

Article

The Body Divine: Tantric Śaivite Ritual Practices in the *Svacchandatantra* and Its Commentary

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Received: 18 March 2014; in revised form: 15 July 2014 / Accepted: 1 August 2014 /

Published: 11 August 2014

Abstract: This work examines ritual, cosmology, and divinization as articulated in select passages of the *Svacchandatantra* and its commentary by the late tenth century non-dual theologian, Kṣemarāja. Both the *Svacchandatantra* and its commentary prescribe the worship of the deity Svachchandabhairava, a form of Śiva, and his consort Aghoreśvarī. Drawing on Gavin Flood’s notion of entextualization, I examine how the rituals described seek to inscribe the corporeal body so that the practitioner is made part of the larger Tantric body and tradition. This present study serves to illustrate the formulation of a Tantric body in the rituals prescribed in the *Svacchandatantra* and commentary and to extend the theory of entextualization to include the ritual environment. I argue that a Tantric Śaivite religious identity is formulated through rituals which seek to create linkages between the cosmos, the body, and by extension, the ritual environment.

Keywords: Hinduism; Tantra; Tantric Śaivism; Kṣemarāja

1. Introduction

In this work, I examine ritual, cosmology, and divinization as articulated in select passages of the *Svacchandatantra* and its commentary by the late tenth century non-dual theologian, Kṣemarāja. The *Svacchandatantra*, a Sanskrit ritual manual, as the name suggests, is a Tantric text. *Tantras* are distinct from the Vedic scriptural corpus of texts. Like the Vedas, they are considered to be revealed scriptures but unlike the Vedas take the form of a dialogue between a particular deity and his or her consort. Both the *Svacchandatantra* and its commentary by Kṣemarāja, dated to the late Tenth century, prescribe the

worship of the deity Svachchandabhairava, a form of Śiva popularly worshipped in Kashmir during the medieval period, and his consort Aghoreśvarī. Drawing on the work of Gavin Flood [1], I examine how the rituals described in the text and commentary seek to inscribe the body so that the practitioner symbolically becomes part of the larger Tantric body. Flood argues that the practitioner entextualizes the corporeal body with the Tantric rituals and ascetic practices prescribed, thereby constructing his subjectivity according to the scriptural tradition ([1], pp. 12–13). Through the reading and performance of these rituals sanctioned through scripture, the body becomes the text of the tradition with which the practitioner identifies ([1], pp. 12–13). This present study serves to illustrate how the Tantric body is formulated in the rituals prescribed in the *Svacchandatantra* and commentary and to extend this theory of entextualization to include the ritual space they inhabit.

The procedures described in the *Svacchandatantra* seek to create linkages between the macrocosm of a specifically conceived universe and the microcosm of the practitioner's body and the ritual space and implements used. These linkages are made evident in the preparatory and daily rituals as well as in the initiatory rituals prescribed. In these rituals, the purification and divinization of the body occur through the application of substances such as clay, ash, or bovine products, through the imposition of *mantras* (*nyāsa*), and through the employment of breath techniques and visualization. By giving attention to the precise details of the performance of the rituals in his commentary, Kṣemarāja displays his regard for ritual processes that seek to inscribe the body while arguing for a non-dual reading of the text. In both text and commentary, the rituals are intended to effect the identification with the deity, Śiva and demonstrate the importance placed on the forging of linkages between the cosmos, the body, and the ritual space in the creation of a Tantric Śaivite religious identity. It is through the creation of these correspondences ritually inscribed that the practitioner is made coextensive with the Tantric body and tradition, understood as the community of Tantric Śaivite practitioners, the various rituals they prescribe, and the ritual environment they construct.

2. Preparatory Rituals of the *Svacchandatantra*

The imposition of *mantras* and the employment of visualization are central to Tantric Śaivite practice, as evidenced in the initial purificatory practices discussed in the *Svacchandatantra*. These purifications involve both the body of the practitioner as well as the physical space in which the ritual takes place. The rituals prescribed are intended to create the larger Tantric body and the practitioner within it. As Richard Davis has noted, the imposition of *mantras* or *nyāsa* is one of the most fundamental actions in Tantrism:

One imposes a mantra onto some object simply by touching that object and reciting the mantra. In some cases, the texts also direct the worshiper to visualize (*bhāvanā*) the form of the deity referred to by the mantra as he imposes it. The power of the mantra and of the deity with which it is identical infuses the object, and the object is thereby transformed ([2], p. 47).

The imposition of *mantras* is discussed in the procedures laid out in the first chapter of the *Svacchandatantra*. After describing the ideal ground for the performance of the ritual to take place, the

text exhorts the master to purify himself before invoking the goddesses of the Sanskrit syllabary, and extracting the *mantras* to be used in all subsequent procedures:

Having become pure, the officiant who is lightly anointed with sandalwood paste, well perfumed and pleased, makes a particular hand gesture. Facing either north or east, one-pointed and concentrated, he should expand the mothers there sequentially, beginning with “a” and ending with “kṣa” ([3], verses 30–31).

In Chapter 2, the text describes the necessary procedures that the worshipper must perform as part of the daily worship of Svachhandabhairava. These procedures also describe the imposition of *mantras* in order to purify and divinize the body. The chapter begins by explaining how one should properly bathe:

Next, I will explain the proper worship in succession. Having evacuated the bowels, one should bathe with earth and water. Having obtained clay from a pure place, it should be purified with the *astramantra*. Having washed on the bank of the river, one should then put it down, O beautiful woman.

From that, the two portions are to be made with the *astramantra*, O thin-waisted woman. One should cleanse the buttocks, the thighs, the calves, and the feet with the half portion, according to the rule, in accordance with the three interstices ([4], verses 1–4ab).

In this passage, the purification of the body takes place by bathing with clay infused with the *astramantra*, a *mantra* generally used for the purposes of purification in Tantric ritual or to provide protection [5]. That the procedures for the purification of the body include the use of *mantras* is significant for understanding how the divinization of the body is thought to take place. As André Padoux argues, the idea is that *mantras*, as the highest level of speech, are synonymous with pure consciousness. Accordingly, the employment of *mantras* is necessary for the divinization of the practitioner’s body because they are thought to bring about a transformative state of pure consciousness. The use of *mantras* for the purpose of purification in Tantric ritual, then, is thought to be efficacious because it similarly establishes a linkage between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the body. The creation of this correspondence in the Vedic tradition is well known and the Tantric tradition draws upon and modifies these [6].

The significance of the imposition of *mantras* that is central to the inscribing of the body is further illustrated in the elucidation of the clay bath that is described in the second chapter of the *Svacchandatantra*:

Having taken the remaining half portion that has been consecrated with the *astramantra* seven times, one should make it blaze like the sun.

One should bathe, having enveloped the body with *mantras* beginning with the head and ending with the feet.

Having come out of the water, and having sipped water according to the proper sequence, one should perform *saṃdhyavandanam* in accordance with the rituals prescribed by the *śāstras*.

That is the bath for the removal of stain. Next we will examine the prescribed bath. One should make the remaining half portion of clay from before into three parts on the eastern portion of the left hand, and on the northern and southern successively. Then one should utter *mantras* on the eastern portion seven times with the *astramantra*.

Similarly, one should utter the *vaktramantras* on the southern portion seven times, and the northern portion with the *svacchandabhairavamantra* joined with the *aṅgamantras*.

Having picked up the eastern portion with the *svacchandabhairavamantra* joined with the *aṅgamantras*, one should scatter it in the ten directions. And one should consecrate the water with the northern portion.

Having smeared oneself the measure of an arm's length with the right hand, O you of firm vow, one should contemplate the lord Bhairava with the southern portion ([4], verses 30–31).

Here the text prescribes several *mantras* to be imposed on the portions of clay, including the thirty-two syllable *svacchandabhairavamantra*. Also prescribed are the *vaktramantras*, *mantras* associated with the five faces of Śiva, each of which serves a particular function: Īśāna, the upward face, is characterized by the activity of grace, Tatpuruṣa, the eastern face, is associated with Śiva's cosmic action of veiling, while Aghora, the southern face is associated with the power of re-absorption. Vāmadeva and Sadyojāta, the northern and western faces, are thought to correspond with the deity's activities of maintenance and emission of the universe respectively. These *mantras* are frequently associated with the *aṅgamantras*. The *aṅgamantras* are said to be *netra* (eye), *hr̥d* (heart), *śiras*, (head) *śikhā* (topknot) *kavaca* (armor) and *astra* (weapon). These *mantras* may be used individually as prescribed in the previous passage with the employment of the *astramantra* or they may all be imposed so as to bestow even more of Śiva's powers ([2], p. 48).

That a corporeal association is indicated in the conceptualization of these *mantras* is evident. This association is illustrated in the *vaktramantras* as well as the *aṅgamantras*, which are understood as parts or limbs of the deity's embodiment. Moreover, it is of interest, as Davis has pointed out, that Tantric Śaivite texts establish further correspondences not only between the *vaktramantras* and the *angamantras* but also between these *mantras* and the five elements of space, air, fire, water, and earth, the thirty-six *tattvas*, or levels of reality, various worlds, as well as parts of the practitioner's body. That the *mantras* are to be inscribed suggests that they are thought to divinize the implements in the ritual space and the practitioner within it in the course of the liturgy prescribed.

Kṣemarāja offers significant exegesis on the above passage, indicating his concern for the precise details of the daily worship prescribed involving the divinization of the body. He suggests that the phrase, “blazing like the sun” means that one should actually hold the clay to the sun so that it is “touched” by its rays or, if the sun is not visible, one may “touch” the clay with one's breath ([4], verses 4cd–12ab). He writes that one should repeat the *praṇavamāntra*, the syllable Om, while sipping water in order to purify the subtle body, after which one should cleanse the corners of the mouth and then touch the orifices of the face following Vedic ritual prescriptions ([4], verses 4cd–12ab). In so suggesting that the ritual should be done according to Vedic injunction, he betrays the overlay of Vedic and Tantric praxis made evident in the text of the *Svacchandatantra*. He also indicates that the *saṃdhyāvandanam*, or the “worship of the juncture”, may be performed using Vedic *mantras*, but must

be performed using Tantric Śaiva *mantras* if one has received initiation ([4], verses 4cd–12ab). As Alexis Sanderson explains, this rite served as a preliminary to the *saṃdhyā* worship to be performed daily at the “junctions” of the day: morning, midday, and sunset [7]. Kṣemarāja further articulates the creation of a micro/macrocsm correspondence, made evident when he argues that while enveloping the body with *mantras*, one should homologize the body with the *śuddhatattva*, the pure level of reality according to Tantric Śaivite cosmology ([4], commentary on verses 4cd–12ab).

Following this, the practitioner is to come out of the water, change clothes, sip water, and install specified *mantras* onto the body along with the *praṇavamāntra*. The text enjoins once again the performance of the *saṃdhyā* worship. Additional purifications are to be performed, including the imposition of the *bhairavamāntra* onto the parts of the body. Only after can the practitioner proceed to the house of worship where he must first wash his hands and feet before worshipping the deities on the door and deities on the door leaves:

Having purified the body, he picks up a flower. O you who have a firm vow, having bowed to the mothers of the directions, having sprinkled the door thoroughly, one should remove evil using the *astramāntra* together with the water of Śiva.

He should worship the lord Gaṇeśa on the upper part of the door post and Śri, with fragrance, flowers, incense, and with offerings of water for drinking and for washing the feet, *etc.* in the proper order.

And then one should worship the deities Nandi and Gaṅgā on the northern part of the door and further one should worship Mahākāla and Kālindī on the southern portion according to the proper sequence.

Having uttered the *astramāntra* of Bhairava, having taken a flower, he should become engrossed in worship. Having recited the *mantra* seven times over the flower so that it becomes filled with the flames of blazing Agni, he should throw it into the house and enter, using *nārācārāstramāntra* (the iron arrow weapon *mantra*). Then all webs of obstacles would be removed ([4], verses 22–27).

The passage demonstrates the creation of a correspondence between the cosmos and the ritual environment in the creation of a Tantric Śaivite religious identification. The practitioner is enjoined to worship the deities associated with the various parts of the door and to divinize the ritual space before entering. Immediately following, the practitioner is instructed to “toss” the *astramāntra* in all ten directions in order to protect the space, and then worship Brahma, who is said to be the superintendent of all spaces. This suggests that the primary method for purification is the imposition of macrocosm onto the microcosm is through the imposition of *mantras*. That the process of entextualization extends to the ritual space suggests that it too is made part of the body of Śiva with which the practitioner is to identify ([4], verses 22–27).

3. The Utilization of Breath Techniques in the Preparatory Rituals of the *Svacchandatantra*

The extensive rituals described in Chapter 2 of the *Svacchandatantra* that follow further illustrate the importance of the inscribing of the body in Tantric praxis as well as the significance of the

praṇavamāntra. Following a description for the imposition *mantras* of the hands, the text states that the practitioner is to perform a series of breath techniques to purify the body:

The three-fold breath control is to be performed as a means of purifying the body.

One's own breath, which is impure, is to be exhaled. Then one should fill the body with the pure. Having performed the retention and the expulsion of the breath, one should place the *ātman* in the void.

It resembles a firefly, is subtle, devoid of instruments, free from effects, through which the abode of *māyā*, illusion, is destroyed. The very soul is to be made Śiva. Listen to how it is to be performed ([4], verses 33–35).

In his exposition on these verses, Kṣemarāja provides a description of how the breath technique is to be performed. He suggests, for example, that the *Svacchandatantra*'s statement that the impure breath is to be exhaled means that one should pacify the flow of the breath in the area of the *dvādaśānta*, a space described as twelve finger tips above the head. He explains that a practitioner should make the breath firm like a full pot, from the space of the heart to the “root” space, and then exhale it using the *divyakaraṇa* technique, described in the fourth chapter as a technique in which the body is relaxed, the tongue is connected to the upper palate, the lips are apart, and the eyes are neither up nor down [8]. In so doing, the self rests in the void which is said to be situated at the top of the head. Kṣemarāja explains that the breath-control technique is to be performed in conjunction with the *praṇavamāntra*, (the syllable “Om”) ([4], commentary on verses 33–35). Both the text and commentary illustrate the importance given to practices which seek to purify and divinize the body through Tantric ritual.

The employment of the *praṇavamāntra* is a significant aspect of Tantric practice, as illustrated in both the *Svacchandatantra* and in Kṣemarāja's commentary. The centrality of the *praṇava* in the *Svacchandatantra* is such that the *mantra* is said to contain all that exists in the world as the knowledge of Śiva ([9], pp. 403–04). It is moreover, significant that the *Svacchandatantra* makes certain emendations to its employment. The *Svacchandatantra* details a classification of the subtle levels of sound in connection with the utterance of the *praṇava* that is distinct even among other Tantric Śaivite systems [10]. While Tantric Śaivite ritualists appear to have borrowed extensively from their brahmanical counterparts, they also developed their own thought and practices to suit their particular aims.

The same process of incorporation and modification can be seen more broadly in the employment of the *haṃsamantra* in Tantric Śaivism. The *haṃsamantra* is identified in the Vedas as a symbol of *brahman*, the underlying substratum of the universe, and is identified with the breath in the *Katha Upaniṣad* ([9], p. 140). As Padoux explains,

...This term, rich with symbolic meanings, was to be used again in later texts, notably in the so-called *Yoga Upaniṣads* as well as in the *Tantras*, which gave it new meanings. For them it still represents the supreme reality: Śiva. But they also break it up into its two syllables haṃ and sa, the former associated with drawing in, the latter with breathing out air or vice-versa. Therefore it came to symbolize quite naturally the movement of the breath which gives life to all creatures and, more especially, the supreme reality as giver of life and present in breath, or breath taken as supreme energy ([9], p. 140).

The *Svacchandatantra* discusses the *haṃsamantra* in several passages of the text. In Chapter 7, it is declared that Śiva is *haṃsa*, as is the self and the breath. In Chapter 4, the text further proclaims that all *śāstras* consist of sound, which is equated with *haṃsa*. Kṣemarāja provides extensive commentary on the latter. He locates the *haṃsamantra* within the body as the *kuṇḍaliniśakti*, the feminine power of the divine thought to be present in the subtle body, while describing the cosmology and concomitant notions of phonic manifestation associated with the *mantra*, suggesting once again, the creation of a micro/macro correspondence ([9], pp. 141–42).

4. Daily Worship of Svacchandabhairava

It is only following this extended preparation involving the purification and deification of the body described in Chapter 2 of the *Svacchandatantra* that the daily worship of Svacchandabhairava may commence. The daily worship, also described in Chapter 2, consists of a complex liturgy that similarly seeks to establish a linkage between the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the universe, here through identification with the deity Bhairava. In this portion of the ritual, the performer must first visualize himself as Bhairava and then mentally construct a lotus onto his body representing the universe:

One should worship the lord who is the god of gods with fragrances, incense, then with flowers, and with various foods to be eaten all of which are conceptualized with the mind alone.

Having meditated upon Bhairava as one's own self, one should perform mental worship (a sacrifice in the heart).

Having visualized onto the navel the root of the lotus, one should imagine the stalk of the lotus, which has the length of twelve fingers, to extend up to the heart. One should contemplate there a very splendid lotus with eight petals, having a filament with a pericarp.

There, the root of the lotus is the essence of *śakti*, the feminine power of the divine, and those fibers on the stalk of the lotus are indeed the worlds of Rudra, O beautiful woman ([4], verses 54–59).

In this mental visualization of the divinized body, the practitioner is repeatedly instructed to imagine himself as the deity. The passage demonstrates that the formulation of a Tantric Śaivite self is closely related to the body that is to be imagined as divine. Through the process of inscribing the body in the practice of visualization, a Tantric Śaivite religious identity is formulated.

The *Svacchandatantra* continues to emphasize the body in prescribing the installation of the three-fold *maṇḍala*, a ritual diagram, discussed in the description of the daily worship that continues in Chapter 2. Each of the ruling divinities are elaborated upon in great detail, indicating that they are to be carefully envisioned as they are symbolically grafted onto the body. In the course of this meditative liturgy, the body is understood as a lotus. The text enjoins the practitioner to envision the deity Brahmā as having four faces, four red arms, wearing a black antelope skin for his upper garment, seated on a blue lotus. He has a water vessel, stick, a rosary, and a lotus and is further described as possessing beautiful eyes. Having envisioned the deity in this way, he is to be installed onto the petals

of the body-lotus. The deities Viṣṇu and Rudra are described with a similar level of detail, which draws on traditional iconographic elements. Viṣṇu is to be installed on the filaments and Rudra on the pericarp of the body-lotus ([4], verses 64–81ab).

The text next prescribes the worship of Sakalabhairava, the iconographic form of the text's principal deity, Svachchandabhairava.

...One should envision him who resembles a thousand moons, with a half-moon on the top of his head, having five faces, large eyes, and ornamented with a Gonāsa snake.

He is resplendent with a necklace of scorpions that are the color of fire, wearing a garland of skulls, [and] bearing a sword and shield.

One should envision the god holding a goad and a noose, an arrow in his hand, armed with a bow, with his hand bearing the gesture of fearlessness, bearing a staff with a skull at the top.

He has in his hands a stringed *vīṇā* and the *ḍamarū* drum, a bell and a trident along with many iron rods and an ax as weapons.

He shines, holding a special circular hammer, wearing a lion skin for a lower garment and an elephant skin for an upper garment. The god has eighteen arms, a blue throat, and an intense splendor ([4], verses 89–94ab).

This passage is of interest not only for the description of the iconographic details associated with Svachchandabhairava but also for its prescription to graft the image onto the body. It is the identification with Svachchandabhairava in a ritual context in which the practitioner's body is made divine that a Tantric religious identity formulated.

5. Preparatory Rituals for Initiation in the *Svacchandatantra*

It is not only in the daily worship of Svachchandabhairava that the *Svacchandatantra* prescribes the creation of the Tantric body but also in the preparatory rites for Tantric initiation. The preparations for an initiation ritual, prescribed in the third chapter, share the same basic elements as those described for the daily worship of Svachchandabhairava in the second. The text first discusses the purifications to be performed by the master as well as the purification with *mantras* of the sacrificial area. The officiant is then instructed to perform a mental sacrifice to Bhairava that requires him to identify with Bhairava and to perform a rite of divinization through the employment of *mantras* and breath control. The procedures described suggest once again the importance placed on the purification and divinization of the body and the ritual space as an extension of the body, with an emphasis on the imposition of *mantras* and the employment of breath techniques. The instruction to perform mental sacrifice, moreover, indicates the significance of imagining in the construction of a Tantric religious identity ([11], p. 141).

The idea that the ritual space is made part of the body of Śiva in the course of the preparatory rites for the initiation ceremony is illustrated in the description of the preliminary preparation to be performed for the sacrificial rite. The officiant is to prepare three ritual vessels by imposing the appropriate *mantras* as part of a rite for the installation of the hand of Śiva (*karanyāsa*). He is then to prepare five bovine products used to continue the process of purifying the ritual space and the vessels.

The deity, Śrī, is to be worshipped next, after which the preparation of the vessel continues through the imposition of *mantras*, designed to make them ready to receive the divinities invoked. After the preparations of the vessels are complete, the officiant is instructed to offer oblations including rice and butter at the fire pit to the ritual implements and deities. Oblations for expiation are then to be performed after which the preparations for initiation may begin. The divinization of the ritual space and implements strongly suggests that the practitioner is to experience all aspects of the ritual prescribed as part of the Tantric body with which he is to identify ([11], pp. 142–43).

In the same way that the officiant purifies the ritual environment and the implements to be used in the course of the ceremony, he purifies the initiate with ashes and water and along with the imposition of *mantras*. The initiate is then led blindfolded to the ritually designated space. After the blindfold is removed, more *mantras* are imposed onto his body in a procedure referred to as *sakalīkaraṇam*. His body is then symbolically destroyed and he is given a new one. The symbolic nature of this procedure is significant because it illustrates that the creation of a specifically Tantric Śaivite religious identity is already established for the initiate in the preliminary rites of initiation only to be affirmed in the subsequent initiation rite. The previous identity of the initiate is destroyed as he becomes part of the Tantric community ([11], p. 143).

The creation of a Tantric Śaivite religious identity is further adduced in a subsequent procedure. In this rite, the master symbolically links his own self to the self of the initiate, and offers oblations to the *mantras* that have been imposed on the initiate's body. The purification of the initiate's subtle body continues in the procedure that follows, as *mantras* are again imposed on to the body of the initiate, this time in an effort to sever bonds in the subtle body that are thought to delimit the practitioner. The master must unite his own self with the self of the initiate through the fusion of the subtle channels (*nāḍisaṃdhānam*). He then unites the self of the initiate with bonds of impurity that are thought to be severed and destroyed. The initiate is thereby considered to be liberated from the macrocosm because the bonds that are made to represent the microcosm are destroyed ([11], pp. 144–46).

The performance of sacrificial rites in order to purify the ritual elements that is prescribed in the above description in the *Svacchandatantra* is resonant with Vedic conceptualizations of divinity expressed through sacrificial acts. As Padoux has argued, the correspondences created between the microcosm of the practitioner's body and the macrocosm of the universe cannot be understood without reference to Vedic conceptualizations of the *atman* and *brahman* [9]. The *atman* is understood as the self of the individual and is correlated with *brahman*, the underlying substratum of the universe. While discussing the purification of the elements of the body, or *bhutaśuddhi*, in Pāñcarātrin ritual, Flood notes the significance ascribed by both Vedic and Tantric ritualists to sacrifice and to the correspondence between the body and the cosmos, citing the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* as an early example ([1], p. 107). A shared cosmological conceptualization also exists in the *Brāhmaṇas* where the texts elaborate on the linkages between the sacrifice and cosmological speculations ([1], p. 107). It is in these Vedic texts, then, that the importance of sacrifice in connection with the body and the cosmos is formulated and carried out in ritual, only later to be incorporated and elaborated upon by Tantric Śaivite ritualists.

6. Initiation of the Tantric Śaivite Layperson in the *Svacchandatantra*

In addition to the initial purificatory rituals and daily worship of Svacchandabhairava which create a correspondence between the practitioner's body and the universe, we also find the same correspondence in the descriptions of initiation rituals in the *Svacchandatantra*. Indeed, the efficacy of the initiation rituals is thought to be dependent upon the creation of this correspondence. Moreover, just as the imposition of *mantras* purifies and divinizes the body, the same procedure is continued during initiation for both the master as well as for the initiate. This is evidenced in the description for the initiation of a layperson into the Tantric community.

In the description of the initiation of a lay initiate into the Tantric Śaivite community (*samayadīkṣā*), the officiant creates a separate diagram for the one to be initiated where the hands of Śiva are imposed on the initiate by the master. The officiant performs various other purificatory rites on behalf of the initiate including the offering of oblations and a rite involving the fusing of the subtle channels as described previously in the initial purificatory rituals in Chapter 3 of the *Svacchandatantra*. Following these procedures, the master performs the extraction of the initiate's previous caste (*jāti*), so that the practitioner can become part of the body of Rudra ([9], pp. 147–48).

What is suggested in this portion of the *Svacchandatantra* is that the master is able to manipulate the *ātman*, or self, of the disciple so that he may become part of the body of Śiva and thus gain entrance into the Tantric Śaivite community. A micro-macro correspondence is intimated in the description of the subtle body of the disciple and in the use of *mantras* so that he becomes a twice-born, a member of the first three social classes in brahmanical society: *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas*. The correspondence is made explicit by Kṣemarāja who argues that the *mantras* employed have the ability to destroy the current subtle body of the disciple and bring about the pure level of reality as envisioned in Tantric Śaivite cosmology ([8], verses 65–68).

It is of interest that both class and caste is discussed in another passage in Chapter 4 where the text states that initiation is available to all:

Those who are initiated according to this process alone, O beautiful woman, they include *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, *sūdras*, or else others, O dear one.

They all possess the same qualities, united in the Śiva's nature.

They are all said to be ascetics whose bodies are marked with sacred ash.

All those who have received lay initiation eat from the same line (eat altogether), O beautiful woman ([8], verses 539cd–541).

The passage goes on to prescribe expiation for anyone who mentions his prior caste and suggests that only the internal distinctions according to the kind of initiation received—general, initiation granting liberation, or initiation granting particular powers—should be recognized:

Having taken refuge in this *tantra*, upon uttering the previous caste of *putrakas sādhakas* and also *samayins*, one would become someone in need of atonement, O goddess ([8], verses 543cd–546).

Kṣemarāja, in his non-dual exegesis, comments on this portion of the text by noting an earlier verse stating that one who is endowed with qualities such as omniscience is joined with the highest level of reality or *tattva*. He argues that through the ritual of initiation, the practitioner becomes one with Śiva without any distinctions. Since the Bhairava caste is bound together by Śiva, he goes on to say, it is both excellent and eternal. Through initiation, then, both the text and commentary suggest that the ritual purifies and divinizes the body of the practitioner through the creation of correspondences between the universe and the body of the Tantric community. These correspondences are then used to create a Tantric Śaivite religious identity ([8], commentary on verse 542).

7. Initiation for Liberation in the *Svacchandatantra*

After the description of the lay initiation, the *Svacchandatantra* explains the ritual of initiation for the purposes of attaining liberation, or *nirvāṇadīkṣā*. In this ceremony, the master imposes the *ṣaḍadhvan* or “six paths” on to the implements used in the ritual. Implicit in this procedure is the creation of macro-microcosmic correspondences in which the elements of the ritual are divinized. Kṣemarāja, while seizing on the occasion to argue his non-dualist position, states that the macrocosm is imposed on to the microcosm of the ritual through the six-fold paths from which the universe is created. He argues that the master can manipulate the paths such that the initiate can receive liberation-granting initiation. Since these paths are thought to be interconnected, the master only need use one to purify all ([11], pp. 149–50).

The *ṣaḍadhvan* or “six paths” is one that occurs frequently in Tantric Śaivite literature. The *ṣaḍadhvan* conceives of a cosmological structure that divides the universe into subjective and objective reality. The former is referred to as the path of sound (*vācaka*) and includes the paths of *varṇa* or phoneme, *mantra*, and *pada* or word, while the latter is referred to as the path of objects (*vācya*) and includes *kalā*, power or a portion of divinity, *tattva* or reality and *bhuvana* or worlds ([9], p. 129). Padoux, in his extensive work on the concept of the word in Tantric Śaivism, notes that this same structure is found in the texts of the dualist school of Tantric Śaivites, the Śaiva Siddhānta as well as those of the Pañcarātra, a Tantric Vaiṣṇavite school ([9], pp. 331–32). That the cosmology suggested in the *ṣaḍadhvan* is known in other texts of the Tantric scriptural corpus is demonstrated in its articulation of *bhuvanas* within the category of objective reality. While discussing the significance of the *bhuvanādhvan*, “the path of worlds”, in which the cosmos is specifically located within the body, Śaiva Siddhāntin texts recognize 224 *bhuvanas* whereas non-Saiddhāntika Tantric texts, such as the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* follow basically the same conceptualization of the universe and enumerate many of the same worlds, thus indicating the foundational quality of this scheme in Tantric Śaivism ([1], p. 130).

The *Svacchandatantra* employs the *ṣaḍadhvan* in a liberation initiation ceremony through the course of *kalā* in the fourth chapter. Interwoven in the discussion of the *ṣaḍadhvan*, however, are other rituals, one of which includes the imposition of the goddess of speech onto the body of the practitioner as the power of the deity. In this rite, the master again fuses with the self of the initiate, then joins the *atman* or self of the initiate with the power of the deity. During this procedure, the initiates’ accumulated *karma* that would require him to be reborn is removed and destroyed. The text then

reintroduces the bonds that are to be destroyed, after which the master returns, as it were, the self of the initiate, then worships the deity Brahmā and the goddess of speech ([11], pp. 151–52).

The complex liturgy described in the *Svacchandatantra* employing the *ṣaḍadhvan* provides little in the way of theoretical explanation. However, that the text of the *Svacchandatantra*, in prescribing the initiation of the disciple by means of the *ṣaḍadhvan*, seeks to forge connections between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the initiate's body as well as the larger body of the ritual space is evident. The purpose of this ritual is to purify the initiate to attain liberation by leading him on the path back to the principle deity. A further linkage occurs between the subtle breath (*prāṇa*) and the *ṣaḍadhvan*, alluding to speech vis-à-vis both the subtle body of the practitioner and external manifestation ([9], pp. 347–48). The conceptualization of the *ṣaḍadhvan*, then, provides insight not only into the creation of spatial correspondences between the microcosm and macrocosm, but it also points to Tantric Śaivite metaphysical speculations regarding the significance of the emanative aspects of language in relation to cosmological notions of the universe [9]. Thus it provides further insight into the importance given to the imposition of *mantras* for the purification and divinization of the body in the rituals prescribed in the *Svacchandatantra*.

8. Conclusions

The ritual practices of the *Svacchandatantra* seek to divinize the body of the practitioner and in so doing create a Tantric Śaivite religious identity. These rituals are part of a shared Tantric idiom that involve an emphasis on the inscribing of the body and the forging of linkages between the macrocosm of the universe and microcosm of the practitioner's body. These linkages are made evident in the preparatory and daily rituals as well as in the initiatory rituals prescribed. Various technologies are prescribed including the application of various substances, the imposition of *mantras* (*nyāsa*), breath techniques and visualization. The purification and divinization of the ritual environment is understood in this context to be made part of the Tantric body. The influence of Vedic thought and praxis is evidenced in the creation of a micro/macrocosm correspondence that has been incorporated and modified by Tantric Śaivite ritualists. In all of the practices described in the *Svacchandatantra* and commentary, it is in the creation of these correspondences ritually inscribed that Tantric Śaivite religiosity finds expression.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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