



Śākta-Śaiva Meditation as Expanded Awareness in Medieval Kashmir

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ABSTRACT Contemplative traditions focused on Śiva and the Goddess developed during the medieval or post-Gupta period in Kashmir, although not limited to that region. In this paper I present textual accounts of a kind of meditation and its accompanying doctrine geared towards liberation conceptualized as an expanded awareness described in Śākta-Śaiva scriptures. This Śākta-Śaiva tradition has scriptural authority in revealed texts and its vision is articulated in the philosophical discourse of the Śākta-Śaiva philosophers, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. It is the Śākta-Śaiva idea of meditation as the realization of an innate purity of awareness which is also an expanded awareness that I wish to examine.

KEYWORDS Śākta-Śaiva, meditation, awareness

Introduction

Contemplative traditions focused on Śiva and the Goddess developed during the medieval or post-Gupta period (post-sixth century CE) in Kashmir, although they were not limited to that region.¹ The problem that the paper seeks to address is firstly what selected texts within the tantric, and specifically Śākta-Śaiva, traditions say about meditation and secondly to raise the question about how we study these texts. This is an issue because generally ‘Hindu’ tantric sources are focussed on ritual and the sections on meditation describe visualisations of deities. There is little instruction or description of meditation without visualisation, as we might find in Buddhist texts, but there is some. On methodological concerns, the paper also hopes to illustrate how attention to textual detail can inform and generate higher order reflection on meaning. Thus, the goal of the paper is firstly to present textual evidence for meditation understood as expanded awareness, texts which to my knowledge have not previously been

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1 I rely entirely on the groundbreaking scholarship of Alexis Sanderson in the field of tantric studies, who coined the phrase ‘Śākta-Śaiva’ to more accurately describe these traditions (e.g., Sanderson 2007, 232). Sanderson, working exclusively from manuscript sources, has rewritten our understanding of the history of religions in India in the medieval period. This paper could not have been written without his prior work.

translated nor discussed outside of Sanderson historically locating them. Secondly, the goal is to offer a view that higher level, phenomenological explanation is generated from philological reading. Specifically, I argue that the texts point to expanded awareness understood as ‘openness’ or ‘verticality’ and that such openness is thought to be a liberating cognition. The close reading of texts generates a higher order model of verticality or openness that accurately describes the purpose of these texts in facilitating an expanded awareness as soteriological goal. To these ends I will present textual accounts of a kind of meditation and its accompanying doctrine geared towards liberation conceptualized as an expanded awareness described in Śākta-Śaiva scriptures.

Most tantric texts of the Śaiva corpus are concerned with procedures of daily and occasional rituals along with rites for a desired end (Brunner 1977; Flood 2020), but some are concerned with meditation (*dhyānam*, *bhāvanā*), and there are tantras that contain extensive treatment of yoga, such as the *yogapāda* sections of the *Raurāvāgama*, *Mrgendrāgama*, *Mataṅgaparameśvarāgama*, *Sārdhatriśatikālottara*, and so on. Indeed, the earlier Śaiva tantras, such as the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, seem to be coming out of a yogic and renunciate milieu, outside of social Brahmanism (Goodall 2015). Many tantras contain descriptions of the visualization of deities for meditation or possibly for the recitation of the visualization text, such as one of the scriptures of the Śākta sect known as the Trika, the *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra* (The Scripture of the Supreme Victory of the Syllabary-Goddess), and some texts contain descriptions of meditation practices without visualization with a focus on the spontaneous expansion of consciousness or awakening in an instant, such as the *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* (The Scripture of Numinous Consciousness). The earliest Śaiva tantra, the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, teaches a supportless (*nirālamba*) yoga beyond the usual Śaiva six-limbed yoga (Goodall 2015, 74). The *Mālinīvijayottara* and *Vijñānabhairava* tantras are outside the mainstream, orthodox congruent tradition of the Śaiva Siddhānta. It is in the more esoteric cults that we find especially the idea of meditation as expanded awareness, a tradition mostly identified with Goddess or Śākta forms of religion. As Alexis Sanderson has established, these Goddess traditions are conceptualized as the heart of non-dualist Śaivism. The Krama or ‘gradation’ system teaches the expansion of consciousness as the deeper meaning of scriptural revelation. This paper presents and describes textual accounts of the Krama meditation system and offers some methodological reflection that such philological description is necessary for phenomenology. It offers an interpretation of the textual material from a phenomenological perspective. [2]

Śākta-Śaiva Religion

In medieval Kashmir, forms of tantric religion developed that were focussed on Śiva but that contained within them the Goddess or Śakti as the essence of Śiva. These forms of religion are known as Śākta-Śaiva, which itself comprised a number of sects, such as the Krama and the Trika. It is within these Śākta-Śaiva sects that we find descriptions of meditation. The scriptural authority of these traditions is in revealed texts whose vision is developed in the philosophical discourse of the Śākta-Śaiva philosophers Abhinavagupta (ca. 975–1025 CE) and Kṣemarāja (ca. 1000-1050 CE). Expanded consciousness is identified as the Goddess by these commentators, who is regarded by them as the deeper meaning of scriptural revelation. Thus, while a text may be overtly focussed on the male deity Śiva, the text’s essence is interpreted to be the Goddess in her form as Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī. While there are purely Śaiva scriptures focussed on Śiva alone—such as those of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition—there are [3]

Śākta-Śaiva scriptures—such as those of the sect known as the Trika—whose essence is the Goddess. The Krama is a form of religion focussed on the goddess Kālī. In the present paper, when referring to the Goddess I intend the absolute reality of the Krama personified as Kālī or more specifically, her form as Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī.²

As Sanderson observes, there is a striking parallelism between this Krama tradition of consciousness as unbounded, innate freedom and the Great Perfection (Tib. *rDzogs chen*) of Ny-yingma (Tib. *rNying ma*) Buddhism with its emphasis on enlightenment by direct experience of the great primordial purity (Tib. *gzhi ka dag chen po*) (Sanderson 2007, 290). It is this Śākta-Śaiva idea of meditation as the realization of this innate purity of awareness which is also an expanded awareness that I wish to examine here.

There are various sources for understanding meditation as focusing on consciousness. We have, for example, one of the scriptures of the Trika cult, the *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra*, which sees consciousness as a stream of awareness (*cintā*) (Vasudeva 2004, 430), and the *Netra-tantra* (The Scripture of the Eye) in its eighth chapter describes the identification of the yogi with the absolute state of Śiva without mediation, by which the yogi becomes ageless and deathless,³ knowing that “I am Śiva, I am without second” (*Netra-tantra* 8.18),⁴ which frees the practitioner from the cycle of becoming.⁵ The *Netra-tantra* is an eighth-century text, popular in Kashmir, occupying a middle ground between the dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta, or normative tantric Śaivism, and the non-dualist antinomian tantras. This idea of the realization of an expanded awareness identified with the supreme reality of Śiva is also found in the Śaiva meditation text, the *Vijñānabhairava-tantra*.

That text describes several meditation practices (called *dhāraṇā*, support) that develop a condition of what we might call expanded awareness. Yet these ‘supports’ are to induce the realization that consciousness has no support: The text redefines meditation (*dhyānam*) not as visualization of a deity with body, eyes, mouth and so on, but as the mind abiding within itself without any support. For example, the text states: “Making the mind [go into] external space, abandoning constriction, which is all-pervading, empty, without support, and eternal, he should enter that which is completely full” (*Vijñānabhairava* 128);⁶ and “[F]or [true] meditation is the intellect unmoving, without form, without support; [true] meditation is not the imagination of a body with eyes, face, hands and so on” (*Vijñānabhairava* 146).⁷ The terms

2 I refer the reader to Sanderson’s work for a mapping of these traditions (see Sanderson 1988).

3 *Netra-tantra* 8.3–6. “[The yogi] becomes ageless and deathless having attained that [state] through identification with it. It is that eternal which speech cannot express, that cannot be seen by the eye, that cannot be heard with the ears, that the nose cannot smell, that the tongue cannot taste, that the sense of touch cannot feel, that cannot be thought by the mind, freed from all colour and taste [yet it is] endowed with all colour and taste, immeasurable, [and] beyond the senses. When that is attained, O Goddess, the yogis become free from old age and death through their exalted practice and supreme detachment”; *yaṃ prāpya tanmayatvena bhavate hy ajarāmarāḥ yan na vāg vadate nityaṃ yan na dr̥ṣyeta cakṣuṣā // 3 // yan na saṃśrūyate karṇair nāsā yaś ca na jighrati na cāsvādayate jihvā na sparśeta tvag indriyaṃ // 4 // na cetasā cintaniyaṃ sarvavarṇarasojhitam / sarvavarṇarasair yuktam aprameyam atim̐driyam // 5 // yaṃ prāpya yogino devi bhavanti hy ajarāmarāḥ tadabhyāseṇa mahatā vairāgyeṇa pareṇa ca // 6 //*. 3a. *yaṃ*] N₁ N₂: *yat*] K₁; *prāpya tanmayatvena*] N₂ K₁; *prāpya te tanmayatvena* N₁. 3b. *bhavate*] N₁; *bhavati* K₁ N₂. 4a. *yan na saṃśrūyate* N₂; *yac ca na śrūyate* K₁. 4b. *yaś ca*] N₁; *ya ca* N₂; *yac ca* K₁. 4c. *na cāsvādayate*] N₁; *na ca svādayate* N₂; *yan nāsvādayate* K. 4d. *na sparśeta*] N₁ N₂; *na sparśed yat* K₁. 5c. *sarvavarṇarasair*] N₁; *sarvavarṇarasair* N₂ K₁. 6a. *yaṃ*] N₁ N₂: *yat* K₁.

4 *śivo’ham advitīyo’ham*.

5 *Netra-tantra* 8.26. “Having known him [the yogi] is released in an instant from the terrible bondage of the cycle of reincarnation, freed from the three categories, eternal, unmoving and stable”; *taṃ jñātvā mucyate kṣipraṃ ghorāt saṃsārabandhanāt / tat[t]vatrayavinirmuktaṃ śāsvataṃ hy acalaṃ dhruvam // 26 //*. 26a. *taṃ*] N₁ N₂; *taj* K₁. 26c. *tatva-*] N₁ N₂; *tattva-* K₁. 26d. *hy acalaṃ*] N₁ N₂; *cācalaṃ* K₁.

6 *nitye nirāśraye śūnye vyāpake kalanojjhite / bāhyākāṣe manaḥ kṛtvā nirākāṣaṃ samāviśet*.

7 *Dhyānaṃ hi niścalā buddhir nirākārā nirāśrayā / na tu dhyānaṃ śarīrākṣimukhahastādikalpanā*.

translated as ‘meditation’, namely *dhyāna* and *bhāvanā*, have the implication of visualization in a tantric context. Third-person singular optative verbs (‘s/he should visualize’) are common in these texts (*dhyāyēt, cintayēt, vikalpayēt, bhāvayēt*), although a proper study of their occurrence would need to be done as this is a complex issue. But generally the notion of meditation without visualization is not so common. The *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* describes various methods of meditation conducive to the realization of an expanded awareness, such as focusing on the body as empty and realizing that there is no meditation object,⁸ meditating on a space inside a pot with the eyes open,⁹ gazing upon an empty landscape,¹⁰ gazing into a well,¹¹ and gazing at a space containing rays from the sun.¹²

The Sky of Consciousness in the Krama

But it is with the Krama system that we find an emphasis on the expansion of consciousness as a kind of non-dual awareness, often referred to as the ‘sky of consciousness’ (*cidvyoma, cidgaganam*). The Krama was a Śākta tradition, also known by the names Mahānaya, Mahārtha, Mahāmnaya (Sanderson 2007, 250–51; Rastogi 1979), that seems to have its origins in Uḍḍiyāna, a kingdom to the north-west of Kashmir. The Krama was an ascetic tradition perhaps originating in a famous cremation ground in Uḍḍiyāna, Karavīra, prior to its transposition to Kashmir, that we know about through accounts of Tibetan and Chinese monks who visited the region (Sanderson 2007, 265–66, 276). It is the site of one of the four Śākta centres of pilgrimage or *pīṭha* (2007, 267–69). The tradition has a scriptural revelation with two texts being revered, namely the *Kālikulapañcaśataka* (Five Hundred Verses on the Power of the Goddess Kālī) and the *Kālikulakramasadbhāva* (The True Being that is the System of the Power of the Goddess Kālī), dated prior to the Kashmirian philosopher Abhinavagupta, and there are later post-scriptural texts that summarize the system such as the *Mahānayaparakāśa* (The Illumination of the Great System) (2007, 260). As Sanderson has described, there is a substantial post-scriptural Krama literature, with three texts bearing the name *Mahānayaparakāśa*, one of which, published in Trivandrum, offers a linguistically sophisticated summary of the Krama system that culminates in consciousness devouring itself (*alamgrāsaḥ, haṭhapākaḥ*) as the deepest truth of the Śaiva corpus. Here the Goddess is the inner essence of Śiva, who cannot perceive this because his inner essence cannot be objectified (2007, 309). The Goddess is

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- 8 *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* 47–48, 47. “He should meditate every substance within the body, pervading it, O deer-eyed one, then his meditation will become firm. 48. He should meditate on the skin part over the body, [as] a wall, meditating that there is nothing within him; he comes to know there is no object of meditation”; *sarvaṃ dehaḡataṃ dravyaṃ viyadyāptaṃ mṛgeḡṣaṇe / vibhāvayēt tatas tasya bhāvanā sā sthīrā bhavet // 47 // dehāntare tvagvibhāgaṃ bhittibhūtaṃ vicintayēt / na kiñcid antare tasya dhyāyann adhyeyabhāḡ bhavet // 48 //*.
- 9 *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* 59: “He should cast his sight in the place of a pot and such like, abandoning [perception of] division; having become dissolved there in an instant, he becomes that reality because of being dissolved in that”; *ghaṭādibhāḡane dṛṣṭiṃ bhittis tyaktā viniḡṣipet | tallayaṃ tatḡṣaṇād gatvā tallayāt tanmayo bhavet // 59 //*.
- 10 *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* 60: “He should cast his sight in a place without trees, or on a mountain, or on a wall etc. He will [then] achieve the destruction of [mental] fluctuation when the mind is dissolved”; *nirvrḡṣagribhittiyādideṣe dṛṣṭiṃ viniḡṣipet / vilīne mānase bhāve vṛttikṣiṇaḡ prajāyate*.
- 11 *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* 115: “Having stood above the hole of a well and such like, he may gaze [into it]: the mind [then] comes to be completely without thought construction [and] in an instant there occurs the dissolution of consciousness”; *kūpādike mahāḡarte sthitvopari nirikṡaṇāt / avikalpamateḡ samyak sadyas cittalayaḡ sphuṭam*.
- 12 *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* 76: “When [one gazes] in the space of a place where there are variegated light beams from the sun etc., right there where the sight enters in, one’s own true nature manifests itself”; *tejasā sūryadīpāder ākāṡe śavalikṛte / dṛṣṭir niveśyā tatraiva, svātmarūpaṃ prakāṡate*.

higher than Śiva and more subtle. Sanderson translates the text in a passage worth citing as follows:

(104–5b) Maheśvara’s repose within himself is the highest state of self awareness. But by the finest of distinctions there shines a state even higher than that. This is the Goddess-ground, in which even the Lord cannot see his way. (105c–106) Being and non-being are grounded in the light of all manifestation, and that is grounded in the ecstasy of consciousness void of all dependence, which in turn comes to rest spontaneously in the limit of the self-groundedness of that all-encompassing [light], where the impressions of the influences left in consciousness by awareness of degree and the like are completely absent. (107–109) What we mean by ‘the Goddess’ is that untranscendable ground that remains when it has devoured even the subtlest traces of the impressions of these influences, positive, negative and both, that persist even within the state of the self-groundedness of that all-encompassing light. This path of [meditating on the cycles of] the deities [of cognition] is precisely the path of the Goddess [so defined]. It derives from that abyss in which all imprints are obliterated. (110) The nature of the Supreme Lord [Śiva] is the self-groundedness that devours awareness [of degree and the like]. We define the nature of the Goddess to be the point in which that itself comes to rest. (*Mahānayaprakāśa* (Triv.) 3. 94–111. 3.104–111)¹³

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This passage illustrates the way in which the tradition understood itself as transcending the lower strata of the tradition and how the grounding of all manifestation is the light of consciousness that the tradition identifies in theistic terms as the Goddess. The Krama regarded itself as the culmination of a graded revelation, beginning with the Śaiva scriptures, then moving up to the Śākta revelation and even transcending this to a sudden enlightenment somewhat akin to the Dzogchen tradition that locates itself at the summit of a hierarchy of revelation, from Atiyoga teachings down to the Anuttarayogatantras, Yogatantras and so on, down to the Mahāyāna Sūtras (Sanderson 2007, 290). But as Sanderson observes, neither the Krama system nor the Dzogchen tradition cut themselves off from those lower levels, which are necessary for their existence, even in terms of mundane issues such as the necessity of patronage (2007, 290). The Krama doctrinally emphasizes a higher teaching that, while being at the summit of a hierarchy of revelation, simultaneously undermines that hierarchy through the equalizing claim of the unity of the field of consciousness.

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Sanderson notes that, unlike the Śaiva traditions, the Krama teaches no rituals, no initiation, no hand gestures (*mudrā*), no visualizing meditation (*dhyānam*), and its teaching is conveyed by the Goddess Bhairavī to her spouse Bhairava, thereby inverting the normal gender relations (2007, 260–61). In negating usual ritual and meditative practices, the Krama lays stress upon the state of liberation as light identified with consciousness, and it is the Goddess who teaches this to Bhairava, who, as we see in the above passage, is himself ignorant of this teaching. In

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13 *maheśasyātmaviśrāntiḥ parāhaṃtātmikā hi yā / tasyā api parāvasthā bhāti sūkṣmaprabhedataḥ / 105 tad devīdhāma yatrāsau kāmādiśiko vibhur bhavet / bhāvābhāvau prakāśe’ntaḥ pratiṣṭhām adhigacchataḥ / 106 sa cāpi sakalāpekṣāśūnyāyām ciccamatkṛtau / tāratamyādikalanāvāsanāvedhadūrage / 107 paraviśrāntiparyante sāpi viśrāmyati svataḥ / paraprakāśaviśrāntidaśāyām api ye sthitāḥ / 108 vāsanāvedhasaṃskārā bhāvābhāvobhayātmakāḥ / *antas tām grasanīkṛtya (conj. : atas tām asanīkṛtya Ed.) yā viśrāntir anuttarā / 109 sā devī kathyate tasyā nayo ’sau devatānayaḥ | *yatrāvaṭe (em. : yatrāpaṭe) *parikṣiṇo (Ed. : parikṣiṇā Cod.) *viṭaṅko (em. [cf. here 1.1d and 3.82a (avātāṅka-), and commentary introducing *Bhāvopahārastotra* v 1: niruttara-nirmīketanāvaṭaviṭaṅka-]: ’pi ṭaṅko Ed.) ’sau nayas tataḥ / 110 yā kālagrāsaviśrāntis tad rūpaṃ paramēsituh / yā tadviśrāntiviśrāntis tad devīrūpam iṣyate (translated by Sanderson 2007, 309–10).*

the earlier Krama scripture, the *Kālikulapañcaśataka*, she teaches Bhairava a meditation on her nature as pure light which is consciousness:

7.42cd–43. I will tell [you] about the secret, supreme system relating to the Goddess. One should meditate on the supreme sun, whose nature is light, the supreme expansive one, the circle of pure consciousness connected to limited consciousness, having the appearance of ten million moons. (*Kālikulapañcaśataka*, Muktabodha edition)¹⁴ [11]

Here we have a succinct statement of meditation as expanded awareness. The circle of absolute consciousness (*citcakra-*) is expansive (*vibhum*) and identified with light but becomes manifested as limited, individualized consciousness (*cetanā*). The terms *cit*, for absolute consciousness, and *cetanā*, for individualized consciousness, are used in Kṣemarāja's summary of the recognition school where the sentient being (*cetanaḥ*, he uses the masculine here) has contracted consciousness as its nature: "A sentient being (*cetanaḥ*) whose nature is contracted consciousness (*citisaṃkocātmā*) has the universe contracted" (*Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* sūtra 4).¹⁵ [12]

This expanded consciousness that the practitioner or *sādhaka* achieves is the sky of consciousness identified with the Goddess. The *Kālikulapañcaśataka* goes on: [13]

7.48. He who suddenly finds [that level of tranquilized consciousness identified with the Goddess] becomes a mover in the sky of consciousness. [So] the entire immeasurable universe is consumed again by the play [of the Goddess]. 7.49. There is no one equal on the earth to that *sādhaka*. He stands supreme in the three worlds in his power, like the Lord. 7.50 The supreme power of consciousness has been told to you, O three-eyed one. This is the supreme secret which cannot be named, the system of the Goddess. (*Kālikulapañcaśataka*, Muktabodha edition)¹⁶ [14]

The *sādhaka* who becomes expanded awareness, moving in the sky of consciousness, has a cosmological correlate as the dissolution of the universe; his or her attainment is likened to the universe being devoured in the play of the Goddess again (*punaḥ*—as this is repeated over and over). The sky of consciousness is identified with tranquilized consciousness, which is identified with the Goddess: "Where the Goddess is established is the level of tranquilized consciousness" (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 7.46ab).¹⁷ The first chapter extols the Goddess who is firm intelligence (*dhairyam*); a man (*naraḥ*) realizes this revealed in the Kaula scriptures (*kaulajñānam*) and attains a divine body (*divyakāyaḥ*), truly practicing according to the teachings that flow from the mouth of the yoginī (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 1.50–52).¹⁸ The yoginī could be a deity or perhaps a human practitioner who reveals the esoteric truth of the Goddess. This is the supreme secret told to Bhairava by Bhairavī that is really his deeper nature, the essence (*sāraḥ*) of the universe itself, the true nature of the supreme (inner) sun (*paramārkasvarūpiṇī*), the unnameable. [15]

The one who knows the system of the Goddess, the *kulavit*, practices and is attached to the [16]

14 *kathayāmi rahasyaṃ ca kālikākramam uttamam // 7.42 // cintayet paramādityaṃ* [k, kh, g: -ditya] *dhāmarūpaṃ paraṃ vibhum* [ciccakracetanāyuktaṃ candrakotyavabhāsakam [g: candrakotyam-].

15 *citisaṃkocātmā cetano 'pi saṃkucitaviśvamayāḥ*.

16 *yo vindati sakṛt tasyās tatkṣaṇāt khecaro* [g: khavaro] *bhavet | nirmāti viśvam akhilaṃ grasate līlayā punaḥ // 7.48 // na tasya sādhakasyaivam upamā bhūvi* [g: bhūvi] *vidyate | trailokye* [g: -kya] *tiṣṭhate paraḥ* [k, kh, g: paraṃ] *prabhutvena* [g: prabhū-] *yatheśvaraḥ* [k, kh, g: -ra] // 7.49 // *paraṃ vijñānavibhavaṃ kathitaṃ te* [k, kh: kathitānte] *trilocana* | *etaḍ rahasyaṃ paramaṃ nākhyaṃ kālikākramam // 7.50 //*

17 *yatra sā saṃsthitā devī cittaviśrāmbhūmikā* [k, kh: vida-; g: cida-].

18 *yoginīvaktramārgeṇa saṃcaratya eva*.

consciousness of the Goddess system: he meditates upon her in both a subtle and gross condition, that is, both in a subtle consciousness and in the world (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 2.67).¹⁹ Meditation upon the nature of the universe as the great beneficent Goddess (*mahālakṣmīm*) is meditation upon she who is addicted to consuming the universe (*viśvagrāsaikalampātām*) (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 2.68cd).²⁰ She has gone beyond the standard sixfold yoga of the Śaivas and always follows her own yoga (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 2.70ab).²¹

Alongside this identification of expanded awareness with the Goddess, the Goddess should be worshipped externally too, and this is done through the practices of offering meat and alcohol. The text states: “He should worship her with mental flowers, with many enjoyable foods, with meat and nice drinks, with offerings to her of higher and lowest sacrificial animals” (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 2.72).²² This is a clear statement of the importance of sacrifice in tantric worship, although there is no explicit reference to sexual transgression here as we have in later literature. In the Trivandrum *Mahānayaprakāśa* it states: “for attachment to sex, wine, and meat is observed among nearly all creatures, of anyone, anywhere [?]. If from the beginning, enthusiasm for giving these up is demanded, the teaching doesn’t take root in the mind, even a little” (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 9.4–5).²³

The supreme Goddess is, of course, Kālī in the form of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī, whose revelation is the northern or upper tradition (*uttarāmnāyaḥ*). By the time we get to the *Yoginīhṛdaya* (The Essence of the Yoginī-Goddesses) (compiled during the eleventh century), the Śākta traditions have been classified according to four streams (*āmnāya*) that correspond to the four directions: (1) the eastern or primary (*pūrvāmnāya*) containing the Kaula tradition worshipping the Goddess as Kuleśvarī with Kuleśvara; (2) the western transmission (*paścimāmnāya*) worshipping the crooked crone Kubjikā; (3) the southern transmission (*dakṣiṇāmnāya*) forming the Śrīvidyā tradition focused on the gentle Tripurasundarī; and (4) the northern transmission (*uttarāmnāya*) of the Kālikula, focused on Kālī (Padoux 1994, 9–10; Dyzcowski 2001). There is an earlier reference to the Krama as going beyond the *uttarāmnāya* as the ‘union’ or ‘meeting’ (*melāpa*) (Sanderson 2007, 342n363 where he cites the *Mahānayaprakāśa* 9.63 that refers to the Krama as the Melāpa).

This identification of expanded awareness with the Goddess is also found in the post-scriptural hymn of praise to the Goddess by Śrīvatsa [fl. 1100-1300 CE], the *Cidganacandrikā* (The Moon in the Sky of Consciousness) (Sanderson 2007, 412), that begins by extolling not the Goddess directly but the expanse of consciousness: “The sky of consciousness (*cidvyoma*) is [like] an ocean of milk, like the full moon, a glittering wave, an expansive sound, a garland of undulating waves with drops of shimmering and spreading light” (*Cidganacandrikā* 1).²⁴ This sky of consciousness is the essence of the primal vibration (*ādyaspandasvarū-*

19 “The knower of the family of Goddesses united with the *sādhakas* [or perhaps more probably ‘united with practices,’ or simply ‘practicing’, taking *sādhakair* as a corruption of *sādhanair*], attached to the consciousness of the Goddess system, should meditate the supreme power who is in a subtle and gross condition”; *kulavid* [k, kh: * *lavin*] *sādhakair yuktaḥ kramavijñānapāraḡaḥ / cintayet paramāṃ śaktiṃ sthūlasūkṣmānuvartinim* [kh: *sthūla* * *(?)*kṣmānuvartinām*; g: -*sūkṣmā-*] // 2.67 //.

20 *viśvarūpām* [kh: *visva-*] *mahālakṣmīm viśvagrāsaikalampātām*.

21 “She always follows her own practice having become liberated from the sixfold practice”: *ṣaḍaṅgayoganirmuktām svayogānucarām sadā*.

22 *pūjāyen mānasaiḥ puṣpāir bhakṣyabhojyair anekaśaḥ* [g: *puṣpaibhakṣabhojyam-*] / *māmsaiś ca pānakair divyaiḥ paśubhiś cottamādhamaiḥ* [g: *paśubhiḥscottama-*].

23 *prāyo hi maithune madye māṃse ca pariḍṛsyate / āsaktiḥ sarvajantūnām viśeṣāt kasyacit kvacit // 4 // yadi tattvāgasamrambhāḥ pūrvam teṣām vidhīyate / upadeśo na sa manāḡ api citte prarohati // 5 //*. Thanks to the anonymous reader for correcting my translation here.

24 *kṣīrodam paurnamāsiśādhara iva yaḥ prasphurannistarāṅgaṃ cidvyoma sphāranādam rucivisaralasadbinduvakrormimālam*.

paḥ) that spreads out (*prathayathi*) as the syllable *OM*. Furthermore, the sky of consciousness is identified with the Goddess who calms the fire of the cycle of repeated birth and death (*Cidgaganacandrikā* 3).²⁵ On the one hand, we have the sky of consciousness, the supreme expanse that is also a wave-like vibration and a sound that expands or extends through it. Here the ocean of milk is a standard image that denotes the nectar of immortality (*amṛtam*) that in microcosmic or yogic terms is located at the crown of the head (*Netra-tantra* chapter 7, Wernicke-Olesen and Einarsen 2018), but in this Krama text it is not particularised in that way. On the other hand, the expanse of consciousness is identified with the Goddess, the moon deity *Candrikā*, who calms the fire of cyclic existence. This vision is of a cosmological structure where the Goddess, who is the supreme reality, manifests as powers. The text continues:

Those powers/goddesses who are your instruments, who open [themselves] to the condition of externality (*mukhabāhyapada-*), move in the sky whose nature is consciousness, O Goddess, for you stand on the elevated path. (*Cidgaganacandrikā* 3)²⁶ [20]

The powers, that are also deities, that move in the sky of consciousness are ‘open’ (*jṛmbhaṇa-*) to externality, which we might take to mean that the universal, inner condition that is the sky of consciousness becomes externalized through the powers who are in a condition of facing outwards (*mukhabāhyapada-*). The cosmological dimension of this doctrine is brought out in the address to the Goddess (*Śivā*) as being elevated on the path that is the cosmos itself. The cosmos is understood as a path, characterised as the six ways (*ṣaḍadhvan*, verses 6, 182, 269) that are the paths of emanation and dissolution, which are also paths of redemption for the practitioner to retrace the emanation through the practice of withdrawing the cosmos to its source within the body (Flood 2002). It is this Goddess who, in the end, reabsorbs the universe: [21]

You are the eternal shining light that consumes the universe, although difficult to behold, you are the habitation of truth, you are the cremation ground, dwelling in the heart of the spiritual hero, without fluctuation, to be honoured in the Karavīra cremation ground. (*Cidgaganacandrikā* 82)²⁷ [22]

The text continues its identification of the Goddess with light, and not only with creation but with destruction, too. The Goddess manifests the universe and consumes it, and so the universe is identified as a cremation ground, yet she is present microcosmically in the heart of the spiritual practitioner: the hero who treads the path of the Goddess. [23]

The Krama literature taught a system of four categories or circles (*cakram*), namely (1) the creation of the universe, (2) its maintenance, (3) its destruction, and (4) the unnameable (*anākhyam*), although as Sanderson notes in his explanation of the system, a fifth phase of pure light (*bhāsākramaḥ*) is added in the Old Kashmiri *Mahānayaprakāśa* (Sanderson 2007, 306). The unnameable is the deeper identity of the Goddess that is expressed as a cycle of thirteen [24]

25 “May the Moon Goddess in the sky of consciousness cool the heat of the fire of cyclic existence for us”; *cidgaganacandrikābdheḥ śamayatu saṃsāradāvadvavathuṃ vaḥ*.

26 *yāś caranti tava khe cidātmake śaktayaḥ karaṇalakṣaṇāḥ śive / muktabāhyapadaḥjṛmbhaṇodyamāḥ tvam hi tiṣṭhasi tadūrdhvage pathi*.

27 *nityabhātaruci viśvaghāsmaraṃ durnirikṣam api sanniketanam / tvam śmaśānam asi vīrahṛdgataṃ kṣiṇavṛtti karavīram iḥyase*.

Kālīs, with the thirteenth identified as the unnameable one, a tradition that regarded itself as transcending the lower revelation of even the non-dualist Śaiva tantras of Bhairava. This system is a tradition of meditation that influences Abhinavagupta and especially his student Kṣemarāja. It is a system focused on the Goddess understood as a primordial consciousness who expands as the universe and contracts; a condition that can be realized as innate within the self, its true identity, and also the identity of the highest Lord, Bhairava. The source for the system of thirteen Kālīs is the *Kālikulapañcaśataka* chapter five, which presents the system of worship and meditation as part of the cycle of the unnameable one (*anākhyacakram*) in a passage that is cited in Jayaratha's (thirteenth century CE) commentary on the *Tantrāloka* (Illumination of the Scriptures) (2007, 251), although the system of Kālīs is also found in the *Jayadrathayāmala* (Union with the One with Victorious Chariots), a Krama text that influenced Abhinavagupta, as Sanderson has shown (1986, 197–98). Here the Krama cult of the Goddess Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī is found to be at the centre of the Trika *maṇḍala* of worship. Sanderson notes: “The innermost power of the *maṇḍala* of final initiation into the Trika is then this quintessential deity group of the Krama, Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī mirrored in the twelve Kālīs of the unnameable as all-pervading, all-devouring non-duality in the dynamic cycle of the object, act and agent of cognition” (1986, 198).²⁸

This system of the Kālīs is difficult to understand (*durvijñeyam*) and difficult to approach (*durāsadam*), concerning enlightened perfected ones (*siddhas*), being the supreme essence (*paramam saram*) that cannot be told (*akathyam*), having abandoned the distinction between speech and its object (*vācyavācakavarjitam*) (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 5.1-2). The source and essence of the system is ineffable and beyond manifestation and any approach; its essence is consciousness. The text reads:

That which is the supreme, absolute light beyond the sky, complete, without parts, the supreme purity, without conceptual thought, without refuge, alone, without support, having abandoned the entire web of speech, bereft of [any] ontic category, called the supreme self, unborn, calm, firm, auspicious, without the conditions of being or non-being, having abandoned meditation, free from the states of giving and receiving, omnipresent, the supreme Lord, having transcended power and the qualities, having abandoned all duality, without eternity and non-eternity, which is not an entity, not two, [neither] duality nor non-duality, having abandoned the condition of being both duality and non-duality, having abandoned any likeness, whose characteristic is consciousness. (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 4–8)²⁹

The supreme reality of consciousness is wholly beyond duality, beyond language and articulated as paradox. It is not an object of attainment/future object (*bhāvyaṃ*) and yet it is consciousness (*saṃvittiḥ*). Interestingly, for the positive attribution of this reality the text uses the feminine noun *saṃvittiḥ* because it is referring to the Goddess. The supreme reality is consciousness that has the quality of being female in some sense and this reality is identified with

28 I refer the reader to Sanderson's article for a full account of the twelve Kālīs at the esoteric heart of the Trika.

29 *yat tad brahma param dhāma vyomātitaṃ nirāmayam | niṣkalam [k: nikulam; g: niḥklam] ca param śuddham [k: śuddhi; g: śuddhi] nirvikāram nirāśrayam // 5.4 // kaivalyaṃ ca nirādhāram sarvavāgjalavarjitam / nistattvaṃ paramātmākhyam ajam śāntam dhruvam [g: dhruva] śivam [k, g: śi *] // 5.5 // bhāvābhāvapadair hīnam [k: -padāhīnam] bhāvanāparivarjitam / dānādānapadair yuktaṃ [g: hānādānapadair muktaṃ] sarvagaṃ parameśvaram // 5.6 // śaktyatītam guṇātītam sarvadvandvavivarjitam / akṣarākṣarabhāvena bhāvyaṃ tan na kadācana // 5.7 // na dvaitam na ca vādvaitam [k: nādvaitam] dvaitādvaitobhayojhitam / kintu sarvopamāhīnam yasya saṃvittilakṣaṇam // 5.8 //.*

the sky of consciousness, the open expanse of consciousness that metaphorically all beings look up to and which is realized in meditation.

This reality is nameless and within this circle of the unnameable (*anākhyacakram*) we have cycles or processes of emanation, maintenance, and dissolution personified as emanations of Kālī. The text continues to describe this. If my interpretation is correct, one by one (*ekaikā*) the processes of producing (*udyatā*), carrying the universe (*haraṇa-*), and destroying it (*saṃhāra-*) are from her own power (*svasāmarthyāt saṃhāraharaṇodyatā*): the supreme Goddess who is the essence of absolute reality is to be known one by one (*ekaikā ca parā devī jñeyā brahmasvarūpiṇī*) in the form of twelve emanations (*Kālikulapañca-śataka* 5.14–15). These twelve are emanations of pure, untainted light (*śuddhāḥ prakāśanirmalāḥ*). They resemble myriad moons, the light of ten million times a thousand suns (*sūryakoṭi-sahasrābhās candrāyuta-nibhopamāḥ*), emanations of the thirteenth Kālī who is unnameable, identified with consciousness, beyond being, and identified with supreme joy. [28]

She [who is called] ‘Great Kālī’ is consciousness, taught in the gradual succession [of the twelve Kālīs]; her true essence has abandoned being and non-being, she is the Goddess of supreme joy. (*Kālikulapañcaśataka* 5.18)³⁰ [29]

She manifests these forms as the expression of her own freedom (*svecchayā*), and she then goes on to tell Bhairava their names.³¹ [30]

The Krama author Arṇasiṃha (fl. eleventh century), who composed a different text named *Mahānayaparakāśa*, speaks of the ultimate reality as a non-place that manifests as five waves (the five wave goddesses) which is also the great festival of the great sacrifice (*mahāyāgamahotsavaḥ*) in which both subject and object are ‘swallowed’ by consciousness itself in a pure reflexive and liberating act. This is the realization of the shining of non-duality (*advayollāsaḥ*) and realization of identity or ‘the sameness of flavour’ with it (*sāmarasaḥ*) (21–22). [31]

Building on this revelation, Abhinavagupta describes the process of the expansion and contraction of consciousness conceived as emanations of the thirteenth Kālī in twelve forms: emanations of the form of Kālī known in the system as Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī. So, rather than thirteen, he names twelve as emanations from the thirteenth (Sanderson 2007, 308–9). He identifies the goddesses with forms or expressions of consciousness in the manifestation and withdrawal of experience. In this process, consciousness expands out from its source as the objects of consciousness and contracts these objects back into itself in a process of constant emanation and contraction. Through becoming aware of this process, consciousness can realize itself as light and we have a shift from the theistic language of the Goddess to the impersonal language of consciousness and light. In the *Tantrasāra* (The Essence of the Scriptures), Abhinavagupta describes this process as follows: [32]

These four powers [the supreme Śakti called Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī who emanates Parā, Parāparā and Aparā] due to their freedom, become manifested singly in three [33]

30 *mahākālīti saṃjñā sā pāramparyakramoditā* [k: -kramoḃditā] |*sadasadyaktasadbhāvā* [k, g: *sadasadvyakta-*] *paramānanandanīnī*.

31 *Kālikulapañcaśataka* 5.20–46: They are: (1) Sṛṣṭikālī (verse 25), (2) Sthitikālī (verse 27), (3) Saṃhārakālī (verse 28), (4) Raktakālī (verse 30), (5) Sukālī (verse 32), (6) Yamakālī (verse 33), (7) Mṛtyukālī (verse 36), (8) Bhadrakālī (verse 38), (9) Paramārkakālī (verse 40), (10) Mārtaṇḍakālī (verse 42), (11) Kālāgnirudrakālī (verse 44), (12) Mahākālākālī (verse 45), and (13) Mahābhairavaghoracaṇḍakālī (verse 46). These correspond to those named in the *Cidgaganacandrikā* (see Sanderson 2007, 297n204).

ways: in creation, maintenance and in destruction and thus become twelve. (1) Consciousness projects existence at first only internally; (2) then expanding, it projects it externally; (3) then having grasped that [state of externality] made of the Goddess Rakti, it manifests existence by wishing to withdraw it internally; (4) then [consciousness] fastens onto and swallows the inhibition that has become an obstacle to reabsorption; (5) [next] with a portion of inhibition swallowed by means of withdrawing into the self, [consciousness] withdraws [even that] part of existence. (6) Then [thinking] “his withdrawal is my nature” [consciousness] withdraws even [this] essence. (7) Then [consciousness] withdraws [even] what remains of any simple consciousness of any existence, established through the nature of being a destroyer, [which remains] as a trace. (8) Then [consciousness] whose nature is manifested internally, withdraws the sphere of the senses; (9) then it reabsorbs even the Lord of the senses; (10) then it reabsorbs even the nature of being an experient, constructed as illusion; (11) then it reabsorbs the object of experience, even abandoning contraction and looking out to expansion, grasping, and tasting. (12) Finally it reabsorbs even the nature of that expansion. (*Tantrasāra* 4, 28–29)³²

With this internalization of the Kālī cult we have the transcendence of all earlier revelations and a kind of psychologizing of a Śākta mythological understanding of the world. While I cannot expand on this here, it seems to me that Abhinavagupta is reading the narrative of the tradition that maintains a view of the Goddess as emanating, maintaining, and consuming or destroying the universe, that we can perhaps describe as an externalized understanding, with an internalized understanding where these external, cosmic events are inner states of mind or consciousness. [34]

In terms of practice, we have seen that this system of emanation and contraction is regarded as operating within consciousness and that consciousness expands and contracts in consonance with the oscillation of the cosmos. Although the Krama disavows conventional ritual, there is nevertheless a ritual component to this in the sense that the texts imply that transgressive rites are necessary, and that the pulsation of consciousness is perceived directly in a meditative experience in which the practitioner perceives or becomes the sky of consciousness. This is a cosmological awareness of a verticality that the tradition is not content to understand merely as a transcendence of world, but a reality that suffuses world and all the spheres of the senses. So, the powers in the sky of consciousness, the rays of light (*marīcayāḥ*), are thought to pervade the spheres of the senses (*viṣayāḥ*), which is the pulsation of the unnameable one in the practice of this system. As the *Mahānayaparakāśa* says: “In whatever sense [35]

32 *tā eṣāḥ catasraḥ śaktayaḥ svātantryāt pratyekaṃ tridhaiva vartante sṛṣṭau sthitau saṃhāre ca iti dvādaśabhavanti / tathā hi: 1. saṃvit pūrvam antar eva bhāvaṃ kalayati, 2. tato bahir api sphuṭatayā kalayati, 3. tatraiva raktimayatām grhītvā tataḥ tam eva bhāvaṃ antarupasaṃjihirṣayā kalayati, 4. tataś ca tadupasaṃhāravighnabhūtām śaṅkā nirmanoti ca grasate ca, 5. grastaśaṅkāṃśaṃ bhavabhāgam ātmani upasaṃhāreṇa kalayati, 6. tata upasaṃhartṛtvaṃ mamedam rūpam ity api svabhāvam eva kalayati, 7. tata upasaṃhartṛsvabhāvakalane kasyacid bhāvasya vāsanātmanā avasthitim kasyacit tu saṃvinmātrāvaśeṣatām kalayati, 8. tataḥ svarūpakalanānāntariyakatvenaiva karaṇacakraṃ kalayati, 9. tataḥ karaṇeśvaram api kalayati, 10. tataḥ kalpitam māyiyam pramāṭrūpam api kalayati, 11. saṅkocatyāgonmukhavikāśagraṇarasikam api pramātāraṃ kalayati, 12. tato vikasitam api rūpaṃ kalayati* (This is a difficult passage and I have been guided by Sanderson, see Sanderson 1985, 199–200, 1995, 73–75).

sphere the sparks of light operate, there is established the pulsation of the unnameable one which is the practice of this system” (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 9.21).³³

As with all other Indian soteriologies, the goal of this complex system is salvation from the cycle of becoming conceptualized in Abhinavagupta’s passage cited above as consciousness devouring its own projection as objectivity and even devouring that realization (Sanderson 2007, 252). As Sanderson observes, this liberation is the correct perception that the object of cognition has no reality outside of cognition itself and the apparent emergence of objectivity and its return to the basis or ground of cognition is just that, only apparent (2007, 252–53). This projection and reabsorption is personified as the cycle of the Goddesses, the Goddesses of the five flows (*vāhadevyah*) who emanate the apparently objective universe, perceived to be distinct, and reabsorb it, yet this gradation of consciousness is established only as the own essence of the goddesses of the flows (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 6, 119).³⁴

[36]

The Phenomenology of Expanded Consciousness

In these textual descriptions we have a doctrine of the cosmos conceptualized as a process of emanation and contraction from the Goddess Kālī and this process being identified with consciousness. We also have the idea that meditation upon this is an existential cognition that is salvific: this is not simply a doctrine but is regarded as a liberating experience. The mythological language of the goddesses—the Kālīs of creation, maintenance, and destruction—is mapped onto an understanding of the world as an emanation and contraction of consciousness. The terms translated by the English word “consciousness” are varied. In the textual material presented above we have *cit*, *citi*, *cetana*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃvitti*, *saṃvit*, and *viññāna*. There is also use of the term *manas*, ‘mind’ (Flood 2021). A study of the specific contexts in which these terms appear has not been done to my knowledge, but we can perhaps assert with some confidence that *cit*, *saṃvit*, and *viññāna* are used synonymously to refer to the supreme reality identified in theistic language as Śiva or the Goddess. *Cit* is a feminine noun and refers to the pure consciousness of Śiva whereas *citi* is a masculine noun, referring to the pure consciousness identified (even though masculine) with the Goddess by Kṣemarāja (as in the above passages). *Cetana* refers to the individual, embodied consciousness as we find in Kṣemarāja’s *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* (Essence of Recognition) where *cetana* is *citi* particularized or contracted in the individual (*Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* 4).³⁵ We have also seen the identification of the elevated or expanded consciousness with light (*prakāśah*) and sky (*gaganam*, *vyoma*, *kha*), which is our true or deepest nature (*svabhāvaḥ*).

[37]

This natural state of consciousness is expanded awareness, but we are prevented from understanding this due to inhibition (*śaṅkā*) according to Abhinavagupta’s text, which restricts, or seems to restrict, the expansion of awareness. Thus, the process of the reabsorption of consciousness back into itself is a process of the devouring of inhibition (*śaṅkā* ... *grasate*), which is simultaneously the opening out of consciousness to its original state. Elsewhere the Śaiva texts speak of the opening out (*unmeṣah*) and closing in (*nimeṣah*) of consciousness (e.g. *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* sūtra 20): consciousness closes in or restricts itself in contraction as limited consciousness controlled by inhibition but opens out in so far as it goes beyond restric-

[38]

33 *yasmin yasmin hi viṣaye saṃkrāmanti marīcayah / tatra tatra hy anāyāsādanākhyasphuraṇaṃ sthitam // 9.22 //.*

34 *vāhadevināṃ svasvarūpaniṣṭhatā saṃvitkramah.*

35 *citisaṃkocātmā cetano.*

tion and contraction. Open consciousness is the realization of the sky of consciousness (*cidgaganam, cidvyoma*), the expanse of consciousness understood in the metaphor of verticality as height and elevation in which the meditator can move. Here s/he becomes a sky-goer (*khecari*), a term that often refers to goddesses who move in that realm. In the *Mahānayaprakāśa* we read:

That Sky-goer is considered to be concentrated on the burning of time [as] a cremation ground, she who is supreme consciousness vibrating in the sky that is driven beyond time. (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 2.15)³⁶ [39]

This sky of consciousness, that is beyond time, must be realized in one's own experience through the practice of meditation certainly, but through the Krama rites involving transgression, and ultimately through simply perceiving the expanse of consciousness in everyday activity, in the spheres or objects of the senses. The Goddess appears as awareness even in the spheres of the senses. Indeed, the sense sphere or field of perception is regarded as a kind of body, and we have here the idea that expanded awareness is also an expanded body. Śrīvatsa makes this identification when he claims: [40]

Awareness [can be] perceived as the awakening of the dawn, even so the highest awareness is seen in the sense sphere. As sight, O Goddess, is a body in the appearance of the sense object, so this [higher] awareness is that which is to be procured. (*Cidgaganacandrikā* 207)³⁷ [41]

The supreme sky of consciousness is identified with the Goddess and this consciousness is contracted into the particularity of the sense spheres which are the unity of organ of perception, such as sight, with its objects. Furthermore, we might understand this operation of the senses as a kind of expanded body, ultimately a body of the Goddess, although we need to be cautious in that the world of experience (*viśayah*) is identified with the body (*vigrahaḥ*) which is a masculine noun. But certainly we know from Kṣemarāja that the embodied person is understood as a contracted or limited form of expanded consciousness. The Goddess who is expanded consciousness in the Krama sources contracts as the limited experience of the bound soul, from which perspective, higher awareness is lost. This seems to be the sense of the verses preceding 207. Although it is somewhat obscure to me, the sense can perhaps be rendered as follows: [42]

You manifest space and time, in this manner, what by you is the dividing/scattering of experience [in particular souls], that is perceived by you to be the soul limited in awareness. She beholds in an instant my [limited] awareness. 206. If she [the Goddess] manifests as [lower] experience, O Goddess, she may not reach that known as [higher] awareness. Indeed, praise in awareness of experience is established in a moment, [but] that very experience is not [higher] awareness. (*Cidgaganacandrikā* 205–206)³⁸ [43]

The sky of consciousness is an expanded consciousness realized by the practitioner in an [44]

36 *akālakalite vyomni spandamānā tu yā citi/ kālādāhaikabhūḥ saiṣā śmaśānaṃ khecarī matā.*

37 *saṃsmṛtiḥ sadṛśavastubodhikā dṛṣṭa eva viśayah smṛtetarāḥ / drk śive viśayabhānavigrahā tatprathā smṛtir iyam yadāhṛtā // 207 //.*

38 *deśakālam avabhāsi yādṛśam yat tayā anubhavitur vibhedinaḥ / tat tayā sakalam iksyate smṛtau matkṛtasṃtim avekṣate kṣaṇam // 205 // yady anaṅkṣyad anubhūtir iśvare sā smṛtis taditi na [em. na: nā] pratiṣyate [em. pratiṣyate: pratiṣyate] / saṃstavo hy anubhavasmṛtau sthitas tatksaye anubhava eva na smṛtiḥ // 206 //.*

opening out and identified with the Goddess. Yet, as we have seen, the texts speak of a further level which is not a level, a deeper understanding which is a supreme light ‘beyond the sky’ (*vyomātitaṃ*). It is this light that is the thirteenth Kālī who remains hidden, the secret essence of Bhairava who spontaneously manifests in form. Such manifestation (*avabhāsaḥ*) is due to her own freedom (*svecchayā*), a freedom central to her nature.

We might then posit an analysis that sets the verticality of the sky of consciousness in tension with the horizontality of practice and social location of the practitioners of such a tradition. This openness and elevation in expanded consciousness is set within a living social context in which the Krama challenges the Brahmanical tradition that rejects it. Orthodox Śaiva Siddhānta sees adherence or conformity to social duty, namely duty regarding caste/class and stage of life (*varṇāśramadharmah*), as a necessary condition for further spiritual development through Śaiva initiation (*dikṣā*) (Sanderson 2007, 231, citing Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, *Mṛgendravrtti, Vidyāpāda*, 63). Caste is a property of the body one is born with (*Mataṅgaparameśvarāgama*, 150–151, reference from Sanderson 1985, 204), but the Krama regards its doctrine and practice to go beyond mere social conformity characterised as inhibition (*śankā*). There is in this material a contrast between expanded consciousness as sky and social conformity as law (*dharmah*) concerned with adherence to social and cultural norms and the obeying of authority. The Krama Goddess tradition challenges this, offering expanded consciousness achieved or realized through its practices as justification for relegating the inhibition that law entails to a lower level, to a very limited understanding of life.

What we might call the Krama meditative experience of expanded awareness is rendered into philosophical categories by the Śākta-Śaiva philosophers of the Recognition School, the Pratyabhijñā, especially by Kṣemarāja. He summarizes this Goddess theology in the opening verses of the *Essence of Recognition*, the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*:

Sūtra 1: Free consciousness is the reason for the actualization of the universe. (*citiḥ svatantrā viśvasiddhihetuḥ*) (*Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* KSTS edition).

His auto-commentary reads:

‘Of the universe’ means from the level beginning with Sadāśiva to the earth [i.e. the entire cosmic hierarchy comprising the ontic categories or *tattvas*]. ‘Actualization’ (*siddhi*) means the production, illumination, maintenance, and destruction [of the universe], which comes to rest in the highest experient. ‘Consciousness’ (*citi*) means the Goddess (*bhagavatī*) whose form is absolute power (*parāśaktirūpā*). ‘Free’ (*svatantrā*) describes the one comprising highest awareness who is non-distinct from Lord Śiva, and ‘reason’ (*hetuḥ*) means cause (*kāraṇam*). Thus, the universe opens out (*unmiṣati*) in its diversity, continues, and closes down (*nimiṣati*) with its destruction. One’s own experience (*svānubhavaḥ*) is a witness (*sākṣī*) in this matter.

Other [levels of the universe], such as material substrate, matter and so on (*māyāprakṛtyādeḥ*), [appear] distinct from the light of absolute consciousness (*citprakāśa*). Due to their lack of energy through not possessing their own illumination, they are not a cause, and so are not anything (*na eva kimcit*). Hence space, time and form, created by that [consciousness], are animated by it and so they are not sufficient [in themselves] to penetrate its true nature. That nature is complete, eternally arisen, and all-pervading (*vyāpakanityoditaparipūrṇarūpā*). This alone is the meaning to be grasped.

Objection: if the universe is different from consciousness, surely it is nothing? How can there be the existence of a cause and its effect in non-differentiation (*abhede*)? [51]

Answer: Only the consciousness-Goddess who is self-willed and autonomous by herself manifests the endless universe. The relation of cause and effect is like that. This is the highest meaning (*paramārtha*-). [52]

Since this [consciousness] alone is the cause of illuminating the appearance of the universe, which comprises subjects, objects of knowledge, and means of knowing, so poor means of knowledge, whose nature is the revealing of new objects (*abhinavārthaparakāśanarūpaṃ*) are not suitable [for revealing absolute consciousness]. These natures are free, undifferentiated, and self-luminous. (*Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* 1 and auto-commentary)³⁹ [53]

I have quoted this at length because it offers a succinct summary of Krama and Pratyabhijñā theology. Expanded consciousness (*citi*), Kṣemarāja explicitly states, is the Goddess (*bhagavati*), making clear that the impersonal language of consciousness can be rendered into the theistic language of deity. Furthermore, the nature of this expanded consciousness is freedom, and the universe is a manifestation or appearance of freedom. The verticality of the sky of consciousness intersects with the horizontality of constrained world as spontaneous freedom and it is here at this point of intersection where human life realizes its own spontaneous freedom as ultimately unconstrained, and which goes beyond law that controls the horizontal plane. There are parallels here with the Great Perfection in Tibetan Buddhism, which itself raises interesting questions about the phenomenology of expanded consciousness as a shared feature of human experience in particular circumstances and civilizations. This cannot be my task, as I am without Tibetan, but there are historical questions about the relationship between the Krama and Dzogchen and the possibility of influence one way or the other and there is also the question of whether these states of expanded awareness are inherent within human nature, to use an old-fashioned language, and what the philosophical or ontological implications of this would be. This second level phenomenology (where philology is a first level) is a legitimate concern for a philosophy or phenomenology of religion that is rooted in the philological study of texts. Along this line of inquiry, the Krama is a philosophy/theology made intelligible in the metaphor of height, the sky of consciousness, and rendered approachable to human life through the practices of the Krama that cultivate cosmic openness to verticality, which, in this system, is thought to transcend social restriction and limitation. Openness to verticality is figurative language for expanded awareness understood as the sky of consciousness. [54]

Translating this structure into a different terminology we have the vertical axis of the expanded consciousness—the sky of consciousness in the terminology of the Krama—intersecting with the horizontal axis of temporality comprising the tradition of textual revela- [55]

39 *viśvasya sadāśivādeḥ bhūmyantasya siddhau niṣpattau prakāśane sthityātmani parapramātrīviśrāntiyātmani ca samhāre parāśaktirūpā citir eva bhagavati svatantrā anuttaravimarśamayī śivabhāṭṭārakābhinnā hetuḥ kāraṇam / asyāṃ hi prasarantyaṃ jagat unmiṣati vyavatiṣṭhate ca nirvṛttoprasarāyāṃ ca nimiṣati iti svānubhava eva atra sākṣi / anyasya tu māyāprakṛtyādeḥ citprakāśābhinnasya aprakāśamānatvena asattvān na kvacid api hetutvam prakāśamānatve tu prakāśaikātmyāt prakāśarūpā citir eva hetuḥ na tv asau kaścit / ata eva deśakālākārā etatsṛṣṭā etadanuprāṇitāś ca naitatsvarūpaṃ bhettum alam iti vyāpakānityoditaparipūrṇarūpā iyam ity arthalabhyam eva etat / nanu jagad api cito bhinnam naiva kiṃcit abhede ca katham hetuhetumadbhāvaḥ ucyate / cid eva bhagavati svacchasvatantrarūpā tattadanantajagadātmanā sphurati ity etāvāt paramārtho 'yaṃ kāryakāraṇabhāvaḥ / yataś ca iyam eva pramātrīpramāṇaprameyamayasya viśvasya siddhau prakāśane hetuḥ tato 'syāḥ svatantrāparicchinnavaprakāśarūpāyāḥ siddhau abhinavārthaparakāśanarūpaṃ na pramāṇavarākam upayuktam upapannaṃ vā.*

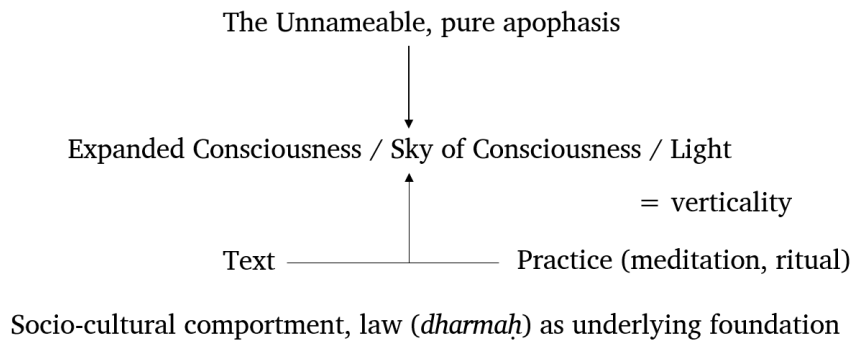


Figure 1 The Structure of Expanded Consciousness. Here the arrow means ‘leads to’: the unnameable manifests as the sky of consciousness and textually formed practice leads the practitioner to apprehend that sky. This is a kind of verticality, in figurative terms, or openness to a numinosity beyond the human. Text informed practice (ritual, meditation) is itself based on social and cultural assumptions and ways of being in the world.

tion and practice. These traditions are themselves developed within wider social and political structures codified as law; a socio-cultural comportment which ritual and meditation practices assume. The practices of the Krama involving meditation as expanded consciousness, that itself is built upon a ritual procedure, is a practice interfused with textual revelation: the verticality of expanded awareness is generated, or at least brought into view, by the fusion of text with practice. The text becomes embodied, which precipitates the elevation to vertical attraction. But the intersection of the verticality of expanded consciousness with the horizontality of tradition and, we might add, social location and temporal power relations, namely dharma, can be disruptive. That is, where the verticality of the sky of consciousness intersects with the horizontality of socio-cultural practice or dharma, there is a rupture. The expanded consciousness of Krama verticality, while being within world as sky, transcends socio-cultural patterns of life while at the same time being given access by them (see figure 1).

We might see expanded consciousness as an ontological category, as foundational or as the necessary condition of existence. While by implication those who experience the sky of consciousness, the ‘sky-goers’, are within time, there is a description of this expanded consciousness as being outside of time and being identified with the unnameable one, the Goddess who is ineffable. The unnameable one, who is articulated as extended consciousness, disrupts the temporality of law or dharma, and this disruption is the realization of freedom because it is the totality of being beyond constraint. If dharma describes what we might call the everyday patterns of life—that might be called ontic structures, the way people are in their everyday world—then extended consciousness as the sky of consciousness and as light describes an *ontological* structure that is more fundamental and upon which the *ontic* structures depend. In terms of the Śākta-Śaiva categories, we might say that the ontic categories of the levels of the hierarchical universe, the *tattvas*, are disrupted by the ontological reality of expanded consciousness of the unnameable. But this ontological structure of the cosmos, the expanded consciousness, is more densely real (*cidghanah*, “the mass of consciousness”) than the lower ontic levels and more intensely real than social obligation or caste, for unlike the Śaiva Siddhānta, the expanded consciousness of the Krama shatters the inhibition of ordinary everydayness and limited identity. For the Krama, there are levels of description more adequate to the real than others, and the Krama category of the unnameable one—identified in impersonal terms with expanded consciousness or the sky, and in personal, theistic terms as

Kālī—is the most apposite because it expresses apophysis in the theological sense of negative theology as the denying of any predicates of God, which might be a most adequate way of expressing this reality.

A Methodological Reflection

Lastly, I wish to reflect on a methodological issue of how we approach the notion of expanded awareness and traditions such as this. How are we to understand this kind of textual material? The dominant paradigm of the last twenty or thirty years in the Study of Religions, that we might call Socio-Cultural Constructivism, is inadequate for engaging in texts for which we know so little of the wider social context and which runs the risk of being too myopic in simply missing the richer conceptual and existential content as well as the context in which such texts were produced: a text is more than simply an index of the power-relations in the society that produced it. [57]

It is not possible to develop these thoughts here, but a method or a science needs to be adequate to its intellectual object. Such adequation between method and object is, of course, difficult to assess, but it needs to be done for progress in any field of study. To study far distant galaxies, we need a James Webb telescope or to study microorganisms we need a powerful microscope and good theories to explain the data. When we study esoteric traditions such the Krama, we need methods and theories adequate to the data provided by the texts. We arguably need a phenomenology of religion that allows that which shows itself to be seen and that can inquire into the deeper significance of what shows itself. This means that a first level phenomenology of religion is focussed on text as the primary site of significance in a civilization and so is engaged with Philology. The philological study of religious documents—such as engaging with the literature of the Krama—privileges text as the most important site of cultural production and is a method that follows the text, allowing the text to reveal its meaning and allowing what shows itself to be seen. While it is true that there is necessarily a pre-understanding or fore-conception of what we find in the texts, this is facilitated through the philological act. This is quite close to the Ontological turn in Anthropology (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 173) but focussed on text rather than ethnos or ‘field.’ The method of philology as a first level phenomenology is not a kind of Western hegemony or colonialism, but on the contrary, challenges dominant modes of thinking through the absorption of forms of thought that are distinct from those dominant modes. While it may be true that we can only recognize something that we already have some notion of, this does not mean that we simply see reflections in the world of what we already understand. We can learn new things. Rather, there is a hermeneutic spiral in which a deeper level comprehension emerges through an initial grasping of textual meaning. We see this with the notion of expanded consciousness or the sky of consciousness in the Krama texts that challenges dominant paradigms of mind/body dualism and challenges the attempt to understand civilizations in terms of the two reductionisms of power structures or a naïve brain science.⁴⁰ [58]

If philology allows us to see that which shows itself at an initial level, then a higher level inquiry allows what shows itself to be understood in terms other questions about meaning and truth. So here, a phenomenology of religion that has the idea of expanded awareness as [59]

40 I am not advocating a kind of Luditism here; brain science—particularly social neuroscience—as well as co-evolutionary theory have great explanatory power as contributions to understanding human life and informing the Humanities (see Flood 2019, 8–11, 368–74; Davies 2016, 87–112).

openness or verticality as its intellectual object can absorb the Krama ideas about the sky of consciousness. Another metaphor is ‘openness,’ that expanded awareness is becoming open to the sky of consciousness. Indeed, the Krama texts themselves use such figurative language as we have seen. Thus, a further or second level Phenomenology is always hermeneutical and raises questions of the text that the text itself may not be asking or addressing (Bowker 2015, 304–5). The notion of verticality as an intellectual object⁴¹ is important in such inquiry because traditions as complex as the Krama are exemplars of civilizations with text as their primary source of meaning or foundational resource. If this is so, then extending language into a field of privilege through philology also shows us what a culture regards as the limits of language. We see this here in the notions of the sky of consciousness and the unnameable one which are concepts that are thought to be beyond the dualism of language (of a subject and predicate structure). Furthermore, a phenomenology of religion shows us not only how text exposes the parameters of the possible within a culture, but also the ways in which text is embodied and enacted. The practices of religions, in enacting text, expose the limits of language and the ways in which human communities have opened themselves to verticality. We see this in the idea of expanded consciousness in the Krama case and a third level phenomenology of religion is comparative because the density of textual data raises questions of comparison across traditions (such as between the Krama and Dzogchen). A phenomenology of religion shows us that religion is focussed on text in conjunction with ritualisation (that includes meditative and prayer practices) and this fusion of text and practice can become the intellectual object of phenomenology, in which case it has not only descriptive power but explanatory power in recognizing the centrality of first/second person accounts in the explanation and understanding of human life. Verticality as constitutive of the human and the notion of expanded consciousness is integral to such a view.

Conclusion

Meditation in the Śākta-Śaiva forms of religion is embedded within a non-dualist metaphysics. [60] While the origin of these Goddess-focussed traditions was on the edges of orthodox, Brahmanical society, these practices and ideas became absorbed into mainstream discourse and behaviour through the philosophers Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. Even though or perhaps *because* the social and political matrix of post-Gupta India would have been restrictive, these traditions developed forms of meditation practice and philosophical systems that claimed to transcend all historical contingency. The idea of the sky of consciousness points to an openness, to a verticality that goes beyond everyday contingency and intends to develop an expansiveness in practitioners such that their identification with that sky of consciousness transcends specific caste restrictions.

Understanding this Śākta-Śaiva meditation system purely in terms of socio-political loca- [61] tion is too restrictive, and we need a phenomenology that lets what shows itself from the scriptures to be seen, and this showing is primarily performed through the philological and historical study of the texts. But this is not enough. We need a higher-level exposition such that the meaning of the texts can show itself, and this showing reveals a kind of openness to transcendence in the human person (with reservations on the use of the word ‘transcendence’,

41 The term ‘verticality’ has been used by Anthony Steinbock in his important book *Phenomenology and Mysticism* (2007), in particular with regard to the notion of ‘vertical givenness.’ It is also a term found in Peter Sloterdijk’s (2013, 113–14) discussion of ‘Height Psychology.’

as sky of consciousness is not outside of the cosmos). Further work, of course, needs to be done on the texts themselves, on the place of this literature within the history of religions in India, and on comparative study, especially the relation of this material to Buddhism. I hope that this essay has contributed something to this understanding.

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