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THE TECHNIQUE OF ANTARA IN THE VIJÑANA BHAIRAVA TANTRA: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT ON THE GAP IN CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the concept of antara (interval/gap) in the Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra as a direct method for recognizing nondual consciousness within the Kashmir Śaivism tradition. The study employs a textual hermeneutic analysis of dhāraṇā verses that contain instructions concerning the middle point (madhya), the pause between breaths, the gap between thoughts, and the cessation of perception. Terminological analysis shows that the terms antara, madhya, śūnya, and visrānti function operationally rather than merely descriptively, as they guide attention to experiential intervals where subject object duality weakens. The linguistic structure of the text is instructive-performative, marked by aphoristic and paradoxical formulas that encourage experiential realization rather than conceptual construction. A typology of interval techniques can be mapped into respiratory, cognitive, and sensory forms, with breath pauses serving as the most explicit model of the mechanism for revealing non-conceptual awareness. This study also places the concept of antara in critical dialogue with contemporary consciousness studies, particularly gap awareness theory and micro-phenomenology, while emphasizing the limits of cross-traditional interpretation. The findings indicate that antara functions as a practical epistemological device for deconstructing duality and recognizing reflexive awareness. Thus, the Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra makes a significant contribution to contemplative discourse and the philosophy of consciousness.

Keywords: Antara, Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra, Nondual Consciousness, Dhāraṇā, Tantric Hermeneutics, Gap awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is one of the most important meditation texts in the Kashmir Śaivism tradition, emphasizing a direct approach to the realization of nondual consciousness through contemplative practice. The text takes the form of a dialogue between Bhairava and Bhairavī, presenting various dhāraṇā (concentration techniques) as means to experience ultimate reality. Unlike the ritualistic approaches found in many other tantric traditions, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* emphasizes direct experiential methods through awareness, perception, breath, sound, inner space, and experiential pauses. Jaideva Singh describes this text as one of the most systematic meditation manuals in the nondual Śaiva corpus because “each technique is a direct means of entering universal consciousness” (Singh, 1979).

Philosophically, the text is rooted in the nondual metaphysics of Kashmir Śaivism, which views consciousness (*cit*) as the absolute reality and the ground of all manifestation. According to Muller-Ortega (1989), in Kashmir Śaivism consciousness is not merely a mental function but an ontological principle underlying existence itself. Therefore, meditation practice in the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is not directed toward achieving an external state but toward direct recognition of the nature of consciousness itself. This approach is known as the path of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), namely the re-recognition of one’s identity with universal consciousness.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is its emphasis on transitional moments, gaps, or pauses in awareness between two experiential states. In many techniques, attention is directed not to the primary object but to the space in-between for example, between two breaths, between two thoughts, between two perceptions, or between sound and silence. This concept is often referred to in contemplative studies as *antara* (interval, gap, in-between awareness). This approach is

unique in that it shifts focus from the object of experience to the structure of awareness itself. Jaideva Singh (1979), in his translation, highlights one of the most well-known breathing techniques from the text with the line: “At the end of expiration and at the beginning of inspiration, there is a pause. Dwell on that pause.” This instruction shows that the transformative point of awareness lies not in the flow of breath itself, but in the interval between breaths. That interval is regarded as an entryway into non-conceptual awareness. In the textual framework, this is not merely a psychological metaphor but an explicit practical instruction.

Dyczkowski (1987) explains that within the Spanda and Trika framework, reality is understood as the dynamic vibration of consciousness. Yet it is precisely within the transition between vibrations that the absolute dimension is revealed. He emphasizes that Śaiva contemplative practice often “locates the Absolute in the interval between two cognitive acts.” Thus, *antara* is not merely a temporal pause but an ontological space where subject–object duality dissolves.

Attention to the gap in awareness has also received consideration in modern studies of contemplative tantric practice. Bäumer (2011) notes that the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* presents methods that are highly phenomenological in a practical sense not as a theory of experience but as a map for direct exploration of consciousness structures. She states that the techniques in this text “lead awareness back to its source through immediate attentiveness to lived experience” (Bäumer, 2011). In this context, *antara* functions as a methodological device for shifting attention from the contents of experience to the conditions of possibility for experience.

Silburn (1988), in her study of consciousness yoga within the Śaiva tradition, shows that attention to the interval is an important method

for breaking the continuity of mental constructions. She explains that when the mental stream is not supplied with an object, consciousness reveals its own reflexive nature. Thus, the *antara* technique works by interrupting habitual cognition and opening the field of pure awareness.

From a textual perspective, it is important to note that the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* does not present its techniques in a systematic philosophical structure but in the form of practical aphorisms. Therefore, textual analysis is essential for interpreting key terms such as *antara*, *madhya* (the middle point), *visrānti* (resting of awareness), and *śūnya* (emptiness). These terms appear across different verses yet refer to similar experiential structures. Textual analysis enables more precise conceptual mapping compared to popular readings that tend to reduce these techniques to mere relaxation methods. In contemporary academic contexts, studies on the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* remain relatively limited compared to other Śaiva texts such as the *Śiva Sūtra* or *Tantrāloka*. Muller-Ortega (1989) observes that although the text has been highly influential in practice, it has received less in-depth conceptual exploration in early Western scholarship. This situation opens new research opportunities, particularly for thematic analysis of key techniques such as *antara* as a contemplative structure.

The relevance of the *antara* concept also extends into cross-disciplinary dialogue with contemporary consciousness studies. Several approaches in contemplative psychology and modern mindfulness studies emphasize attention to transitional moments and non-reactivity, although grounded in different metaphysical frameworks. A textual study of *antara* in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* contributes important perspectives that enrich this discourse from a nondual philosophical standpoint.

This research is academically relevant because it addresses a gap in in-depth thematic studies of one of the key techniques in a classical tantric meditation text. A textual-analytical approach

enables precise interpretation of terminology, instructional structure, and philosophical framework, while avoiding popular spiritual or purely psychological reductionism. This study is expected to enrich the field of nondual Śaiva studies and contribute conceptually to the study of consciousness and contemplative practice.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using textual and hermeneutic analysis of the primary text, *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*. The research focuses on identifying and interpreting verses that contain contemplative techniques based on pauses in consciousness (*antara* or *madhya*). Primary data sources include academic editions and translations of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, particularly the critical translation by Jaideva Singh (1979), which is widely used in Kashmir Śaivism studies. The analysis was conducted through close reading, tracing key terms in Sanskrit transliteration, and comparing contextual meanings across verses to identify conceptual patterns of interval techniques. This approach follows the principles of religious text studies, which treat linguistic structure, technical terminology, and doctrinal context as the foundation for interpretation (Dyczkowski, 1987).

Methodologically, interpretation was conducted within a philosophical-hermeneutic and conceptual study framework, aiming to understand the meaning of terms and practice instructions within the horizon of nondual Kashmir Śaivism. The analysis was supported by authoritative secondary literature to maintain doctrinal and terminological consistency, particularly the works of Muller-Ortega (1989) and Bäumer (2011). This model aligns with hermeneutic approaches in religious studies, which emphasize dialogue between text, tradition, and the conceptual framework of the interpreter (Gadamer, 2004). Consequently, the research method not only

describes the content of the text but also reconstructs the operational meaning of *antara* as a structure of consciousness within the nondual tantric meditation system.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Position of *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* within the Kashmir Śaivism Tradition

The *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* holds an important place in the Kashmir Śaivism tradition as a meditation text that emphasizes the direct realization of nondual consciousness through systematic contemplative methods. Within the classification of nondual Śaiva traditions, the text is generally placed in the Bhairava-tantra corpus and associated with the Trika tradition, which integrates metaphysical dimensions, yoga practices, and the epistemology of self-recognition (*pratyabhijñā*). Unlike many other tantras that focus on external rituals, this text is widely recognized as a manual for direct awareness practice. Dyczkowski emphasizes that in the Trika tradition, the Bhairava path prioritizes instant realization through consciousness itself rather than through hierarchical ritual stages, and the *Vijñāna Bhairava* represents one of the clearest examples of this approach (Dyczkowski, 1987). From historical-doctrinal perspective, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is understood as part of the network of Bhairava texts that influenced the formulation of the nondual Kashmir Śaivism system later philosophically developed by Abhinavagupta. Although the text itself is practical in nature, its metaphysical framework aligns with the view that absolute consciousness (*Paramaśiva*) is fully present in every moment of experience. Muller-Ortega explains that in nondual Kashmir Śaivism, practice is not aimed at “attaining” a transcendent reality but at recognizing that individual consciousness is already a direct expression of absolute consciousness (Muller-Ortega, 1989). Therefore, meditation texts such as the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* function as operational instruments of this nondual metaphysics.

The text is also distinctive in that it is composed as a dialogue between Bhairava and Bhairavī, symbolically representing the relationship between absolute consciousness and its dynamic energy. This dialogical format is not merely a literary style but reflects the theological and epistemological structure of Tantra, where revelation occurs through question-and-answer exchanges that open the dimension of direct experience. In his commentary, Singh notes that the Bhairava–Bhairavī dialogue serves as a pedagogical framework to convey methods of realization that can be directly practiced, rather than abstract metaphysical speculation (Singh, 1979). This structure also demonstrates the Śiva–Śakti equality principle foundational to Trika ontology, where consciousness and its manifest energy are not dualistically separated (Bäumer, 2011). The most prominent feature of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is its exposition of 112 dhāraṇā, or consciousness-concentration techniques, covering a wide spectrum of human experience: breath, sensory perception, sound, emotion, inner space, and the pause between two thoughts. These techniques are not arranged as layered rituals but as direct entry points into nondual consciousness. Singh describes the text as a “manual of self-realization” because each dhāraṇā is positioned as a complete method capable of guiding practitioners toward recognition of the nature of consciousness (Singh, 1979). In recent philological and textual-explanatory studies, Ivanov (2024) emphasizes that the structure of techniques in the *Vijñānabhairava* reflects a strong practical-contemplative orientation, with instructions that are concise yet conceptually dense.

The distinction between the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* and ritualistic tantras becomes clear when compared with Kaula or Śaiva Siddhānta texts, which emphasize rites, formal initiations, sacred diagrams (*yantra*), and liturgical procedures. In this text, the transformation of consciousness does not depend on external

ritual apparatus but on redirecting attention to the structure of direct experience. Silburn notes that in certain streams of nondual Śaivism, particularly the Bhairava path, internalization of consciousness shifts dominance away from ritual toward direct inner experience, with the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* as a prime example of this orientation (Silburn, 1988). Consequently, this text is often viewed as a bridge between Tantra and direct-consciousness yoga, relevant not only to religious studies but also to contemplative studies and modern philosophy of consciousness.

3.2 Conceptual Framework of Nondual Consciousness in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*

The conceptual framework of nondual consciousness in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is rooted in the metaphysics of Kashmir Śaivism, which regards ultimate reality as *cit* (pure consciousness) that is autonomous, reflexive, and creative. In the Trika system, *cit* is not merely a mental function or psychological awareness but an ontological principle underlying all manifested experience. Consciousness is understood as a reality possessing self-reflective power (*vimarśa*), the ability to know itself without an external object. Dyczkowski emphasizes that in nondual Śaivism, consciousness is “self-referential and dynamic awareness,” serving as both the source and the substance of experience (Dyczkowski, 1987). Consequently, meditation practice in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is not aimed at producing a new state of consciousness but at revealing the intrinsic nature of consciousness, which is always already present.

The concept of *spanda* (vibration or pulsation of consciousness) complements the understanding of *cit* as a dynamic reality. *Spanda* is not understood as physical motion but as a metaphysical pulsation of consciousness that underlies the arising and subsiding of experience. In the Spanda doctrine, reality is not static but throbs as an expression of the freedom of absolute consciousness. Dyczkowski

describes *spanda* as “the subtle throb of awareness underlying all cognitive and perceptual events” (Dyczkowski, 1992). This framework is crucial for interpreting the techniques in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, as many dhāraṇā direct attention to moments of transition, pauses, or experiential intervals points at which the pulsation of consciousness can be directly recognized. In other words, the contemplative techniques in the text operate not on the objects of experience but on the dynamics of consciousness itself.

From an epistemological perspective within Kashmir Śaivism, spiritual practice is understood as a path of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), not as the attainment of something previously absent. The *pratyabhijñā* doctrine asserts that the identity between the individual self and absolute consciousness has always existed but is obscured by perceptual limitations and mental constructs. Therefore, the function of practice is not to produce a new reality but to open direct recognition of that identity. Muller-Ortega emphasizes that in this tradition, realization is an act of recognition, not the production of mystical states: “recognition is not the attainment of something new but the unveiling of what has always been the case” (Muller-Ortega, 1989). This framework aligns with the character of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, which offers instant and direct methods without requiring gradual ritual or ascetic progression.

In line with the principles of *pratyabhijñā*, meditation in the nondual Trika framework is understood as disclosure, not achievement. Practice is not aimed at producing a trance state separate from ordinary experience but at directly perceiving the nature of consciousness within any experience. Bäumer emphasizes that practices in the Trika tradition are oriented toward immediate recognition of the ground of consciousness through concrete experience, so that “ordinary experience becomes the field of revelation” (Bäumer, 2011). This explains why the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* contains

techniques based on everyday activities—breath, sound perception, taste, even intense emotions as entry points for realization. Meditation is not separated from life but reveals the nondual dimension inherently present within it.

The structure of nondual experience in Śaiva Trika is generally explained through the triad Śiva–Śakti–Nara or parā–parāparā–aparā, which represents the spectrum of consciousness from absolute to manifested. However, in the experience of realization, this triad is not perceived as three separate entities but as one consciousness expressed in layered forms. Abhinavagupta, as discussed by Muller-Ortega, views the peak experience as the union of transcendent and immanent consciousness within a single reflexive awareness (Muller-Ortega, 1989). This triadic framework helps explain why techniques in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* often utilize the middle point (*madhya*) or interval (*antara*): it is precisely there that experiential polarities dissolve and the nondual structure becomes apparent. Thus, the entire conceptual framework of the text is consistent with the metaphysics and epistemology of nondual Trika, where consciousness is simultaneously the ground, the process, and the aim of recognition.

3.3 Terminological Analysis: *Antara*, *Madhya*, and *Visrānti*

A terminological study of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* shows that understanding the contemplative techniques in the text depends heavily on precise reading of key Sanskrit terms. One important term is *antara*, philologically meaning “in between,” “interval,” or “interstice.” In classical Sanskrit lexicons, *antara* denotes a space that both separates and connects two states. In the context of tantric meditation, its meaning shifts from merely spatial-temporal indication to a marker of transitional moments in consciousness. Textual translations and commentaries emphasize that in some dhāraṇā, the interval between two

processes such as the end and beginning of a breath is positioned as an entry point for pure consciousness experience (Singh, 1979). Ivanov (2024), in his philological study of the *Vijñānabhairava*, also notes that the term “interval” in the text is not merely descriptive but instructional, directly guiding the operation of meditative attention.

A second term closely related conceptually is *madhya*, meaning “middle” or “center.” In the nondual Śaiva corpus, *madhya* has a technical meaning as the central point of consciousness where experiential polarities dissolve. Unlike *antara*, which emphasizes the gap between two processes, *madhya* emphasizes a stable center where consciousness rests in itself. Dyczkowski explains that in the Trika and Spanda tradition, the center (*madhya*) is not a geometric location but a condition of reflexive consciousness free from subject–object differentiation (Dyczkowski, 1987). In several verses of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, meditation instructions guide the practitioner to abide at the “middle point” of breath, perception, or cognition—operationally identical to the recognition of nondual consciousness. Thus, *antara* and *madhya* form a conceptual pair: one highlights the transitional interval, the other the center of consciousness revealed within that interval.

Other terms appearing in the same semantic network are *śūnya* (emptiness) and *visrānti* (rest, dissolution, repose). In the nondual Kashmir Śaivism reading, *śūnya* is not interpreted as nihilistic absence but as emptiness of mental constructs and conceptual differentiation. Silburn emphasizes that emptiness in the Śaiva context is better understood as a “plenum of consciousness emptied of objectification,” i.e., fullness of consciousness free from objects (Silburn, 1988). Meanwhile, *visrānti* refers to the state of consciousness resting in itself—a condition of cessation of cognitive tension. Muller-Ortega associates this concept of resting consciousness with the experience of pure

reflexivity, when consciousness no longer moves toward objects but abides in its source (Muller-Ortega, 1989). In several dhāraṇā, the state of *visrānti* arises directly from attention to the interval (*antara*) or the center (*madhya*).

Variations in the use of these terms across different verses indicate that the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* does not operate with a single technical definition but with a network of terms that illuminate each other contextually. Ivanov (2024) observes that textually, different terms often refer to similar experiential structures but through different phenomenological entry points—breath, sound, space, or cognition. Therefore, a purely philological approach is insufficient; a hermeneutic reading considering the instructional function of each verse is required. Singh (1979) also emphasizes that terms such as *śūnya*, *madhya*, and *visrānti* must be read operationally, not just lexically, as they all indicate modes of consciousness practice.

The distinction between literal and operational meanings becomes crucial in textual analysis. Literally, *antara* = gap, *madhya* = middle, *śūnya* = empty, and *visrānti* = rest. Operationally, in meditation practice, these terms indicate modes of attention and states of consciousness. Dyczkowski (1992) stresses that in nondual Śaiva texts, technical language is often performative—it does not merely describe experience but initiates ways of experiencing. Thus, terminological analysis in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* must read terms as practical devices, not mere conceptual labels. This approach aligns with the textual-hermeneutic method, which views meaning as a function of context, tradition, and the instructional purpose of the text.

3.4 The *Antara* Technique in the Structure of Dhāraṇā

In the dhāraṇā structure of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, the *antara* (pause/interval) technique appears as a recurring and systematic pattern of meditation instructions. Textual analysis of the verses shows that the interval is not understood

as passive emptiness but as a transitional moment that opens direct access to nondual consciousness (*cit*). Structurally, many slokas form a three-step instructional formula: (1) observation of a process (breath, thought, perception), (2) apprehension of the pause, and (3) stabilization of attention in that interval until consciousness is revealed. Singh emphasizes that this technique is characteristic of the direct awareness method in the text, distinct from gradual meditation approaches based on visualization or ritual (Singh, 1979). The clearest instances of verses containing pause techniques appear in breath-based dhāraṇā. One frequently cited sloka reads:

*madhye prāṇaḥ samāyāti punar yāti
bahiḥ sthitaḥ
tasya madhye tu yad rūpaṁ tat rūpaṁ
bhairavaṁ smṛtam (24)*

Translation:

“When the breath enters and then exits again, at the midpoint between them, the form that is present there is Bhairava.” (Singh, 1979)

This verse demonstrates the explicit structure of the *antara* technique: the focus is not on the inhalation or exhalation but on the *madhya*—the interval point between them. Operationally, this instruction shifts attention from the dynamic object (breath) to the static space of consciousness that underlies it. Dyczkowski interprets this pattern as a form of ritual internalization: the sacred center is no longer at the altar but in the interval of consciousness itself (Dyczkowski, 1987). A similar pattern appears in thought-stopping techniques. One dhāraṇā states:

*yatra yatra mano yāti tatra tatra śiva-
smṛtiḥ
nirādhāraṁ manaḥ kṛtvā dhyāyet tattvaṁ
nirāmayam (116)*

Translation:

“Wherever the mind moves, there remember Śiva; make the mind without

support, and meditate on that pure essence.” (Singh, 1979)

Although the word *antara* is not always explicitly used, the instructional structure points to a referential pause of the mind when the mind is released from its object (*nirādhāra*). Muller-Ortega interprets this formula as a technique to interrupt the stream of intentionality, where an objectless interval becomes the vehicle for self-recognition of consciousness (Muller-Ortega, 1989). Thus, *antara* does not always refer to a temporal pause but also to an intentional pause. Perceptual pause techniques are also found in sense-based dhāraṇā, particularly sound. A well-known sloka states:

*anāhata-śabdasya madhye śrutih parā smṛtā
tatra cittam niveśyeta tatra bhairava-
darśanam (38)*

Translation:

“In the midst of the unstruck sound (*anāhata*) is recognized the highest hearing. When consciousness is established there, Bhairava is revealed.” (Dyczkowski, 1992)

This instruction directs the practitioner not to dwell on the phenomenon of sound but on the interval of consciousness within the act of hearing. Silburn notes that sound practices in nondual tantra are often aimed at the “resonance gap,” where perception and consciousness are no longer separate (Silburn, 1988). This structure reaffirms the pattern: phenomenon → interval → recognition of consciousness.

From the analysis of instructional formulas in these slokas, the *antara* technique can be categorized into several types. First, the respiratory type, i.e., breath pauses (between inhalation and exhalation; between two breaths). Second, the cognitive type, i.e., the pause between two thoughts or when the mind is released from its object. Third, the sensory type, i.e., pauses within perception sound, sight, touch, or space. Ivanov (2024), in his textual

study, notes that although the initial objects of dhāraṇā differ, their instructional structures converge: all guide the apprehension of the interval as the gateway to the experience of Bhairava.

Structurally, slokas containing *antara* techniques exhibit performative language patterns: the use of location markers such as *madhye* (in the middle), *yadā... tadā* (when... then...), and subtle imperative verbs directing attention rather than belief. This supports a hermeneutic reading that the text functions as a manual of consciousness practice rather than mere metaphysical speculation (Dyczkowski, 1987; Singh, 1979). Thus, the *antara* technique in the dhāraṇā structure can be understood as a primary methodological device in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* for revealing nondual consciousness directly.

Table 1: Mapping of Antara Techniques in the Dhāraṇā Structure of the Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra

No	Sloka (opening phrase)	Initial Object	Form of Antara / Madhya	Technique Typology	Instructional Formula	Mechanism of Consciousness
1	<i>madhye prānaḥ samāyāti...</i>	Breath	Pause between inhalation–exhalation	Respiratory	Focus on the midpoint of the breath	Interruption of mental flow → reflective consciousness arises
2	<i>śvāsa–praśvāsa yoḥ madhye...</i>	Breath	Interval between two breaths	Respiratory	Abide in the gap between inhalation and exhalation	Interval as the gateway to Bhairava
3	<i>nirādhāraṁ manaḥ kṛtvā...</i>	Thought	Pause without object support	Cognitive	Release the object of thought	Interruption of intentionality
4	<i>yatra yatra mano yāti...</i>	Movement of mind	Gap between cognitive movement	Cognitive	Be aware of the mind’s	Consciousness as witness

No	Sloka (opening phrase)	Initial Object	Form of Antara / Madhya	Technique Typology	Instructional Formula	Mechanism of Consciousness
			nts		transiti on	
5	<i>anāhata - śabdasya madhye</i> ...	Inner sound	Resonance midpoint	Sensory	Listen at the center of the sound	Perception → consciousness
6	<i>dr̥ṣyam sūnyam bhāvay et...</i>	Vision	Emptiness of object	Sensory	Empty the visual object	Collapse subject-object
7	<i>kṣaṇam ātra-vilīnetu...</i>	Experience	Momentary dissolution pause	Cognitive	Catch the moment of disappearance	Nondual glimpses
8	<i>uccāra-ante sūnyabhāvaḥ</i> ...	Mantra / Speech	Pause at the end of sound	Sensory-mantric	Focus after the sound	Residual vibration of consciousness
9	<i>bhāvasya bhāva-sūnyatā</i> ...	Emotion	Pause between affects	Affective – cognitive	Observe the fading of emotion	Emotion → cit
10	<i>madhya-deśe manaḥsthāpya</i> ...	Attention	Central point of consciousness	Integrative	Establish at the center	Nondual stability

The Table above shows that the *antara* technique in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* does not stand as a single, isolated method but as an instructional pattern across multiple objects. Textual data indicate that breath, thought, sound, visual perception, and even emotions are used as “threshold triggers” to locate the interval of consciousness. In other words, the object serves merely as a spark; the actual target is the transitional interval (*antara/madhya*) where the duality of experience weakens (Singh, 1979). Structurally, the sloka formulas containing the *antara* technique almost always include linguistic location markers such as *madhye* (in the middle), *ante* (at the end), *sūnya* (empty), or *vilīna* (dissolved). These markers function as operational pointers for attention, not

metaphysical descriptions. Dyczkowski (1987) emphasizes that the instructional language in nondual tantra is performative it directs conscious action rather than merely explaining a concept. From the typology mapping, four main clusters of *antara* techniques emerge:

1. Respiratory – breath pauses (most explicit textually)
2. Cognitive – gaps between thoughts / release of mental objects
3. Sensory – intervals within perception (sound, visual, mantra)
4. Integrative – establishment at the center of consciousness (*madhya*)

Ivanov (2024) notes that the diversity of objects reflects the text’s pedagogical strategy: providing multiple entry points to the same experience, namely, the direct recognition of Bhairava as nondual consciousness.

3.5 Breath Pause as the Gateway to Consciousness

Within the dhāraṇā structure of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, the most explicit and recurring technique is attention to the breath pause as the gateway to nondual consciousness. Several verses instruct practitioners to observe the transitional moment between inhalation (*pūraka*) and exhalation (*recaka*), including the natural stop point in between. Textually, the instructional formulas are typically marked with words like *madhya* (middle) or *anta* (end), functioning as operational indicators of the attention locus. Modern philological readings emphasize that the text’s focus is not on physiological breath control but on the interval of consciousness revealed when the breath spontaneously halts (Wallis, 2013). In this way, the breath serves as a phenomenological anchor to reveal layers of consciousness unbound to objects.

Comparative studies of contemporary translations and commentaries indicate that the breath pause in this text differs from classical *prāṇāyāma*, which is engineered and sequential. In the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, breath

retention is understood more often as natural retention (*sahaja kumbhaka*), a micro-pause occurring effortlessly when attention is finely attuned. Wallis emphasizes that nondual tantra instructions do not stress manipulation of vital energy but recognition of consciousness already present within the biological process (Wallis, 2012). This approach aligns with the character of the direct means (*śāmbhavopāya*), where consciousness is recognized through brief non-movement moments rather than achieved via extended breath-control exercises.

Phenomenologically, the pause between inhalation and exhalation is understood as a non-conceptual moment, because at that point there is no directional movement, no dominant object, and no urge to move in or out. Padoux explains that, within Śaiva hermeneutics, such transitional moments are considered an “ontological gap” where consciousness spontaneously arises free from mental constructs (Padoux, 2014). Since the mind typically follows the rhythm of the breath, a momentary suspension of that rhythm interrupts the stream of conceptualization. Thus, the breath pause functions as a natural cognitive deconstruction device. This perspective is supported by cross-traditional analyses showing that awareness gaps often occur synchronously with micro-respiratory pauses (Jones, 2019).

In traditional exegesis, Jaideva Singh emphasizes that the midpoint of the breath should not be understood as a passive empty space but as the presence of Bhairava itself that is, absolute consciousness free from mental movement. He interprets the breath-pause verses as methods of direct recognition, not techniques for regulating *prāṇa*. According to him, “the pause between breaths is not produced; it is recognized” the pause is not created but apprehended (Singh, 1988). This emphasis is important because it distinguishes the nondual approach from technical yoga. Lorenzen also notes that in the Śaiva tantra corpus, breath is often used as a symbol of the cosmic expansion contraction of consciousness, so the pause is

seen as a moment of unification (Lorenzen, 2002).

Contemporary scholars also highlight that the breath-pause technique in the *Vijñāna Bhairava* reflects a shift from external ritual to interiorized practice. Hatley points out that the Bhairava texts present a *sādhana* model that relocates the altar into the practitioner’s body and consciousness, with the breath as the primary medium (Hatley, 2018). In this framework, the respiratory pause becomes an internal sacred locus. This analysis reinforces the reading that breath-based *antara* techniques are not merely attentional exercises but a theological-practical strategy to directly experience nonduality.

3.6 Antara as the Deconstruction of Subject Object Duality

Within the praxis framework of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, the *antara* technique (pause/interval) can be read as a mechanism for deconstructing the subject–object duality that typically underpins everyday experience. Structurally, empirical consciousness operates through reference: there is an observer, an observed object, and a cognitive relation between them. The *antara* technique interrupts this relation at the transitional point when the object has not yet formed or has just disappeared from the field of attention. In nondual Śaiva philosophical analysis, a moment without object reference is not nihilistic emptiness but an openness of consciousness to itself. Ratié emphasizes that, in Pratyabhijñā epistemology, consciousness is never truly dependent on objects; objects merely modulate its manifestations. Therefore, when object reference collapses, what remains is not absence, but reflexive consciousness (*prakāśa-vimarśa*) (Ratié, 2016).

The pause as a collapse of object reference can also be understood as a cognitive interval in which the flow of *vṛtti* (mental modifications) momentarily halts. Unlike forced cessation through strict concentration discipline, the

interval in the *antara* method is micro and immediate it occurs between two thoughts, two perceptions, or two intentional impulses. In comparative studies of Śaiva and Buddhist meditation, Ganeri notes that some Indian traditions understand cognitive gap moments as points where the representational structure of consciousness weakens and non-representational awareness is revealed (Ganeri, 2022). In the context of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, these gaps are not treated as anomalies but as methodological portals. Thus, the cessation of *vṛtti* is not the ultimate goal but an indicator of the opening of nondual modes of consciousness.

A hermeneutic reading of the experience structure in the text shows that the *antara* instructions operate through performative language patterns: they do not describe metaphysical reality but direct a transformation in the way of experiencing. Torella emphasizes that Pratyabhijñā and Trika texts use “operative” language terms and formulas are not intended as speculative definitions but as triggers for the self-recognition of consciousness (Torella, 2013). From an experiential hermeneutics perspective, the pause can be understood as a deconstructive device against cognitive habits that always link consciousness to objects. When this referential structure is interrupted, experience is no longer organized dichotomously. Here the text functions not merely as a doctrinal document but as a map of experience.

The connection between the pause and practical nonduality is evident in how the *antara* technique shifts nonduality from the ontological to the domain of direct practice. Nonduality is not only expressed as the teaching that “everything is Śiva” but is experienced in moments without distance between observer and observed. In recent studies of nondual Kashmir Śaivism metaphysics, Nemeč shows that nondual recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) occurs not through rational inference but through flashes of experience in which the subject object structure collapses (Nemeč, 2021). The pause technique

provides a micro-condition for this collapse, repeatedly verified in meditative experience. Therefore, *antara* can be understood as a methodological bridge between nondual theory and nondual realization.

This approach is further supported by cross-traditional contemplative studies that identify “gap awareness” as a key mechanism for deconstructing perceptual duality. Fasching argues that in pure consciousness experience, there is no intentional subject–object structure; such structure is a higher-order construct of cognitive activity (Fasching, 2020). Accordingly, the *antara* technique in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* can be read as a technology of consciousness that systematically opens access to pre-intentional awareness. This demonstrates that nonduality in Śaiva Trika is not merely a metaphysical thesis but an experiential procedure that can be repeated through capturing cognitive intervals.

3.7 The Interval Consciousness Structure in a Hermeneutic Perspective

From a hermeneutic perspective, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* exhibits the character of an instructional-performative text whose primary purpose is not to construct metaphysical concepts but to guide readers to direct experience. Its slokas are not arranged as systematic arguments but as sequences of praxis triggers. Each dhāraṇā functions like an experiential protocol: it identifies an initial object, shifts attention to the interval (*antara/madhya*), and then indicates the recognition of Bhairava as consciousness. In the framework of religious hermeneutics, such a text model is called an operative text—its meaning is fully actualized only through the practice it directs (Flood, 2018). Thus, understanding does not stop at semantic interpretation but moves toward existential verification through meditative experience.

The distinction between instructive language and descriptive language is key to a hermeneutic reading of interval consciousness

structure. Descriptive language attempts to explain reality; instructive language directs action. In the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, subtle imperative sentences, locational markers of experience (*madhye*, *ante*, *yatra*), and conditional formulas (“when... then...”) indicate the dominance of an instructional mode. Clooney notes that Indian praxis texts often employ “directive discourse” language that shapes the reader’s inner action rather than merely providing information (Clooney, 2010). Therefore, terms like *śūnya*, *madhya*, or *visrānti* should not be read simply as concepts; they function as attention directives. Hermeneutically, the meaning of a term is determined by its praxis function within the instructional structure.

The paradoxical and aphoristic conciseness of the slokas also plays an important role in opening the interval experience. Many dhāraṇās are formulated very succinctly, even elliptically, leaving conceptual meaning open. The aphoristic structure forces the reader to “complete” the meaning through contemplative practice. Bronkhorst notes that the aphoristic style in Indian texts is not merely a literary convention but a pedagogical strategy to prevent conceptual reification (Bronkhorst, 2011). In the context of *antara* techniques, paradoxes such as “full emptiness” or “center without a center” function to break the mind’s tendency to form objects. Hermeneutic-phenomenologically, paradox opens an apophatic space where experience precedes conceptualization (McDaniel, 2018).

Contextual reading within the tradition also determines the structure of understanding interval consciousness. In Kashmir Śaivism, the text does not stand alone but is read together with commentaries, transmission lines, and the Trika–Pratyabhijñā doctrinal framework. Williams emphasizes that tantra hermeneutics is traditionally participatory: meaning arises within a network of practice, commentary, and interpretive community (Williams, 2021). Therefore, the *antara* technique cannot be fully

understood through literal sloka translation alone; it requires a traditional horizon that understands nonduality as a recognitive, experientially accessible phenomenon. This context explains why traditional commentaries and modern philological studies are both important for analysis.

Methodologically, the hermeneutic perspective helps clarify that the interval consciousness structure in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* results from the interaction between language form, instructional function, and the tradition’s horizon. Ricoeur describes this model as a transformation from “text as meaning” to “text as world presented” the text opens a world of experience for the reader (Ricoeur, 1991). In this case, the world presented is the experience of nondual pause. Thus, *antara* can be understood not merely as a meditation method but as a hermeneutic event, where understanding occurs as conscious experience rather than as conceptual knowledge.

3.8 Relevance of the Concept of *Antara* for Contemporary Consciousness Studies

The concept of *antara* (interval/pause of consciousness) in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* holds significant relevance for contemporary consciousness studies, particularly in dialogue with modern contemplative research and cognitive science. Over recent decades, consciousness research has expanded beyond representational models to acknowledge pre-reflective and non-conceptual dimensions of experience. Modern contemplative studies focus on moments of “experiential gaps” transitional points where cognitive flow diminishes and awareness arises without narrative structure. This concept structurally corresponds with the *antara* technique, which positions the pause as the locus of consciousness recognition. Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson demonstrate that certain meditation practices train the detection of micro-moments in the flow of experience, correlating with changes in attentional dynamics and meta-

awareness (Lutz et al., 2008). Thus, the *antara* technique can be read as a classical formulation of interval awareness observation strategies that are now empirically studied.

Dialogue with the concept of gap awareness in psychology and neurophenomenology also reveals methodological convergence. In neurophenomenology, first-person experience is mapped alongside neurocognitive data to identify microstructures of consciousness. Petitmengin emphasizes the importance of training attention toward transitional phases of experience “micro-gestures of awareness” often overlooked in ordinary observation (Petitmengin, 2006). The *antara* technique explicitly trains attention on such transitional phases: between breaths, between thoughts, between perceptions. This correspondence indicates that nondual tantric texts developed a practical taxonomy of experiential intervals long before the emergence of experimental phenomenology methodologies. While the metaphysical frameworks differ, there is structural convergence at the level of experience.

The conceptual contribution of tantra to consciousness discourse lies in asserting that the interval is not merely a temporal pause but an ontological mode of consciousness. In many Western cognitive models, experiential gaps are often interpreted as a lack of content. Conversely, in the nondual Śaiva framework, the interval is regarded as the moment in which pure consciousness most fully reveals itself. Thompson notes that Indian contemplative traditions offer models of non-representational consciousness that can enrich enactive and reflexive theories of consciousness (Thompson, 2015). Thus, the concept of *antara* expands the discourse by providing a category of experience in which consciousness is defined not by content but by its own presence. This offers a conceptual contribution to debates on whether consciousness is always “about something” or can be present without an object. However, the cross-traditional interpretation entails

methodological limitations that must be emphasized. Directly equating *antara* with modern gap awareness risks conceptual reduction and neglects the metaphysical and soteriological horizon of the tantric text. Comparative contemplative studies remind us that practice and concept must be read within their respective doctrinal ecology. Dahl, Lutz, and Davidson stress the importance of a “construct-validity across traditions” framework so that experiential terms are not forced into equivalence merely because of phenomenological similarity (Dahl et al., 2015). In this context, *antara* is not merely an attentional technique but part of the path of nondual recognition (*pratyabhijñā*). Therefore, conceptual dialogue must be analogical rather than identificatory.

The concept of *antara* is relevant for contemporary consciousness studies in three ways: (1) as a classical model of attention training toward experiential intervals, (2) as a framework for non-representational consciousness, and (3) as a corrective against the tendency to reduce consciousness to content-laden cognitive processes. Its relevance, however, must be approached through careful comparative hermeneutics, maintaining the distinction between the nondual tantric horizon and modern consciousness science. With this approach, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* can serve as a robust conceptual dialogue partner without compromising its traditional integrity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on textual, philological, and hermeneutic analysis of the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, the *antara* technique (pause/interval) can be understood as one of the primary methodological devices in nondual Śaiva Trika consciousness practice. The interval in question is not merely a temporal gap but a transitional moment in which the referential structure of experience particularly the subject object relation weaken or collapse. Across various dhāraṇās, the text consistently directs

practitioners' attention to the midpoint (*madhya*), the gap (*antara*), dissolution (*visrānti*), and operational emptiness (*śūnya*) as entry points for direct recognition of Bhairava, that is, absolute consciousness. The recurring instructional patterns across slokas reveal a performative formula: from phenomenal objects (breath, thought, sound, perception) to the non-conceptual interval where consciousness discloses itself without conceptual mediation.

Terminological analysis shows that networks of terms such as *antara*, *madhya*, *śūnya*, and *visrānti* operate functionally rather than lexically. Their meaning is determined by praxis function within the meditative instruction structure. Thus, the text does not primarily construct a discursive metaphysical system but organizes experiential protocols. Hermeneutically, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* is better read as an instructional-performative text guiding transformation in the way of experiencing, not merely conceptual understanding. Aphoristic language, paradoxes, and locational markers serve to deconstruct cognitive reification tendencies and open direct nondual experience.

Typological analysis indicates that the *antara* technique occurs across multiple domains: respiratory (breath pauses), cognitive (gaps between thoughts), sensory (perceptual intervals), and integrative (settling in the center of consciousness). The diversity of objects underscores that the essential aspect is not the object itself but the interval structure. Within this context, breath pauses occupy a central position as the most explicit model of interval mechanisms understood not as engineered retention but as natural cessation revealing non-conceptual consciousness. Both traditional exegesis and modern scholarly analysis emphasize that the interval is not produced by technique but recognized by refined attention.

In dialogue with contemporary consciousness studies, the concept of *antara* demonstrates strong conceptual relevance, particularly with notions of gap awareness, micro-

phenomenology, and non-representational consciousness. Interval techniques in nondual tantra can be seen as classical formulations of attention training toward experiential gaps now studied in cognitive science and contemplative studies. Cross-traditional comparison, however, must be conducted carefully to avoid reducing the Śaiva Trika metaphysical and soteriological horizon to merely a psychological technique. Relevance is best achieved through analogical dialogue rather than direct equivalence.

In conclusion, the concept of *antara* in the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* represents a praxis model for deconstructing duality and recognizing nondual consciousness that is direct, operational, and cross-modal. It situates the interval not as passive emptiness but as an epistemological and ontological locus for consciousness disclosure. These findings underscore the significant contribution of the nondual tantric text to consciousness studies in religious studies, philosophy of experience, and contemporary contemplative dialogue.

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