

DANAM CONFERENCE 2008

SESSION HPSP

Theme: **Hindu and Psychodynamic Self Psychologies: Revisioning Merger, Narcissism, and Psychospiritual Development**

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Psychoanalysis and Hinduism have had a long and ambivalent relationship, with the creative impetus initially passing from Hinduism to psychoanalysis (via Freud's theory of primary narcissism and Jung's ideas on a transpersonal self, to cite two examples) while subsequent interpretive energies have mostly been directed the other way (Freudian readings of the Oedipus complex in Hindu texts, viewing the Hindu Goddess as a representative of the Great Mother archetype, etc.). It has been argued that these latter pathways into Hinduism from psychoanalysis have proved unproductive, at best revealing limited aspects of Hindu culture and at worst distorting Hindu realities. This panel aims to rethink the relationship between Hinduism and psychoanalysis and to go beyond the stale Freudianism that has paralyzed research in this area. Exploring the overlap of interpretive horizons in the shared space between psychoanalysis and Hinduism, we hope to enrich both traditions.

ABSTRACTS

David P. Lawrence, University of North Dakota

The Psychology of the Tantric Self: Religious Metaphysics and the Transformations of Narcissism

My paper builds upon my earlier comparative philosophical interpretations of the Pratyabhijna school of Kashmiri monistic, tantric Saivism to engage that tradition's philosophical psychology with psychoanalytic and related Western conceptions of narcissism. It suggests that the Pratyabhijna illuminates linkages within Western discussions and points towards a religious or 'transpersonal' understanding of narcissism beyond the explanatory scope of the psychoanalytic method.

A central feature of what contemporary scholars call tantra is the pursuit of various immanent and transcendent modalities of power, the theological essence of which is the Goddess, Sakti. In monistic Saivism, Sakti is encompassed metaphysically within the God Siva, the 'possessor of Sakti' (saktiman), who emanates and controls the universe through her. The aspirant pursues identification with the omnipotent Siva through internal and external rituals that reenact the Siva-Sakti narrative. The Pratyabhijna, 'Recognition,' system, created in the 10th-11th centuries by Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, follows the same modus operandi through the medium of philosophical inquiry.

The Pratyabhijna philosophical psychology describes the empowered divine identity recognized by the practitioner as purnahamta, 'perfect I-hood,' associated with integral svatmopabhoga, 'self-enjoyment.' For the Pratyabhijna, ordinary egotistic identity-- described by such terms as ahamta,

'I-hood,' abhimana, 'pride,' and asmita, 'I-am-ness'—is an immanent expression of God's identity. While the Saivas concur with other South Asian and Western traditions that egotism per se is a spiritual and moral flaw, they contend that it must not be surrendered, but rather universalized and transfigured into its essential nature as perfect I-hood.

The Saivas propound various contemplations to accomplish this universalization of Ihood. For example, most suggestive of Western discussions of narcissism are contemplations of the entire universe as a reflection (pratibimba) of one's empowered identity. Other practices extend an individual's 'I-am-ness' to the sun, moon and other cosmic forces, in order to cultivate the sense that the universe is actually one's body. Yet others take a linguistic approach, such as in terms of the semantics and syntax of grammatical persons and agentive nouns. One contemplates all people and things referred to in the second and third persons as absorbed into an omnipotent agent expressed in the first-person.

In the West since ancient times, numerous moralistic and religious critiques have been propounded of the inability of the legendary Narcissus to love others and his destruction in grasping for an insubstantial image of himself. This legacy is continued in psychoanalytic theories of problems of narcissistic individuals in developing object relations, critiques of the contemporary culture of narcissism, and Orientalist allegations of the self-absorbed, amoral character of Asian 'mysticism.'

As Paul Zweig and Julia Kristeva have observed, in a broader metaphysical and anthropological perspective, Western philosophy and theology since the Hellenistic period have frequently ascribed a kind of self-love or 'narcissism' to God. God is often described as creating the world and creatures in his own image, and likewise loving himself in loving creation. The logic of these conceptions, as with the Pratyabhijna divine egoity, derives from the perfection and self-satisfaction of the divine. Western traditions, like the Pratyabhijna (and some non-tantric Hindu traditions), also allow that devotees may come to participate in the divine self-satisfaction. However, this participation is usually accomplished through the ostensible surrender or effacement of egoity—rather than its expansion.

Most orthodox psychoanalytic scholars would probably view the Pratyabhijna realization of perfect I-hood as a pathological regression to primary, infantile narcissism—following Freud's interpretations of the unitive, mystical 'oceanic feeling,' so-called 'primitive' beliefs in magic and omnipotence, and schizophrenic object decathexes. Jacques Lacan, who pioneered psychoanalytic understandings of the narcissistic developmental mirror stage and linguistic/imaginary/symbolic mirroring, would also likely view the Saiva expansion of mirroring to encompass the universe as a pathological exercise in megalomania.

Heinz Kohut's self psychology offers greater possibilities for a rapprochement with the Pratyabhijna, for it affirms narcissism moderated by a sense of finitude as constitutive of a psychotherapeutically viable self, and is more generally sympathetic to religious experience. According to Kohut (whose views were further developed in the Indian context by Sudhir Kakar), one may work through the narcissistic, grandiose mirror and idealizing transferences--into an exceptionally healthy, empathic identification with the universe and all its beings that he calls 'cosmic narcissism.'

The psychoanalytic methodology, however, does not provide Kohut with a metaphysical rationale for the empathic identification with the universe. Likewise, I am unaware of any Saiva or other traditional religious theories with significant analogies to psychoanalytic accounts of narcissism in early psychological development, though I do not think that these traditions need in principle be opposed to such accounts if they are conceived nonreductionistically.

Paul Ricoeur endeavored to mediate Freudian understandings of the unconscious, identification and sublimation, with the hermeneutics of religion, morality and art—in terms of a dialectic

between archaeology and teleology. Along such lines, my paper proposes that the Saiva theory of perfect I-hood articulates an insight that links Western notions of divine self-love with Kohut's theory. Combining the religious metaphysics and the developmental notions, I suggest that the experience of divine self-satisfaction or narcissism is the telos of human narcissism, a telos prefigured in the childhood intuitions of unity discussed by William Parsons and Arthur Deikman. I add that, belying Orientalist characterizations of the amorality of Hindu mysticism, and substantiating Kohut's linkage of cosmic narcissism with empathy, the Saivas affirm strong ethical concerns with helping others, both on the path and after identification with Siva. A constellation of factors led the Pratyabhijna to distinctive insights into the religious significance of egoity. Among such factors is its unusual conception of the Ultimate as both monistic and theistic--describing identity with a unity that has personality or I-hood.

Also important is the tantric theme of using things that ordinarily bind as media for spiritual practice--by which Saivas exploit and sublimate 'grandiose' pursuits of magical powers within the cosmic power of a deindividualized Self. While others will suggest alternative explanations, I believe that engagement with the Saiva philosophical psychology illuminates and calls for further investigation into the rich relationships between religious conceptions of the Ultimate, human identity, and pride or narcissism.

Alfred Collins (independent scholar)

Death and Transfiguration: Integrating Freud's Thanatos and Oceanic Narcissism through Samkhya-Yoga

Indian religious philosophy has often been interpreted in terms of psychoanalytic concepts. Although the origins of psychoanalysis owe much to Indian thought, the hermeneutic use of Indian ideas to revision psychoanalysis has been rare in recent years. This will be the approach of the present paper. Two of the most challenging elements of Freud's mature thought are his final instinct theory (life or eros versus death or thanatos) and his ideas on narcissism as based on a primordial oceanic experience of oneness. In *Civilization and its Discontents* the two ideas come close to, but resist, unification. Viewing thanatos and narcissism through the lens of Samkhya and Yoga will show their intrinsic connection more clearly.

Freud cites Romain Rolland as a source for the oceanic understanding of narcissism, although significantly he disavows having such experiences himself. Freud's concept of 'primary' narcissism is essentially identical to (and was taken indirectly from) the equilibrium state of prakrti that Samkhya (and other Indian traditions) see as preexisting the world. For instance, the metaphor of a great reservoir of psychic energy imagined by Freud recalls the pre-cosmic ocean on which Lord Vishnu lies, and which his avatars dive into and churn in the process of cosmogenesis. The "blissful island of the I" and "purified pleasure ego" that Freud imagined at various times are related visions of the same primordial state.

On the other hand, most of life, as envisioned both by Freud and Samkhya/Yoga, is filled with suffering (unlust and duhkha, respectively). Our goal is always satisfaction that can only be achieved by the wearing out and extinction of the life instincts (eros, prakrti). Samkhya claims that this aim requires cultivation of the insight (jnana, buddhi) that is an intrinsic part of the life instincts themselves. Through insight there arises a nay-saying by the lower self (ahamkara) that allows it to merge into a state of being indistinguishable from the unity and fullness of the pure consciousness called purusa. The overcoming of suffering, therefore, does not require leaving suffering behind but rather a recognition of 'not I' (naham, Samkhya Karika verse 64) at the heart of suffering. Negation of selfish strivings and achievement of primordial self-satisfaction are identical to (or at least indistinguishable from) one another. In Freudian terms, thanatos (the striving for quiescence, also called the nirvana principle by Freud) and primal narcissism can be viewed as two aspects of the same ultimate aim of human existence.

The Samkhyan and Yogic arguments make possible a unification within psychoanalysis only dimly perceived (though clearly yearned for) by Freud of the death instinct and narcissism. The intrinsic nature of insight is the crucial difference between Samkhya and Yoga on the one hand and Freud on the other. For Freud, insight is mostly understood as an emergent ego property and is part of civilization (and its discontents). For Samkhya and Yoga, insight is primordial. And yet both Freud's death instinct (thanatos) and primal narcissism imply insights remembered from earliest life before the rise of the ego and its vicissitudes. Foregrounding the innate orientation of life toward the aim of dissolution into an oceanic state allows psychoanalysis to move beyond its ego/oedipal preoccupations and make room for a spiritual center within the personality.

Samkhya and Yoga make possible a unification within psychoanalysis only dimly perceived by Freud (though clearly he yearned for it) between primal narcissism and the death instinct (thanatos). The intrinsic nature of insight is the crucial difference between Samkhya/Yoga on the one hand and Freud on the other. For Freud, insight is an emergent ego property and is part of civilization (and its discontents). For Samkhya and Yoga, insight is primordial. And yet both Freud's death instinct (thanatos) and primal narcissism imply memory of experiences from earliest life before the ego and its vicissitudes. Foregrounding the innate orientation of life toward the aim of dissolution into an oceanic state of bliss allows psychoanalysis to move beyond its ego/oedipal preoccupations and to become a more adequate psychology of religion.

Thomas B. Ellis, Appalachian State University

Merged in or Separated by Oceans: Object Relations Theory and the Hindu God Image

God image research is a significant field within the larger, contemporary psychological study of religion. Interested in the ways individuals and communities envision their deities, god image research draws its theoretical support primarily from object relations theory and attachment theory. In this regard, questions concerning the individual's relationship to primary others, e.g., parents, siblings, and extended family members, inform the larger task of interpreting the idiosyncrasies of any one particular image. This paper employs object relations theory and attachment theory to interpret two dominant god images in the Hindu religious tradition, that is, the god image associated with the Advaita Vedanta and the god image associated with the devotional traditions of viraha bhakti (love-in-separation) and virodha bhakti (love-manifest-as-enmity). I argue that these two images serve contrasting psychological needs of the participant communities. Attachment theory argues that human infants are ethologically driven to form attachments to primary caregivers. This process was naturally selected over the course of human evolution because it ensures the proximity of the infant to the caregiver, a proximity enabling in turn the protection of the infant from dangerous others, that is, predators – conspecific and otherwise. While attachment theory addresses primarily human ethology, object relations theory addresses the fantasies concerning the relationship between self and other attending such behavioral programs. In other words, while attachment theory clearly articulates the biological bases of human relationships between parents and children (not to mention continuing attachment processes throughout the life cycle), object relations theory addresses the images any one individual sustains in their inner world regarding self-representations and object representations. From an object relations perspective, the god image becomes one such object representation. God images are not purely idiosyncratic. Certain images come to enjoy an audience above and beyond the individual. These god images resonate with the community because they reflect common psychological interests; that is to say, they represent a common cultural psychology. Of course, with a cultural repertoire of deities as diverse as the Hindu Indian, we come to recognize that there must be a variety of psychological needs reflected by such a pantheon. Hindu “theology” explicitly recognizes this in its endorsement of ishtadevata or “chosen deity.” The question that

motivates the present project relates precisely to this issue: Why do some Hindus choose one god image over another?

Throughout the history of psychological studies of Hinduism, one god image has enjoyed pride of place: the god image associated generally with the Advaita Vedanta has been the preeminent object of scholarly analysis. This god image is most associated with the religious experience metaphorically referred to as the “oceanic feeling.” The preeminent American, cross-cultural psychoanalyst Alan Roland boldly claims that without an appreciation of the centrality of the Advaita Vedanta god image in Hindu India we simply fail to understand the psychological make-up of Hindu Indians. It would seem that the dominant psychological constellation in Hindu India is one of privileging monistic mergers or fusions, the god image of the unio mystica. Roland overstates the case. There is no question that the monistic god images are prevalent in Hindu India; all the same, we must take into consideration the god images associated with the devotional traditions. To be precise, we must take into consideration those god images that reflect not a merging with the god but the exact opposite. Viraha bhakti and virodha bhakti engage god images reflective of a withdrawn or non-responsive other. In distinct opposition to the merged identities of the Advaita Vedanta, these bhakti traditions, I argue, serve the opposite need, that is, the need to maintain an individuated sense of self.

One of the core components of object relations theory of religion is the notion that god images serve the lifelong task of separation-individuation. Separation-individuation theory argues that all infants begin life in a non-differentiated symbiosis with the mother. Over the course of development, the individual eventually separates out from this early, blissful state and comes to recognize their identity in opposition to the other. God images serve this process. The sense of a transcendent other (an object representation) enables the sense of an individuated self (a self-representation). Accordingly, one way of interpreting god images concerns the extent to which the image facilitates – or not – the separation-individuation process. In the classical psychological literature on Hinduism, many authors suggest that the Vedantic god image reflects a pathological desire to undo the separation-individuation process. Monistic god images serve a regressive function for the frustrated and individuated self. This need not be the case. According to some recent critical studies, the very imposition of the separation-individuation process on Hindu India is mistaken; Hindu India encourages separation-integration. If this is in fact the case, then the monistic god image reflects a normative psychological development: the individual is encouraged to immerse him- or herself in the extended group and as such the monistic god image reinforces this normative outcome. Allowing for the present the notion that monistic god images are in fact correspondent to the normative developmental pattern, I argue that the bhakti images offer a compensatory alternative. In other words, no one culture is psychologically homogeneous. Despite dominant patterns, there will always be outliers. I propose that those devotional traditions that represent that god as absent, withdrawn, and/or unresponsive reflect the devotee’s psychological need to maintain a distance between the self-representation and the object representation. Certain bhakti traditions serve the psychological needs of some Hindu Indians to individuate in opposition to the putatively dominant cultural pattern of integration. The theologically recognized ishtadevata enables the psychologically healthy option to choose a god image most suited to the psychological idiosyncrasies of the particular practitioner, idiosyncrasies significantly reflective on at least one register of the crucial developmental issues pertaining to both separation-individuation and separation-integration.

God image research is a significant field within the general psychological study of religion. Employing object relations theory and attachment theory, god image research investigates the extent to which god images serve the psychological needs of both the practitioner and the participant community at large. Within object relations theory in particular, the psychological process of separation-individuation has always commanded attention, a process until quite recently considered universal. Contemporary studies suggest, however, that Hindu India

privileges separation-integration. This paper argues that the god images associated with the Advaita Vedanta and the devotional traditions of viraha bhakti (love-in-separation) and virodha bhakti (love-manifest-as-enmity) reflect these contrasting psychological processes. The monistic god image of the Advaita Vedanta corresponds with the normative psychological pattern of separation-integration while the separated god image of the devotional traditions enables a compensatory outlet for those who desire separation-individuation.

Travis Chilcott, University of California, Santa Barbara
Transitional Objects and Gaudiya Vaishnavism

In this paper, I will discuss the movement from a conditioned state to an enlightened state of being in Gaudiya Vaishnava theology and praxis. The phenomenological self makes use of external objects to effect this transformation in a way fundamentally similar to D. W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, which assist the child in moving from a state of dependence on the primary caretaker and love object to one of relative independence in early psychological development. This paper will demonstrate the ways in which Winnicott's theory of transitional objects can elucidate our understanding of how and why certain kinds of religious paraphernalia are used in Gaudiya Vaishnava endeavors for self-perfection. Conversely, the Gaudiya Vaishnava use of such paraphernalia challenges us to expand Winnicott's notion of transitional objects and extend its applicability to the study of religious phenomena.

Transitional objects belong to a broader category that Winnicott refers to as transitional phenomena. Transitional phenomena refer to psychic space, actions, and objects that assist in transitioning an infant from a self-absorbed and solipsistic state of mind to one that recognizes and acknowledge others as independent and separate objects not under the infant's control. A transitional object, as the first "not-me" object, represents the transition from a stage of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate. Common examples of transitional objects include the perennial "security" blanket or teddy bear. Some of the key functions of transitional objects are to symbolize simultaneously union with and separation from the caregiver; to serve as a symbolic substitute for the primary caregiver that allows the infant to keep the internal mental representation of the caregiver alive in their absence; to help defend against anxiety, especially depressive anxiety and separation anxiety; to transition one from a state of emotional dependence on and attachment to the primary caregiver to a state of emotional independence and detachment; to assist the infant in the recognition that a multiplicity of others exist; and to diminish the infant's sense of omnipotent control, allowing recognition and acceptance of the less-than-ideal actual world.

Gaudiya sadhana practices make copious use of transitional objects, which are used to move practitioners from a conditioned state of existence to an enlightened one. Some of the hallmark characteristics of the conditioned state include ignorance of one's true self identity in relation to Krishna; attachment to mundane objects, events, and experiences; and an existence plagued by unhappiness and suffering. In the enlightened state one becomes free of ignorance and rediscovers one's true self-identity. With no attachment to anything not directly related to Krishna in some way, one attains a perpetual state of bliss free from any tinge of mundane suffering.

A variety of objects embodying all sensory qualities—auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory—are enlisted to assist in the transition from the conditioned to the enlightened state. Examples of such transitional objects include, among others, deity images, gurus, temples, geographical locations, and sound vibrations. These are all considered to be "sacred" and are indispensable for the practice and effectiveness of vaidhi-bhaktisadhana, or the "path of regulated devotional practices". Due to their intimate and direct association with and relation to Krishna, they serve to represent Krishna and can be used to cultivate one's relationship with Him. Attachment to these

objects is consciously and vigorously cultivated, particularly in the earlier stages of sadhana practices.

The Gaudiya and the infant's use of transitional objects have similar functions but a different ultimate purpose. Transitional objects in both cases are used to facilitate a move from a state of emotional dependence on and attachment to a particular external object to a state of emotional independence and detachment from the object. In the case of the infant, the external object is the primary caregiver. In the case of the Gaudiya practitioner, the external object in question is any mundane object not directly related with Krishna. For the infant, the purpose of the transitional object is to broaden one's experience of the external world, expand the horizon of external object relations, and fortify one's internal relation with the internal representation/object of the caregiver. For the Gaudiya practitioner, however, the purpose of the transitional object is to narrow one's experience of the external world, decrease the scope of external object relations, and weaken one's internal relations with their representations. However, at the same time Gaudiya transitional objects work to narrow, decrease, and weaken in the above ways, they also serve to fortify one's internal relation with an imagined internal object, viz. Krishna, and expand the network of imagined internal object relations that are related to Krishna. Imagined is the operative word here because Krishna has no real-world, external object counterpart other than transitional objects themselves, eg the deity image (murti). Moreover, unlike Winnicott's transitional object, Gaudiya transitional objects are simultaneously also intended to move the practitioner from a state of independence to one of total dependence, i.e. independence from mundane objects of attachment, but dependence on the deity.

In addition to the above example, there are a number of other significant correlations between the infant's and Gaudiya practitioner's use of transitional objects that can be made as well. For example, correlations can be made in their uses and functions as symbols; in their ability to defend against certain kinds of anxieties; and the relationship of transitional objects with issues of omnipotent control, among others. A closer examination of these correlations, which will be the focus of this paper, challenges us to pry the gem of Winnicott's theory of transitional objects out from its initial application to the understanding of early psychological development and set it into the study of religion for the sake of illuminating our understanding of religious phenomena and the role religious paraphernalia plays in a practitioner's psychological development.

In this paper I will discuss the movement from a conditioned state to an enlightened state of being in Gaudiya Vaishnava theology and praxis. The phenomenological self makes use of external objects to effect this transformation in a way fundamentally similar to D. W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, which assist the child in moving from a state of dependence to the primary caretaker and love object to one of relative independence in early psychological development. This paper will demonstrate the ways in which Winnicott's theory of transitional objects can elucidate our understanding of how and why certain kinds of religious paraphernalia are used in Gaudiya Vaishnava endeavors for self-perfection. Conversely, the Gaudiya Vaishnava use of such paraphernalia challenges to us to expand Winnicott's notion of transitional objects and extend its applicability to the study of religious phenomena.

Elaine Molchanov, North Pacific Institute of Analytical Psychology
Snake symbolism in Jungian psychoanalysis and Kundalini shakti in Siddha Yoga: Comparing the imaginal and transformative levels of a symbol

In Jungian psychoanalysis a symbol is generally understood as a sensory formpossessing imaginal significance of an archetypal nature. In other words, it is a perceptual image that calls to us from a deeper level of the psyche within the unconscious domain. Symbols guide life and give it meaning, but do not usually (though at times they may) intervene in life and transform it

energetically. In contrast, in Siddha Yoga (used here to refer to the teachings and organization founded by Swami Muktananda to carry on the tradition of his teacher Swami Nityananda, and continued by Swami Cidvilasananda) symbolic forms such as the cobra (a form of the psychospiritual energy called Kundalini) and the 'Blue Pearl' (representing consciousness) are more than symbols in the limited and usual Jungian psychoanalytic sense. They do not merely hover on the horizon of ordinary life and guide us. More than a cynosure, the Siddha Yoga symbol is an active force that directly engages with the personality and self-sense of the devotee and brings about change of far-reaching significance, often in a comparatively short period of time. This perspective on symbols provides a corrective to the esthetic and cultural understanding that is prevalent--though not universal--within psychoanalysis today. This paper will narrate the story of how snake symbols developed simultaneously within a Jungian psychoanalysis and as part of a process of Kundalini initiation and sadhana. Devotional and meditational practices on the one hand, and Jungian practices of dreamwork, sandplay, and active imagination on the other took place within the same period of years and interpenetrated one another. Sandplay and dreams, begun as part of analysis, became entrained to the awakening and transformation of Kundalini energies that took place in the relationship with the guru. Jungian practice, and the symbols it evoked and made use of (especially the snake), became intensified and merged with the movement of psychospiritual energy (shakti).

In order to show this process graphically, the presentation will center on a series of dreams and sandplay images begun by the presenter as part of her personal Jungian analysis but that engaged and manifested Kundalini development. By following this spiritual-cum-psychological narrative it is possible to understand better how symbols work in the personality, and to go beyond the limited understanding of symbols common in Jungian psychoanalysis, especially as the Jungian movement has been 'tamed' and brought within the fold of Western mental health practice. While the psychological significance of the serpent as a symbol of transformation and deep psychic reality has been important to me, and I have experienced many snake dreams and images that did not obviously connect with the Kundalini process, the center of my 'snake work' has been the transformation of Kundalini. How the psychological and the psychospiritual/energetic sides of the process interacted, sometimes seemingly in conflict and at other times engaged in creative dialog, will be the subject of my paper. The process has had professional as well as personal significance, and has influenced how I understand and practice Jungian psychoanalysis.

In Jungian psychoanalysis a symbol is generally understood as a sensory form possessing imaginal significance of an archetypal nature. It is a perceptual image that refers to deeper levels of the psyche. Symbols guide life and give it meaning, but do not usually intervene decisively in life and transform it energetically. On the contrary, in Siddha Yoga (used here to refer to the teachings of Swami Muktananda) symbolic forms such as the cobra and the 'Blue Pearl' are more than symbols. They do not merely hover on the horizon of ordinary life and guide us but are forces that directly engage the personality and self-sense of the devotee and bring about changes of far-reaching significance, often in a comparatively short period of time. This paper will describe the development of snake symbols within a Jungian psychoanalysis and simultaneously as part of a process of Kundalini initiation and sadhana.