



Implicit Anthropologies in Pre-philosophical Śaivism with Particular Reference to the *Netra-tantra*

Gavin Flood^{1,2}

Published online: 16 July 2020
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Abstract While there are overt philosophies of the person in both dualistic and non-dualistic Śaivism that developed their doctrines explicitly in relation to each other and to non-Śaiva traditions, especially Buddhism, many Śaiva texts exemplify what might be called a pre-philosophical discourse. Such works contain philosophical ideas but do not present systematic arguments (that is the job of later commentators) and are often regarded as divine revelation (namely the tantras but other genres of literature might also be included such as paddhati). It is this layer of the articulation of concepts linked to practices that the paper exposes, which the arguments of the later philosophers reflect upon and from which they develop. The claim here is that through an analysis of pre-philosophical literature, texts such as the *Netra-tantra*, we can build a picture of the conceptual universe of the early medieval period that forms the basis for the development of thinking by the later philosophers. One way of doing this is through the micro-study of particular textual passages and from that to build a larger picture of pre-philosophical discourse.

Keywords Śaivism · Netra tantra · Pre-philosophical discourse · Self

Abbreviations

ISG	<i>Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati</i>
K	<i>Netra-tantra</i> as published in the KSTS edition
KSTS	Kashmir series of texts and studies
Na	<i>Amṛteśatantra</i> , NAK MS 1-285, NGMPP Reel No. B 25/5
Nb	<i>Amṛteśatantra</i> , NAK 5-4866, NGMPP Reel No. A 171/12
NAK	National archives of Nepal, Kathmandu

✉ Gavin Flood
gavin.flood@theology.ox.ac.uk

¹ Champion Hall, Oxford University, Oxford, UK

² Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford, UK

NGMPP Nepal–German manuscript preservation project
 NT *Netratantra*
 NTU *Netroddyota*

Introduction

While there are overt philosophies of the person in both dualistic and non-dualistic Śaivism that developed their doctrines explicitly in relation to each other and to non-Śaiva traditions, especially Buddhism, many Śaiva texts exemplify what might be called a pre-philosophical discourse. Such works contain philosophical concepts but do not present systematic arguments (that is the job of commentators) and are often regarded as divine revelation (namely, the tantras but other genres of literature might also be included such as paddhatis). It is this layer of the articulation of concepts linked to practices that I hope to expose, which the arguments of the later philosophers reflect upon and from which they develop. My claim here is that through an analysis of pre-philosophical literature we can build up a picture of the conceptual universe of the early medieval period concerning the person, that forms the basis for the development of thinking by the later philosophers about metaphysical problems concerning the self. One way of doing this is through the micro-study of particular textual passages and from that to build a larger picture of pre-philosophical discourse. Text is an index of wider social attitudes and while this material does not give us direct accounts of how people lived, it does provide evidence for how people thought about their lives, their hopes, fears, and their aspirations. But before beginning such an enterprise, I need to clarify (a) what I mean by ‘pre-philosophical discourse’ and (b) what I mean by ‘implicit anthropologies,’ in order to develop a line of argument that the *Netra-tantra* exhibits distinct understandings of the human person, along with (c) the methodological principles by which such a claim might be established.

(a) Pre-philosophical Discourse

Philosophy is not enacted outside of cultures and there is a background, the possibility of thinking, that diverse philosophies share. Even confrontational philosophical positions are mutually comprehensible because of this background. As François Jullien observes in the Chinese situation, ‘the most diverse and even opposing points of view are able to stake out their distinctive positions with mutual comprehension because of this shared background.’¹

This is also the case with Indic traditions: that the Śaiva Siddhānta theologian Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha (c. 950-1000 AD) could argue with Buddhists over the notion of

¹ Jullien (2007, p. 55)

the self on coherent, mutually understandable grounds, is because they share a language of disputation and philosophical knowledge broadly accepted by all.²

Such ground supplies the necessary conditions for understanding. Language is key here—Rāmakaṇṭha and his Buddhist opponents wrote in Sanskrit, indeed the language of debate used over the generations—but not only this, they share traditions of scriptural authority and philosophical problematics generated through the cultural and social practices of the civilization in which they lived.

It is this background or what I have called the pre-philosophical conditions of thought in the Śaiva case that I wish to examine. The pre-philosophical conditions, the necessary conditions for understanding, contain implicit anthropologies that we can detect in the literature, including an implicit idealism and cosmological views of the person constrained by wider cosmological powers. The philosophy/pre-philosophy distinction is not, however, a sharp divide in the sense that many of these sources, such as the Śaiva Siddhānta scriptures, the *Parākhyā* and *Kiraṇa* tantras, offer systematic, conceptual expositions.³

Nevertheless, the distinction is useful for identifying the thought worlds out from which philosophy develops. If, as Ganeri claims, philosophy seeks to decontextualize ideas and treat them outside of history, then this is a marked characteristic of philosophy⁴ and a central feature of philosophical theory along with the development of argument and reason.

While both revealed text or scripture and philosophy may operate within a broad cultural rationality, philosophy is more systematic and directional in its argumentative strategy: philosophy needs to be a universalizing mode of thinking, whereas pre-philosophy, while being within a rational paradigm, is less systematically engaged in a dialogical or even confrontational enterprise. Pre-philosophy is a deeper resource of rational reflection that persists through time and is more concerned with categorization than reasoning per se. This pre-philosophy/philosophy division that is consonant with categorization/reasoning, is close to Heidegger's distinction between worldview (*die Weltanschauung*) and philosophy, where philosophy has developed out of worldview, the difference being that, according to Heidegger, philosophy aims at achieving a universal understanding of life.⁵ My appeal to Heidegger is not to impose his distinction on the Indic material but to exemplify the difference between pre-philosophical and philosophical discourse. We can legitimately distinguish philosophy from the ambient thought world articulated in revealed texts, in which philosophy exists, which it presupposes, and which provide the necessary conditions for understanding. The questions of philosophy concerning the nature of the person are explicit and reflective in

² Watson (2006, pp. 51–69). Cabezon calls this intellectual context Scholasticism. Cabezón (1998). On the dialogue between the non-dual Śaivas and the Buddhists see the definitive book on the Pratyabhijñā by Isabelle Ratié (2011).

³ Indeed, scriptures such as the *Kiraṇa-tantra* were inspired by philosophical schools, particularly Sāṃkhya. See Goodall (1998, p. li). The *Parākhyā* (1.5), for example, offers a programmatic treatment of five topics, the bound soul (*paśuḥ*), the Lord (*īśvaraḥ*), pure knowledge (*vidyā*), and liberation (*muktiliḥ*). Goodall (2004, pp. 139–140).

⁴ Ganeri (2001, p. 4).

⁵ Heidegger (1988, pp. 8–11).

contrast to a general awareness of self, or implicit philosophies of the person in pre-philosophical literature; as Ratié observes in relation to the Pratyabhijñā, I know that I am myself, but philosophy articulates the problem that I do not know what I am.⁶ Pre-philosophy can offer categorization to show how a person fits in to the grander cosmological structure but only philosophy offers reasoned arguments as to why this should be the case.

(b) Implicit Anthropologies

Over the last thirty years or so there has been a great deal of work done in the social sciences and humanities focused on the body and there is an extensive literature on this.⁷ While this shift of focus has been in many ways commendable and has supported questions being asked about the past that have contemporary relevance, concerning, for example, gender equality and social justice, I would, however, like to shift attention from the category ‘body’ to the category ‘person’ because this allows us to look for the relational and social nature of persons and the ways they are embedded in the historical *longue durée*. The ‘person’ – at least in the Western sense of embodied social actor – is not a privileged category in Indic thought; rather Indian philosophy tends to focus on the category of the self (*ātmā*, *jīvaḥ*, *puruṣaḥ*), impersonal absolute (*brahma*), or being (*bhāvaḥ*), but using the category ‘person’ as a lens through which to view textual material from the past, allows us to examine not only ideas about body, but ideas about self and moral agency too.⁸ It also allows us to raise philosophical questions about historical understandings of person, and whether the category can be legitimately used as a lens through which to view the world of the text. An implicit anthropology is a theory of persons that might remain unthematized in a culture, to uncover which is the task of the analyst. In exposing pre-philosophical, implicit anthropologies we are inevitably using a *prima facie* notion of person as operating in moral and legal discourse. That is, the category ‘person’ is more than a synonym for ‘human being,’ as Charles Taylor observes,

⁶ The Pratyabhijñā philosophers claim to transform a delusional insight about one’s sense of self, who I am, into a recognition of one’s true nature. Ratié puts this well, that I know that I am myself but the nature of what I am escapes me. This is an alienation that deprives me of a freedom that only the complete realization of my true nature can restore to me, that the Pratyabhijñā philosophy claims to provide. The *Netra-tantra* does not articulate this idea but is nevertheless orientated towards a non-dualistic view in chapter 8. Ratié identifies the Pratyabhijñā position succinctly: ‘Je sais que je suis moi-même - faute de quoi je n’aurais pas à me reconnaître. J’ai conscience de mon identité, et c’est cette conscience qui sourd dans toute reconnaissance de soi, mais l’essence qui rend possible ma permanence en tant que sujet m’échappe. Et c’est parce que, tout en sachant que je demeure le même, j’ignore ce qui fonde réellement cette identité, que je suis un être souffrant, asservi, aliéné au sens propre du terme: c’est dans la mesure où je demeure étranger à moi-même qu je suis privé d’une liberté que seule peut me restituer la réalisation complète de ma véritable nature. Les philosophes de la Pratyabhijñā opposent ainsi à la reconnaissance de soi ordinaire, présentée à la fois comme l’indice de ma véritable identité et comme le symptôme d’une fondamentale méconnaissance de soi, une Reconnaissance d’un ordre supérieur parce qu’elle implique la prise de conscience complète de définitive de ce que je suis.’ Ratié, *Le Soi et l’Autre*, pp. 5–6.

⁷ See, for example, Turner (1984), Shilling (1993), Coakley (1997) and Feher et al. (1989). With the focus on the body in Indian religions we have: Boullier and Tarabout (2002), Botto et al. (2004) and Michaels and Wulf (2011).

⁸ On the idea of categorization see Frazier (2014).

because it entails a being with certain capacities, such as language, such as being the bearer of rights, such as having a sense of self and identity.⁹

Many years ago, Michael Carrithers, Steven Lukes and the late Steve Collins published a collection of papers responding to Marcel Mauss' essay 'Le concept du soi,' in which Mauss argued a case for a developmental scheme leading up to the notion of a person as a citizen with rights and legal status in contrast to the earlier understanding of person as simply a role or mask (*personnage*). Mauss claimed that the notion of the person never developed in India in spite of potential. Of particular importance in this collection was Alexis Sanderson's essay 'Purity and Power Among the Brahmins of Kashmir' that challenged Mauss and changed the way we think about the history of medieval religion in India. In this essay, Sanderson posited the distinction between what we might call two realms of discourse, the realm of Brahmanical purity and the realm of Tantric power that opposed it. Sanderson claims, contra Mauss, that the Brahman of classical Indian religion is 'the most individual of individuals' concerned with the protection of boundaries around the self and focused on his ritual purity.¹⁰ By contrast the extreme Śaiva ascetic transgressed the boundaries of such purity in pursuit of magical power and ecstatic mysticism. Sanderson presents a spectrum of cultural values from orthodox *vaidika dharma* to heterodox *tāntrika sādhana*, with a range of texts from orthodox practice in texts of Dharma to the extreme 'power end' of the spectrum with transgressive Kaula texts such as the *Brahmayāmala*.¹¹

While Sanderson's essay has been significant in understanding the history of Indian religions, and the distinction between purity and power is an important one, I wish to capture something more of what post-Gupta or medieval tantric texts understand a person to be. If we look more closely at Sanderson's view that the Brahman at this time is highly individualistic, this means that he is the bearer of certain obligations and capacities to behave in accordance with an understanding of himself and the world he lives in, generally to live in ways consonant with duty, with *vārṇāśrama-dharma*,¹² and to pursue legitimate goals of life (*puruṣārthaḥ*) of duty (*dharmah*), success (*arthah*), and pleasure (*kāmah*) and even, perhaps finally, salvation (*mokṣah*).¹³ This is the orthodox Brahman conforming to the cultural values of the wider society. But there is also the tantric practitioner seeking power

⁹ Taylor articulates well what the English word designates: 'A person is a being with a certain moral status, or bearer of rights. But underlying the moral status, as its condition, are certain capacities. A person is a being who has a sense of self, has a notion of the future and the past, can hold values, make choices; in short, can adopt life-plans' (Taylor (1985, pp. 97–114). While we cannot assume that this conceptualization is shared across cultures and throughout history, it is a succinct summary of what the word 'person' indicates, from which one can begin to measure differences and similarities in other contexts. It seems to me that the category of the person as having moral status and certain capacities, such as language, reason, and judgement, is a necessary assumption for such inquiry.

¹⁰ Sanderson (1985, pp. 190–216).

¹¹ Sanderson, 'Purity and Power': 'We see that the forces of self-representation in the Kashmirian community of this period, manifest in the poles of this duality of the orthodox and heterodox and in the dialectic of their convergence, were contained within a fundamental structure of values which, arguably, underlies a far wider range of cultural forms in the kingdoms of medieval India' (p. 192).

¹² Sanderson (2019, pp. 1–48).

¹³ On the importance of these values see McClish (2019, pp. 150–170).

and tantric texts present a view of the person as having relinquished limited Brahmanical agency for supernatural abilities; thus, in the Krama tradition of Kālī, as Sanderson shows, the practitioner dissolves inhibition to experience true autonomy in his identity with autonomous consciousness.¹⁴ Alongside the orthodox Brahman and the tantric practitioner, we also have the socially marginalised (women and lower castes) who fall outside of the Brahmanical code.

With this background in mind, the argument I wish to develop is that the implied category of the person in the *Netra-tantra* exemplifies a range of views of person as bearer of capacities from making choices and being directional towards an eschatological goal, to a being whose choice-making capacity has been removed through supernatural intervention. This distinction between person as agent in control of their choices and life direction, in contrast to person as passive receiver of another's agency to their distress and potential death, is arguably linked to social status. The Brahman tantric practitioner who seeks power and liberation is a person in charge of their life, developing certain capacities through participation in a tradition of practice. The non-Brahman who becomes possessed by a goddess has relinquished agency, has given voice over to another power, although we must not forget the case of intentional relinquishing of agency in controlled possession.¹⁵ There is arguably a case here, that those occupying lower social status or those on the social margins find voice or enter into mainstream discourse through possession (see below).

The *Netra-tantra* contains both models of the person; the person as agent with capacities for developing spiritual practices whose goal lies in a vertical direction of world transcendence, along with the person who is afflicted by supernatural power such that he or she has relinquished agency. The reason for choosing this text in answer to questions about early medieval views of a person, is because it contains this spectrum of understanding. The sociological reality of these implicit anthropologies comes to articulation or becomes transformed as philosophical argument and speculation.

But both the agential self of the tantric Brahmanical practitioner and the passive self of the possessed are themselves set within a broader anthropology that we might characterise as a cosmological view of a person: the view that each person in social relationships is the subject of massive forces beyond them, a cosmological hierarchy that controls each level of the universe into what it is.¹⁶ Even the Brahman agent is the recipient of past karmic action but is not determined by those actions because the powers of the person recapitulate the powers of Śiva.¹⁷ The person in this traditional cosmology contains an *imago dei* and through spiritual practices such as those of the supreme and subtle meditations in the *Netra-tantra*, he recognizes this within himself through Śiva's grace, and, for the *Netra-tantra*, in so doing is freed.

¹⁴ Sanderson, 'Purity and Power,' p. 199.

¹⁵ For a contemporary account see Freeman (1998, pp. 73–98).

¹⁶ This important question of the what are the constraints that control an outcome into its particularity is raised by Bowker in his work. See Bowker (2015, pp. 146–164).

¹⁷ It is not possible to develop this here, but Śiva has five capacities of creation maintenance, destruction, concealment and grace that are recapitulated in the person. See Kṣemarāja, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* sūtra 10.

(c) Methodological Principles

Lastly in these introductory remarks, I need to say something about methodological principles through which such a claim can be established. The fundamental principle is to work upwards to structurally or conceptually higher levels through paying close attention to the texts and where possible or practicable, to working with manuscripts themselves. The study of textual passages lends support to an argument about implicit anthropologies or views of person of which the text is an index. But it is not as though the scholar comes to the text in a completely objective way, because the questions brought to bear on the material are usually from a wider context outside of the text, the context of scientific inquiry and of philosophical questions relevant to the context of inquiry. But once raised, the methodological principle must always be to pay attention to the text, and scholarship (philological methods of inquiry for example) can create the conditions in which the meanings of the text can be revealed. This is a letting be seen that which shows itself; a first level phenomenology of paying attention to what shows itself.¹⁸

So, we bring to bear our philosophical concerns about the nature of the person to the historical, textual material and address those concerns through a philological approach that allows the text to speak. Through this kind of attention, we see that our questions about the nature of the person do indeed develop dimensions of the text that might otherwise remain unthematized. Thus, with the *Netra-tantra*, in paying attention through close reading, we are able to see what it says concerning our questions about the nature of the person. The text points both to a sociological understanding of persons in relation to each other in the wider society and culture and also to a philosophical understanding or to ontological commitments about the nature of person. I argue that in the *Netra-tantra* this conceptualisation is eschatological in orientation and progressive, in the sense that one conceptualisation implied in the chapter on gross meditation in which person is subjected to externalised forces, gives way to the subtle meditation in which the person is suffused with power from within, to the acme of the supreme meditation in which person is identified with God as cosmic agent. These are implicit anthropologies, models of person, that could form the basis of further work of comparison; the analysis of anthropologies within or even between civilizations or measuring the textual accounts against normative, philosophical argument about persons (which this paper does not do).

Having hopefully clarified what I mean by pre-philosophical discourse, implicit anthropologies, and the methodological principles underlying the inquiry, we can begin with an account of the intellectual object of this inquiry, the text itself.

The *Netra-tantra*

The main source of my reflection will be the Nepalese recension of the *Netra-tantra*. The *Netra-tantra* is a text, as Sanderson shows, in the middle ground between the extremes of antinomian tantric practice of the Kaula and Krama sects and what

¹⁸ See Flood (2013, pp. 256–262).

Abhinavagupta perceives as purity obsessed concerns of highly orthodox Brahmans. According to Sanderson the *Netra-tantra* was composed in Kashmir between 700 and 850 AD¹⁹ and there is a Nepalese recension of the text preserving an earlier version than the Kashmir witnesses. The earliest manuscript, the *Amṛtīśvara-tantra* (Na), is dated as being copied by pandit Kīrttidhara for Viśveśvara who commissioned the copying, in February/March of saṃvat 320 in the Nepālīya system, thereby dating it to 1200 AD.²⁰ This is the principal witness and archetype of the Nepalese recension, written as a palm leaf manuscript in a Nepalese variant of a proto-Bengali script, with an ectype (Nb) on paper in devanāgarī. The *Netra-tantra* goes by the names of the *Amṛteśvara-tantra* or the *Amṛtīśvara-tantra* and also the *Mṛtyuñjit* and *Mṛtyuñjaya*.²¹ The Nepalese archetype (Na) that I use here calls itself the *Amṛtīśvara-tantra* while the ectype (Nb) calls itself the *Amṛteśvara-tantra*. The only printed version of the text is the Kashmir recension; the Nepalese recension only currently exists in manuscript form without Kṣemarāja's commentary. Only the Kashmir recension includes the commentary (*Uddyota*) by the Pratyabhijñā philosopher Kṣemarāja (c. 1000-1050 AD), which itself bears witness to the text's importance in his bringing it into the orbit of his non-dualist metaphysics. All four manuscripts in Śārada script that I am aware of from Kashmir contain the *Uddyota*.²²

In quoting from the text, I present a positive apparatus, citing the Nepalese witnesses and citing the Kashmir published text where there are differences. I sometimes refer to Kṣemarāja's commentary on the Kashmir recension as an aid to understanding, although we need to be cautious in that he attempts to impose a univocity on the text consonant with his non-dualist metaphysics. Indeed, he

¹⁹ See the Appendix, Sanderson (2004, pp. 229–300).

²⁰ *Amṛtīśvaratantra* f. 89v4-5: Viśveśvara was the author of an initiatory text, the *Amṛteśvaradīkṣāvidhi*, a Nepalese text on initiation and ritual for the royal family and specifically for the initiation of the kings Arimalla (b. 1153, r. 1200/01-1216) and/or his son Abhayamalla (b. 1183, r. 1216-1255) for whom the text would have been copied (Sanderson 2005, p. 241-42). Indeed, the latter had himself composed a ritual manual on regular worship after initiation (Sanderson 2005, p. 242). Kīrttidhara writes at the conclusion of his work (f. 89): 'This injunction by the Lord of Immortality, Mṛtyuñjit, is completed, full, and auspicious. This book, commissioned by Viśveśvara, was written by me, the scholar Kīrttidhara, in the bright fortnight of the month of March/April, 320.' (*samāptam idaṃ mṛtyuñjidamṛtīśavidhānam saṃpūrṇam iti śubham. saṃvat 320 caitra śudi 9 śanidine++ viśveśvaralikhāpitam idaṃ pustakam paṇḍitakīrttidharalikhitam mayā*).

²¹ Abhinavagupta cites the text three times in his *Tantrāloka* under the name of *Mṛtyuñjaya* (16.59 and 224; 21.11) and under the name *Netra* (citing 8.30b) in his *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtti-vimarśini* vol. 3 pp. 311 and 313. References from Brunner (1974, pp. 125–197), herself citing Lilian Silburn.

²² The *Netra-tantra* was first published in the KSTS in 1936 (vol 46) and 1939 (vol 61) edited by Madhusūdan Kaul based on two manuscripts, although he gives no details of them. There are four manuscripts, along with Kṣemarāja's commentary, to my knowledge in the Oriental Research Library, Srinagar. These are publicly available in digitized form at <http://www.archive.org> courtesy of eGangotri and McIntosh Skipper Roth. All are on paper and so later than the Nepalese witnesses.

comments on it in order, he says, to bring the text within the sphere of his Śākta inspired non-dualism as Alexis Sanderson shows.²³ But the *Netra-tantra* resists such monoglossic interpretation as it gives voice to distinct perspectives, as I hope to show here. My conclusion will lend support to the view that pre-philosophical Śaiva literature such as the *Netra-tantra* contains distinct anthropologies, views of the person that functioned in different social and religious contexts.

I have chosen to privilege the Nepalese witnesses for conceptual reasons, that it expresses a range of perspectives which contain contrasting, if not conflictual, views, and because the Nepalese recension reflects an earlier stage of the text's development. While there are mostly not significant semantic divergencies from the Kashmir *editio princeps*, there are some (such as 7.13 where the use of the different verbs *virecayet* and *nirodhayet* might indicate different conceptualisations, as we will see). Furthermore, through referring back to manuscript sources whose date we know, we are on surer ground of making claims about the text during a particular period. There is also a methodological principle that ideally, we refer to source material where possible, which means we examine manuscripts. Privileging the Nepalese witnesses over the Kashmir witnesses is justified on those grounds. Thus, the oldest Nepalese manuscript (Na) is the *editio princeps* of that recension. I will draw into the discussion parallel passages from other sources, namely scriptures of the Śaiva Siddhānta, Non-dualistic Śaivism, and some yogic texts (see below for details of precisely which sources and the primary source section of the references). I do this because these parallels lend support to the presentation of implicit anthropologies in the *Netra-tantra* and indicate that what the *Netra-tantra* expositis is not idiosyncratic but can be taken as a sign of wider conceptualisations and practices at the time of its formation and during the time of its transmission.²⁴

Often the Kashmir reading is better semantically and grammatically, but in the following quotations I have preserved the Nepalese recension as it stands, noting the Kashmir edition variants, which allows modern readers access to the basic textual material from which ideas of personhood can be generated. Alexis Sanderson has shown how the text was primarily connected with royalty and used in the courts of kings by Śaiva officiants in the role of the royal priest or *rājapurohita*. That Śaiva and Mahāyāna gurus performed 'apatropaic, restorative and aggressive Mantra rituals' for the protection of king and kingdom is well attested in the kingdoms of

²³ Sanderson (2007, pp. 231–582): '... Kṣemarāja stresses that his motive is to re-establish what he sees as the true, non-dualistic perspective of these texts [such as the *Netra-tantra*], which, he says, had been overshadowed by the prevailing view, that of the Saiddhāntika dualists, an unjustifiable inroad into non-Saiddhāntika territory that had both imposed a less enlightened reading of their teachings and led to the suppression of elements of non-dualistic practice (*advaitācārah*), such as the offering of fermented liquor to Svachchandabhairava, that were vital to the proper performance of their rites' (p. 398).

²⁴ We know, for example, that it was copied for the King of Nepal in 1200 and that further texts came from it focused on practice, namely *Amṛteśvarapūjanavidhi*, a ritual manual based on the *Netra*, a palm leaf manuscript in Newari script, dated Nepaliya Saṃvat 336 and Vikrama 1273, thus dating it to 1216 or 1217. There is also the *Netrodbhava* dated Nepaliya Saṃvat 279 and so is dated to 1159 AD before, or contemporaneous with, the copying of Na.

south and south-east Asia from the ninth to eleventh century and the *Netra-tantra* is a text that bears witness to Śaiva gurus in the service of kings.²⁵ The principal use of the text would have been the protection of the king and his family through the propagation of its ritual procedures and particularly the recitation of the *netra* mantra. The text was first brought to our attention by H  l  ne Brunner who describes each chapter in some detail in her 1974 paper;²⁶ a useful source for not only the contents of the text, but for her comments on its structure and relation to other texts. It is probable that the *Netra-tantra* was composed over a long period of time and the final redactors are bringing together diverse elements into a whole. David White argues that the oldest or original section of the work is the material concerned with possession and exorcism²⁷ and this systematic treatment of possession is indeed a notable feature of it, akin to similar treatment in the *  s  naśivagurudevapaddhati*.²⁸

The central deity of the *Netra-tantra* is Amṛteśvara, named Amṛtīśvara or Amṛtīśa in the Nepalese recensions, also known as Amṛteśabhairava, Mṛtyunjit, and Mṛtyuñjaya, whose consort is Lakṣmī/Śrī called Amṛtalakṣmī in ritual manuals based on the text.²⁹ After an initial chapter in which Amṛteśvara, referred to as Bhairava, responds to the questions of the Goddess by extolling the virtues and powers of Śiva's eye, the text presents a number of meditations on a number of deities, catholic in its range, not only from the systems of the Mantram  rga but from Vaiṣṇava traditions as well.³⁰ The *Netra-tantra* is an amalgam of material including descriptions of meditations on a range of deities and their systems, yogic practices, possession and exorcism, and theological reflection. I wish here to identify concepts of the person within this material that provide evidence for the common worldview from which later Śaiva philosophers developed their arguments.

Within the *Netra* we can identify three implicit anthropologies, three models of what a person is, that I shall call permeable, processual, and gnostic views of the self. What concerns me here is not so much the deity visualisations, nor the chapters on possession, but three chapters that form a group: the chapters on the gross (*sth  la-*), subtle (*s  kṣma-*) and supreme (*para-*) meditations (*dhy  nam*), six, seven, and eight. It seems to me that this threefold hierarchical structure is an attempt to order a range of practices and understandings of the person, that the *Netra* is incorporating and it does so with some coherence, the lowest level of meditation practice being concerned with magical protection, the subtle level with the visualisation of the body and the powers moving within it, and the supreme meditation being principally a gnostic reinterpretation of the 'limbs' of classical yoga and understanding the self's identification with Śiva. The subtle meditation is especially interesting because it presents two different systems of visualisation, one in which subtle energy rises up through the body and a second in which that same

²⁵ Sanderson, 'Religion and the State,' p. 233.

²⁶ Brunner, 'Un Tantra du Nord: le Netra Tantra.'

²⁷ White (2012, pp. 145–171)

²⁸ ISG Mantrap  da, 2.42,3b-8.

²⁹ Sanderson, 'Religion and the State,' p. 239, n. 18.

³⁰ For example, it describes N  r  yaṇa as a naked, ithyphallic youth, a 'handsome child' (*b  lar  paṃ*), standing on a ram (13.10-13b), as well as visualisations of Tumburu and his sisters (chapter 11).

power rising through the body releases nectar at the crown of the head that then floods the body.³¹ Kṣemarāja calls these the *tantraprakriyā* and the *kulaprabhā* respectively. This distinction is significant in so far as the former was the practice developed within non-dual Śaivism for the married householder that involved a regime of worship after initiation (*dīkṣā*), while the latter involved worship focussed on the Goddess and entailed transgressive ritual, such as making offerings of impure and sexual substances to the Goddess, and signs of possession at initiation.³² The *Netra-tantra* is influenced by Śākta tradition, and although there is indication of the *kulaprabhā* in the visualisation of the subtle body, there is no erotic worship in the *Netra* that the term *kulaprabhā* usually implies, referring to the practices of the Kaula secret societies of Kashmir.³³ The *Netra-tantra* sees itself as universal in its practice and sees itself as transcending the other branches of Śaiva scripture.³⁴ This universality means that the text absorbs different systems and traditions. Thus, the *Netra-tantra* attempts to incorporate different models of the self into a coherent world picture and it does this through creating a hierarchy of practice in which the gross, subtle and supreme meditations exemplify three distinct understandings of the person, three distinct anthropologies. Brunner regards these three meditations as progressive for the tantric practitioner or Sādhaka who follows a path of seeking power having undergone a specific consecration after initiation. The Sādhaka is impregnated with the power of his mantra and can unite with his power or Śakti through the process of practice that follows a hierarchical sequence exemplified by the three chapters of the *Netra-tantra* under consideration here.³⁵ The *Netra-tantra* uses the term and is familiar with the distinction between the Ācārya and the Sādhaka³⁶ (e.g. 5.3) and while it does maintain a hierarchy of practice, the gross meditation is less concerned with the practitioner's spiritual development and more with protection and exorcism.

But let us set the scene with two opening verses from a later section of the text, the longest chapter nineteen, on possession. The Goddess is asking the Lord Amṛteśvara about the supernatural goddesses who can possess people.

³¹ I have benefitted from Bäumer's excellent study and translation of chapters seven and eight. See Bäumer (2019).

³² See Sanderson 'The Śaiva and Tantric Traditions,' p. 682.

³³ Sanderson, 'Purity and Power,' pp. 203–205.

³⁴ *Netra-tantra* chapter 1, Na f. 3, colophon. The text calls itself the essence of the collection of all the streams of revelation (*sarvasrotasaṅgrahasāram*).

³⁵ Brunner (1975, pp. 411–443).

³⁶ E.g. NT 5.3: ... *adhikārtham ācārye sādhaḥ siddhikāmataḥ // 3 //* 'For the teacher, his purpose is authority, for the Sādhaka, his desire is power.'

The Permeable Self

19.2. idānīm śrotum icchāmi saṁśayaṁ me ḥṛdi sthitam/dṛṣṭipātaṁ prakurvanti jantūnām mātaraḥ sadā // 19.3. asaṁkhyātās tu tā devyo hy aprameyabalānvitāḥ/chāyāchidreṇa bādhante yoginyo balavattarāḥ //³⁷

19. 2-3. Now I want to hear [the dispelling of] doubt remaining in my heart, [how] the mothers are always casting an eye on people. Those goddesses are truly innumerable, furnished with immeasurable strength. The Yoginīs, possessing greater strength, force [their way] through the hole of the shadow.

Immediately we see what we are up against. The person's ambient environment is pervaded by supernatural powers that constantly threaten misfortune.³⁸ I have translated *dṛṣṭipāta* literally here, although Brunner renders the term as 'the evil eye' (le mauvais oeil),³⁹ no doubt following Kṣemarāja's gloss as *jighāṁsayā nirīkṣaṇam*, a look with a desire to harm, which clearly seems to be what the term means in this context.⁴⁰ I have rendered the *chāyāchidreṇa* as a genitive tatpuruṣa, 'through hole of the shadow,' or it could also be rendered as a karmāharaya, 'by means of the hole which is the shadow.' But Kṣemarāja takes *chāyā* and *chidram* as distinct terms. Shadow for him seems to mean that if a shadow were to be cast by women during their courses, or during parturition, or wicked people, this could be a cause of possession. The 'hole' he declares to be beings crying in the forest. In this case, we might render *chāyāchidreṇa* as a dvandva compound, as Kṣemarāja does, that the Yoginīs attack 'through the hole [which denotes] beings crying in the forest, and through the casting of a shadow.'⁴¹ The shadow here is the vulnerable entry point, the point of permeability in which external powers can become established within the person. All beings are subject to this kind of affliction, and the text particularly notes the kings, princes, and queens who are afflicted by sudden death and 'killed by the snares of time' (*kālapāsair jighāṁsitāḥ*),⁴² or if we are to take the desiderative meaning of *jighāṁsitāḥ* seriously, become desirous of being

³⁷ NT 19.2-3. Na f. 60, Nb f. 39. 19.2ab: *saṁśayaṁ* Na, Nb: *saṁśayo* K; *sthitam* Na, Nb: *sthitāḥ* K; 19.2cd: *jantūnām* Na, Nb: *manuje* K; 19.3ab: *aprimeyabalānvitāḥ* Na, Nb: *hyaprimeyabalānvtāḥ* K. I am grateful to the readers for their comments on this passage and for discussion with Wernicke-Olesen.

³⁸ On the yoginīs see Törzsök (1999).

³⁹ Brunner, 'Un Tantra du Nord,' p. 175.

⁴⁰ But the term does not always have a negative connotation. For example, in the *Lakṣmī-tantra* 21.26ab the mantras lead (*nayanti*) the man with controlled senses who is under the gaze of the teacher (*ācārya-dṛṣṭipāta-sthaṁ puruṣaṁ saṁyatendriyam*) where the *dṛṣṭipāta* is clearly of benefit.

⁴¹ NTU vol. 2, p. 128 by Kṣemarāja: 'The shadow is the reason for possession of praised people by elemental spirits and so on, being given by the most wicked, by [women] who have given birth, and by [women] during menses. The hole [refers to] beings who cry in the forest.' *chāyā rajas-valāsūtīkāpāpīṣṭhādibhir dīyamānā praśastasya jantor bhūtādisvīkṛtihetuḥ, chidram aranye rodanādi*. Brunner thinks that we cannot interpret *chidram* literally as 'hole' but that it conveys the idea that the shadow can bring up from the ground elemental spirits that can attack vulnerable people. Brunner (1975, p. 175, note 2).

⁴² NT 2.15ab.

killed by the snares of time. Hence there is need for magical protection against such eventualities and the text supplies this in the gross meditation.

In the opening verses of the sixth chapter, Amṛteśvara speaks of how poor people are assaulted by these terrible powers, stricken with anxiety, disease and danger, and that through the threefold method comprising the gross, subtle and supreme meditations they are freed from those killers.⁴³ The text regards these three as a complete system that correspond to the threefold method mentioned earlier in the text in chapter two, namely knowledge, yoga and mantra, that bestows liberation and powers.⁴⁴ The gross method that comprises ritual action such as fire offerings, mantra repetition, ritual gestures and so on, for defence against supernatural incursions, is formed by the King of Mantras, namely the *netra mantra*.⁴⁵ The ritual procedures for the purpose of warding off affliction (*pratighātārtham*)⁴⁶ are described, writing the name of the person to be protected, and offering white substances such as sugar, butter and milk into a fire pit.⁴⁷ With such ritual procedures accompanied by repetition of the mantra, the emaciated body will come back to health instantly, and even previously ineffective mantras can be enlivened by being framed by the *netra mantra*.⁴⁸ The weak man, full of disease, when looked after will be released through repeating his name framed by the *netra mantra*.⁴⁹ The text describes a number of other ritual procedures for curing affliction and gaining prosperity such that a barren woman may become fecund, a daughter may find a husband, and the king obtain a prosperous kingdom and long life, strength and fame.⁵⁰

This is a world in which the boundaries of person are permeable (as arguably was the case in all pre-modern societies), in which the normative goals of fulfilling one's social obligation, worldly success, and enjoying pleasure, attested in other kinds of literature such as the Brahmanical Smṛtis and texts of the Śivadharma genre, are to be preserved from adverse supernatural interference.⁵¹ The inevitability of human misfortune is explained through a model of self in which human agency is limited because of the threat of such incursions in which the person is almost the passive recipient of external forces. In the *Netra*, agency is invested in the wielders of counter powers, the mantrins or masters of mantra, who protect and expel obstacles to success in life, where 'obstacles' are indeed supernatural powers, the Vighneśas. This worldview pervades all social levels as we see here, the *Netra* being

⁴³ NT 6.5-6. Na f. 12 recto – f.13 verso, Nb f. 9: *apamṛtyuśatākṛāntā janā dāridryasaṃyutāḥ ādhivyādhibhayodvignāḥ pāpaughair vinipīḍitāḥ || 5 || mucyante tu yathā sarve pūrvoktair māraṇaiḥ priye/ trividhaṃ tad upāyaṃ tu sthūlaṃ sūkṣmaṃ paraṃ ca yat || 6 ||*. 6a: tu] Na, Nb: ca K; 6b: māraṇaiḥ] Na, Nb: dāruṇaiḥ K; 6cd: yat] Na, Nb: tat K.

⁴⁴ NT 2.7b

⁴⁵ NT 6.7. The construction of the *netra mantra*, OM JUṂ SAḤ, has been described in chapter two.

⁴⁶ NT 6.9c

⁴⁷ NT 6.11cd-12ab.

⁴⁸ NT 6.17-20.

⁴⁹ NT 6.18.

⁵⁰ NT 6.46-48.

⁵¹ Sanderson (2009, pp. 41–350).

particularly concerned with the royal household; a worldview that was not restricted to Kashmir or Nepal but extended probably throughout the subcontinent in the early medieval period and is attested in Kerala where the Śaiva Siddhānta text, the *Īśānaśivagurudeva-paddhati* bears witness to similar concerns, presenting a typology of possessing beings, similar to the *Netra*, along with prescriptions for their expulsion. We can read in these texts, indices of attitudes towards caste and gender as well. The ISG, for example, describes children and women in certain conditions, such as menstruating, laughing loudly, when naked, or ‘standing at a crossroads’ (prostitutes?) as being particularly vulnerable to possession, along with those who transgress caste boundaries, such as people in lower social strata pretending to be Brahmans.⁵² This would be a worldview pervasive of all social levels and these texts articulate a sense of person that is the basis for the development of systematic reflection on the nature of the self that we find in philosophical literature. But with the chapters on possession, we arguably also have the expression at a discursive level of the concerns of marginalised social groups who would otherwise not have voice, particularly important as it comes in the guise of revelation.⁵³

The Processual Self

A second model of person is articulated in the *Netra*'s subtle meditation. We might call this a model of the self as processual in the sense that rather than a focus on the permeable boundary between self and cosmos, this is a wholly internalized conception of self in which cosmological powers move within the body and the practitioner, far from being a passive recipient of invasive powers from outside the body, consciously controls power within the body. Indeed, through yogic practice the practitioner activates a process in which power is awakened and rises up to the crown of the head, as in standard later yoga tradition.⁵⁴ But the *Netra-tantra* posits two systems of meditation related to an indigenous classification of traditions into the system (*prakriyā*) of *tantra-* or *kula-*, which both entail slightly different understandings of person.

In chapter seven on the subtle meditation the body is immediately presented as a hierarchical structure for the support (*ādhāra*) of the soul, pervaded by various loci of power, the six ‘seasons’ or centres, twelve knots, five voids, three luminous abodes, and so on.⁵⁵ But there is a contrast between the impure body and the purified body that becomes divine, which the Yogin needs to achieve.

⁵² ISG Mantrapāda, 2.42. 3-8.

⁵³ See the classic argument that we find possession in marginalized groups, by Lewis (1971): ‘In peripheral cults these pressures arise from the oppression to which subordinate members of the community are subject’ (p. 176).

⁵⁴ See Padoux (2002, pp.163–187). Also, Flood (2011, pp. 70–83).

⁵⁵ NT 7.1-3. Na f. 15, Nb f. 10: *ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi dhyānaṃ sūkṣmam anuttamam/rtuṣaṣṭha svarādhāraṃ trilakṣaṃ vyomapañcakaṃ //1// granthidvādaśasamyuktam śaktitrayasamanvitam/dhāmatrayapathākṛāntaṃ nāḍītrayasamanvitam //2// jñātvā śarīraṃ suśroṇi daśanāḍīpathānugaṃ/dvāsapatisahasraṣ tu saptakoṭyārdhasamyutam//3// 7.1c rtuṣaṣṭha] Na, Nb: rtucakram K; 7.1d*

7.4. nāḍivṛndaiḥ samākṛāntaṃ malinaṃ vyādhibhir kṛtaṃ/sūkṣmadhyānāṃṛte-
naiva pareṇaivoditena tu // 7.5 āpyāyaṃ kurute yogī ātmano'tha parasya
ca/divyadehas tu bhavati sarvavyādhivivarjitaḥ//⁵⁶

7. 4-5. [The body] is impure, overrun by a multitude of channels, riddled with diseases, but the Yogin then fills his highest self with the nectar of the subtle meditation that is proclaimed as the highest; he becomes a divine body bereft of all disease.

Here the contrast is stark between the disease-ridden body and the divine body bereft of disease that the Yogin seeks to attain. Thus, there is a resonance with the previous chapter in that both the gross meditation and the subtle seek to transform the body through the expulsion of disease caused, in the first case, by the intrusion of malevolent entities. This account is not incompatible with that view and seeks the transformation of the Yogin so that he becomes full or complete. In the sentence *āpyāyaṃ kurute yogī*, while Brunner's 'le yogin redonne vigueur'⁵⁷ is of course correct, the term *āpyāyaṃ* conveys the sense of expansion or filling; in the Kashmir recension, the Yogin becomes full himself yet can also perform this meditation for another (*ātmāno vā parasya ca*) and one suspects that it is the king who is meant here. The alternative reading of the Nepalese witnesses replaces *vā* with *atha* and so this can be taken to mean that the Yogin becomes full of the supreme self, as suggested by Wernicke-Olesen (personal communication).⁵⁸

In the process, the Yogin establishes the supreme power (*parā śaktiḥ*) within himself in the lowest of the bodily centres, the power that is in fact his own nature (*svarūpam*), his self-perception (*svasaṃvedyam*), that pervades himself (*svavyāpti-saṃbhavam*), is self-arisen (*svoditam*) and, in an obscure phrase, this power is Śiva present in the Yogin's womb. The Kashmir recension of the text identifies 'his womb' with the auspicious Goddess (*tadgarbhagā śivā*), which Kṣemarāja claims

Footnote 55 continued

trilakṣaṃ] Na, Nb: *trilakṣyaṃ* K; 7.2b *daśanāḍipathānugaṃ*] Na, Nb: *daśanāḍipathāvṛtam* K; 7.3c *dvāsaptatisahasraḥ*] Na, Nb: *dvāsaptatyā sahasraḥ* K; 7.3c *saptakotyāḍhasaṃyutaṃ* Na, Nb: *sārdhakoṭītrayaṇa ca* K. 'Now I will tell you about the excellent, supreme, subtle visualization [of the body which comprises] that with sixteen supports [the vowels], the six seasons, the three objects, and the five voids. 7.2. [That body is] accompanied by twelve knots, associated with three powers, perfused by the path of three luminous abodes [sun, moon, and fire, and] permeated by three channels. 7.3. Having known the body, O one with beautiful hips, that follows the path of ten channels, with seventy-two thousand, and 3,500,000 [channels] [the yogi can create a divine body].' I have rendered *ṛtuṣaṣṭha* as 'six seasons' although *ṣaṣṭha* means 'sixth.' The Kashmir edition reads *ṛtucakraṃ* where *ṛtu* is simply a synonym for 'six'. The term *sūkṣmadhyāna* is attested elsewhere including the general, hierarchical structure of the subtle body, e.g. in the later *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 6.18ab: *tejodhyānaṃ śrutam caṇḍa sūkṣmadhyānaṃ vadāmyaham*, 'You have heard the luminous dhyana, Chanda; I shall describe the subtle dhyana' (Mallinson's translation); 6.20cd *sūkṣmadhyānaṃ idaṃ gopyaṃ devānām api durlabham*, 'This subtle dhyana is to be kept secret. It is hard for even the gods to attain' (Mallinson's translation.). See Birch (2011, pp. 527–554.

⁵⁶ NT 7.3-4, Na f. 15- f.16, Nb f. 11. 3b: *kṛtam*] Na, Nb: *vṛtam* K; 5ab *ātmano'tha*] Na, Nb: *ātmano vā* K; 5d: *tu*] Na, Nb: *sa* K.

⁵⁷ Brunner, 'Le Netra Tantra,' p. 143.

⁵⁸ Also see the Wernicke-Olesen Śākta traditions website, <http://saktatraditions.org/netratrantra-chapter-7/>.

shows the identification of śakti with śiva, that she is not in a dependent relationship to him, while the Nepalese witnesses retain the masculine case *tadgarbhagaḥ śivaḥ*.⁵⁹ But the point is that the Yogin establishes the Goddess in the root centre of his body and forces this power into the central channel that pervades it, making her flow between exhalation and inhalation. This is also a strong sense of his own self (*abhimānam*), although in the end an erroneous sense.⁶⁰

The text then goes on to describe two processes that Kṣemarāja identifies as the system of the *kula* and the *tantra*,⁶¹ citing an anonymous Kaula text describing the centres of the body. The *kulaprakriyā* is the system in which the Yogin raises the power within him from the centre at the base of the central channel so that it rises, piercing the various loci along the central axis of the body, to the crown of the head. Here—and this is the distinctive Kaula practice—he causes the nectar of immortality located there to flow down through the channels of the body, pervading the body, thereby filling it with the nectar of immortality that is the cause of a somatic joy. Wernicke-Olesen has identified this as a distinctive Śākta anthropology characterized by this practice of ‘flooding’ the body with the nectar of immortality flowing from the head (*amṛtaplāvanam*).⁶² This practice is to enter the mainstream Haṭha Yoga tradition such that it comes to replace the earlier system that Wernicke-Olesen identifies as *binduyoga*-Anthropology aimed at retaining semen within the head (*bindudhāraṇa*), an idea central to the later practice of the *khecarīmudrā*.⁶³ Indeed, Wernicke-Olesen shows how the later tradition came to retain both models,⁶⁴ even though contradictory to each other. Here in the *Netra-tantra* the *kulaprakriyā* follows the *amṛtaplāvana* idea while the *tantraprakriyā* seems to be in accord with the *bindudhāraṇa*. On the *amṛtaplāvana* practice, the *Netra* has the following verse:

7. 13. *viśrāmyānubhavaṃ prāpya tasmāt sthānāt pravāhayet/sarvaṃ tad amṛtaṃ vegāt sarvatraiva nirodhayet ||*

⁵⁹ NT 7.7.

⁶⁰ NT 7.8. The term *abhimāna* generally designates an erroneous evaluation of the self, a pride or high opinion of oneself, but in the Pratyabhijñā it is taking oneself for less than what one truly is and is the root of the ego. Ratié explains this well: ‘Ici, le sens du terme est en quelque sorte renversé, puisque l’*abhimāna* dont parlent les philosophes de la Pratyabhijñā consiste à se prendre pour moins que ce que l’on est (c’est-à-dire pour un corps particulier, un intellect particulier etc, au lieu de s’appréhender comme la totalité d l’être), mais ce renversement n’est qu’apparent: le terme *abhimāna* suggère une inflation de l’ego, or c’est cette conviction erronée qui est à la racine du sens de l’ego précisément - de la conviction d’être un ‘moi’ par opposition au reste du monde.’ Ratié, *Le Soi et l’Autre*, pp. 206–207, note 76.

⁶¹ The *tantraprakriyā* is the normative, liturgical system of the Trika tradition of Śaivism, referring to the Śaiva initiate’s daily worship (*nityavidhiḥ*), while the *kulaprakriyā* represents a more esoteric tradition only for the suitable person (*adhikārī*). Sanderson, ‘Maṇḍala and Āgamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir,’ p. 169 note 2.

⁶² Wernicke-Olesen and Einarsen (2018, pp. 241–257). Also see Mallinson (2015, pp. 109–140).

⁶³ On this see Mallinson (2007).

⁶⁴ Wernicke-Olesen and Einarsen (2018, pp. 249–251).

7.13. After resting and having attained that experience, he should cause [the nectar] to flow from that place [and] he should forcefully hold it there everywhere [in the body].⁶⁵

The Nepalese text uses the optative *nirodhayet*, ‘he should hold’ the nectar in the body whereas the Kashmir text has *virecayet*, ‘he should cause it to flow’. While one should be careful of not reading too much into this, it could be that the vocabulary of the text reflects an older understanding of ‘holding’ and controlling nectar within the body, because the Nepalese recension preserves an earlier condition of the text, whereas the Kashmir edition reflects a fully formed Śākta idea. But both would seem semantically appropriate as the practitioner causes the nectar to be suffused through the body but also keeps it there.

Kṣemarāja understands this practice to be of importance. Although in his commentary he uses the term *amṛtārṇavaplāvana*⁶⁶ rather than *amṛtaplāvana*, and identifies it with the realization of oneself as the Lord of Immortality, commenting on one of the last verses of the chapter that the Yogin should meditate upon Supreme Śiva as being of the nature of supreme nectar which floods the body ‘in all directions,’ which is to be united with the powers of will, cognition and action.⁶⁷ As is his practice, he reads the text through the lens of his non-dualism. But this idea of flooding the body with nectar is attested in other sources and is often in conjunction with ‘drying’ (*śoṣaṇam*) and ‘burning’ (*dahanam*), practices of visualization in which the impure body is imagined as being dried up and then burned to ashes, followed by being flooded with nectar arising from the union of Śiva and Śakti at the crown of the head, and thereby renewed and reformed. A post twelfth century example of this is the Kaula text the *Kulārṇava-tantra*⁶⁸ which describes breathing practices accompanied by drying, burning, and flooding:

15.37. dvādaśāvarttayan tārāṃ vāyuṃ madhye ca kumbhayet/śoṣayed vāyubījena dehaśoṣaṇam īritam //37// punaś ca pūrvavad vāyuṃ virecyāpūrya kumbhayet/dahet dahanabījena dehadāhanam īritam //38// punaś ca pūrvavad vāyuṃ virecyāpūrya kumbhayet/śivakuṇḍalinīyogasyandanāmṛtadhārayā/ āpādamastakam devi plāvayet plāvanaṃ bhavet //39//⁶⁹

⁶⁵ NT 7.13, Na f. 16, recto, Nb f. 11. 7.13a *viśrāmyānubhavaṃ*] Na, Nb: *viśrāmānubhavaṃ* K; 7.13d: *nirodhāyet*] Na, Nb: *virecayet*, K.

⁶⁶ NTU vol. 1, p. 175.

⁶⁷ NTU vol. 1, p. 175: Kṣemarāja’s commentary: *tataḥ sarvaromakūpaiḥ prasṛtyāntarbahirāsāditavyāpti sarvadikkam amṛtārṇavaplāvanasamarasībhūtaparamāmṛtarūpam, icchā-jñāna-kriyāśaktikacītam paramaśivarūpaṃ nirāmayamātmānaṃ cintayet*. ‘One should meditate on the self as free from disease, having the nature of the Supreme Śiva, aligned with the powers of will, cognition and action, whose nature is the supreme nectar, whose being is the taste of sameness [resulting from] the flooding by the ocean of the nectar of immortality in all directions, being the condition of pervasion diffused through all the pores of the skin, inside and out.’

⁶⁸ Sanderson writes that this text marks the development of a new kind of Kaulism claiming superiority over earlier forms. Sanderson (2012–2013, pp. 1–113).

⁶⁹ *Kulārṇava-tantra* 15.335–39.

15.37. Repeating the saving syllable [OM] twelve times, [the Yogin] should retain the breath in the middle [channel, then] he should dry up [the body] with the wind-seed syllable [YAM] uttered for the drying up of the body.

15.38. And again, as before, having exhaled and inhaled the breath, he should retain it [then] he should burn [the body] with the burning seed syllable [RAM], called the burning of the body.

15.39. And again, as before, having exhaled and inhaled, he should retain the breath. He should meditate on flooding [and] should flood [the body] from head to toe, O Goddess, with the nectar held [in the head] flowing from the union of Śiva and Kuṇḍalinī.

Here we have a Kaula text that has integrated the *plāvana* practice with haṭha yoga breath control. This association of *plāvana* with *śoṣaṇa* and *dahana* along with its practice connected to breath control and the seed syllables for air, fire, and water is well attested elsewhere.⁷⁰ In his commentary on the *Svacchanda-tantra*, closely related to the *Netra*,⁷¹ Kṣemarāja gives the seed syllables associated with the practice and presents a reading in line with his philosophy.⁷² Thus, the practice of drying up the body is the somatic experience in which the fluid or sense of oneself as an ego is dried up⁷³ being replaced by the experience of non-dual awareness.⁷⁴

The practice of *plāvana* is also integral to the daily ritual procedure of the purification of the elements within the body (*bhūtaśuddhi*) in which, as a preliminary to the creation of a divine body, inner and outer worship, the body is burned in the imagination and the ashes washed away by the flood arising from mantra utterance. This practice is well attested throughout Śaiva literature but perhaps its best, and possibly its earliest, articulations comes with the Pāñcarātra text, the *Jayākhya-saṃhitā*, which speaks of the symbolic destruction of the body through being burned from the ‘fire of time’ (*kālāgniḥ*) in the big toe; the resulting pile of ashes is then washed away by the liquid born from the visualization that the

⁷⁰ For example, the twelfth century *Śāradātīlaka* 4.27-28: *tataḥ saṃśoṣayed dehaṃ vāyubijena vāyunā/vahnibijena tenaiva saṃharet sakalāṃ tanuṃ //27// viśeṣayet tadā doṣān amṛtenāmṛtāmbhasāl/āplāvyaṅplāvayayed dehaṃ āpādātalamastakam //28//*. ‘Then he should dry the body with wind, with the wind seed mantra, with the fire seed mantra he should destroy the entire body, then he should dissolve the faults with nectar, with the fluid of nectar, flooding the body, he should inundate it from head to toe.’ The commentator Rāgavabhaṭṭa (composed 1494) cites a source that he names simply ‘*saṃhitā*’ and cites teachers (*ācāryās ca*) who say: *athavā śoṣaṇa-dahana-plāvana-bhedena śodhite dehe*, ‘or he should purify the body with the division of drying, burning and flooding.’ On the place of the text in the history of Śaiva literature see Sanderson, ‘Śaiva Literature,’ pp. 82–83. There are other attestations of these three together, for example the *Śiva Purāṇa* 28.10cd; Maheśvarānanda, *Mahārthamañjari* 44; *Paraśurāmakalpasūtra* 3.12. Even the Śaiva Siddhānta text, the *Suprabhedāgama* 4.23 bears witness to ‘burning and flooding’ after the imposition of mantras on the hands (*karanyāśah*). The Bhairava tantra, the *Svacchandatantra* also describes the three practices 2.30-38ab.

⁷¹ Sanderson, ‘Śaiva Literature,’ pp. 36–38.

⁷² *Svacchandodyota* 2.37ab.

⁷³ *Svacchandodyota* 2.36, p. 23: *tanoḥ śoṣo ’hantābhīmānaratānūbhāvaḥ*.

⁷⁴ *Svacchandodyota* 2.39cd, p. 25: ‘*plāvayet’ bhairavābhedaparāmarśamayam kuryādityarthaḥ*. “‘He should flood’ means he should perform that which comprises the supreme awareness of the non-duality of Bhairava.’

practitioner imagines flooding the directions.⁷⁵ This symbolic burning of the body reflects the idea of sacrifice and even the sentiment in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.37) that wisdom reduces all actions to ashes. Although the text does not explicitly say this, we may assume that the source of this milky liquid, this nectar (*amṛtam*) is from the crown of the head where, at this stage of the rite, the practitioner's self is located. The milky ocean thereby created flows to the directions, that is, fills the body. This practice is very close to the yoga of burning and flooding the body and the inner Kaula practice of Kuṇḍalinī.

We have, therefore, three closely related practices: the Kaula *plāvana* attested in the *Netra-tantra*, the Haṭha yogic *plāvana* performed in conjunction with *śośana* and *dahana*, and the pan-tantric, ritual practice of the *bhūtaśuddhi*. All of these are predicated upon a particular understanding of the person that I have called processual in so far as the Yogin as the exemplar of human accomplishment undergoes a process of inner transformation or realization through a process of change in which visualization practices are thought to facilitate an existential shift in the condition of the practitioner. Philosophical articulations and arguments about metaphysics – the Pratyabhijñā arguments for the identification of self with pure consciousness for example – are predicated upon an overall model of the self as having porous boundaries and thereby being transformable through a process that entails the manipulation of powers within the body. In particular, the nectar of immortality located at the crown of the head comes to be released, filling the body with happiness and creating a sense of identification with that power. The philosophical arguments for non-dualism expressed particularly in Abhinavagupta's *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* and the position summarized in Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñāhrdaya*,⁷⁶ are easy developments from this pre-philosophical understanding of both the porous and processual self. Both of these conceptions of self entail the idea of transhuman powers having the ability to enter into the person thereby changing their nature, either in terms of negative moral value, as in the case of the malevolent possessing deities, or of positive moral value in the case of the yogic process of imbuing the self with the nectar of immortality. Both entail a 'container' metaphor of the body⁷⁷ that can be filled with powers—even conceptualized as a fluid in the *plāvana* case—and both entail the integration of person with structure of cosmos and also the integration of the hierarchical cosmos into the self. From the porous and processual models, it is but a small step to developing a philosophical conception of non-dualism such that, in a citation by Kṣemarāja, *aham eva paro haṃsaḥ śivaḥ paramakāraṇam*, 'the supreme cause is the supreme self Śiva, which is that very I [which is myself].'⁷⁸ It is also reflected in Abhinavagupta's interpretation of the term *samāveśa* as immersion in pure consciousness rather than possession by external

⁷⁵ *Jayākhya-saṃhitā* 10.77: *dhyānajenodakenātha bhūtiṃ saṃplāvya diggatām vinipāt svamanreṇa siktēna kṣīrarūpiṇā*, 'Then having flooded the ashes [left from the burning of the body] he should [make the fluid] flow down to the directions, sprinkled with his own mantra, whose form is milk.' See Flood (2002, pp. 25–43).

⁷⁶ On the philosophical development see Ratié (2013).

⁷⁷ Lakof and Johnson (2003, pp. 29–30).

⁷⁸ *Svacchandodyota* 2.36, citing 4.399.

power.⁷⁹ The implication of this is that practices of meditation and yoga come prior to practices of philosophy in that philosophical argument is predicated upon pre-philosophical assumptions and models of self that are articulated in pre-philosophical literature.

The Gnostic Self

The last pre-philosophical implicit anthropology born witness to in the *Netra*, we might name the gnostic self. The content of this entails the Yogin reappraising practices and understanding of normative yoga (the system of Patañjali) within what the text regards as a higher register of interpretation. While some Tantras make reference to six ancillaries of yoga (*ṣaḍaṅga*),⁸⁰ the *Netra* refers to the famous eight. Here the ancillaries of yoga practice are interpreted to mean different states of knowledge or cognition. Thus, the chapter on the supreme meditation (*paradhyanam*) opens with the Yogin having identified himself with the absolute reality of Śiva, who shines forth, beyond the power of speech to express that which cannot be seen by the eyes, smelled by the nose, tasted by the tongue, felt by the sense of touch, nor heard by the ears, because it is immeasurable and beyond the senses. Attaining this realization through great practice and detachment (*tad abhyāseṇa mahatā vairāgyeṇa pareṇa ca*), Patañjali's terms, the Yogin becomes free from old age and death.⁸¹ Such attainment is consonant with moral values of abandoning passion, hate, greed and delusion and other negative qualities such as self-conceit, jealousy, arrogance and intoxication. Realizing the supreme state in the blink of an eye, the Yogin becomes liberated.⁸² While he attains this realization through the eight ancillaries of yoga, this is no mere mundane yogic practice of a gradual ascent to liberation, but rather the Yogin needs to understand the inner meaning of the limbs, that self-control (*yamaḥ*) is really the cessation of becoming, restraint (*niyamaḥ*) is constant meditation (*bhāvanā*) on supreme reality (*pare tattve*) and the other ancillaries are similarly reinterpreted. Posture (*āsanam*) is abiding within between inhalation and exhalation, and thereby becoming established in the power of knowledge (*jñānaśaktim*), while breath control (*prāṇayāmaḥ*) is the stilling of the mind beyond the gross and subtle levels to attain the supreme pulse (*paramaṇḍ spandanam*), withdrawal (*prayahāram*) is cutting the noose of becoming (*bhavapāśanikṛntanam*), meditation (*dhyānam*) the reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedyam*) that is the Lord (*vibhum*), the supporting concentration (*dhāraṇam*) is meditation on the supreme self (*paramātmānam*), and concentration (*samādhānam*) is placing consciousness equally in all beings.⁸³ I have not come across this kind of

⁷⁹ See Alexis Sanderson (1986, pp. 176–177) and Wallis (2008, pp. 247–295).

⁸⁰ Somadeva Vasudeva has written on the six ancillaries of yoga. Concerning those in the *Netra-tantra* he observes that 'it may actually be more appropriate to compare the eight ancillaries of the *Netratantra* with the formulaic *dhāraṇās* taught in the *Vijñānabhairava*, which show an even greater tendency towards the transcendence of the inherited complex of ritual and yogic procedures' (Vasudeva (2004, p. 382).

⁸¹ NT 8.1-6.

⁸² NT. 8.7-9.

⁸³ NT. 8.10-17.

reinterpretation of yoga elsewhere. The chapter goes on to introduce a number of disparate themes, the self being identical to pure consciousness, and ending by a return to laudation of the *netra* mantra and its power. In one passage we read:

yadā tu paramāśaktis sarvajñādiguṇānvitā/āpādādivikāśinyā na vikāmyeti nirmalā //8.31// yāvan na nirmalo hy ātmā baddhaḥ śaive tad ucyate/yatrasthaḥ puruṣaḥ sarvaṃ vet[t]y atītam anāgatam //8.32// sanniyamyendriyagrāmaṃ tattattvaṃ śaktilakṣaṇam/yatra yatra bhaved icchā jñānaṃ vāpi pravartate //8.33// kṛyā kṛtyasvarūpā vā tattattvaṃ śaktilakṣaṇam/vyāpakasya sato devi cidrūpasyātmanaḥ śivāt //8.34// prasaraty adbhutānandā sā śaktiḥ paramā smṛtā/viprasārya tavātmānaḥ sarvajñādiguṇair guṇī //8.35// sābhāsaḥ kathyate devi śivaḥ paramakāraṇaḥ/sarvajñaḥ paritṛptaś ca yaś ca bodho hy anādimān //8.36// svatanthro hy apraluptaś ca yaś ca vānantaśaktiḥ/śaktimān guṇabhedena saguṇān vindate guṇī //8.37//⁸⁴

8.31-32. But when the highest power possessed of all qualities beginning with omniscience, expanding out from foot [to head] is not without desire [?], she is pure. It is said in the Śaiva [scripture] that even though the self is not impure, it is bound. Where the self is established [in its purity] it knows all past and future.

8.33-34ab. One who controls the group of senses, his reality is characterised by power. Wherever knowledge or will arises, there also will be action, whose own nature is to do what is to be done, his reality is characterised by power.

8.34cd-35. O Goddess, for the self whose nature is all-pervading consciousness, wondrous joy proceeds from Śiva. That Power is known as the supreme. Having expanded yourself [in this way, the yogi becomes] endowed with [good] qualities, with the qualities of omniscience and so on.

8.36. Goddess, [this yogi] is called Śiva, shining, the supreme cause, all knowing and completely satisfied, and who is awakened without beginning.

8.37. He is free and not lost, of endless power, the possessor of Power, being the possessor of qualities, he experiences his own qualities by the distinguishing of qualities.

In these verses we see the ideal of the liberated Yogin who moves from a condition of impurity and bondage to a condition of freedom and knowledge, knowing past and future, and, indeed, being omniscient, filled with the power of Śiva and identified with his pure consciousness. The Yogin reflects the powers of Śiva, will, knowledge, and action, in himself and becomes Śiva. Such a transformation is to

⁸⁴ NT.8.31-37. Na f. 20- f. 21, verso, Nb f. 14, verso. 8.31a *paramāśaktis*] Na, Nb: *paramā śaktiḥ* K; 8.31b. *sarvajñādi-guṇānvitā*] Nb, K: *sarvajñādiṣu guṇānvitā* [unmetrical]; 31d: *vikāmyeti*] Na, Nb: *vikāsyeta*, K. Perhaps we can take *vikāmyeti* to be *vikāmyā iti*, as an instrumental singular agreeing with *vikāśinyā*, but I have not found this attested elsewhere and the meaning is unclear. The Kashmir text's *vikāsyeta*, third person singular optative verb, is perhaps an attempt to clarify it. 32a: *yāvan*] Na, Nb: *tāvan*, K; *vetty*] Nb, K: *vey*, Na; 34a: *kṛyākṛtya-*] Na: *kriyākṛtya-* K, *kṛtyākṛtya-* Nb. 34c: *sato*] Na, Nb: *yato*, K; 35c *tavātmānaḥ*] Na, Nb: *tamātmānaḥ* K; 36b: *paramakāraṇaḥ*] Na, Nb: *paramakāraṇam*, K. 36d. *yaś ca*] Na, Nb: *yasya* K; *-śaktiḥ*] Na, Nb: *-śaktimaḥ* K; 37d: *saguṇān*] Na, Nb: *svaguṇān*, K.

adopt or absorb the qualities of Śiva, which are good qualities such as omniscience. In this model, the self is gnostic, the Yogin knowing himself to be Śiva along with Śiva's powers. Although moral qualities are not explicitly stated, a moral transformation is also implied in the Yogin's becoming the possessor of qualities (*guṇī*) and in his control of the senses. But perhaps what is most striking about the passage is that it shares the fundamental structure of the self being filled by forces conceptualised at one level to be outside of it, although the Yogin realises that these powers are in the end, none other than his own. Indeed, the text continues:

8.38. pṛthagbhavedavibhedena nānātvaṃ vicared iha/sarvābhāsa iti prokto nirābhāsa tu kathyate //38// nāham asmi na caivanyo nirābhāso yathā bhavet/sāvasthā paramā proktā śivasya paramātmanah //39// nāham asmi na cānyo'sti dhyeyaṃ cātra na vidyate/ānandapadasaṃlīnaṃ jñānaṃ samasāṅgatam //40//⁸⁵

8.38. He manifests here as variety by splitting into different parts. He is called the manifestation of everything yet is said to be beyond manifestation.

8.39. Beyond manifestation [means] that 'I am not and there is no other.'⁸⁶ This state of the supreme self of Śiva is called the highest.

8.40. 'I am not and another is not,' here, there is no object of meditation; [the Yogin's] cognition has gone to the sameness of flavour [with Śiva], dissolved in the condition of joy.

The creation of the plurality of the universe is called *sarvābhāsa*, the manifestation of all, yet it is also *nirābhāsa*, beyond manifestation, which the text goes on to explain means that this is a condition beyond self and other, which becomes the object of the Yogin's meditation. Here the conception of the self is that it is identical to Śiva who is beyond manifestation yet who becomes plural as manifestation. The *Netra-tantra* is open to Kṣemarāja's non-dualist reading, although in itself it presents an emanationism rather than a pure metaphysical non-dualism. This is a pre-philosophical discourse in which the self is conceptualised as Śiva at the highest level: the boundaries of person are extensible beyond individuality. The text goes on to describe meditations in which the Yogin does not focus the mind above or below, with eyes neither shut nor open, focussing on the sense of self as universal.⁸⁷ Having practiced these three methods (the gross, subtle, and supreme) the Yogin becomes a conqueror of death, a practice that is called 'the cheating of time' (*kālasya vañcanam*).⁸⁸ This is consonant with the Pratyabhijñā doctrine of the experienced

⁸⁵ NT 8.38-40. Na f. 21, Nb f. 14, verso. 38b: *vicared*] Na, Nb: *vimṛśed*, K. 38c: *sarvābhāsa*] Na, Nb: *sa sāvābhāsa*, K. 39a: *caivanyo*] Na, Nb: *cānyo'sti*, K. 39b: *nirābhāso yathā*] Na, Nb: *nirābhāsa tadā*, K. 40d: *jñānam*] Na, Nb: *manah*, K.

⁸⁶ This would seem to be a stock phrase, attested earlier in the text at 3.14. It is cited by the Śaiva Siddhānta Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇakanṭha in his commentary on the *Mrgendrāgama*, Yogapāda 59, in Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* 29.64a which adds *kevalāḥ śaktayas tv aham*, 'I am merely powers,' and the *Tantrasadbhāva* 1.328.

⁸⁷ NT.8.41-43.

⁸⁸ NT 8.50.

self as contracted consciousness realizing its true nature as pure consciousness, the pure subject, who cannot be reduced to a series of cognitions.⁸⁹

Concluding Remarks

Through developing a typology of persons, I have attempted to explicate implicit anthropologies contained within the *Netra-tantra*. These form a typology in a hierarchical model of progress reflected in three modes of practice, the gross, the subtle and the supreme meditations. These three conceptualisations of the person – the permeable, processual, and gnostic – themselves share an implicit anthropology that person is embedded within a cosmos and furthermore that the soteriological goal of life is to undergo a shift from a condition of permeability in which the person is subjected to externalised forces, through a process of inner development, to a state of liberating gnosis. There is a scale of practice linked to a scale of conceptualisation, from externalised conception of the permeable self, to internalized conception. With permeable boundaries, external powers can enter into the person and change them, usually in a negative way. This is not necessarily linked to moral standing in which moral uprightness is a protection against malevolent forces, but rather to magical protection, or lack of it. But there is some link between ritual impurity and moral laxity as we have seen with Kṣemarāja's commentary on *dr̥ṣṭipāta* where he lists conditions of ritual impurity, such as parturition, alongside moral degradation (see above).

The higher-level practice is the subtle meditation which anticipates an eschatology of empowerment and liberation. Here the hierarchy within the body reflects the hierarchy of the cosmos and we have seen how the symbolic journey through the body in the subtle meditation is a journey through the cosmos to Śiva. We saw here that even this subtle meditation contains two systems, the *tantraprakriyā* that envisages an orientation towards verticality and the realization of Śiva typically located at the crown of the head, the *kulaprabhā* moving to a further stage of flooding the body with the nectar of immortality contained there. The person here is filled with the bliss of the Goddess. Lastly, the final and highest meditation is the realization of the person's divinity; the identification with Śiva conceptualised as supreme consciousness, through the re-reading of classical Yoga in terms of Śaiva metaphysics. Here the person is innately divine, an understanding brought about through a specific gnosis. Yet these three implicit anthropologies of the permeable, processual, and gnostic self are still contained within the tantric cosmology in which the world of daily transaction is an emanation of higher, more subtle worlds. An emanationist and hierarchical cosmology is the backdrop for these different conceptualisations of the person.

Translating these implicit anthropologies into a different kind of language, we might argue that the eschatological hope of deliverance from affliction, of

⁸⁹ See Ratié, *Le Soi et l'Autre*, p. 238: 'La subjectivité (*veditr̥va*) est "quelque chose de plus que les cognitions" (*vedanādhika*): si toute cognition est le sujet, au sens où elle est une forme contractée de la conscience pure, le sujet, lui, ne se réduit pas à la série des cognitions; il transcende ces formes infiniment variées, mais limitées, de lui-même.'

progressing on an inner journey to God, and of realizing innate divinity, expresses human aspiration particular to the period of the *Netra-tantra's* popularity. That is, the text articulates an orientation towards verticality and a developmental view of a person as the bearer of capacities for self-enhancement. These anthropologies are esoteric and not really concerned with the person as the bearer of obligations to others and of rights for themselves. While the *Netratantra* is in some sense a political document in its being used by the Śaiva priest in the courtly domain, its implicit anthropologies are apolitical in presenting models of the person without the explicit specification of gender or caste. The person's spiritual elevation can be achieved through application, through gnosis, and the avoidance of supernatural obstacles to progress. Texts such as this provided the raw material from which philosophy can draw to develop its overt arguments about the nature of person and the ontological status of categories such as self, Lord, and matter.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest. I would like to thank the anonymous readers for their helpful comments.

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