

Article

The Fulcrum of Experience in Indian Yoga and Possession Trance

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Abstract: The “inner organ” (*antaḥkaraṇa*) in the Indian philosophical school called Sāṃkhya is applied in two different experiential contexts: in the act of transcendence according to the path of yoga explored in the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali (ca. 350 CE) and in the process of identity shift that occurs in possession by a deity in a broader range of Indian cultural practices. The act of transcendence will be better understood if we look at the *antaḥkaraṇa* through an emic lens, which is to say as an actual organ that is activated by experiential shifts, rather than as a concept or explanation that is indicative of a collocation of characteristics of the individuating consciousness or merely by reducing it to nonepistemic objective or subjective factors.

Keywords: antaḥkaraṇa; *Yogasūtras*; *saṃyama*; possession; Balaji; Ganges; pilgrimage

1. Introduction

In her recent book *Lost Ecstasy*, June McDaniel addresses critics of the study of commonality in religious experience, specifically ecstasy. Critics argue against its very legitimacy because what is important, they maintain, are differences; nothing else is worth studying because attempts to locate convergences obscure what makes religious experiences unique, namely their differences. McDaniel understands that “[w]hile the study of religion in India lacks the comparative categories of understanding and analysis that we see in Western departments, it has also been free of the Western reduction of religion to political and economic forces” (McDaniel 2018, p. 8). Through a methodological analysis, McDaniel frees herself to study religious experience, regardless of the present intransigence of the community of critics in the West that has positioned itself against such study.

In this essay I align myself with McDaniel, whose understanding is closer to the emic; she does not impose external or etic methods of reinterpreting indigenous understandings of religious experience. Following this lead, I will draw from an array of sources to argue that an “internal or inner organ” is activated and energized at the time one undergoes certain kinds of experience that they regard as religious. Thus, what I am trying to do here is rescue an emic understanding of the subtle physiology of an internal organ. It is this organ or organ system that is awakened from its somnolence and impels or shepherds the interconnected web of cognitive and physiological processes in the direction of specific experiences that closely resemble those described in multiple reliable sources, including texts and ethnographies. The “evidence” for this, if this term is permissible here, will be drawn from Indian text and practice. The texts are from the realm of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, including, notably, the *Yogasūtras*, and from the “practice” of possession, which is in fact most often performed and nearly as often carefully choreographed, even if textual models from classical or even modern literature are lacking or insufficient. This is not to deny that yoga and the experiences derived from it also manifest through performance, because it surely is, even if it is performed only for oneself.

This essay will be divided into six sections: (1) introduction; (2) a description and interpretation of an inner or internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*); (3) examination of the description and function of what *Yogasūtras* 3.4 invokes as the power or, we might say, the organ that is illuminated when the three

highest stages of Patañjali's eightfold path combine into a single cognitive unit, namely *saṃyama*; (4) the experiential point at which an individual's personality transitions from one to another during the process of possession (*āveśa*); (5) discussion and reflections on the three substantive sections; and (6) conclusions that in which we will examine how we might (or might not) put all of this together in order to come more closely into engagement with an "organ" that generates transcendence and motivates it to press forward into other modes of experience and consciousness. We cannot at this point correlate our findings with an ever-deepening understanding of organ systems as understood medically, or of the role of neurotransmitters in this process. The identification and understanding of neurotransmitters are rapidly expanding, and I feel confident that eventually these two areas of understanding and discourse will be brought together.¹

At the moment, however, I would like to see two paths converge, or come asymptotically close at any rate. These are, first, the path of yoga as articulated in the *Yogasūtras*, and, second, the lived experience of possession as a mode of self-identification and even re-embodiment. A theoretical foundation for this may be seen in the structure of the *antaḥkaraṇa*. How then can the *antaḥkaraṇa*, drawn largely from *Sāṃkhya*, *saṃyama* from the *Yogasūtras*, and possession intersect, and how are they relevant to each other? I hope to identify within them a fulcrum of that balances worldly and transcendental experience, an organ that opens the door to ecstasy and yogic realization, one that enables individuals to experience deity or spirit possession. I will take the concept of *saṃyama* in YS 3.4 and analyze it as an organ that becomes operational only when *samādhi* is achieved, one that draws and recasts the energy of *samādhi* into what are called *siddhis* or *vibhūtis*—"powers of perfection," in Miller's (1998) term,² which are only possible as concentrated and subtle experience. I would then like to examine the way in which this organ stands at the fulcrum of personal identity that is evident and transformational in states of possession.

2. The *Antaḥkaraṇa*

Let us begin with an attempt to discover what an "internal organ" that regulates experience might look like or how it might be described. The Sanskrit term that presents itself as the primary suspect is *antaḥkaraṇa*, regarded as one's emotional and perceptual center. The *antaḥkaraṇa* is classically translated as "heart," although it must be understood as a secret heart, the locus of deep emotional engagement. This overlaps with the sense of the physical heart (*hṛd*, *hṛdaya*), which also often shares these connotations. Thus, the heart was regarded as a multifaceted organ that went beyond physical, measurable, dissectible qualities. The *antaḥkaraṇa* was classically defined as the combination of *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*, or intellect, egoity, and mind (Larson and Bhattacharya 1987). These, taken together, constitute a single functioning organ that comprehends "all objects in all three worlds" (Larson and Bhattacharya 1987, p. 188), and to which the "external organ" of perception and cognition (*bāhyakaraṇa*), the composite of the five sense organs (*buddhīndriya*) and the five organs of action (*karmendriya*), is subservient (Larson and Bhattacharya 1987, pp. 52, 62, 87). Thus, the "internal organ," more powerful and consequential than the "external organ," is conceptualized as the awakened heart, the organ of consciousness and intentionality. The heart is regarded as the center of the system of five *prāṇas* or lifebreaths in classical Indian medicine (Ayurveda). It is the locus of the union and separation of the upward moving breath (also called *prāṇa*) and the downward moving breath (*apāna*), as well as the organizing force or vector of all the lifebreaths. This is because it provides them with both magnitude and direction. It is the container and the locus of both intentionality and the cognitive self. It is, then, a substantial fulcrum that contains within it the intellect, egoity, and mind, as well as the organizer or organizing principle that moves this powerful composite towards its externalized mirror image, the physical world (*bāhyakaraṇa*, "external organ", or *lauikika*, "worldly," realm) as well as to the

¹ For a brief summary, see <https://www.tuck.com/neurotransmitters/>.

² See her translation of YS 3.37 and 4.1, pp. 68 & 74, respectively.

transcendental (*alaukika*) realm. As reasonable as this appears to be, however, according to Sāṃkhya, which lies at the “heart” of Indian philosophical orthodoxy,³ both the *antaḥkaraṇa* and the *bāhyakaraṇa* irrevocably abide in the relative world, in that field of “primordial materiality” (*prakṛti*) (Larson and Bhattacharya 1987, p. 24, *passim*). Even if the various components of the internal organ and the external organ possess different densities, form, and mobility, they are substantialities nonetheless.⁴ They are, therefore, forever separate from and untouched by an individual or monadic “catalytic consciousness” (*puruṣa*), as Elisa Freschi describes it, which is not substantial and is “distinct from intellect and primordial materiality.” The *antaḥkaraṇa* is, she states, “the abode of mental events such as thinking, imagining and remembering” (Freschi 2012, p. 371). Even if this is the case, its “presence . . . is essential for the occurrence of the awareness function of intellect and the transformations of primordial materiality” (Larson and Bhattacharya 1987, p. 25).⁵ This presentation is essentially adopted by the *Yogaśāstra*, but this is understandable because it does not tally with the correlative function of the *antaḥkaraṇa* in yoga practice as found in the *Yogaśūtras*.

The *antaḥkaraṇa* is more expansively described by the Vaiṣṇava sectarian founder and philosopher Vallabhācārya (1479–1531?) in his brief *Antaḥkaraṇaprabodha*, “Awakening of the Inner Organ,” the seventh treatise in the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* or Sixteen Works.⁶ In this text of ten and a half verses, he addresses the *antaḥkaraṇa* as if one part of his inner self were speaking to another. It is this brief sense of dialogue that is important here, as if the *antaḥkaraṇa* were an intermediary between his will and his actions, between his learned and cultured sense of Krishna as the Supreme Lord and his devotional ecstasy, learned and cultured on the other side of the *antaḥkaraṇa*. He does not describe the anatomy of this inner organ, which appears to be a bridge between internal and external awareness. However, the copious commentaries on this text do explain it. It is most easily summed up by Nṛsiṃhalālji, who composed an undated *Brajbhāṣā* commentary on Vallabhācārya’s *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ* between 1775 and 1825. Nṛsiṃhalālji says in his commentary on verse 4 of Vallabhācārya’s *Nirodhalakṣaṇa* (Smith 1998) that if a devotee experiences *kīrtana* or enlightened discourse in the association of one who has attained proximity to Kṛṣṇa (*bhagavadīya*), then Kṛṣṇa appears in the *antaḥkaraṇa* of the devotee. The *antaḥkaraṇa* is defined as consciousness (*cit*), mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and ego (*ahaṃkāra*) taken together as a single functioning organ. The extra ingredient—consciousness—is added here, thus placing it entirely within the realm of what Sāṃkhya would regard as *prakṛti*, with the

³ This is the case even if Sāṃkhya metaphysics is entirely different from the other orthodox schools that obtained maximum currency as religious schools, namely the various expressions of Vedānta. Thus, Sāṃkhya cosmology, minus the nettlesome duality of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, nature and individual consciousness, was employed as the baseline explanation of the structure of the self in *Ayurveda*, virtually all sectarian *Purāṇas*, and most philosophical schools. Similarly, it is accepted at face value, which is to say in its Sāṃkhya embodiment, by Abhinavagupta, a term on which he does not speculate. It is absent from the *Tāntrikābhidānakośa*, which suggests that the Tantras paid scant attention to it; it was simply a structure designed to uphold the inner constitution. Thanks to Alberta Ferrario for pointing this out to me. It is interesting that the *antaḥkaraṇa* barely plays a role in Abhinavagupta’s discourse on *śaktipāta* (*Tantrāloka*, chapter 13), which brings about the kinds of transitional experience discussed below (Ferrario 2015).

⁴ Loriliai Biernacki writes: “Known as the *antaḥkāraṇa*, the inward sense organs, these include the intellect (*mahat/buddhi*), the ego (*ahaṃkāra*), and the mind (*manas*). These three, as evolutes of *Prakṛti*, fundamentally lack sentience. Thus what a contemporary Western scientist might understand as “mind”, “awareness”, or ‘consciousness’, is, to the contrary, from an Indian perspective relegated to the level of mere materiality” (Biernacki 2014, p. 4).

⁵ The epistemological process here is well-described recently by Walter Menezes: “Knowledge arises when there is a modification (*vṛtti*) of *antaḥkaraṇa* in the form of the object, assisted by the instrumental cause (*karaṇa*). Thus, the same basic consciousness assumes various forms through different mental modes corresponding to different objects. This clarifies why there is knowledge of varied forms, such as, knowledge of a thing, e.g., tree, house, and horse; knowledge of an attribute, e.g., redness, beauty, and roundedness; and knowledge of action, e.g., flowing, flying, and blowing. Like the varied knowledge of external objects, there is also varied knowledge of mental states, such as happiness, fear, love, imagination, memory, and so on, of which mind is also the instrumental cause. By taking various forms of diverse objects, *antaḥkaraṇa* causes variations in knowledge or consciousness, but does not generate it” (Menezes 2016, p. 157). Note that the term *antaḥkaraṇa* also entered the stream of non-philosophical Sanskrit. Kalidāsa used it in *Abhijñānaśūktalā* 1.19: *asamsāyam kṣatrapariḡrahaḥsamā yad evam asyām abhilāsi me manah | satām hi samidehapadesu vastuṣu pramāṇam antaḥkaraṇaprapavṛttayah ||* “Doubtlessly she is fit to be wed by a warrior, since my heart [*manah*] desires her so. For in matters of doubt the inclinations of their inner faculties [*antaḥkaraṇa*] are authority for the good” (Vasudeva 2017, p. 195).

⁶ For information on the *Ṣoḍaśagranthāḥ*, see (Smith 1998; Redington 2000). Redington has translated the *Antaḥkaraṇaprabodha* along with a few textual notes and more extensive notes from his teacher, Shyam Manohar Goswamy from Mumbai.

Supreme Lord (*puruṣottama*) Krishna, with his *līlā* or divine play replacing *puruṣa*.⁷ Thus it is that *antaḥkaraṇa*, the awakened heart as the organ of consciousness and the storehouse of intelligence and personality, can serve as the intermediary between awareness and the Supreme Lord. Elsewhere, Vallabhācārya states in the Sarvanirṇayaprakaraṇa (51–52, unpacked in the commentaries) of his massive Tattvārthadīpanibandha that only through the *antaḥkaraṇa* can one experience the true bliss of the *svāminīs* (*gopīs*) or milkmaids of Vraja, the archetypal exemplars of single-minded divinely envisioned devotion. Thus, the *antaḥkaraṇa* serves as the bridge between ordinary (*laukika*) and transcendental (*alaukika*) experience.⁸

In sum, we can do little better than to quote Paranjpe (1998) on advaita Vedānta (the identity of the philosophical school he is citing is unimportant), which, he says,

“assigns the tasks of perception, cognition, recollection, and others to an entity conceived as the “inner instrument” (*antaḥkaraṇa*), [which] includes the mind (*manas*) manifesting attentivity, the intellect (*buddhi*) meaning the capacity for determination and ascertainment, and *citta*, a storehouse of past impressions and memories. The inner instrument is a crucial aspect of the embodied person that coordinates the functions of the senses and the body while in constant interaction with events within the body and its surroundings. The inner instrument is said to “reach out” to objects in the environment through the senses, and to become transformed into their shapes, so to speak. The inner instrument is constantly undergoing modifications, depending on the objects it reaches out to, and it tries to ‘know’ them by itself being transformed into their shapes.”

This must be distinguished from the Vaiṣṇava reckoning of the inner organ as delineated by Vallabhācārya in that the latter is theistic, in which the inner organ functions within a theistic or *saguṇa* context, while the advaita Vedānta that Paranjpe describes operates within a nondual or *nirguṇa* context.⁹ Let us now see how this squares with *saṃyama* of the Yogasūtras.

3. Saṃyama

Scholarly and popular exegesis on the Yogasūtras of Patañjali constitute a major area of focus in advocating and assessing the “spirituality” of both India and the West. The 194 *sūtras* or aphorisms are divided into four *pādas* or chapters. Since the compilation or composition of the YS in the late 3rd or early 4th century CE,¹⁰ the first two *pādas* have received nearly all the scholarly and public

⁷ Vallabhācārya and the commentarial tradition on his work speak of *līlāvātāra*, a broader extended realm of the Supreme Lord, which includes materiality as his *līlā* or divine play. In this reckoning the *antaḥkaraṇa* would be regarded as part of the whole fabric of *līlā*, neither external nor internal, but a mere facet of a whole in which its role as connective tissue is devalued. Much has been written on *līlā*; see, for example, (Sax 1995).

⁸ Somewhat analogous to this is Elaine Fisher’s quotation of Kumārasvāmin, a fifteenth century Śaivasiddhānta philosopher who has written a commentary on the Tattvapraṅkāṣa of Bhojadeva: “For, unmediated [*aparokṣabhūta*] knowledge [*jñāna*], in fact, is the cause of su-preme beatitude [*āpavarga*]. And its unmediated quality arises when the traces [*saṃskāra*] of ignorance [*avidyā*] have been concealed through intensive meditation [*nididhyāsana*]. And intensive meditation becomes possible when the knowledge of Śiva arises through listening to scripture [*śravaṇa*] and contemplation [*manana*]. And those arise because of the purification of the inner organ [*antaḥkaraṇa*]. That [purification] occurs through the practice of daily [*nitya*] and occasional [*naimittika*] ritual observance, with the abandoning of the forbidden volitional [*kāmya*] rituals” (Fisher 2017, p. 42). Again, the *antaḥkaraṇa* serves as a radio; it is a mechanism, a device with varying degrees of clarity or static, which mediates between a remote source and a listener. In a more modern context, note the words of the 20th century yogi Patañjali: “*Sira* [channel systems of the mind, otherwise labeled *srotas*] are those *nāḍī* [internal channels] that carry messages from the *antaḥkaraṇa*, a “message center” located in the region of the heart, throughout the body, and also provide a “vital link in the functioning of the sense organs” (Smith 2008, p. 10, fn. 11).

⁹ More could be said about this, particularly because the guiding forces of the *antaḥkaraṇa* in these two cases would be different. In the case of theistic *saguṇa*, it would be Supreme Lord (*puruṣottama*), while in the nondual *nirguṇa* case the *antaḥkaraṇa* would be guided more by the interior dynamic between the self or *ātman* and its conscious positioning with the abstract absolute, the *brahman*. To say more would require a separate essay.

¹⁰ (Maas 2006, 2010), and elsewhere, settles this debate. He also argues, from manuscript sources, that the YS was composed in its entirety by Vyāsa, the first commentator on the YS. Many questions can be raised about this assertion, but this is not the place for it. However, this is why efforts such as Chapple’s essay “Reading Patañjali Without Vyāsa” remain valuable (Chapple 2008, pp. 219–35). Other reasons for keeping the debate alive are found in (Aciri 2012; Gokhale 2015).

attention. The reasons for this are because they deal with formal categories of *samādhi*, the eightfold (*aṣṭāṅga*) path of yoga (which continues through the first three *sūtras*, out of fifty-five, of the third *pāda*), and their discussions of the goals, ethics, and obstacles on the path of yoga.¹¹ The remainder of the text, nearly the entire third *pāda*, and the entire fourth *pāda* (consisting of 34 *sūtras*), has been all but neglected. The dimensions of the Sanskrit commentaries, the secondary sources, and the weight of the teachings of virtually all yogis and yoga schools in India and the West, bear out this disregard. The reasons are clear enough: the third *pāda* consists largely of a list of transcendental powers (*siddhis*, “accomplishment”, or *vibhūti*, “the power to extend everywhere” (White 2014, p. 31)) that are of little interest to the scholarly traditions in both India and the West that have been responsible for perpetuating the *yogaśāstra*, the system of knowledge of yoga that is transmitted as an intellectual project. This list of *siddhis* and the means of achieving them is patently exotic. The *siddhis* lack an empirical or testable basis, even if they make logical or cosmological sense. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has shown that *siddhis*, either those mentioned in YS Chapter 3 or elsewhere,¹² were in fact the most commonly sought-after goals of yoga in the first half of the second millennium CE.¹³ The fourth *pāda* presents a different set of problems: it is difficult and often elliptical, as it attempts to tie together various strands from the YS, eluding or exhausting nearly all who have dealt systematically with it. Here our concern is the method of achieving *siddhis* described in the third chapter, called Vibhūtipāda.¹⁴

What I suggest here is that if we understand the first several *sūtras* of the third *pāda*, especially the fourth *sūtra*, we will be better able to grasp the experience that the YS offers to its learned audience. The *sūtra* reads *trayam ekatra saṁyamah*, “*Saṁyama* is the three taken together as one.” *Saṁyama* means “holding together, restraint, complete control.” The literal meaning, however, is less important than the fact that it serves as a designation for the state in which the three higher limbs of yoga described in YS 3.1–3.3—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are held in a delicate stasis. The goal of yoga stated in YS 1.2 is the cessation of the oscillations of the mental processes (*yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*). Its fulfillment is articulated here, at the beginning of the third *pāda*, in the description of the three higher or “inner” limbs (*antaraṅga*) of the eightfold path. What it requires is, first, fixing the mind to an object of thought (*dhāraṇā*, 3.1). This is then allowed to flow uninterrupted through time in a settled state of watchfulness (*dhyāna* or meditation, 3.2). Finally, the true essence of the object shines forth without

¹¹ Namely the *vṛttis*, waves or mental modifications that must be evened out through the practice of yoga (YS 1.5–1.11), obstacles (*antarāya*) to our practice (YS 1.29–1.40), and (3) afflictions (*kleśa*) with which we must all deal (YS 3.3–3.14).

¹² Many of the tantric and yoga texts list eight characteristic *siddhis*: *aṇimā* (reducing the size of the body to molecular dimensions), *mahimā* (expanding the size of the body to enormous dimensions), *garimā* (heaviness, increasing the body weight), *laghimā* (becoming light as a feather), *prāpti* (ability to translocate), *prākāmya* (ability to acquire whatever is desired), *iṣitvā* (lordship), and *vaśitvā* (ability to control nature). These are referred to in YS 3.45, but are not listed. Indeed, this *sūtra* should serve as the link between the *siddhis* mentioned in YS and the array of later texts. Many more than these are found in the later texts, although nowhere are they explicitly tethered to the process discussed in the YS. It is not certain that the later yoga texts thought about *siddhis* as actualized through the same process or explanation discussed in the YS, namely through *saṁyama* as the stable collocation of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*, but the conceptual link leaves space for this to have been carried forward.

¹³ See (Mallinson 2012) and elsewhere. This is now acknowledged in the academic study of yoga. See (Vasudeva 2011) for an eighteenth century example of the early goals of yoga as articulated in the YS later on losing their dualist focus as yoga is appropriated into the realm of Vedānta.

¹⁴ All translations and editions of the YS (or PYŚ, as it’s commonly called now, for Pātañjalayogaśāstra, (Maas 2006) must perforce address the topic of *siddhis*, but the treatments are usually briefly, with almost no learned elucidation. The infrequency of the term outside the YS may be seen in its treatment by Mallinson and Singleton (2017, pp. 286–87, 324) and Larson and Bhattacharya, where it is rarely referred to outside the YS and its commentaries. Larson and Bhattacharya present the commentarial discussions (see their index), even if they are difficult to follow due to the policy of the Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy to include minimal Sanskrit. Precedents, however, this may be seen in the Bhagavadgītā. Cf. BhG 4.26 śrotādinīndriyāny anye saṁyamāgñiṣu juhvati—One should offer senses such as hearing and others into the fires of *saṁyama*, viz. self-control); 2.61 (tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamaya yukta āsīta matparaḥ—with the senses restrained, he should sit, disciplined focused on me); 3.6 (karmendriyāni saṁyamaya ya āste manasā smaran—he sits, restraining his organs of action); 6.14 (manaḥ saṁyamaya maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ—the mind restrained, collected together, etc.), 8.12 (sarvadvārāṇi saṁyamaya mano hr̥di nirudhya ca—having restrained all the gates [orifices], confining the mind in the heart). These passages present the general semantic horizon for this term prior to the YS.

mediation (*samādhi*, 3.3). These taken together constitute the singular unified state of *saṁyama*. Eleven *sūtras* follow (3.5–3.15) that describe the nature of the transformation brought about by the process of cessation (*nirodhāparināma*, 3.9), which invites transformation within the expanded realm of one-pointed unmediated focus (*ekāgratāparināma*, 3.12).

The list of the *siddhis* begins at 3.16 and continues with little break through 3.46.¹⁵ They include knowledge of the past, present, and future, the movement of the stars, the interior arrangement of the parts of the body; vision of perfected beings (*siddhas*); the attainment of the four commonly listed virtues (friendliness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity); the ability to fly through the air; and many more. Most of these “powers of perfection” betray a formulaic rhetoric: from *saṁyama* on X, Y is achieved. For example, in a complex act, 3.21 reads “from *saṁyama* on the form or appearance of the body, one can become invisible by obstructing another’s ability to grasp the body by blocking their eyes from the light.”¹⁶ Many are much simpler, for example 3.26 reads, “from *saṁyama* on the sun, one gains knowledge of the worlds.”¹⁷ Another well-known *sūtra*, 3.42 reads, “from *saṁyama* on the relationship between the body and empty space or ether (*ākāśa*), and from absorption in a state in which the body becomes as light as cotton, one can move through space.”¹⁸

These examples are sufficient to show that *saṁyama* serves as a valve between the world of ordinary reality and discourse and the realm of transcendental or supernatural accomplishments. It may be viewed as the neck of an hourglass through which awareness must pass and become transformed. The possibility for such accomplishments exists, but it is inert until it is awakened by taking advantage of the higher operations of the path of yoga. One might say it is an organ that is activated or switched on by the singular operation of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, and *samādhi*. *Saṁyama* might then be imagined as an organ that reallocates the composite energies of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, and *samādhi*, rendering them useful in attaining exalted and unprecedented knowledge, power, and virtue. It is the heart of cognition and the cognition of the heart. In Patañjali’s manner of speaking, it is the purified *antahkaraṇa*, because, as described above, it is the organ, the inner organ, through which the *laukika* and *alaukika*, the worldly and the transcendent, are mediated and communicated to one another. It is also the moment of dissociation when one identity overtakes another and allows an individual to manifest divinity in a state of invited or controlled possession. This leads to consideration of an inner organ that mediates this moment of dissociation.

4. Possession

Possession falls into two basic categories: voluntary and involuntary. When voluntary, in a large number of cases, it may be labeled positive and oracular.¹⁹ When involuntary, it is nearly always negative and disease producing. The latter constitutes a formal category in classical Ayurveda, *āgantuka unmnāda*, madness (Sanskrit: *unmnāda*) that comes on a person from outside (Sanskrit: *āgantūka*). This is medicalized at length in the early Ayurveda literature and treated with a broad pharmacological spectrum, with ritual, and through unique psychodynamic practices and processes.²⁰ It is then picked up and dealt with extravagantly in a large number of *tāntrik* texts as well in the regional languages of India in which the earlier categories of possessing entities, which fit collectively under the name *bhūtavidyā* (“science of possessing entities”) are expanded and localized.²¹ What we will address here,

¹⁵ The most notable break is the much discussed *sūtra* 3.37, *te samādhāv upasargā vyutthāne siddhayaḥ*, which states that if one is not careful these *siddhis* can become impediments to *samādhi*, that we can be overtaken by our own success.

¹⁶ *kāya-rūpa-saṁyamāt tat-grāhyaśakti-stambhe cakṣuḥ prakāśāsāṁprayoge ’ntardhānam*.

¹⁷ *bhuvana-jñānaṁ sūrye-saṁyamāt*.

¹⁸ *kāyākāśayoh sambandha-saṁyamāl laghutūlasamāpattēś cākāśagamanam*.

¹⁹ See Sax 2002, 158ff., who speaks of oracular possession in terms of “complex agency.” The notion of assigning agency to non-human actors is controversial in anthropology, but my experience over the years in the Himalayas forces me to concur with Sax’s observations and conclusions.

²⁰ This is described and analyzed at length in Smith (2006, chp. 12).

²¹ Most of this is also described in (Smith 2006). Some of what appears in the next few paragraphs is drawn from various parts of that publication. See also (Smith 2010).

however, is positive oracular possession, which is, as I argued earlier (Smith 2006, chp. 1), the most frequently sought after state of transcendence in India. It is nearly always induced through ritual, and is therefore virtually always public. It is attractive and enticing, it entreats and impels the individual into an inner zone of safety, power, and authority. To the unknowing outsider or observer, including “official” representatives of priesthoods and orthodox hierarchies, it appears frightening and dangerous. But to the experiencer it is uplifting. In most cases, a gradual crescendo of emotional engagement is visible to observers, whether it is in a religious festival, a healing temple, or a devotional environment in which musical or other activity that may be identified as shamanic, such as drumming, occurs (Rouget 1985). This is distinct from *siddhis* in yoga, which are, by necessity, private. We are then proceeding in this section from the realm of the theoretical, the *antahkaraṇa*, and the private, the cultivation of *siddhis*, to the public realm, the learned, anticipated, and manifested moment of transcendence into a divinely inspired state.²²

Two brief ethnographic examples must suffice here. One is from a video titled Kusum (2000), filmed most prominently at and near the Balaji temple in Mehndipur, Rajasthan (Pakaslahti 1998; Dwyer 1999, 2003), a few kilometers off the main road, about halfway between Agra and Jaipur. The other is drawn from a pilgrimage to the headwaters of the Ganga, along the Bhagirathi between Gangotri, the temple town that marks the origin of the Ganga,²³ and Mukhba, 27 km south, where Gaṅgā Devī travels with her retinue for the winter (Smith 2018).²⁴ The evidence here, ethnography, is of a very different order than the textuality that guides the two previous sections. It is neither Sanskritic nor philosophical. But there is sufficient common experiential or emic ground for the link to be justifiable.

Balaji is a well-known pilgrimage center known for the treatment of possession, which is to say an exorcism center. Many modalities are employed here, because hundreds of healers, largely from villages in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, come from their native villages every month for perhaps a week, renting out small spaces which they use for their ritual. This is in addition to the exorcistic rites sponsored by the Balaji temple itself. In the last half century, the number of worshippers and individuals who believe themselves to be in need has dramatically expanded, from a trickle of a few hundred per day to no less than seven- or eight-thousand every day. Not everyone who comes feels they are possessed and in need of exorcism. The main reason is because it is exclusively family therapy; if one person is afflicted, then the rest of the family must be, so the narrative among healers goes. Also, afflicted individuals need family around them to withstand the often heavy-handed psychodynamic processes that occur at Balaji.

One of the afflicted was a fourteen year old girl named Kusum. Her treatment (along with many others) was tracked by Pakaslahti, and filmed by a Finnish television crew in 2000 (Aaltonen 2000). Kusum was brought to Balaji, like many if not most others, as a last resort healing center. Biomedical doctors had failed to diagnose her condition and Western psychoanalysis and psychopharmacology were unavailable, as is the case for nearly all Indians, for whom the bare facts of life render such treatment an irrelevant upper class Westernized luxury.²⁵ Kusum’s father was an autorickshaw driver

²² See (Freeman 1993, 1998), on possession as learned behavior.

²³ Although the actual beginning is at Gaumukh, 18 km further upriver, where the Bhagirathi emerges as a fully formed river from beneath the receding Gangotri glacier. However, it is only possible to travel there on foot. Thus, the temple, beyond which very few people go (the government imposed limit is 150 trekkers per day), is in the densely built up pilgrimage center of Gangotri.

²⁴ The data and comments included here are based to some extent on my fieldwork at Balaji in 2001, 2002, and 2007, and participation in the Mukhba-Gangotri pilgrimages in 2007, 2013, 2015, and 2016. Much of this was conducted thanks to two senior research fellowships from the American Institute of Indian Studies in 2001 and 2006, and two from Fulbright, including a Fulbright-Hayes in 2007 and a Fulbright Nehru in 2015–2016.

²⁵ Pakaslahti begins his important 1998 article by pointing to an article then twenty-five years old (Neki 1973), which needs to be updated, that provides an interesting statistic: “80% of the population first consult[s] religious folk healers when they seek outside help for mental health problems” (Pakaslahti 1998, p. 129). This statistic cannot have changed much in the last half century.

in a very poor area in South Delhi, her aunt folded and glued discarded newspaper pages into fragile paper bags for use in the market, and her mother was at home all day every day to prevent the tiny house in the jam-packed slum from being robbed. Without providing more details of the case than are necessary here, suffice it to say that three or four families, each with an afflicted family member, were in attendance in a moderately sized rented room that had been turned into a temple, and that entrancing music blared loudly from a CD player for a couple of hours each morning to the accompaniment of well-known exclamatory chants such as Śrī Rām Jay Rām Jay Jay Rām, Jay Śrī Mā, Jay Bābājī, and so on. At a certain point someone, not necessarily the afflicted individual, will enter a trance state. This can become contagious, but in my experience is limited to members of a single family. In this case it was Kusum's aunt that fell into a trance state.²⁶

Eventually, after a few days of sitting in the back of the room, more or less staring blankly, appearing pent up and reserved, Kusum developed the comfort and confidence to express herself, and finally entered a state of possession. As is standard for such behavior in India, Kusum first unbound her tightly braided hair.²⁷ This is emblematic of a state of freedom; indeed, this is part of the kinesthetics of possession-based freedom for women in India. Another facet of the bodily expression of possession is rotating quickly counterclockwise with the arms flailing in the air. Kusum did not do this. She remained seated, but her eyes bulged and her tongue lolled down to the tip of her chin as she took on the visage of Kālī (Aaltonen 2000, minute 44:00 and onwards), a familiar goddess who often evokes bouts of possession (Figure 1). In fact, one of the walls of the room featured a common color poster of Kālī (Figure 2). The extent to which Kusum's tongue lolled downwards is not normal; the mimetic replication of Kālī was unmistakable. Regardless of what one's theoretical positioning might be, from that moment on Kusum's healing began to manifest, and continued on an upward swing.²⁸



Figure 1. Kālī possessing Kusum (Kusum 45:52).

²⁶ It is important to note that the healers who transit through Balaji operate through very different modalities even if nearly all of them advocate family therapy. They are not certified by any outside bureau or board; their procedures are highly idiosyncratic. Among other things this is a reason for more research to be conducted there.

²⁷ See (Obeyesekere 1981; Erndl 1993; Hildebeitel 1991), although some of this requires modification today.

²⁸ The most promising theory is Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (Latour 1996, 2005), which provides limited and contextual agency to non-human entities and objects; see (Sax 2009), for applying this to possession in the central Himalayas.

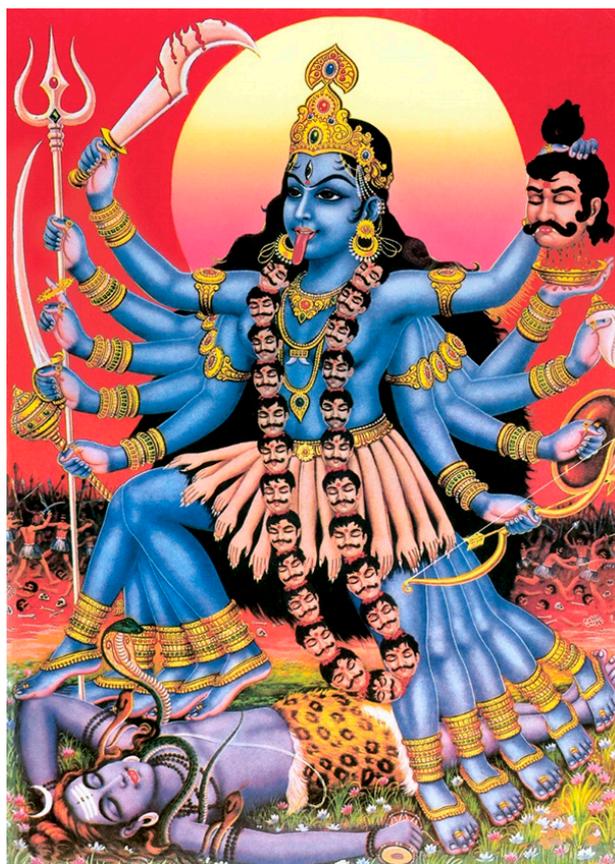


Figure 2. Kālī, poster art (in the author's collection).

So, we must ask, what happened here? What process of liberation transpired within Kusum's mind and body that began to generate her healing? What exactly is this unique, untested, and perhaps untestable healing process? The main actors were *pūjā*, the music, the singing, and the ritual actions of Bhagatji, the healer, a kindly man with a third standard education from the town of Hapur, eighty kilometers east of Delhi, and his assistant, Meena, an intelligent and compassionate woman with a sixth standard education, who had the uncanny ability to temporarily wrest invasive spirits from those in the room who were possessed. The sum of their parts allowed the creation of a small space of safety and community, even if the families did not know each other.²⁹ Bhagatji, dressed casually and standing off to the side, usually smoking a cigarette, confidently in charge, studiously and intently surveyed the room and observed the shifting dynamics. When a family member of an afflicted individual fell deeply into a state of possession, Meena, sitting at the front of the room with her kindly unassuming smile, suddenly entered into a state of possession and unloosened her own hair, her eyeballs disappearing upwards into her head, or so it seemed. In this ostensibly blind and cathartic visage, she nevertheless expertly wrestled the disembodied entity from the person holding it, who was not necessarily the one identified as the afflicted family member. Eventually Meena and the possessed person collapsed, exhausted from the battle, but still fully in their altered states. Bhagatji strode to the front of the room from the side and proceeded to psychoanalyze the spirit, not the individual who was afflicted. Bhagatji called out for the spirit, *bhūt* or *bhūtpret* in Hindi, to identify him or herself, ask their reason for being there. Bhagatji would plead to the spirit to cooperate with his intention of transforming the "lives" of invasive bothersome spirits, who destroy the lives of those we regard as the living, and to join the

²⁹ One can easily label this a shamanic scenario, and create a list of shamanic features, but the labeling is not important here.

legions of the spirits of the good, which is to say in this case the army (*phauj*) of Hanumān. In this paradigm, the good spirits were marshalled together as an effective force, the ethereal army of the chief magistrate of this court of law, namely Balaji, as the baby Hanumān is called in this part of Rajasthan. All of this helped generate an unambiguous trigger point that enabled Kusum to unfurl her hair and unburden herself to an extent unprecedented in her short life, in the closed and hardscrabble social space that was the lot of her family. Throughout much of that fateful morning, Bhagatji interrogated, sometimes brutally, the entity held within Meena's body that she had borrowed from the auntie. At a certain point this achieved a critical mass, following which Kusum let loose, crying desperately at the heart of Kālī, who was none other than herself.³⁰

How, we might ask, is this trigger point different from the extreme concentrated energy that is unloosed in the post-*samādhi* state of *saṃnyama*, at which the *antaḥkaraṇa* or internal organ is the fulcrum or balancing point that holds ordinary or laukika reality on one side and the transcendent or *alaukika* realm of *siddhis* or manifestation of a deity that heals on the other side? We shall return to this shortly.

The second example is of possession during a Himalayan pilgrimage. The venue was the annual pilgrimage of the Goddess of the Ganges, Gaṅgā Devī, from Mukhba, on the north bank of the Bhagirathi, where she spends the winter resting, to Gangotri, 27 km further east, the nominal source of the Ganges. This pilgrimage occurs on akṣayya tṛtīyā, the third day of the bright half (*śuklapakṣa*) of the month of Vaiśākha, towards the end of April or beginning of May. This is widely considered an auspicious day for embarking on new beginnings. The return journey from Gangotri to Mukhba occurs on Dīpāvalī, the well-known family and community festival that falls on the new moon of the month of Kārttika, towards the end of October or beginning of November. The semiannual peregrination features Gaṅgā Devī, accompanied by her associates Sarasvatī and Annapūrṇā in a *dolī* or palanquin (lit. "a swing"), carried by seasoned and strong men, followed by pilgrims, at first perhaps five hundred, but by the end no more than twenty-five or so. The number decreases as the terrain becomes more difficult and the altitude rises, from Mukhba at approximately 8700 feet (2652 m) to Gangotri at 10,300 feet elevation (3139 m), and the cliff from the trail becomes more precipitous.

One of the primary features of this procession and festival, as is the case at festivals and pilgrimages throughout India, is possession.³¹ The experience here is closer to the norm of "normal" oracular possession that is found across India (if one can, for a moment, accept possession as normal behavior reflecting a normal ontology). Usually it is women who are awakened to the presence of the deity, although it is not uncommon of to find men experiencing such "ecstatic" possession, especially in the Himalayas, where they most often serve as oracles to the deities. Gendered behavior is approximately similar. Certain behavioral manifestations of public possession, such as untying and loosening the hair, then spinning counterclockwise, are usually associated with women, although this is certainly possible for men (disregarding the unloosening of the hair), as noted in the video Kusum. The terms employed for possession in the Himalayas are *jhulānā*, "causing (the god) to swing" (Sax 2002, p. 175 n. 39); *bhāv ānā*, "to bring on a feeling or experience"; *khelnā*, "to play"; and *āveś*, "to invite entry." *Āveś* discloses the senses of "charge, agitation, intense emotion, frenzy, wrath."³² The verb *nācnā*, "to dance," is also in common use because of the widespread perception that the deity is *dancing* in the body of the devotee (note the title of Sax's 2002 book, *Dancing the Self*). This possession, Sax says, "is brought on in by musicians' esoteric knowledge, magically powerful spells, and especially their drumming, [which] induce possession and provide the highly charged ambience of a performance. Moreover,

³⁰ Cardeña's (1994) clear articulation of dissociation is invaluable here.

³¹ For example, see (Stanley 1977), for the festival at the Khaṇḍobā temple at Jejuri, fifty kilometers southeast of Pune the on the *somavatī amāvāsya* or new moon that falls on a Monday; Hildebeitel 1991 for the Draupadī festival in North Arcot district of Tamilnadu; (Sax 1991) for the pilgrimage to Nandadevi; and much more. See (Smith 2006, chp. 4), for further examples.

³² See (Smith 2006, p. 113) for the richness of the vocabulary of possession in North India.

what I have called “possession” is conventionally understood as dance.³³ Village gods and goddesses, along with the Pāṇḍavas, are said to enjoy ‘dancing’ in the bodies of human beings” (Sax 2002, p. 53).

What I observed in Gaṅgā Devī’s pilgrimage was less the deities dancing, even if outbursts of it were occasionally visible, than divination performed by pilgrims for their own benefit or temple priests and other skilled brahmans communicating with the devatā, often employing easily accessible forms of divination to shed light on a pressing situation for a client. Some of the conventional possession behavior was observable, but not nearly as ubiquitous as is the case when a festival does not require walking long distances in a more or less orderly fashion, or at healing centers such as Balaji. Regardless, however, of the mobility or external physical demands on the participants, the behavior during the pilgrimage resonated with that of the Mahābhārata characters in the Pāṇḍav līlā; most if not all Garhwali public performances are related through the flexible and localized Garhwali Mahābhārata.³⁴ “They become possessed by the character in question and begin to tremble, roll their eyes, and exhibit other conventional signs of possession” (Sax 2002, p. 137).

5. Discussion

We must ask whether and how the experiences of Kusum in her positive or “divine” possession by the Goddess, induced specifically to counter a prior negative disease-producing possession,³⁵ and that of the participants on Gaṅgā Devī’s pilgrimage are similar, or even related. Do they reflect a sufficiently recognizable underlying psychophysical mapping to enable us to infer that a single internal organ was guiding the process? Is there a moment, a threshold, beyond which transcendence occurs during “divine” possession, when the individual and his or her agency emerges into that of a deity (or spirit)? As noted, among the “conventional signs of possession” are unloosening the hair, trembling, rolling the eyes, and spinning counterclockwise. Some of the other symptoms are resonant with what Abhinavagupta and others in Kashmir wrote a thousand years ago in describing samāveśa or “complete immersion in the sense of ontological identity” (Ferrario 2015, p. 11), including a feeling of intoxicating devotion” (ibid.), convulsions (*ghūrṇi*, kampa), and loss of consciousness (nidrā) (Smith 2006, p. 370). At a certain point, this allows the individual to become fully identified with the deity, whether it is Śiva, Bālājī of Mehndipur, or Gaṅgā Devī. It is this point of transition that we must address in drawing conclusions.

With this in mind, it is important to note that there is no common word or term in South Asian regional languages to describe or identify the moment of identity transformation in experiences of possession, or that can be equated with the word *saṃyama* in the *Yogasūtras*. Indeed, in other yoga texts, including those that lie within the *Yogaśāstra* but outside the immediate realm of the *Yogasūtras*,

³³ In June 2018, quite by accident, I attended a village festival at Shri Dhan Singh Devta, Aleru, Tehri Garhwal, south of Chamba, on the road to Rishikesh. It began as a simple chai stop during my taxi ride. I soon heard drums beating up the hill behind the chai shop. I asked man at the chai shop about the commotion. He said simply, *nāc, upar se mandir haiṃ*, “they’re dancing up at the temple.” I quickly finished my chai and climbed the hill behind the chai shop to discover perhaps 150 people, in mid-morning, dancing, many of them, both men and women, exhibiting the characteristic behavior of possession. Dhan Singh was a resident who had died suddenly from cholera, and was transformed into a rathī devatā. The reason is because he was believed to have traveled to the heavenly world in a chariot (ratha). This piqued my interest for a number of reasons. Later, I discovered the videos of a young Garhwali filmmaker who calls himself Ashish Chamoli. in which all of this is explained. It is illuminating to watch the following: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SzrmalbNqM&t=105s> (subtitled in English) Ashish Chamoli’s videography here is a good example of what can now be found scattered across the Youtube universe (and no doubt on social media) that is helpful in gaining access to cultural forms throughout the world. It is just as possible that I would not have seen this than that I did.

³⁴ Presently D. R. Purohit, William Sax, and I are working to bring out an edition and translation of one version of the Garhwali Mahābhārata, the only one for which the recited text has been written down, hailing from the town of Agastmuni, along the Mandakini River north of Rudraprayag.

³⁵ An outsider sensitive to other modes of thought might diagnose the initial possession as depression or anxiety. These concepts, at least as considered by western academics and the biomedical establishment, are not operable in rural India. The local interpretation, then, must be honored in order to abide by the dictum that the informant is always right. The notion of counter-possession is present not only in India but in Christian practice as well. Thiessen writes “Possession by the Spirit is a form of counter-possession in contrast to demon possession. If demons are dissociative phenomena, then positive possession by the Spirit is also a positive dissociative phenomenon” (Thiessen 2014, p. 183).

the word *saṃyama* is not employed in the same decisive and programmatic way that it is found in the third *pāda* of the *Yogasūtras*. Possession is, as I argued earlier, the most highly valued and frequently sought after form of spiritual experience in India.³⁶ Its devaluation by elites within India across the political spectrum that try to define Hinduism to those outside, or even inside, cannot regularize the discourse because its lexical markers differ regionally and often from one venue to another within a small area. This hampers the ability of a comparative project such as this one to achieve a definitiveness that many would seek. It is only possible to say with certainty that the moment of transcendence must remain a mystery no matter how sophisticated an argument or model can be made for lining up and equating related sets of conditions. It's less comparing apples and oranges than it is comparing varieties of apple.

A proper inquiry now is to ask whether that point or fulcrum of transitional experience is the same in positive and negative possession. Further distinctions may be made within the realm of positive possession, including (a) devotionally induced possession (*āveśa*),³⁷ which accounts for a preponderance of possession in Indian spiritual and ritual situations; (b) yogic and ritually induced possession, which is to say when a yogi possess another person's body (*paraśarīrāveśa*, *parakāyapraveśa*)³⁸ or possession as induced in children for divinatory purposes³⁹; and (c) Śaiva initiatory possession (*samāveśa*). Another category that should probably be added here, although it possesses characteristics of (a) and (b), is possession that occurs when a singer induces positive possession in an audience. For example, in Garhwal and Kumaon in the central Himalayas, bards hold nocturnal sessions called *jāgar*, "awakening," in which a locally recognized shaman gains the ability through song and drumming to awaken the deity in others.⁴⁰ Taking all of these forms together, it is possible to say that regardless of the specific point along the scale of experience the fulcrum is balanced in these different forms of positive possession, there is no question that the conditions for each one establish the definition and nature of *laukika* and *alaukika* experience for each, and that within the framework of each experiential mode transcendence is a reality. It is their reality, and we must go with this.

It is inadvisable, in my opinion, to deny the individuals within these collocated groupings their own model of transcendence by imposing etic methodologies and standards. Our priority must be to understand the models we study and to see that each has a balancing point, which we are here labeling the *antaḥkaraṇa*, based on a widely used indigenous model of cosmological analysis and personality structure. It is neither possible nor advisable to search for an absolute point for all these modes at which the *antaḥkaraṇa* allows the individual experience to shift from the *laukika* to the *alaukika*. The very possibility of transcendence means it must be inferred. Each realm of experience contains sufficient descriptive and theoretical force to allow such an inference to become validated within its own realm. Thus, the "awakened heart" that one feels in devotional possession is qualitatively different from the visionary landscapes of initiatory possession or the moment of cessation (*nirodhapariṇāma*, YS 3.9) that allows the yogi to disappear into voyages of discovery after experiencing *saṃyama*. Even states of negative possession, in which dissociation may be wild, erratic, uncontrollable, and destructive, are characterized by a balancing point on which the *antaḥkaraṇa* rests, even if it shifts constantly up and down a dissociative scale.

³⁶ "As an indigenous category in ancient and classical India, possession is not a single, simple, reducible category that describes a single, simple, reducible experience or practice, but is distinguished by extreme multivocality, involving fundamental issues of emotion, aesthetics, language, and personal identity" (Smith 2006, p. 4).

³⁷ This is covered in (Smith 2006, chp. 4), describing ethnographies (pp. 110–72), and chapter 9 on devotion explicitly articulated (pp. 345–62). Keep in mind that nearly all of South Asian religion is devotional, and any intense experience can lead to possession. This is generally acknowledged.

³⁸ See (Smith 2006, pp. 255–65, 286–89, 294–97; White 2004).

³⁹ (Smith 2006, pp. 440–48).

⁴⁰ Such performances are almost always performed by lower caste bards in fairly small rooms with a relatively small audience. See (Alter 2018) for discussion of the music; (Sharma 2006, 2012) for a wealth of local information on *jāgars*; and (Bhatt et al. 2014) for an illuminating depiction of the use of *jāgar* in the Garhwal Himalayas.

6. Conclusions

The *antaḥkaraṇa*, we have decided, is the collective energy of the cognitive and conscious self that rests at the balancing point between its disparate parts and their reorganization into a unified higher functioning unit; it is, in other words, as much a faculty or, to materialize it even further, an organ as it is a theory. As such, the consciousness (*cit*), mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and [according to some, the] ego (*ahaṃkāra*) congeal and radiate more powerfully in a singular concentrated purposefulness. In this way they become a tripartite or quadripartite organ, an internal organ that abides at and as the fulcrum that balances ordinary (*laukika*) experience with the supraordinary (*alaukika*) realm. The components of the *antaḥkaraṇa* for everyone are therefore the same, but they are arrayed and organized differently for everyone, as well as differently for each person or living being constantly, as the components change from one moment or day to the next, just as other internal organs and mental and psychological processes change as they grow, flourish, and wane. Thus, the *antaḥkaraṇa* shifts along a scale of individual identity formation like a chord in a song. The chord cannot be held for too long, its nature is to change until the song is over.

We have examined two modes of transition that demonstrate this. The first is through the practice of yoga and achievement of *saṃyama*, the point that separates the developmental stages of yoga, including *samādhi*, and the higher or *alaukika* realizations, namely the *siddhis*. This, as described in the *Yogasūtras*, can only be practiced by well-schooled and (more likely) initiated practitioners. The list of *siddhis* and the details of the *saṃyama* are unique to this text, and, I suggest, were rarely presented in this systematic a manner in guru–disciple pedagogical exchange. This we can assume from the history of practice, from the division between Yoga as *śāstra* and yoga as a disciplinary practice (Yoga with a capital Y and yoga with a lower case y), which appears to have begun soon after the composition of the *Yogasūtras*, as James Mallinson and others have amply demonstrated.⁴¹

The second mode is through deity or oracular possession, which has been a widespread phenomenon in India for a very long period (Smith 2006). In this practice, which is actually a set of related practices, surely numbering in the hundreds, that were localized throughout India, the devotee learned how to come into such close contact with a deity that his or her own identity was at least partially erased as the deity and its power to assert agency came to the fore. The moment of transition from ordinary body awareness to experiencing the initial symptoms of possession to final emergence of the deity is, I am arguing, comparable with the *yogin* entering into a practice (any practice will do), developing and perfecting his or her powers of concentration, meditation and *samādhi*, which eventually achieve a critical mass, and finally enters a state in which higher powers can be realized. In both cases, I am proposing, the congealed power of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is transformed from habitual directedness towards the *laukika* world to a retrained focus on the *alaukika* world. These *alaukika* realms are envisioned differently in Pātañjala yoga and possession states. The point of transcendence is always found at a junction, balanced as if on a fulcrum. It is an inner, secret, changeable, and highly individual point where light emerges in fullness from shadow or darkness. Furthermore, as this is cultured, its effects redound upon the practitioner's life, enabling him or her to achieve, on one hand, the final result of yoga as stated in the fourth *pāda* of the *Yogasūtras*, namely *dharmameghasamādhi* (YS 4.29), a state beyond *siddhis* when one's *samādhi* emerges as a cloud of right action. It is also, within the scope of positive possession, a realm of continuous experiential empowerment, which envelopes social empowerment, where the deity without becomes available as the deity within.

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⁴¹ See, for example (Mallinson 2011, 2012, 2016), and elsewhere; (White 2014; Vasudeva 2011) and others illustrate the bifurcation of the yoga tradition in which study of the *Yogasūtras* and its commentaries became limited to the paṇḍita or scholarly community while yoga practice was taken up largely by ascetics with their own very different textuality.

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