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Suggesting *Śāntarasa* in Shanti Mandir's *Satsaṅga*: Ritual, Performativity and Ethnography in Yogaland

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Suggesting *Śāntarasa* in Shanti Mandir's *Satsaṅga*: Ritual, Performativity and Ethnography in Yogaland

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ABSTRACT

S*atsaṅga* is a public domain where ideas related to transcendence and culturally-contingent "Truth" are suggested. This paper combines a longitudinal study of Shanti Mandir's (www.shantimandir.com) *satsaṅga,* with close reading of local and non-local literary theories related to the performativity of *satsaṅga* and the doctrine of appreciating tranquillity (*śāntarasavāda*). This leads to the possibility of framing *satsaṅga* as a *rasavat-kāvya* (charming-literature) literary artefact; which we can regard as a type of hybrid *campū-rasavat kāvya*. Finally, from an interdisciplinary perspective, I provide a novel epistemological bricolage to understand the soteriological and sociological aims of *satsaṅga* from within the Temple of Peace (Shanti Mandir) organisation, and propose an analytical framework about how *satsaṅga* operates as a formal learning domain; where *sādhaka*-s (aspirants) attempt to gain access to a yoga-inspired disposition related to becoming (*praśama*), embodying and experiencing *śānti* (tranquillity), which occurs

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through learning to become *śāntamūrti*-s (embodiers of tranquillity) by appreciating *śāntarasa* (the aesthetic mood of tranquillity).

KEY WORDS: *śāntarasa*, *satsaṅga*, *campūkāvya*, Shanti Mandir, literature, epistemology, global yoga, ethnography

This paper explores the educational domain and pedagogical system of *satsaṅga* (literally *sat*-truth + *saṅga*-assembly), from both a historical sociological and ethnographic perspective, in relation to its location within the global context of Yogaland (an emic term for the global yoga industry).

A hallmark aspiration within global yoga today relates to the desire to reduce anxiety and stress. While yoga's global popularity resides in its ability to facilitate a sense of re-enchantment in a hyper-regulated world, it is predicated by a general rhetorical strategy that suggests the goal (*sādhya*)[1] of the seeker (*sādhaka*) of spiritual wisdom is to gain a direct experience (*vijñāna*) of "divinity," and become established (*siddha*) in the natural state of one's self (*samyagjñānaprakṛtiḥ*), which Rudraṭa explains is *śānta* (pacified)[2], and possibly includes attaining *mokṣa* (liberation) while living[3].

Suggestions regarding how to obtain this potentially emancipatory knowledge often occur during *satsaṅga*, which is a widely popular domain for collective, participatory, religious experiences within contemporary Hinduism. Increasingly, at least for some soteriologically-focused yoga communities, it has become the formal domain for learning how to attain the fruits of listening (*phala-śruti*) to the guru, which culminate in the reportedly sublime experience of *śānti* (quietude). This involves listening to didactic stories that cultivate disenchantment (*vairāgya-kathā*) and promote disillusionment (*nirveda*) toward the mundane world, which will apparently lead to an unmediated experience of the underlying emotion (*sthāyibhāva*) of *śānta*.

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[1] This is a common term that is even the name of a yoga apparel. [Online] 8th March 2017 http://www.byronyogaclothing.com/sadhya-pants/.

[2] See Kāvyālaṅkāra 15.15.

[3] Liberation, as per Abhinavagupta, is gaining awareness of one's nature. Abhinava Tantra (1.156a) *mokṣo hi nāma naivānyaḥ svarūpaprathanaṃ hi tat*. For both Abhinavagupta (10th century CE) and Rūpa Gosvāmīn (16th century CE), *rasa* is central to understanding religious experience (WULLF 1986:374).

The guru-disciple tradition aims to cultivate a profound inner transformation in the disciple through a distinctive integration of aesthetics and analysis within *satsaṅga*. This is employed for the overall purpose of reinforcing affective qualities of disenchantment and yearning, so that discrimination develops, and the sources of suffering can be identified. Through repeated attendance at *satsaṅga*, the individual may learn how to emulate a culturally specific disposition, and gain legitimacy as a knower within an in-group/epistemic community (group of learners). This article proposes an interesting analytical framework about how *satsaṅga* operates as a formal learning domain; where *sādhaka*-s attempt to gain access to a yoga-inspired disposition related to becoming (*praśama*), embodying and experiencing *śānti*.

Satsaṅga is situated as an educational domain where culturally specific knowledge about how to embody *śānti* and become a *śāntamūrti* (one whose body is calmed) are suggested. This occurs through a combination of the charming rhetorical style of the guru's didactic exposition (*pravacana*) with the other performative elements (*viśiṣṭa-samāgrī*), which are inherent in this ritualised domain.

Inspired by Pollock's ideas related to the historicity of the South Asian literary and performative traditions (2003: 43), Marriot's (1989) ethno-sociological model that uses local concepts and theories, the ethno-philological method of Pinkney (2013), and the "rasa-consciousness" meta-narrative lens of Sundaram (2014)[4], I endeavour to explore the performativity of *satsaṅga* using an applied, emic, aesthetic methodology.

As an entry point to a broader discussion about the form of education and the role of apperception in *satsaṅga*, the Indian literary and performative tradition's theory of aesthetics (*rasālaṁkāraśāstra*) proves useful. It describes the universalising principle of *sādhāranīkāraṇa* (making commonly shared). *Sādhāraṇīkāraṇa* can be understood as the communal experience of euphoria that is generated by group participation, which leads to the reaffirmation of shared identity and moral unity, or *sāttvika-bhāva* (virtuous internal-emotion). This is said to occur through a process of deindividuation and involvement in a

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[4]   Sundaram (2014:ii) posits "the concept of '*rasa*-consciousness' as the audience's metanarrative lens that transforms emotive cues and signposts in the dramatic work into sentiment through a process of aesthetic 'remembering.' This lens is constituted through a complex interaction between culture, empire, and modernity that governs the spectator's memorializing process."

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communitas, which occurs through identifying with the group mentality, and which ultimately leads to the feeling of collective effervescence (LAW 2011).

This theoretical discussion is built upon a grounded methodological approach, which is combined with a fifteen-year longitudinal study of the learning process specifically within *satsaṅga*, as experienced at the Shanti Mandir (Temple of Peace) ashram in Gujarat, India (www.shantimandir.com). The founder of Shanti Mandir, Svāmī Nityānanda Sarasvatī (1967-) explains that: "satsaṅg [sic][5] means the company of truth. We come together and chant and meditate. We allow the mind to become still so that we can understand our true nature, so we can experience the divinity of our true Self" (SHANTI MANDIR 2011c:1).

However, there is more to just chanting and meditating in *satsaṅga*, which is the formal learning domain where ideas and expressions of Shanti Mandir's ideal yogic lifestyle, disposition and identity are discussed, celebrated and embodied. This is because *satsaṅga* is a performative arena within which certain emotions (*bhāva*-s) and aesthetic moods (*rasa*-s) are consciously cultivated. *Satsaṅga* and *kāvya* (literature) share the similar aim of evoking in an audience[6] the "universal, impersonal and non-empirical aesthetic experience" of *rasa* (ROSSELLA 2004:16). Storytelling plays a prominent role in the didactic methods of gurus in *satsaṅga*[7]. This is one reason why we can look more expansively at what we consider literature to be. It is also why I assert that *satsaṅga* is a part of the

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[5]   Shanti Mandir prefers the Hindi nomenclature, which elides the inherent vowel in word-final, Sanskrit consonants.

[6]   Implying an early development in the field of audience reception, Ānandavardhana's principal successors, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta, took the focus of this theory from a textual locus towards the audience's response (POLLOCK 2003:44).

[7]   In the guru-centred mystical tradition, *satsaṅga* represents both continuity of tradition and change, which represents an ideal that can refer to more than just scriptural references, texts and teachings, while including "oral and written selections specially infused with the guru's intentionality and, more particularly, their own words, teachings, and interpretations" (SIDDHA YOGA 2015). The *Bhagavata Purāṇa* emphasises two essential practices of *bhaktimārga* (path of devotion). These are inherent to the practice and aims of *satsaṅga*: 1) hearing and speaking about god; and, 2) cultivating knowledge for advancing on the path towards liberation. The *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (7.5.23) suggests there are nine limbs of *bhakti* – hearing about Viṣṇu, repeating his names and activities, remembering him, serving his feet, becoming his friend, and offering one's very self. See, also *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (3.25) *satāṁ prasaṅgān mama vīrya-saṁvido bhavanti hṛt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ taj-joṣaṇād āśvapavarga-vartmani śraddhā ratir bhaktir anukramiṣyati.*

broader *kāvya* tradition, and that it is a specific type of *miśra* (mixed) literature, which we can categorise as *campūkāvya*.

Shanti Mandir is introduced in the Section 1. Section 2 explicates two underlying concepts: epistemological access and *śāntamūrti*. The third section presents the argument regarding how to identify *satsaṅga* as a literary artefact embedded within a performative tradition. This is followed with a discussion in Section 4 related to the performativity of *satsaṅga* in relation to epistemological access. In the concluding discussion, the key features from the preceding sections are integrated into a holistic, interdisciplinary bricolage, where this novel way to understand *satsaṅga* is reasserted.

Shanti Mandir and *Satsaṅga*

In 1987, Svāmi Nityānanda Sarasvatī of the Mahānirvāṇī Akhaṛa and Śṛṅgeri Śaṅkarācārya lineage established Shanti Mandir (SHANTI MANDIR 2016). It is aligned with an older[8], syncretic tradition (SABHARATHNAM et al. 1997); however, the organisation is a direct result of the contentious succession that resulted in the mid-80s schism in the Siddha Yoga empire, which was created by the charismatic Baba Muktānanda (1908-1982) (HEALY 2010; JAIN 2013). Jain explains how Muktānanda is described as an "entrepreneurial godman" who broke into the competitive spiritual market and cemented his position in the 1970s by prescribing solutions for the perceived ills of modernity. The monolithic identity he constructed for his organisation offers a sense of re-enchantment and re-mystification of the world (BOGDAN 2010; STUCKRAD 2010). His celebrated status is a source of inspiration for thousands of devotees across the world. Figure 1 shows how this lineage is represented on Shanti Mandir's website.

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[8]   The Vedāntic tradition is often misrepresented as a static monolith. Various debates within the Vedāntic schools, particularly in the late colonial period, have influenced the position Vedānta has today in the construction of Hindu, Indian and yogic identities. Combined with a totality of positive attitudes (*āstikya-buddhi*), as Śaṅkara called it, and committing to the practices that may provide a 'vision of god' (*brahma-sākṣātkāra*), Shanti Mandir's assertion is that, it is through regular attendance at *satsaṅga*, combined with certain fundamental practices of Advaita Vedānta, that this goal of clarifying the mind and purifying the heart is achieved through: 1) hearing the teachings (*śravaṇa*); 2) thinking about the teachings (*manana*); and 3) meditating upon the teachings (*dhyāna, nididhyāsana*) (See BSŚBh 3.4.26).

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Figure 1: *About Shanti Mandir. Source: SHANTI MANDIR 2016*

As a relatively young organisation, Shanti Mandir operates within the shadow of his spiritual legacy. It does this as "a worldwide community of people" which maintains the "spiritual work of Baba Muktānanda," which is known as his "Meditation Revolution" (SHANTI MANDIR 2017a)[9]. Shanti Mandir is affiliated with the Śṛṅgeri Daśanāmi Maṭha, and identifies with the non-sectarian Smarta tradition. The Smarta sect restricts access to the initiated "twice-born" upper castes; however, the Siddha tradition of Muktānanda's heritage is supposedly free of such restrictions, as it aims to move beyond the limitations of orthodoxy. This demonstrates an underlying tension between more conservative traditional values and the liberal values that Muktānanda promoted, and how Shanti Mandir's religious praxis involves a high degree of orthodox (Vedic) ritual practices. This

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[9]   The following video shows Shanti Mandir celebrating the arrival of Muktānanda's *mūrti* (statue) at the ashram. Available at:
https://www.facebook.com/ShantiMandirWalden/videos/970642732968192/ (accessed 09 February 2017).

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yoga lineage is promoted within the neo-Hindu context of *sanātana dharma*[10], which Shanti Mandir translates as "universal law" (SHANTI MANDIR 2015b:1).

This Siddha lineage is an expression of Kashmir Shaivism (MUKTANANDA 1979). A prominent figure of this medieval movement was the tenth-century theologian-poet, Abhinavagupta. His *rasa*-oriented philosophy is invoked every time Shanti Mandir facilitates one of their workshops, which provide, "an understanding and experience of the sublime philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, a non-dual philosophical tradition" (SHANTI MANDIR 2017b).

Pollock (2016:210) demonstrates that the new theoretical position developed by Abhinavagupta infers that *rasa*'s location is in the spectator (*sāmājika*), which is a simple, blissful, self-awareness. This is explained by Abhinavagupta in his commentary (Locana 2.4 of the Dhvanyāloka), that the production of *rasa* (*rasotpatiśca*) occurs in oneself (*svātmani*).

Both Siddha Yoga and Shanti Mandir utilise a similar discourse to that of Muktānanda. They offer potential solutions to disaffected individuals seeking to replace the hyper-regulated world with a transcendent subjective idealism, which locates the source of bliss as within oneself. This is seen in one of Muktānanda's essential teachings, which is, "Honor yourself, worship yourself, meditate on yourself, God dwells within you, as you" (SIDDHA YOGA 2017; SHANTI MANDIR 2014a).

Shanti Mandir's ashram is known by the community as "Magod"[11]. This is because it is located adjacent to the village of Magod, which is a three-hour journey by car north of

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[10] *Sanātana-dharma* is a reductively problematic term that was popularised by late-colonial Neo-Hinduistic reform movements, which placed a strong-emphasis on Vedic and Vedantic heritage as the normative expression of Hinduism, and by extension the modern Indian state (PIRBHAI 2008; NICHOLSON 2010). The positivist, realist and empiricist philosophies of early 19th-century Europe were at odds with the idealist propensities of Advaita Vedānta that asserted that everything apart from Brahman is not real (*mithyā*). Classical Advaita Vedānta was "weaponised" and reformulated to deal with the epistemological assault coming from the predominant Bradleyan version of Hegelian Idealism (CONTRIBUTORS 2015). Paul Hacker is said to have borrowed the term "Neo-Hinduism" from the Jesuit scholar, Robert Antoine (1914-1981), who in turn may have adopted it from Brajendranath Seal (1864-1938) (HACKER – HALBFASS 1995:9).

[11] I spent over one year during 2012-13 in this ashram conducting ethnographic fieldwork. This builds upon three-months of master's fieldwork in the same ashram, and over fifteen years of casual association with the organisation.

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Mumbai, on the west coast of India. Since the donation of a 20-acre mango orchard in the late 1990s, the property, which is ten kilometres south of the coastal town of Valsad, in southern Gujarat, has grown to become a picturesque, intentional community that has several buildings nestled amongst the century-old trees. Shanti Mandir's website describes it as a "beautiful and serene natural setting," and provides a glimpse of what it refers to as a "Vedic way of life". This includes, "Guiding seekers to the direct experience of divinity through Sanskrit chanting, silent meditation, study of sacred texts, the offering of service, and participation in sacred rituals" (SHANTI MANDIR 2016). These activities occur daily within *satsaṅga*, which Nityānanda views as a domain "to share uplifting thoughts, to share uplifting things" (SHANTI MANDIR 2015a). Nityānanda explains the use of *satsaṅga* is as a vehicle for experiencing *ānanda* (bliss)[12]:

Baba Muktānanda would say, "God dwells within you as you." Words alone cannot adequately describe, explain, or take us to that deep place. We have to allow ourselves to be taken there. We have to become immersed within, where ānanda, bliss, continually arises, rather than remain in the shallow realms of mind and emotion (SHANTI MANDIR 2011c:1).

Nityānanda equates liberation (*mokṣa*) with resting in a state of equanimity. He refers to Uddālaka's thoughts that to obtain liberation requires the cessation of mental agitations caused by desire and cravings (SHANTI MANDIR 2010a:3), and reminds his followers that "we have come to satsaṅg thinking about living blissfully. How do I live blissfully? How do I

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[12] As a verbal noun, the *ā* prefixing *nanda* implies a locus where it is possible to find bliss. *Ānanda* is not considered to be just a free-floating unfocused bliss, category or a state of transcendent beatitude. Instead it has an implied object that has the individual on the path of knowledge (who attends *satsaṅga*) as its locus (see OLIVELLE 1997:174; VAN BUITENEN 1979:327). Abhinavagupta describes in Locana 2.4 that, the enjoyment of *rasa* is the bliss that comes from reposing in the true nature of one's self, which is different from memory or direct experience (INGALLS – MASSON – PATWARDHAN 1990:222). Based on the Brahmasūtra, *ānanda* is synonymous with Brahman, which denotes feelings of intense joy (OLIVELLE 1997). *Brahmasūtra* (1.1.7-12) asserts that the state of being (*iyatvā*) related to the blissful state (*ānandamaya*) of Brahman derives from the (*tat*) injunction of the teacher (*vacanāt*), belief in the (*niṣṭha*) teaching on liberation (*mokṣopadeśāt*), the habit of being taught (*śrutatvāt*), which facilitates a state of equanimity (*gatisāmānyatvāt*), and comes from self-reflection (*svāpyayāt*). In the *Nyāyadarśanabhāṣya* (1.1.22), Vātsyāyana gives a lengthy discussion on the question of whether liberation (*mokṣa*) is a blissful state or not. He defines *apavarga* as a condition involving attainment of bliss and calls it "Brahman," linking his concept to that located in the Upaniṣads.

live in bliss most of the time, or all of the time?" (SHANTI MANDIR 2011b: 4). Nityānanda continues:

If we think about it, often the important ingredient missing in our lives is love. We say, "Listen to the Truth within, know the Truth within, the Truth dwells within you." Yet often the first thing we do as humans is cut ourselves off from this inner connection. Then we come to satsaṅg, to the temple, to the ashram to find out how we can reconnect ourselves (SHANTI MANDIR 2011d:4).

In a seminal text on yoga, which Nityānanda occasionally refers to in *satsaṅga*, the sage Vāsiṣṭha explains to Rāma that, the knowledge available in *satsaṅga,* is the best path for obtaining the supreme reward, which is liberation (SHANTI MANDIR 2010a:1)[13]. This highest goal, according to the devotional aesthetic tradition exemplified by another central text in Shanti Mandir's scriptural canon, the Bhagavata Purāṇa (1.10.11), explains that, "from a desire to continue hearing the glory of god and an inability to stop enjoying the company of good people (*satsaṅgāt*), the wise person gains release from bad inclinations." The *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (1.01.003) also refers to itself as the *rasa-śāstra* (treatise on emotion), explaining that it is written for aesthetes and people with taste.

The Bhagavad Gītā is another text central to Shanti Mandir's corpus of devotional literature. Verse 6.15 describes the disposition of a yogin as *śānta* (calmed)[14]. The text is recited in its entirety every Sunday morning in *satsaṅga* at Shanti Mandir's ashram in Gujarat, India. This recitation takes approximately three hours to complete. The entire Sunday *satsaṅga* lasts for several hours, from early morning until mid-afternoon, with only a short pause for breakfast. The rest of *satsaṅga* is filled with the activities mentioned above, but, most importantly, it includes the physical presence of Nityānanda, who leads the chanting, ceremonies, meditations, and gives several lectures. While there is a solemn tone, it is also quite often a place of laughter and delight. In the temple, the audience is comprised of women and men, who sit separately, respectively sitting on the left and right sides. In front of the audience, several statues and pictures of various deities are positioned facing them. The main *mūrti* (statue) is that of Muktānanda's guru, Bhagavān

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[13]   Yoga Vāśiṣṭha (2.16.19) *saṁtoṣaḥ paramo lābhaḥ satsaṁgaḥ paramā gatiḥ*.

[14]   Bhagavad Gītā (6.15) *yuñjann evaṁ sadātmānaṁ yogī niyata-mānasaḥ. **śāntim** nirvāṇa-paramām mat-saṁsthām adhigacchati*.

Nityānanda (1897-1961). While the seating arrangements sometimes change depending on the ritual calendar, usually Nityānanda sits next to (stage left) the *mūrti* of Bhagavān Nityānanda, which is positioned in front of Muktānanda's picture[15].

Epistemological Access to Divinity and the Śāntamūrti

Individuals who attend *satsaṅga* form an epistemic community, or group of knowers. This leads us to wonder what types of knowledge are created and justified, considered relevant, and how one might gain epistemological access to this knowledge. Epistemological access refers to being accepted and inducted as an insider through learning the "ways of being." It determines entry and ascension into various fields of learning (ARBEE 2012:20), and is found in any social domain of learning where there are domain-specific ways (i.e. often implicit rules) of being inducted into a disposition, way of knowing, or "way of life."

The formal criterion mentioned above is related to the teacher's aim, which is to facilitate epistemological access to knowledge (MORROW 2007; LOTZ-SISTIKA 2009). The inherent performativity within this ritualised arena enables this epistemic community to gain epistemological access to Shanti Mandir's specific, context dependent, cultural knowledge.

The "spiritual" education offered at Shanti Mandir operates through an axiological enquiry, which focuses on suggesting ways to compare and determine what is perceived as valuable, or necessary, for the *sādhaka*'s development. This relies upon the cultivation of sentimentality instead of rationality. This is essential for cultivating the disposition deemed necessary to imbibe this knowledge. Therefore, it is interesting to explore how the individual gains (epistemological) access to this knowledge.

To limit any offence to an emic perspective caused by an etic assumption suggesting *satsaṅga* is merely a "performance" for "entertainment's sake," this discussion focuses, instead, on the "performativity" of *satsaṅga*. Performativity deploys consciously

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[15]   This video shows ritual worship of Nityānanda and the spatial relations of the temple. [Online] 9th February 2017. https://www.facebook.com/ShantiMandirWalden/videos/1085892578109873/.

formulated strategies implying creative resourcefulness, which "makes ritual and/or performance interesting to watch" (STEINER 2007:91). Lutgendorf (1991:33-34) explains two productive criteria for analysis. They are related to the ways in which the (1) formal assumption of responsibility is taken by the performers to the enhance the (2) affective experience of the audience. Also, Ferrara (2017) provides an interesting overview of the development of ideas related to performance, performativity, ritual, and theatricality, in which it is argued that the categorical differences between ritual and theatre are ultimately arbitrary. However, even thought the Vedic ritualised acts seal a social contract, encode eternality and morality, and evoke a tangible experience of the numinous; they also have a high degree of theatricality, which is a display of power, and performativity, which is an expression of the achievement of that social power. These are important points to remember in relation to the symbolic accumulation of power and authority generated within the social domain of *satsaṅga.*

In India, the fields of religion, art, and performance interpenetrate because they share "the basic world-view in general and the specific goal of *mokṣa* (liberation) in particular" (VATSYAYAN 1996:160). The links between religion, literature and performance occurred in the medieval period. This is when the "new mentality" focused on the conscious production (*bhāvanā*) of emotions, which became the model for a new kind of religious experience (POLLOCK 2001:198; SATHAYE 2010:362). While the complexities of Indian aesthetics are limited by the imposition of etic categories like "philosophy" and "religion," it is possible to study the religions of India through the performative arts, which we can also consider *satsaṅga* to be a part of (cf. SCHWARTZ 2008; SCHULTZ 2013). *Satsaṅga* includes a mode of language use that is an inherent part of the North Indian tradition of "performing". It involves the perceived benefits of collective recitation and listening that have grown out of a religious milieu, which has the dynamic and emergent transmission of religious "Truth" as its aim (LUTGENDORF 1991:38).

Satsaṅga and *kāvya* consist of similar elements that aim to evoke an aesthetic experience, which can include conveying religious messages, retelling ancient myths, and providing practical philosophical tools (cf. BOCCALI 2000:387). It is also a site for reconfirming social boundaries and identities between in and out groups[16], which is often couched as a

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[16]   The same occurs within the institutionalised domain of *satsaṅga*. As a professional "god-man," Nityānanda uses *satsaṅga* to define the necessary qualifications and dispositions required for

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"mystical" domain where culturally contingent ideas of "Truth" are offered, which are offered to counter a Weberian sense of disenchantment[17], provide moral certitude, and utopian visions for a "better world". In its holistic form, *satsaṅga* is central to the utopian project. This is because it focuses on the education of desire. It creates a space in which the audience is invited, through suggestions, "to consider and feel what it would be like not just to live differently, but to want differently. As a result, the taken-for-granted nature of the present is disrupted" (LEVITAS 2010:542).

Dated between the third and fourth centuries CE, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is a significant Śaiva text (FLOOD 2003:86). It demonstrates the causes of suffering and how to avoid them. Inspired by this text, the principal aim of Shanti Mandir is to reduce suffering and increase peace or contentment. This is evidenced by their prominent use of the common, benedictive *maṅgala-mantra*: *lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*, which means "may all beings be content." However, this does not equate to a logical comprehension of content. This is due to Shanti Mandir's pedagogical system, which emphasises an experiential, devotional aestheticism that concludes with the production of thoughtless affects. Think back to Nityānanda's focus on taking his congregants deeper than the "shallow realms of mind and emotion" mentioned above.

The Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra is another central text in Shanti Mandir's "community of texts." Verse 15 asserts that perception of one's own internal state as bliss (*antaḥ svānubhavānanda*) occurs when one's field of awareness (*gocara*) is free (*unmukta*) of thought patterns (*vikalpa*). This is made clear from Nityānanda's explanation that the aim of his yoga system is to cultivate peace, and bypass the mental chatter:

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legitimate participation within his community; while finding a like-minded community that is accepting is fundamental to relieving one's anxiety and doubt (STARK – FINKE 2000:164).

[17] Before Brahman-insight (*brahma-vid*) is realised, the removal of *avidyā* (ignorance) is required. It is the role of the guru or *adhyāpaka* (teacher) to cultivate two affective qualities of disenchantment and yearning, alongside discrimination. Through the integration of aesthetics and analysis, the mind is challenged to imagine, logically comprehend, and experience the nature of Brahman, which is explained as supreme bliss (*paramānanda*) and is associated with the "tasting of brahman or ultimate bliss" (*brahmāsvāda*) (SATHAYE 2010:362; GEROW 1977:267-8). The opening verse of the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇam* asserts that the six-chakra-system (*ṣaṭcakrādikrama*) is regarded (*ucyate*) as the primary step (*prathamāṅkura*), whose accomplishment (*nirvāha*) is *paramānanda* (VIDYĀRATNA 1913:2). The six-chakra-system is a central metaphysical component of Shanti Mandir's ontology.

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[W]e have to become clear: I am not tortured by anyone. My own mind tortures me. I don't suffer because of anyone else. My mind is the cause of my suffering. When are you content? When are you at peace? When your mind is at peace (SHANTI MANDIR 2012:5).

A variant form of *satsaṅga* is Shanti Mandir's "Meditation Intensive," which consists of: *mantra* meditation, guided meditation, questions and answers with Gurudev Nityananda, and quiet contemplation. Figure 2 is example of a recent meditation intensive. Shanti Mandir continue this format of Muktānanda, who says that "the goal of Meditation Intensives is to bring peace to the mind and nourish love for the Inner Self" (SHANTI MANDIR 2017c).
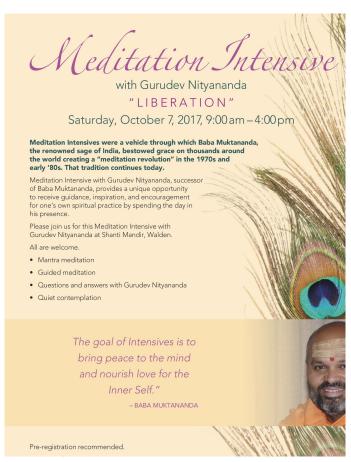

Figure 2: *Meditation Intensive Flyer. Source: SHANTI MANDIR 2017e*

Even though the *satsaṅga* audience does listen and think about what the guru says, or what the overall message of each *satsaṅga* might be, I agree with Bailey (1995), who explains that this type of edutainment is:

[P]rofoundly disintellectual. As modelled, the performance is not, even when it purports to be, an invitation to be rational, to doubt, to ask questions even-handedly. It is an enticement directly to feeling, to unquestioning belief; an implantation of values and in that respect a form of "diseducation" it is designed to make people not think, not question, not calculate, only to feel and ultimately to act on the 'truth' that is presented to them is that (BAILEY 1996:5).

The potentially revelatory knowledge of the *yoga-sāṃkhya-krama* (*yoga-sāṃkya* system) at the centre of Shanti Mandir's episteme aims to produce feelings of indifference and eventual abstinence toward the sensual enjoyment and the world (*anuttamāmbhasika*). As Lindholm (2002:9) explains, this occurs through glimpses from transitory emotions, intuitions, and subjective mystical insights, which take precedence as legitimate forms of knowledge. Through *satsaṅga*, the subjectivity of the seeker is reoriented as the goal for attaining an "authentic" inner connection with an individual's deeper self, which is considered by this community to be the source of ultimate "Truth," i.e. *vijñāna*, or direct, unmediated experience. Shanti Mandir suggests this is found at their meditation workshops that focus on explicating and discussing various centering techniques located within the Kashmir Shaivite text, like the Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra (SHANTI MANDIR 2017b).

The affective and cognitive impacts available in *satsaṅga* highlight the nature of the blindness (*acakṣuṣṭva*) and ignorance (*avidyā*) that inspire Nityānanda to discuss ways to avoid misperceiving Brahman and experiencing pain and suffering. Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita Vedānta epistemology plays a central role in Shanti Mandir's approach. Verse 558 of the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi explains that the giving up of many things does not lead to liberation; rather, it is through identifying *avidyā*, and working on cutting the knots of the heart (*hṛdayagranthimokṣaḥ*), that liberation occurs. Verse 255 refers to the *gocara* as only knowable through the "eye of pure knowledge" (*vimalabodhacakṣuṣā*) (ŚAṄKARA 2017).

These types of legitimising assertions are woven into the guru's didactic discourses. In the process, the construction of a collective identity occurs through shared practices,

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experiences, epistemological training, and moral edification. This achieves an affective sense of trust, which helps to suspend disbelief and removing doubt. The possibilities of an alternate, utopian society can be realised through the subjunctive mood and suggestions of the guru's message, which reside in the implied meaning made explicit through his discourse and behaviour (GRENOBLE – RICE – RICHARDS 2009; ROSSELLA 2004:16).

In terms of narrative analysis, sometimes, what is most revealing is what cannot be said. Instead, it registers as an implication (JAMESON 2005:xiii). The aim of the guru's ritualised performance, and role as a master of ceremonies, is to point, guide, direct, and suggest, symbolically, how his audience can become established (*siddha*) in a potentially permanent state that is free of the overpowering attachment to suffering.

The Pātañjalayogasūtra 3.10 claims that the flow (*vahitā*) of spiritual peace (*praśānta*) derives from impressions (*samskārāt*). According to Shanti Mandir, the required impressions are found in *satsaṅga*. Therefore, to become a Shanti Mandir "knower" requires gaining an aesthetic experience of *śānti*. This means one must learn culturally contingent ideas related to *śānti* through a repeated, bodily regime of attending *satsaṅga*, which is overseen by a type of guru governmentality within the asymmetry of the guru-devotee relationship (COPEMAN – IKEGAME 2012).

While Nityānanda does indeed discuss the qualities of *śānti,* in relation to being a *yogin*, he does not explicitly use the adjectival compound *śāntamūrti*. I adopt this local literary concept to describe the "ideal" disposition he indirectly describes with terms like: "yogi," "knower," "gurus," "saints," or "siddhas." However, it is attested in Shanti Mandir's literary canon, which is central to their religious practice. Namely, the Lalitā Sahasranāma Stotram[18]. Shanti Mandir recites this text during the two, larger celebrations of *śarada* (autumn) and *vasanta* (spring) Navarātrī[19]. From this, we can see that Shanti Mandir aims to enculturate individuals into becoming *śāntamūrti*-s.

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[18]   Lalitā Sahasranāma Stotram (2) – *śrī vidyāṃ śāntamūrtiṃ sakala surasutāṃ sarvasampat-pradātrīm / sakuṅkuma vilepanā maḷikacumbi kastūrikāṃ. samanda hasitekṣaṇāṃ.*

[19]   See Shanti Mandir (2017d) for footage of this text being chanted. The other texts are Svayambhu Purāṇa (10.58) and Rāma Rakṣa Stotram (27).

The aesthetic dimension of approaching or gaining epistemological access to divinity ought not to be overlooked when trying to understand the pedagogical system involved in revealing Brahman to seekers of knowledge (DUBOIS 2013:100). How realisation happens for the audience is a result of logic combined with a distinctively artful imaginative use of language that nurtures disenchantment and yearning (HIRST 2005:77, 160). It is due to the charming performative aspects based on principles of literature that allows the audience to become receptive to the guru's ecumenically, spiritual message.

Satsaṅga as a Literary Artefact

Contextualising *satsaṅga* as a "community of texts"[20] relies on merging specific yogic and devotional-narrative traditions into an ecumenical *mélange*. This facilitates Shanti Mandir's predisposition toward the devotional spirit of *bhakti-yoga* (yoga of devotion), as opposed to the knowledge system of *jñāna-yoga* (yoga of knowledge) (cf. GUPTA – VALPEY 2013:8-13). Shanti Mandir consciously draws from the literary performative tradition in the production of *satsaṅga*. This is because the stated goal of both *kāvya*[21] and *satsaṅga* is to evoke, perhaps only glimpses of *nirvāṇa* (liberation), by providing an *alaukika* (supernatural) experience (ROSSELLA 2010:9). Schulman (2012:65) asserts that the medieval literary theorists Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta marginalised the moralistic and didactic aims in the pursuit of a more secular *alaukika* pleasure. The ideas of coming to rest (*viśrānti*) and turning inward (*antar-mukhatva*) to forget about the world, and taste the fullness of *rasa* through aesthetic rapture (*rasāsvāda*), were central to their literary pursuits. These aims are like Shanti Mandir's, which consciously employs *satsaṅga* to evoke and enjoy *rasa*. Take, for example, The Rasa Utsav (Festival of Rasa), which was an invitation to celebrate the "nectarean essence of joy" through a meditation intensive that included talks, discussions, centering techniques, quiet contemplation, and singing (SHANTI MANDIR 2014b). Figure 3 is the flyer that was distributed for this event.

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[20] Brooks' typology of texts: 1) texts the guru treats as sacred either by declaring them to be or by explicitly endorsing their use; 2) texts, written or oral, that are taught, recited, or used by the guru to impart a given teaching; 3) texts the guru uses to teach or make a point. Texts in this latter group may or may not achieve a canonical status, depending upon whether they fall into one of the other two categories (BROOKS 1997:278-279).

[21] Abhinavagupta's aim of *kāvya* in *Dhvanyāloka* (1.7) is knowledge of *tat – Kāvyārthatattvajña*.
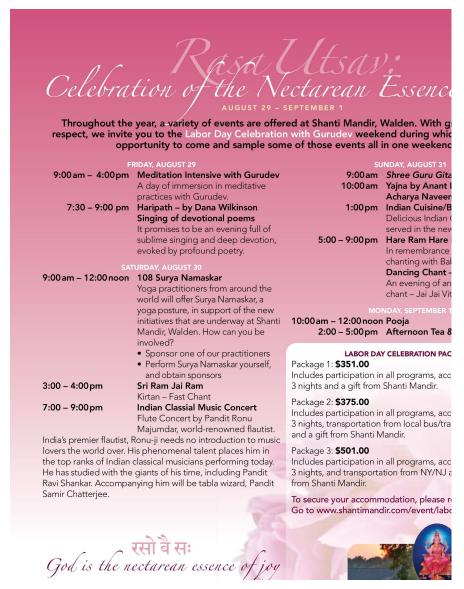
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Figure 3: *The Festival of Rasa Flyer. Source: SHANTI MANDIR 2014B*

Developing the argument that *satsaṅga* can be theorised as a type of performance-based literature, the correct definition of *kāvya* revolves around the concept of *sahṛdayatva* (aesthetic capacity) (HUDSON 2013: 54). This concept is central to the cultivation of the refined aesthetic sensibility of the sensitive audience member (*sahṛdaya*)[22], which allows for identification with the heart of the poet (*kavi*)[23], which in the *satsaṅga* context, is the guru[24].

Nepali (2000:1) provides clarification of the two main types of *kāvya* as given in Viśvanāthakavirāja's Sāhityadarpaṇa[25]. *Kāvya* is distinguished by two sub-genres: an audible *śravyakāvya* and a visual *dṛśyakāvya*. Even though *satsaṅga* has both audible and visual elements, it is placed within the audible *kāvya* genre. While there is an undoubtedly visual component to *satsaṅga*, it has an overwhelmingly static nature, due to the sustained, seated positions everyone takes. There is a further distinction within *śravyakavya,* known as *campūkāvya*, which is a *miśra* (mixed) type that incorporates the other two styles from within the subgenre of audible poetry, namely, prose (*gadya*) and poetry (*padya*)[26].

The early 20th century commentator of the Sāhityadarpaṇa, Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgīśa, explains how the use of this type of *kāvya* is said to gladden the connoisseurs of poetry by way of arousing a sense of amazement in them[27]. This is done by breaking the monotony that prose and poetry alone are liable to create if either is used exclusively (NEPALI 2000:1-7). It is due to the special operation (*vyāpāra*) involved in switching between the following forms, which is the base for the guru's charming, didactic exegesis: the words of

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[22] Dhvanyāloka (1.1) *prasiddha-prasthāna-vyatirekiṇaḥ kāvya-prakārasya kāvyatva-hāneḥ sahṛdaya-hṛdayāhlādi-śabdārtha-mayatvam eva kāvya-lakṣaṇam. na cokta-prasthānātirekiṇo mārgasya tat sambhavati.* A *rasika* (connoisseur) is a synonymous with *sahṛdaya* as a spectator. See Dhvanyālokalocana (2.4) *sāmājikamiti sahṛdayamityarthaḥ.*

[23] *Kavihṛdayatādātmyāpattiyogyatā.* See McCrea (2009:112, 114).

[24] In the general sense of the sensitive listener, before Abhinava started using *sahṛdaya,* it was used by Vāmana in Kāvyalaṃkārasūtravṛtti and by Udbhaṭa (MCCREA 2008:114). This idea of literary sensitivity is related to the concept of epistemological access, which refers to how the "rules of the game" are established, transmitted, and received (cf. MULLER 2014).

[25] Sāhitya Darpaṇa (6.1) *dṛśyaśravyatvabhedena punaḥ kāvyaṁ dvidhā matam.*

[26] Sāhitya Darpaṇa (6.336) *gadyapadyamayaṁ kāvyaṁ campūrityabhidhīyate.*

[27] *Campū camat-kṛtya punāti sahṛdayām vismitīkṛtya prasādayati iti campuḥ.*

the guru's discourse, the utterance of Sanskrit *mantra*-s and *subhāṣita*-s[28], and quotes from other texts that captivate the congregants. We can further classify *satsaṅga* according to Udbhaṭa's typology of *kāvya* as the *rasavat* type[29]. *Rasavat* literature is used to evoke a specific sentiment. In this case, the primary sentiment is *śānta-rasa* (sentiment of quietude) and the secondary sentiment is *bhakti-rasa* (sentiment of devotion) (cf. DESHPANDE 2009:140; BHADURI 1988)[30].

Satsaṅga generates intersubjectivity through the fundamental poetic principle, which is employed to make the audience more receptive to the suggestions[31] of the guru (SATHAYE 2010:362). Pollock (2001) asserts that Ānandavardhana's application of suggestion (*vyañjanā*) is the cornerstone of his aesthetic theory. This concept of *dhvani* focuses on the creative use of language, and its role in generating meaning within an epistemic community that shares and learns through repeated attendance[32], how to understand the linguistic and cultural nuances within the field of learning. This occurs through generating an epistemic, or rather, an aesthetic relation to knowledge (MOHANTY 2000:133). This concept of *dhvani*[33] allows for the meaning of texts (i.e. the guru's discourse and the narratives within the recited texts) to reside in the emotional[34] content (*rasa*) that is communicated by suggestion, as *rasa* (aesthetic appreciation) manifests through suggestive manipulation (*vyañjanā*).

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[28]   See Ali (2010) for an exposition of the role of *subhāṣitas* in ethical teaching.

[29]   *Rasavat* literally means "like the rasa" or "similar to the rasa," however, it can also mean "graceful," "witty," or "charming." A synonym is *rasābhāsa* "nearly or approximately rasa." From Ānandavardhana onwards, *rasavat* was equated with *rasābhāsa*. The element responsible for *rasābhāsa* is impropriety (*anaucitya*). (See AKLUJKAR 1977:274-275). This idea of impropriety is related to the concept of epistemological access. The local environment in which individuals are embedded is said to directly influence cognitive processes and the success of suggestions (GALLAGHER 2008).

[30]   Kāvyalaṃkāra Sūtravṛtti (4.3) *rasavaddarśitaspaṣṭaśṛṅgārādirasādayam svaśabdasthāyisaṃcārivibhāvābhinayāspadam*.

[31]   Building upon this idea of suggestion, Copeman and Ikegame (2012) argue that the guru "is a social form of peculiar suggestibility;" and a vector between sacred and profane domains where a liminal space is constructed by aesthetic and verbal implications (COPEMAN – IKEGAME 2012:289-291; CARSTEN 2011:2).

[32]   Think of the bodily regimes of Mauss (1992).

[33]   The theory of aesthetic suggestion, or implication, is also known as *vyañjanā*.

[34]   "No doubt there are many kinds of understanding, but here we have particularly powerful and moving kind where the pure cognitive content appears, first and foremost, as an intuition, or perhaps an emotion, or even a tactile sensation" (SCHULMAN 2012:167).

In a post-structuralist sense, the guru can also be read as a "text" by observant disciples. Ultimately, to "become like the guru," individuals invest in the opportunity to learn how to "behave like the guru," which the literature says, leads to discovering within themselves the "true state of the guru" (*guru-tattva*) (SHIVANANDA 1999). Theoretically, at least, this allows the individual to attain the "ideal" experience and inner state of the guru's self-perfection (BROOKS 1997:325-6, 336). But, this all relies on what Shulman (2012:107) explains as the poet's [i.e. guru] ability to build "a world in a detailed, crafted, and visionary way," which "establishes its own temporality, drawing matter freely from past and future, which are made visible in an intensified present." This connects back to the formal assumption of responsibility taken by the guru to enhance the affective experience of the audience.

The Performativity of *Satsaṅga*

As a *pravācaka* (expounder)[35], the guru uses his epistemic capital[36] during *satsaṅga* to explain the social world and one's relation to it. He does this by employing characteristics of *kāvya,* and the dramaturgical tradition, to produce *bhāvas* (emotional states) and *rasas* (aesthetic moods)[37] that assist in conveying his message to the audience (MCCREA 2009:46).

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[35]   In the Hindi version of Shanti Mandir's e-magazine, Siddha Marg (The Accomplished One's Path), one article is titled "*Śrīgurudev kā Pravacan*" (The Guru's Discourse). This demonstrates Nityānanda's identity as a *pravācaka* (SHANTI MANDIR 2013).

[36]   Epistemic capital is neither economic nor symbolic. Instead it can be understood as "the ability to better explain the (social) world" (MATON 2003:62).

[37]   Building upon Merleau-Ponty, Csordas' theory on somatic modes of attention and embodiment form a paradigm regarding the "sense of somatic contingency and transcendence associated with meditation and mystic states" (CSORDAS 1990:138-9). It is, however, possible that "the character of particular human experiences shaped by yoga are products of human consciousness and not the realisation of a Universal Truth" (ALTER 2006:764). It is also possible that the production of a supernatural atmosphere, where both the calmed and devotional sentiments become signifiers for divinely inspired altered states of consciousness, signify sacred and mystical yogic experiences. These mystical experiences, however, can be interpreted not as facts but, instead, as religious opinions assigned to facts (MADSEN 2013:34). This is due, in part, to the non-arbitrary, epistemic relativist, and subjective nature of the mystical experience, which is based on a mixture of propositional and non-propositional truth claims related to the non-

For most of the devotees, participation is a passive affair at fire ceremonies (*yajñas*) and other rituals, such as daily worship (*pūjā*, *abhiṣeka*, *ārati*), which are described in a multitude of ways as "beautiful," "magical," "timeless," "wonderful," "special", and "sacred."
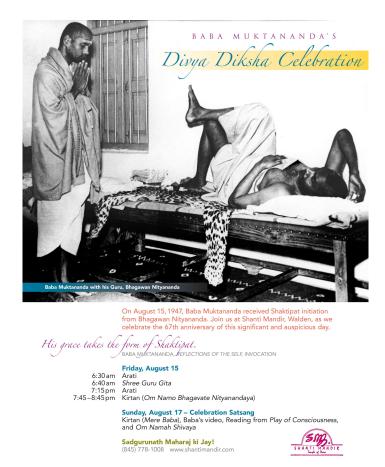

Figure 4: I*nvitation to Celebrate. Source: Shanti Mandir 2014c*

linguistic, but dynamic, expressive forms of ritualised behaviour and forms of religious life (BRECHT 2014: Chapter 1).

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In general, performances aim to evoke an imagined reality through cultivating an intense and heightened emotive experience between the performers and the spectators of the audience. This results in an altered awareness of their situation and, quite possibly, a sense of emotional relief, as they are reassured that the alternate world they seek is immanently possible, because they can feel it. Through the shared experience of evoking an imagined reality and altered state of awareness, both the spectators and protagonists of the performance share in the construction of a collective identity. This is applicable to any ritual (STEINER 2007:91); as performance and performativity are essential to the *satsaṅga* aesthetic and experience. Figure 4 is an example of how Shanti Mandir promotes *satsaṅga*.

Like any performance, *satsaṅga* requires dramatic equipment (*viśiṣṭa-samāgrī*). All of which are used to engage the latent mental impressions (*vṛttis*)[38] of the spectator that underlie the mental state forming the stable emotion (*sthāyibhāva*), which are produced by the *vibhāva*, and brought into view by the *anubhāva* (heightened emotion)[39]. The only thing that *satsaṅga* does not normally include is an actual dramatic performance. Sometimes, however, the students from Shanti Mandir's Sanskrit college[40] perform a play in Sanskrit, for the enjoyment and moral edification of the congregation[41]. On other occasions, professional dancers and musicians are invited to entertain the audience, as a cultural interlude during *satsaṅga* (SHANTI MANDIR 2008). Regardless of the absence of

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[38] Compare Patañjalayogasūtra (3.10) *tasya praśāntavāhitā saṃskārāt*.

[39] The *vibhāva* is any condition that excites or develops a state in the body or mind. In this way, we can understand the arena of *satsaṅga* as a *vibhāva*. The *vi-* affix is an intensifier, so *vi+bhāva* refers to something that cultivates an intense or heightened emotion. The *anubhāva* is an experience of a heightened emotion caused by the *vibhāva*. In this case, the *anubhāva* is the synonymous feeling of *ānanda* or *śānta*, which ultimately relies upon, or aims to stabilise, the durable feeling, or state of mind (*sthāyibhāva*), of *śama* (quietism) (INGALLS – MASSON – PATWARDHAN, 1990:223). See *Abhinavalocana* (2.4.29).

[40] Shanti Mandir has a residential Sanskrit college called Śrī Muktānanda Saṃskṛta Mahāvidyālaya, which has approximately 100 students. [Online] 9th February 2017. http://www.shantimandir.com/charitable-works/shri-Muktānanda-sanskrit-mahavidyalaya/.

[41] Also, dramas and dialogues do occur in some of the devotional texts which are recited as part of the daily religious practice. For instance, the Śiva Mahimna Stotram features celestial beings engaged in a conversation. The *gandharva* (celestial musician), Puṣpadanta, offended the king by taking his flowers that he would ordinarily have used for his own worship of Śiva. Displeased by the act of Puṣpadanta, a trap was prepared that resulted in him offending Śiva, and thus his power of invisibility was retracted. Puṣpadanta sought forgiveness by composing the Śiva Mahimna Stotram, which absolved him and returned his "divine" powers (GONDA 1977:259).

"actors," in the normal sense of a dramatic play, what is undeniably present is a type of stagecraft that includes: presenters, singers and musicians, who engage in well-tempered and choreographed ritual acts and other types of performances. These serve as focal points for the audience to be exposed to aesthetic moods, where certain emotions are cultivated. Such an aesthetically pleasing space climaxes with the guru's discourse and *darśana*[42], which involves seeing and being seen by guru, and invokes its own type of performativity through the community's emotional labour involved with adhering to behavioural and somatic ideals this domain expects[43].

The *satsaṅga-darśana* event develops/reveals a state of mind (*vibhāva*), of which the collective singing and vision of the guru act as a stimulating factors (*uddipanavibhāva*). These performative elements come together to create a compassionate experience

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[42] Eck explains how the Hindu term, *darśana,* does not only signify "seeing the deity" but it includes the "seeing of truth" (1998: 4). The visual aspect of seeing the divine form is an intimate occasion that places emphasis on a personal encounter. *Darśana* is a heightened mode of perception that focuses attention [*Rasa* is explained as the process of perception itself (*pratiyamāna eva hi rasaḥ*) while *rasanā* (aesthetic experience) is a kind of perception and aestheticised emotion concomitant with *paramānanda* (MASSON – PATWARDHAN 1969:73)]. This "attention is the closed telescope when the gaze is upon the deity. The returned gaze, being open, is what is desired by the devotee—the view from Brahman's point of view" (SANZARO 2008:16). *Darśana* events are an opportunity for an active visual exchange between guru and devotee that may involve a dialogic interaction. The expectation central to the *darśana* experience is that a transference of the guru's power will occur, and a transformation will result (LUCIA 2014). It is believed that, through this exchange, the "descent of grace" (*śaktipāta*) occurs, and a transmission of spiritual energy (*śakti*) will happen (SABHARATHNAM et al. 1997; SVOBODA 2008). As the guru sits on his throne (*āsana*), he symbolises the whole cosmos, which he is deemed to transcend while being worshipped through the *abhiṣeka* (ritual bathing) and *gurupūja* (worship of the guru) (PADOUX 2000:44; SHANTI MANDIR 2010b).

[43] Organisations explicitly and implicitly prescribe what emotions are required and how they ought to be expressed. As Hochschild (1983) first explained, emotional labour is undertaken at a personal cost to the worker and is a direct result of the commercialisation of emotion. We can appreciate that the attenuation of emotions is central to the soteriological focus and institutional ambitions of Shanti Mandir. Kiely and Sevastos (2008) explain Hochschild's view of emotional labour as predicated by the necessity to not feel or display genuine emotions. As a general yogic disposition has already been defined as one which is peaceful, unagitated and detached, it becomes necessary, at least initially, to inhibit certain emotional, physical and vocal outbursts that might be considered transgressive in an "unyogic" sense. In a performative sense, sustained displays of inauthentic emotions can result in 'burnout' or increased emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction, anxiety, manic episodes, and depression (MONTGOMERY et al. 2006). When trying to keep up "yogic" appearances becomes too much for individuals within the Shanti Mandir community, the answer, generally, is to intensify the focus on the guru and work on building a stronger relationship through the normative practices that focus on trying to emulate the guru's disposition.

(*anubhāva*) that may include: horripilation, tears, excitement, cries of joy, feelings of love, and possibly feelings of anxiety.

An example of stagecraft involves the return of Nityānanda to the ashram from his frequent travels. On such occasions, fleet-footed messengers are sent through the orchards to various buildings. They run along the corridors requesting people's presence in the temple prior to his arrival. As the temple fills with expectant devotees, updates of his imminent arrival make their way to the musicians leading the chant. The excitement and anticipation of being able to once again see and interact with their guru, after several weeks or months, creates an intoxicating blend of emotions, such as a desire to be seen and anxiety about being seen. Most devotees ensure they are immaculately groomed and change into their best clothing, some of which is reserved specifically for the temple. The re-union of the guru with his devotees creates the semblance (*rasābhāsa*) of the erotic emotion (*śṛṅgārarasa*). Many devotees earnestly pine for direct vision of their guru (*sākṣāddarśana*), seemingly like exiled lovers in a Kālīdāsa poem. While there might appear to be a semblance of impropriety (*anaucitya*) in this statement of mine, one of the key elements of *śṛṅgārarasa* is the sense of longing and unfulfilled desire it evokes. As Roberts (2014:74) also explains, "Erotic language is an apt metaphor for this relationship, even if there is nothing physically sexual about it."

However, his physical presence obstructs a full blossoming of the erotic sentiment; which is based on his heroism as a personification of justice (*sākṣāddharma*). Bhārata provides three types of hero (*vīra*) in his Nāṭyaśāstra (6.79): A *yuddhavīra* (military hero), a *dharmavīra* (moral hero), and a *dānavīra* (hero of generosity)[44]. Not on the list is the *dayāvīra* (hero of compassion). Perhaps this is because it invokes the Buddhist concept of compassion (*dayā*), which incidentally signifies the fundamental mood of *śāntarasa*[45].

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[44] *Dānavīraṃ dharmavīraṃ yuddhavīraṃ tathaiva ca, rasaṃ vīramapi prāha brahmā trividhameva hi*

[45] *Śānti,* as a literary concept, was finally accept by the literati in the ninth century CE after three centuries of debate; however, it is uncertain who first introduced the concept (SCHWARTZ 2008:5). The *śāntarasa* "taste," or "aesthetic," was probably developed by "some Buddhist writers on aesthetics who first maintained, following their great poet Aśvaghoṣa, that the calmed was a distinct rasa" (WARDER 1972:40). However, other scholars suggest that the progenitors of an aesthetic concept that later evolved into the doctrine of Śāntarasavāda was first floated by Udbaṭṭa, and later commercialised by the Theragatha Buddhists as a strategy to accumulate capital (MCCREA 2009:46; ROSSELLA 2010:12). As a literary/performative artefact, *śāntarasa* seems to have evolved out of the confluence of interactions between Buddhist and Shaivite scholars in Kashmir. These scholars were interested in aesthetics and literature as a means to

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Interestingly, when presented with the above list regarding which hero best depicted their guru, many devotees of Nityānanda chose the fourth option. This further supports the idea related to *śānta* as central to the performative, aesthetic and ontological aspirations of Shanti Mandir.

Before entering the temple, Nityānanda quite often stands waiting, just out of sight, until the emotional charge of the collective singing reaches another crest in an undulating wave of tempo-driven emotional climax. It is at this moment that he enters to the rapturous applause and cheers of the crowd. As the music continues to create a palpable effect on the audience; seamlessly, Nityānanda sits down on his *āsana* (chair) facing the audience (See Figure 5). Sometimes, he might go straight to musicians and take up the lead in the drumming (See Figure 6). From whatever position, he surveys the audience and smiles. As he brings the microphone a little closer, he begins to lead the simple call-and-response *kīrtana* that had been playing leading up to his arrival[46]. There is nothing random about the timing of these events. It is orchestrated, precisely, to stimulate the emotions of the congregation and reinforce the perceived "divine" qualities of the guru. Such a regular and repeated event clearly incorporates orchestrated, performative elements.

While the experience might be "true" for the experiencer, it is difficult to say, definitively, whether "divinity" is, or is not, involved. Hence, while the experience is a fact, qualifying it as a "religious" or "spiritual" experience is only an opinion regarding the fact. This can be explained because of the heightened affectivity groups have, which has an irrational component where people in groups lose their individuality in favour of a common mind. To explain these existential experiences, various signifiers are assigned to help construct a "web of belief" and meaning dependent on the cultural context. This phenomenon relies on the power of charisma, suggestion, and a kind of social contagion (i.e. ideas, sentiments, immersions and beliefs). Combined with the guru's charismatic and referent power, it induces in his followers a high level of admiration and identification, which urges

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liberation, and that it was probably the Buddhists who first made conscious use of linguistic, rhetorical and performative technologies to prompt the audience with implicit messages fundamentally based on emotions.

[46]   See Shanti Mandir (2015c), which shows the layout for a similar event.

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them to adopt similar attitudes and behaviours as a strategy to find "peace" and gain legitimacy (CROVETTO 2011)[47].

Figure 5: *Nityānanda in Satsaṅga. Source: Author*

The transmission of affect relies on mimetic entrainment to share in the dominant emotion suggested by the charismatic leader (BRENNAN 2004:53-57). Brennan (2004:70) suggests that hormonal, nervous and auditory entrainment are important factors that should be considered when discussing the transmission of affect; and, whereas chemical entrainment occurs unconsciously, it can be consciously cultivated using the rhythmic entrainment and prosodic elements of pitch, melody and stress, which is found in singing *kīrtana*, reciting *subhāṣita*-s, and chanting *mantras* in *satsaṅga*.

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[47]   Referent power refers to the power an individual seems to have that entices people to become like them, which leads to imitating their behaviour, mannerisms and dress. Charisma refers to an individual's ability to attract people towards them.

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Figure 6: *Nityānanda playing music. Source: Shanti Mandir 2014d*

It is possible to locate how particular yogic experiences are culturally contingent, and how they are the result of learnt behaviour that includes learning to discuss, embody, and ultimately display the results of receiving *śaktipāta*. *Śaktipāta* refers to the "descent of grace" that a guru bestows on their *cela* (disciple). It is considered an esoteric secret of this salvational path of Siddha theology, to which Shanti Mandir very much identifies with (MULLER-ORTEGA 1997:424-25). Muktānanda made a flamboyant dispensing of *śaktipāta* at his *satsaṅga*-s a trademark feature of his personal brand. It is believed that *śaktipāta* enables certain *kriyā*-s (physical responses) to spontaneously manifest through the awakening of *kuṇḍalinī śakti*[48], which is considered by many to be an essential component to gaining emancipation (cf. MADEREY 2017). This includes glossolalia, which I have seen several times in Shanti Mandir *satsaṅga*-s. Whether these are spontaneous or

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[48]   A fundamental energy said to reside at the base of the spine that is "awakened" through yogic and Tantric practices.

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premeditated *kriya*-s, they can also be analysed within the performance paradigm to justify or validate truth claims.

The use of Sanskrit verses during the guru's discourse is a rhetorical technique of sprinkling Sanskrit verses into one's speech. Primarily, it shows the speaker's knowledge of the tradition, specific subject matter, and as an expression of status that "validates the oral discourse by tying it directly back to the authority of the original source text" (TAYLOR 2015:519). It demonstrates that the guru is metaphorically located at the centre of the scriptural canon and community of texts, and can, himself, be seen and read as a text.

Inspired by Csordas' discussion of glossolalia, and its similarity "much in the manner of a mantra" (CSORDAS 1990:30), it is possible to at least consider that the Sanskrit utterances have a similar effect on the audience. While not suggesting that the guru babbles incoherently when uttering Sanskrit verses, what is similar is the fact that most of the audience does not understand what these utterances mean, and that is why he qualifies them through paraphrasing or translating them directly in to Hindi or English. This is because these utterances lack "referential content," and so the "performative force" heightens the sense of the "sacred" (LAMBEK 1990:29). Moreover, these translations of unintelligible verses lack a lineality that semantically prosodic or musical utterances have. This allows the verses (and the audience) to exist outside of time for a moment, and experience glimpses of eternity. The Sanskrit term *ākāśabuddhalakṣa*[49], is a theatrical term that refers to fixing one's gaze on some object out of sight. It is through the guru's discourse, and his raised position, that the object out of sight is made visible, and, once visible through a description in *satsaṅga*, it is closer to being obtained. As the embodiment of *nityānanda* (eternal bliss), every move the guru makes is said to be a reminder of the salvific aim. Also, the use of Sanskrit utterances can be understood as a type of charismatic prophecy and direct message from god, that, even though they may not foretell future events, they ritually establish certain states of affairs as implicit in the structuring of relevant social relations (CSORDAS 1990:28-9).

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[49]   The scan, and digital entry, of Monier Williams has –*buddha*–, whereas several other online dictionaries and wikis have –*baddha*–.

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Concluding Discussion

This paper suggests that *satsaṅga* can be understood as part of the broader performative tradition, and that it can also be considered as a hybrid *campū-rasavat* literary artefact. This is because it facilitates the cultivation of emotions using an embellished rhetorical style, and includes both prose (*gadya*) and poetry (*padya*). Linking this to the use of the devotional narrative tradition, which is used by global yoga organisations like Shanti Mandir, we gain a clearer understanding of how the suggestive power of literature, performance, and audience reception combine to cultivate normative forms of behaviour.

In an attempt to reverse the occidental gaze and privilege local epistemologies, I endeavoured to create an analytical methodology and conceptual bridge between a social realist epistemology, the epistemology of *rasālaṃkāraśāstra*, and the epistemology of Advaita Vedānta. This paper is the result of working with a grounded theoretical approach, which was utilised, in part, to explore how people who attend Shanti Mandir's *sausage,* come to imbibe through repeated attendance, the domain-specific knowledge that is required for their social and soteriological aims within this epistemic community of knowers.

The construction of a collective identity through shared practices, experiences, epistemological training, and moral edification is achieved through building an affective sense of trust, suspending disbelief and removing doubt. For many who attend, the possibilities of an alternate, utopian society are possibly realised through the subjunctive mood and suggestions of the guru's message, which resides in the implied meaning made explicit through his discourse and behaviour, which are combined with the extra-linguistic aesthetic cues, the various accoutrements, and the inhering performativity of the ritualised space.

Creating a message that is available to everyone is difficult to achieve. This is because the audience is not a homogenous unit. There are people of many different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds present. This means the level of epistemological access differs between individuals, which forces the guru to rely on particular rhetorical strategies, such as appeals to purity, emotion, tradition and authority, which include ambiguity and suggestion. In concert with the performative aspects, the application of these strategies allows the guru's didactic message to become potentially more accessible to individuals who have different levels of aesthetic capacity.

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This aesthetic capacity relates to the individual's ability to imagine and experience the utopian aspiration presented by the guru, which potentially enables the audience member to understand and imbibe the guru's message. This type of accessibility relies upon the epistemic capital of the guru, who aims to create a flatter "horizon of participation"[50], which enables the audience to interpret, understand, and experience what they consider to be the "timeless truth" found within this community's corpus of texts. This inspires the community, who cross-reference that with their subjective experience of cultivating and experiencing the aesthetic mood of *śāntarasa*, which, confirms at least, for the audience member, that what the guru says is "true". However, these types of truth claims are subjective and non-arbitrary, which leads to a type of epistemic relativism where propositional truth claims emerge from non-propositional claims that are based on the experiences and insights gained through attending *satsaṅga*.

However, the message is often contrasting and conflicting, which simultaneously promotes devotion and independence. This highlights an interesting contradiction. The salvific promise of release and independence is inhibited by the insistence, within the tradition itself, of promoting continued fidelity and reliance on the institution of gurudom[51] Further, it is through mimetic adaptations, learnt by observing the guru's

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[50]   The "Horizon of Participation" is established primarily by the invitation to participate, and by the relation between the event, its specific context and the cultural background of the audience (WHITE, 2013:60). Both Gnoli (1968) and Masson and Patwardhan (1970) discuss how Abhinavagupta in Abh and *Dhvanyālokalocana* moved from defining an audience by social parameters to psychologically defined characteristics of cognitive processes and emotional experiences (cf. LINGORSKA 2007:154).

[51]   The class structure of gurudom (i.e. the institution of gurus) is worth mentioning here. Sharma explains how this 'institution of the intermediary' developed a class of gurus during the medieval period that was based on the all-pervading authority of the guru that acted as an intermediary essentially replacing god. This is thought to have been based on the influence of Tantrism upon all sects, which believed that it was impossible to become a *siddha* and attain liberation without the blessings of a guru, whose function was to instruct the disciple in spiritual knowledge while the priests assisted the guru in the performance of religious ceremonies (Sharma 2003: 274). This relationship between guru and priests is precisely what occurs in the Shanti Mandir ashram today, temporally linking the earlier and contemporary aesthetic traditions. The pedagogical system later developed into a devotional aestheticism focusing on the cultivation of emotion. This evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the monastic orders of north India began to focus more on aesthetic, devotional, and literary accomplishments compared to the worldly martial pursuits of the *akhāḍās* (places of training). Within the Vaiṣṇava context of devotional aestheticism that focuses on worshipping Rāma and Kṛṣṇā, a greater emphasis was laid upon *rasika*-oriented *bhakti* that emphasises heightened emotions and the careful perception

behaviour, and listening to his morally edifying discourse, that individuals anticipate their soteriological and social ambitions of achieving enlightenment and gaining legitimacy within and beyond this community of faith.

Therefore, from a heuristic and theoretical point of view, Shanti Mandir's legitimate yogic identity can be conceptualised as learning how to personify "peace" and become, through suggestion, a *sāntamūrti*[52]. However, what is a *śāntamūrti* beyond being an adjectival compound?

This final theoretical comment attempt to answer this question, which revolves around what I heuristically describe as the "internal structure" of the *śāntamūrti*. Briefly, it is worth explaining why I make this comment. It is an explanation to those within the Shanti Mandir community who were not interested in understanding and appreciating the core aims of my project. Perhaps, I also share some portion of the confusion through having not been able to cogently articulate my intentions. Throughout the research, many members of the Shanti Mandir community were deeply ambivalent or suspicious of the academic project's value. On more than one occasion, I was reminded of the perceived futility of this "ego-based project". Instead, it was suggested that I should simply "forget about the PhD and come chant in the temple". Some were even hostile, to the point of espionage.[53]

In short, what follows is some of the grounded theory that developed through my post-structuralist training, and how it interfaced with the thought-world of the Shanti Mandir

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of sensory experience (Pinch 1996). These structures, identities, practices and aims are central to the pedagogy of Shanti Mandir and the role of *satsaṅga*.

[52]   It is pertinent to keep in mind that these are concepts exist within the non-arbitrary dimension of knowledge, which makes any assertion next to impossible to critique, qualify or quantify.

[53]   Some devotees befriended me in attempts to learn more about my intentions, which were then reported to the guru. I know this because one of the self-appointed defenders inadvertently sent me an email that contained a litany of accusations and misrepresentations of my personal character and project, which included a fantastic claim that I was a Mossad secret agent sent from the Israel. Regrettably, as I was reading this on the small screen of my rudimentary smart phone, it was not until I had read the email three times that I understood why I was mentioned in the third person. This email was the last of several I received from this individual in one day. I did not notice that the emic salutation of *Jai Gurudev* (Victory to the Divine Guru), which begins most emails sent by members of the community, was instead *Dear Gurudev.* It seems, however, that this was a self-initiated purpose by this individual to appear valuable to the guru and his community. However, I was also asked to befriend new arrivals to the ashram during my stay, to ascertain their intentions and whether or not they were spies sent from Siddha Yoga.

community. Ultimately, it is a comparative epistemological attempt to highlight the similarities between two seemingly incommensurable worlds together.

Of course, this is probably not an ontological reality. Rather, this internal structure is based on the phrase Nityānanda often repeats in *satsaṅga* that, "we must develop big hearts and minds." Therefore, building on this statement, it is possible to consider that the ontological-epistemological features of the *śāntamūrti* consist of: 1) the Silent Witness (*sākṣin*); and 2) the True Connoisseur (*sahṛdaya*) (See Figure 7). We have already discussed the centrality of the *sahṛdaya* to *rasavāda*; and the centrality of the non-dualist (*advaita*) Vedānta as a philosophy and epistemological source for Shanti Mandir. The *sākṣin* is the foundation of Advaita Vedānta's *jñāna-yoga* epistemology; which means it is also fundamental to Shanti Mandir's legitimate yogic disposition (CHATTERJEE 2003; GUPTA 1998). Within a legal framework, a *sākṣiṇi* is "one who testifies," i.e. a "witness." However, within the yogic episteme, the *sākṣin* is also considered an epistemological tool *and* a "field of awareness," where phenomena are experienced (CHATTERJEE 1982; FORT 1984).
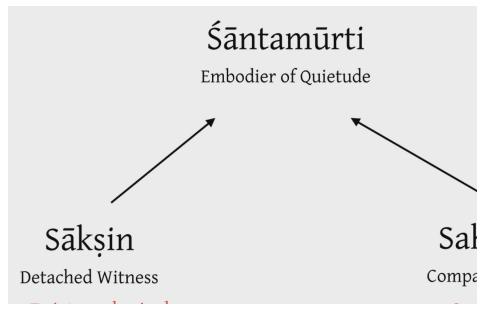

Figure 7: *Mapping the Śāntamūrti*

While reading through primary and secondary texts related to Advaita Vedānta epistemology, it became clear to me that the idea of the *sākṣin* sounds somewhat similar to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. I am not, in any way, suggesting that these ideas are historically related. It simply struck me as interesting that Bourdieu's idea, which was designed to create an epistemic break, or third-way, thus overriding the epistemic blind spots present in both structuralism and phenomenology is similar to the *sākṣin*, which also constitutes an epistemic break, and seems to draw the spectator (of the field of awareness) into the relatively similar state of "participant objectification", where the individual objictifies their own subjective experience to become reflexively self-aware (BOURDIEU – WACQUANT 1992). In a similar way, it seems, the attitude of the witnessing approach (*sākṣībhū*) or gaze of the "disinterested witness," as this term is quite often translated into, regards the practice, or method, of taking an abstract step back to observe one's own life, as if dispassionately watching a movie whose characters one knows but does not identify with. Instead of observing the field directly, the seer (*draṣṭṛ*) also observes one's own reactions, biases and shortcomings to the act of observing the field. Thus, the individual's own subjectivity is objectified, and we arrive at a similar state comparable to participant objectification.

This epistemological technique is part of a reasonably popular meditation taught in many yoga studios around the world. It is known as *antar-mauna* (inner-silence)[54]. This six-stage technique was developed and popularised by Svāmi Satyānanda Sarasvatī (1923-2009), the founder of the Bihar School of Yoga (YOGAPEDIA 2017).[55] Regarding the practice, Satyānanda asserts that, "When the mind is silent and peaceful it becomes very powerful. It can become a receptor of bliss and wisdom enabling life to become a spontaneous flow and expression of joy and harmony" (ATMATATTWANANDA 2002).

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[54]   "Three factors are involved: 1) the external object of perception (smell, taste, sound, sight and touch); 2) the external organs of perception (the *jnanendriyas*: skin, nose, ears, eyes and tongue); and 3) the internal perceiver – the witness awareness – which knows it is observing; "I know I am listening to the outside sounds and I know that I know" is the form this awareness can take" (ATMATATTWANANDA 2002).

[55]   Satyananda Yoga is embroiled in controversy for its culture of silence and avoidance of addressing the main findings of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which as Pankhania and Hargreaves (2017) explain, revealed "shocking levels of abuse".

Without sounding like I have gone too "native", I find these claims interesting when compared with this statement, that sociology is "first and foremost, a way of thinking about the human world" that can generate sensitivity towards ourselves and others through learning to understand the shared universality of the spectrum of human experiences (BAUMAN 1990:8). Again, in a similar way to the narratives found in *satsaṅga,* sociology and sociological thinking help the cause of freedom, aiming to serve humanity through "the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance as a paramount condition of shared freedom" (BAUMAN 1990:232). Bourdieu also claims that "in considering our present decisions, we are forever influenced by our past developments; but, he does give us a chance for transcendence. Through knowledge, we can become conscious and aware, capable of overcoming our past to become completely free movers" (CHEN 2011:4). I argue that this epistemological approach of Continental, post-structuralist sociology related to the idea of gaining "freedom through knowledge" is similar, if not, parallel to the aims of Shanti Mandir, which is ultimately summarised by Shanti Mandir as, "May we all experience freedom within ourselves. May we all share that freedom, that wisdom, with everyone" (SHANTI MANDIR 2011a:7).

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