice through his seminal work has been of great significance. However, for a broad-ranging understanding of *maṇḍala* practices his ideas must be complemented by an approach that acknowledges the key role that *maṇḍala* practice plays in the public affirmation of the religious identity of different communities.

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