Journal of Dharma Studies
https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-024-00174-z

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Nakedness of *Prakṛti*: A Sāṃkhya-Yoga Reading of Aubrey Menen's *The Space Within the Heart*

Raquel Ferrández[1]

Accepted: 8 June 2024

Abstract
In his autobiography *The Space within the Heart* (1970), the writer Aubrey Menen shares the experiment in self-inquiry he conducted in the 1960s in the Piazza Farnese in Rome. Relying on the reading of two Upaniṣads, he decided to retreat to a room and not abandon the experiment until he had achieved the experience of his true self, the *ātman*. Employing only intellectual analysis, Menen distances himself, one by one, from all the narratives that make up his empirical identity. In this essay, I propose to interpret his experiment from classical Sāṃkhya philosophy, reading it as a contemporary practice of *tattva-abhyāsa* that proceeds through a methodic disenchantment and entails a cognitive and emotional nakedness that might be interpreted as the nakedness of *prakṛti*. This case study raises questions about the application of Sāṃkhya philosophy in contexts other than renunciation and outside of any tradition, as well as on the role that emotions play in the process of the negation (*pratiṣedha*) of *tattva*-s, for the latter are not abstract entities, but shape our various empirical identities through emotional knots that the seeker will have to undo in the exercise of coming to affirm their identity as *puruṣa*.

Keywords *Tattvābhyāsa* · Sāṃkhya · Yoga · Aubrey Menen · *Kleśa* · Emotions

Seeking the Disembodied Laughter

The famous stanza 64 of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (henceforth: SK) condenses in a short sentence the knowledge to which the practice of the contemplation of the *tattva*-s leads: "I am not (*na asmi*), it is not mine (*na me*), there is no I (*na aham*)." To clarify these words, Vācaspati Miśra explains that *nāsmi* means *puruṣo'smi*, so the negative formulation "I am not" carries implicitly the affirmative knowledge "I am puruṣa," the knowledge that my true identity is beyond transformation, change,

✉ Raquel Ferrández
rferrandez@fsof.uned.es

[1] Department of Philosophy, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Madrid, Spain

Published online: 25 June 2024

birth, and procreation.[1] Commenting on this same *kārikā*, the *Yuktidīpikā* (henceforth: YD) advocates that through a repeated exercise of negation (*pratiṣedha*) of the *tattva*-s and objects of the world (*parikalpita-viṣaya*), this knowledge "*nāsmi name nāham*" arises.[2] A possible question at this point has to do with the ways of realizing this negation of the *tattva*-s. Is there only one correct way of realizing this *abhyāsa* or can there be different ways of coming to affirm the liberating threefold negation? Does this practice require exercises that transcend the domain of the intellect or can it be carried out solely through intellectual analysis? It is also necessary to ask about the role that emotions play in this process. Distancing oneself from the *tattva*-s implies distancing oneself from many of the identities to which we have clung all our lives. *Tattva*-s are not abstract entities; they are involved in our sexual identity, for example, but also in our moral, religious, political, or filial identity. Denying the *tattva*-s implies denying a multitude of narratives around ourselves that have taken root in us through complex emotional knots; therefore, neutralizing them implies neutralizing all those emotions and attachments as well. Keeping this is in mind, I also wonder how many lives there will be behind the knowledge that summarizes SK 64, behind the movement that Vācaspati Miśra proposes from not being *prakṛti* to being *puruṣa*. In other words, I wonder how many stories the tension between being and not being can tell us.

To answer these questions about the practical dimension of the exercise of recognizing what we are not (*nāsmi*), what we do not have (*na me*), and the kind of self that does not represent us (*nāham*), I have turned to the experiment in self-inquiry that Aubrey Menen, skeptical, analytical, provocative writer, outside of all tradition, religious affiliation, and political commitment, left narrated in his autobiography *The Space within the Heart* (1970). In the 1960s, Menen decides to seclude himself in a small apartment in Piazza Farnese in Rome, and not to abandon the experiment until he has reached the experience of his true self, the *ātman*. To that end, he is going to rely on the reading of two Upaniṣads, although in this essay I try to show that his experiment has more to do with classical Sāṃkhya philosophy than with Upaniṣadic thought. Menen does not mention *brahman* at any point, nor even when the experiment is bearing fruit does he refer to any feeling of union or fusion with something greater. There are no hidden correspondences, no secret doctrines. What there is is a systematic effort to analyze and deny, one by one, all the "skins of his life" or the empirical identities that make up his false identity. The method employed consists of studying oneself through reason and analysis, the key to success being the continuous repetition of such study and the progressive negation of all the resulting narratives. This process of continued negation (*pratiṣedha*) assumes the phenomenology of an emotional *sattvification* around those narratives, and the gradual emergence of the true self, a sort of feeling that Menen (1970, 11) calls the "disembodied laughter" but describes as a "Tranquil eye" or as "an empty space to

[1] *athavā nāsmeti puruṣo'smi na prasavadharmā* (TK, 267, SK 64).

[2] *parikalpitaviṣayabhedapratiṣedhamukhena nāsmi na me nāhamityapariśeṣam* (YD 1998, 265, 7, SK 64).

be used as a post of observation," features of isolation and passivity shared by both the Upaniṣadic *ātman* and the *puruṣa* of classical Sāṃkhya.

It is important to emphasize that Menen is not seeking absolute liberation, and at no point does he advocate being liberated upon successful completion of the exercise. He does not even mention rebirth so it is doubtful that the idea of liberating isolation (*kaivalya*) in the sense in which it is posited by classical Sāṃkhya philosophy even crossed Menen's thought. All he sought was to create an experience of his true self strong and stable enough to be able to live in the world remembering that this true self is beyond transformation, change, and birth.

In what follows, I will employ the philosophy of classical Sāṃkhya to interpret Menen's experiment, but also some aspects of the *Yogasūtra*, especially in its psychological dimension. Menen's practice does not seem to correspond to any *yogābhyāsa* as formulated by Patañjali, but it can be considered an unusual and transgressive attempt at *tattvābhyāsa*. The main purpose of *The Space Within the Heart* is to propose a model for all those who want to put the experiment into practice. It is not, therefore, a conventional autobiography, but rather an *anti-autobiography* where what is detailed is the process of deconstructing a life populated by false identities constructed by society and others.

The Methodic Disenchantment

Born in London in 1912, son of an Irish mother and an Indian father, Aubrey Menen was the author of twenty-six books of fiction and non-fiction. He is best known for his *Ramayana retold* (1954), one of the first books censored in independent India. Living at the crossroads of all empirical identities, this professional satirist is the symbol of rootlessness as a way of life. Not English enough in his native land, not Indian enough in the land of his father; homosexual in times unsympathetic to the diversity of sexual identity, consummate anti-nationalist and non-believer in any of the dogmas to which many of us turn for refuge: religious, moral, political, and even *affective* dogmas. In his fifties, he decided to lock himself in a room in Rome, guided by the reading of two Upaniṣads, with the purpose of not abandoning the experiment until he had reached the experience of the *ātman*. For this, he is not going to employ meditation, prayer, or *prāṇāyāma*, but only his thought. The process and result of this experiment have been captured in the work *The Space Within the Heart* (1970). From the title, it is easy to guess that he has used the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*, in which the *ātman* is characterized by this expression. This space, as Menen approaches it, has nothing to do with the pericardium or the vital breaths that are concentrated in that area of the body. Menen ignores the physiological dimension of the ancient Upaniṣads and takes this expression as if it were the metaphor of the "cave" in which the *ātman* resides hidden—a metaphor proper to later Upaniṣads, such as the *Kaṭha*.[3]

[3] According to Jonardon Ganeri (2007, 21), "The metaphor [of the cave] is absent from the two earliest Upaniṣads -*Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*- which speak instead of a 'space within the heart' (*hṛdaya ākāśaḥ*) and that is not a metaphor but an important element of early Upaniṣadic physiology and psychology." Aubrey Menen, however, takes the expression metaphorically, ignoring its physiological dimen-

The place chosen to carry out this experiment could be considered a *heterotopia*, literally "other space," in the sense that Foucault (1986) gave to this term. As Foucault describes it, a *heterotopia* is a "verifiable utopia," a utopia that exists, is real, and can be located on a map. It often presents itself as a liminal space capable of harboring within itself multiple spaces and time periods (*heterochronies*). In this case, Menen's heterotopia consists of a remote and hidden place located, however, in the heart of a tourist capital. To reach his room, Menen had to cross two squares, a corridor with four doors all locked and a courtyard. But the location of this "cave" is none other than Piazza Farnese, in Rome's old town. Once installed in its *outer* heterotopia, the process of letting the "other-self" emerge (a sort of *inner* heterotopia) requires a series of self-reflection tools that appeal to the capacities of *prakṛti*. At first, the process is of a purely intellectual nature. Most of the autobiography, in fact, is a demonstration of how Menen classifies and cuts with the scalpel the "public selves" with which the world has pretended to endow him with an identity.

> But the fact remains that the only way of getting to the space within the heart is to go through the process of examining your false self. It cannot be attained by prayer, or by controlling your breath, or by taking a drug. It is as pure an intellectual process as learning a foreign language, and like that, it must be done by going over the same lesson again and again. (Menen, 1970,13)

One would say that in order to separate in this way one by one the strands that make up the rope of empirical identity, memory is an indispensable element. And yet Menen warns future seekers of the danger of relying on this instrument. In his interpretation on the *Yogasūtra*, Daniel Raveh mentions the paradox of a memory (*smṛti*) that is unable to remember *puruṣa*, the true self that is making it possible. "To remember *puruṣa*, or more precisely oneself as *puruṣa*," claims Raveh (2012, 27), "memory (in the conventional sense of the word) has to be suspended; suspension which may give rise to that which memory, that is, 'phenomenal memory,' cannot register." In the context of Menen's experiment, phenomenal memory must not be suspended, but neither can we simply rely on it. For memory is a deceptive tool: not only does it fail to remember *puruṣa*, it fails to remember many parts of itself. As we all know, falsifying memories is one of the functions of a healthy memory. If this experiment is to be carried out seriously, in the manner of a precise surgery, the seeker must provide herself with external resources. The effort promises to be cumbersome: building a kind of museum about oneself and then tearing it down by careful scrutiny.

> You are going to examine your life to see how much of it is really yours. But one's memory cannot be relied upon. It is well to surround yourself with mementos, hooks on which to hang your enquiry. You are not on holiday; you have not gone to get away from it all. You have gone away to see through it.

Footnote 3 (continued)
sion. Thus, at the end of the work, he explicitly states: "Then one hears a call. It comes from somewhere here, deep in the mind -the word "heart" is a metaphor. It calls one away from the Public self and the Private self. It is a voice in an island, calling across the sea" (Menen 1970, 167).

> Books, photographs, letters, keepsakes are all useful. Your walls should grow to resemble those of a retired actress, except that beside your triumphs you are careful to put reminders of your disasters. (Menen, 1970, 163)

The plots of his life that Menen shares with us represent skins of *prakṛti* that are being peeled off in the process, one by one, separated from a core of consciousness that they used to cover up. When studying himself, Menen constantly employs the metaphor of the "surgeon" to symbolize a process of analysis that is neutral, detached, and as unemotional as possible. "Most of the thinking we do about ourselves is cozy and sentimental," Menen confesses (1970, 51). However, to carry out this experiment requires not "hazy human-kindness" but "the neutral precision of a surgeon." The person who proposes to retire to follow in the steps of this exercise is no novelist seeking to embellish his life. Especially, Menen warns, he is not a novelist in the style of Gustave Flaubert, who used to be moved by the emotions of his characters. On the contrary, "the seeker must be no more moved than a judge on the bench listening to evidence which sounds tragic but may be a clever lie" (Menen, 1970, 164). It is important to emphasize that Menen is fundamentally going to use thought to reach a space within himself where there is knowledge, but no longer thought. "I had reversed Descartes. He said 'I think, therefore I am.' But I was, I existed, calmly, quietly, without a care in the world; yet there was no thinking," Menen (1970, 167–168) comments at the end of the experiment. Thus, the final experiences of the exercise transcend the domain of the intellectual. And although the claim of this exercise is not to attain a definitive *kaivalya* in the manner of the classical Sāṃkhya or Yoga, to attain the experience of *puruṣa* and obtain a certain "liberation" from all false identifications require equally the nakedness of *prakṛti*. After all, does not *tattvābhyāsa* consist fundamentally in the progressive nudity of *prakṛti*? Through his particular methodical disenchantment and following intellectual paths, Menen proposes to us a way to put it into practice. And the isolation or *kaivalya* that results from such an attempt is also to be understood as a cognitive and emotional nakedness. Rodney J. Parrott mentions this very nakedness by interpreting SK 61, where we are told that *prakṛti*, acknowledging that she has been seen, never again presents herself to *puruṣa*'s sight.

> Prakṛti has been dancing for Puruṣa since beginningless time. […] Why does she suddenly become so bashful? Because until now she was being viewed by a Puruṣa with empty eyes. 'I' was watching as intellect, ego, etc. As soon as 'I' becomes Puruṣa, the eyes of Puruṣa become full of conscious awareness. This awareness makes Prakṛti self-conscious of her nakedness. (Parrott, 1990, 105).

Unraveling the Plots of *prakṛti*

"It was Pope John XXIII who caused me to make up my mind to find out who I was," begins *The Space within the Heart* (1970, 1). In a semi-private audience, the Pope corrects Menen's nationality, explaining to him that he is not English, but Indian. In this way, His Holiness adds to a long list of correctors and "stereotypers."

For Menen had seen his national identity questioned or corrected in different situations and with different results. In France, he is systematically taken for a mystic given his Indian roots,[4] while in England, he is not awarded the financial prize for an essay he had won because he is not of purely English descent; yet he does not feel English when surrounded by Bloomsbury artists and in India he is not considered Indian enough given his English upbringing. In a way, this whole experiment in self-inquiry is dedicated to the Pope, as Menen takes him as the symbol of all those who, throughout his life, have tried to define his identity on the basis of his nationality, his skin color, his Indian physical traits, his English upbringing, etc. Therefore, with this beginning, Menen chooses to lead the experiment by questioning the identity linked to nationality, homeland, and skin color. But this is only one of the many identities or "public selves" that he will have to discard and purge locked in that room.

These narratives are important given that at different times in his life Menen tried to find his true self by identifying with them, without success. The *tattva*-s are involved in all of them, and the threefold process by which Menen goes about denying them could be considered an exercise in *pratiṣedha* as mentioned in the *Yuktidīpikā*.

Although I will dwell on the case of the denial of filial identity, I will first briefly enumerate the list of identities that Menen deconstructs in the experiment. One of Menen's convictions is that belonging to a group or collective cannot lead us to the true self. In this sense, neither morality nor nationality can give us back the image of what we really are, but rather they can become deviations on the road to self-knowledge.[5] His first novel *The Prevalence of Witches* (1947), a satire against nationalism, Western prejudices, and religious superstition, is the result of his attempt to find

[4] In Paris, one of his first lovers insists on considering him a mystic because of his Indian roots (Menen, 1970, 91). This tendency to mystify his person on the basis of his origin is also mentioned in the prologue of *India* (1969) in which he makes a plea against all the preconceived ideas that English, Americans, French, and Italians hold about India and its inhabitants. This plea bears certain similarities with Daya Krishna's lecture "Understanding Civilizations. Two Cases Studies, Indian and Western" (2012a, 90), insofar as both denounce the exotic and mystifying image of India that was constructed both from the West and from the Indian subcontinent itself. In this context, I share the beginning of such a plea by Menen and Beny (1969, 14) because it is significant in understanding the weight these prejudices have had in his own life: "India was a 'sub-continent' (whatever that meant) inhabited by a rather excessive number of brown people. These people incessantly worshipped three thousand gods, would not kill cows, and even more eccentrically, would not kill human beings. They were divided into rigid castes that forbad all social progress. Women were treated as chattels and wives had to walk seven paces behind their husbands. From this benighted mass of people only two figures emerged -Mahatma Gandhi, who was a saint with the peremptory habit of refusing to eat when he could not get his own way, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who regularly ate three meals a day and was a thorough gentleman. These two, with approximately 400, 000, 000 fellow-countrymen, statistically made up one-fifth of the human race, but it could not be said that it mattered very much. Nor was it only the British who held these opinions. The Americans thought much the same way, but they were more open-minded about it. They were eager to learn something new of India, provided it was about Yoga. The French, who leave their universities knowing everything, also knew all about India. To the usual list they added the fact that Indians were mystics. Visiting Indians, like myself, who complained that they were not mystics were merely told in rapid French that they were.".

[5] For example, in his other autobiography, *Dead Man in the Silver Market*, Menen states: "There are no national virtues. We are alone, each one of us. If we are good, we are good ourselves. If we are bad, the

himself through the action of "good deeds." As a young man, he accepts the job of going into the forest to inculcate Western progress in the Dangis tribe in India. Once there, the feeling of hypocrisy grows within him, since he feels neither wiser nor more civilized than the Dangis in the moral sense of the term. The refusal to seek himself through belonging to the group also leads him to discard his identity as an artist, just as he experienced it when he lived with the Bloomsbury group of artists in the 1930s. Immersed in that artistic atmosphere, some try to convince him that his true self is linked to the social structure and to think otherwise is a sign of egotism: "'Egotism, still egotism. You are not just you. You are part of the social structure.' It was a new idea then. It was in the air in all the Bloomsburys in Europe. […] It is the purpose of [*The Space Within the Heart*] to show how wrong [these words] are" (1970, 112). The same can be said of his political identity, for Menen may have chosen to develop a political career by joining the Indian League for Independence in England led by V.K. Krishna Menon. Without quite knowing why, he refused to follow this path. Decades later, locked in that room in Piazza Farnese, Menen understands why he made that decision: "I was not myself. I was what the world and my friends had made of me. I saw that if I followed Menon I would never be true to my own real being, even if, then, I did not know what that was." (1970, 116). Finally, the narrative around his sexual identity is also implicated, which carries weight in this exercise because it carries weight in Menen's own life. Menen discovers that he is homosexual in morally retrograde times regarding this issue, and this makes him question even more the criteria of social morality, which is revealed to be changeable and arbitrary. On the other hand, by distancing himself from his sexual identity and affective relationships, Menen is also dis-identifying himself from his own body and sensorial desires. Religious identity is also to be discarded, and Menen's brief approach to Catholicism is revealed in that room as a deviation in the search for his true self, as an attempt to take refuge from himself through the fixed guidelines of an institutionalized religion.

Taking as a case study the denial of the filial identity, I propose to show the steps Menen follows to neutralize each of these narratives. Filial identity is the starting point that affects the process of denial of all other identities and, naturally, its denial arouses an emotional intent that Menen will have to deal with. As will be seen, this inusual attempt at *tattvābhyāsa* follows a working pattern that is far from random.

Pratiṣedha Applied to Filial Identity

Undoing the filial identity, the view of himself as "son" and the role imposed by his family, is one of the most difficult exercises for Menen and, therefore, perhaps the most serious part of the experiment. To begin with the deconstruction of this narrative, Menen warns us:

Footnote 5 (continued)
virtues of others will not make us better. We cannot borrow morals. They are ours or they do not exist for us." (1953, 188).

> When you begin to examine yourself to find your true self, you dwell for a long time on the comforting myths that have got you by. Nor do you know they are myths. But one day, as you grow wearier and wearier to the heart of your being, you lose them. You see yourself naked and no lie will comfort you anymore. (1970, 45)

Only when one is willing to "undress" and let go of the myths that used to protect us from ourselves can the exercise be undertaken in earnest. The process of denial of filial identity follows a three-step pattern. First, Menen arrives at the room in Piazza Farnese carrying with him a narrative that he sets out to analyze in detail to see how much truth there is in it. This first narrative, now subjected to the surgeon's scrutiny, takes the form of an idealization of his parents. Menen recognizes that this idealizing myth has protected him in difficult stages of his life, especially during his childhood and adolescence, when racism and discrimination awaited him at the school gate.

> My parents were pioneers: I was the offspring of bold spirits who had opened the path to a new world where all the races of mankind could live in harmony together. [This myth] sustained me when English school companions called me the Rajah of Jampot and tripped me up so that I fell in the mud. (1970, 36)

Although this "mythological" narrative may play an important role in a person's life, identifying with it poses a serious obstacle when one is preparing the ground for the experience of *puruṣa* to emerge. Such idealization is rooted in wrong knowledge and is a type of *viparyaya*. This term appears as one of the *pañca-vṛtti*-s or five mental movements formulated in YS 1.5, and also appears in SK 47 in the context of enumerating the emergence (*sarga*) of mental phenomena (*pratyaya*). The *Yuktidīpikā* names and enumerates these five kinds of *viparyaya* as follows: dullness (*tamas*), delusion (*moha*), extreme delusion (*mahāmoha*), gloom (*tāmisra*), and utter gloom (*andhatāmisra*) In its commentary to YS 1. 8, where *viparyaya* is defined, Vyāsa identifies this erroneous knowledge with the five *kleśa* listed by Patañjali in YS 2.3. Ian Whicher explains *viparyaya* as follows:

> The second [vṛtti] is "error" (*viparyaya*), that is, when one's understanding or a thought does not correspond with reality and one apprehends something as other than what it is. Vyāsa (*YB* I.8) treats *viparyaya* as a synonym for the term *avidyā* (ignorance), *avidyā* being the principal among the five afflictions (*kleśa*).The *vṛtti* of *viparyaya* is the fundamental error due to which we misinterpret or misconceive existence itself! (Whicher, 1998, 110)

In the *Tattva-kaumudī*, Vācaspati Miśra also connects these five *viparyaya* mentioned in SK 47 and listed in the *Yuktidīpikā* with the five *kleśa* of the YS. It is worth bearing in mind here the appreciation of Anindita N. Balslev when she indicates that "not all erroneous cognitions are referred to as *kleśa*-s, although the five *kleśas* are no doubt said to give rise to mistaken views of things and hence are *viparyayas*" (1991, 79).

Menen's process of negation begins by an idealizing narrative, which would correspond to *rāga*, the *kleśa* of attraction and desire, and hence to *mahāmoha* or extreme delusion. But this narrative is very soon going to be offset by its counter-narrative, a much less optimistic and hopeful narrative that is going to tend to the opposite extreme and that fulfills a key function in this "methodical disenchantment." For this second narrative is necessary to cut through the delusion of the first, even though it too gives rise to erroneous knowledge and is rooted in the *kleśa* of aversion and disgust, *dveṣa*, or in terms of the *Yuktidīpikā*, in the *viparyaya* called *tāmisra* (gloom).

Only when this second narrative leaves its dormant state (*prasupta*) and attains its state of full manifestation (*udāra*) can it serve to counteract the effect of the first.[6] This becomes possible when, locked in that room, Menen recalls some words that his mother confessed to him, being already a widow and sentenced to death by a pancreatic cancer, after drinking more champagne than the account. That confession had to do with the reasons why she had married: she had fallen in love with Menen's father because he had reminded her of one of the brown dolls she used to play with as a child and that she used to give to missionaries. For some reason, Menen had not paid much attention to these words of his mother, expressed in a casual moment of drunkenness. Now, however, immersed in the experiment of finding himself guided by the reading of the Upaniṣads, he is in a position to confront what this confession makes him feel and, more importantly, he is in a position to use it to construct a counter-narrative that helps him neutralize the idealizing narrative under which he used to hide. Thus, in that room, Menen goes from feeling proud for being the son of "two pioneers" to feeling humiliated and disappointed for being the son of "a doll and a willful woman."

In the analysis of this counter-narrative, emotions are unleashed and Menen allows rage and anger to surface freely, even going so far as to question the whole experiment. Let us keep in mind that it was his father, before he died, who asked him to read the Upaniṣads and seek the experience of his true self. Therefore, the memory of his father reduced to a brown doll and the idea that his own birth is the fruit of an arbitrary chance tinged with racism and infantilism makes Menen direct his anger also against the Upaniṣads themselves and against the experiment he is conducting. The following words, addressed to the Pope, show the state of anger and sadness he was in, but also the way Menen internalizes the racism he himself endured throughout his life.

> Neither English nor Indian, Holy Father. I am the child of a doll and a willful woman. May I ask your apostolic blessing for the doll, Holy Father? It was a very Christian doll. It was meant for missionaries, but I do not know if they were Catholic. [...]

[6] In YS 2.4, the various phases that *kleśa*-s go through are explained: dormant (*prasupta*), attenuated (*tanu*), intercepted (*vichinna*), and fully manifest (*udāra*). According to Balslev (1991, 86), this scheme expresses "different facets and stages of the life of emotion.".

> I cursed the Upaniṣads. What were they, after all, but a product of the doll? Why was I sitting in my room reading this Oriental mystification if it was not because of the doll? Who was the middle-aged man, his grey hair plastered to his head with wet? Who was he? Ask the doll. (1970, 49-50)

Although the exercise consists of submitting all these narratives to the impassive eye of the surgeon, that does not mean that emotions should be suppressed or repressed. Stripping the filial identity cannot be a process devoid of emotions. Performing *sunetram*, the seventh of the nine kinds of contentment (*tuṣṭi*) mentioned in SK 50 and which according to the *Yuktidīpikā* involves distancing oneself from loved ones, can hardly be accomplished while ignoring the emotions that lie at the root of those false identifications. But after the narrative and the outburst of the counter-narrative, there comes the key moment of negation (*pratiṣedha*), the rejection of both narrative identities and the recognition that both are *viparyaya*-bearing and rooted in afflictions or *kleśas*. It is convenient to understand *kleśa* here in its double meaning as both "affliction" and "defilement." In his study of the Buddhist influences on the *Yogasūtra*, Pradeep P. Gokhale points out the parallels between Patañjali's use of the term *kleśa* and Asaṅga's definition of *kilesa* as a "factor of mental disturbance" in his *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.

> The defining feature of *kleśa*, according to Asaṅga, is lack of peace (*apraśama*). Asaṅga says, 'What is the defining feature (of *kleśa*)? It is the characteristic (of mind) which, when arises, is characterized by non-peace. When it arises, the body-mind series tends to be without peace.' The two meanings of the word kleśa, namely "defilement" and "affliction", can be connected in this way: kleśa stands for defilement of mind, which afflicts the mind by taking away its peace. (Gokhale, 2020, 70)

The moment of negation of these two narratives rooted in *kleśa*-s, therefore, can be understood as a process of recovery of that peace of mind (*prasáma*) and manifests as a gradual *sattvification* of emotions, from anger to compassion. Such *sattvification* culminates in a neutral or equanimous attitude (*madhyastha*) towards previously disturbing mental contents, an attitude which is the result of the practice of the nine contentments according to the comments of the YD to SK 50.

> The doll no longer worried me. The doll had not made [...] the man who sat alone in his room, dissecting his life. It had made the man who had written the banned play; it had made the writer of the row of my books which stood on the shelves of my room. [...] But the tranquil observer of all this that I had found deep inside myself was no part of any of this. Secure in this discovery, I could see [...] the woman who married her doll in the shape of my father as the same woman who had faced the news of her own death with courage. (Menen, 1970, 72-73)

Menen is going to follow these three steps with each of the narratives I have listed above, although his autobiography does not give us details of the process of denial of all of them. However, he is going to let all the narratives around his various identities unfold freely, allowing the *guṇa*-s to fight among themselves and then move

on to neutralize any possible identification with that battle. The process requires the impassivity and impartiality of the surgeon, but that does not mean that it is devoid of emotional turmoil or "periods of bitter reflection" that Menen recognizes as necessary phases in the purification of the skins of *prakṛti*.

Contemplated in this light, doubt arises for the role of emotions in the exercise of *tattvābhyāsa* and, in general, in the psychology of classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The commentaries to the famous stanza 64 of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, where this practice is made explicit do not mention even in passing any emotional process. This absence of the emotional dimension in the process of discrimination that the Sāṃkhya proposes is quite significant.[7] Daniel Raveh wondered precisely about this same absence in regard to the *Yogasūtra*.

> Another missing feature in the vṛtti-scheme, apart from imagination, is emotions. Patañjali depicts the human consciousness as knowledge-oriented, thus ignoring or even suppressing the emotional realm. The question is of course why. Is it because he belongs to a cultural climate in which it is uncustomary to discuss emotions? Or since he evaluates emotions as a subordinated to and determined by the knowledge-centered vṛtti-s enumerated by him? Prima facie, emotions (consisting of the word motion, that is, vṛtti) seem to be a constitutive factor of the constant change, movement, restlessness of consciousness, which Patañjali seeks to resolve. The "medicine" prescribed by him for mental activity as a "disease" is twofold, consisting of abhyāsa and vairāgya, repetitive practice and dispassion. (Raveh, 2012, 27).[8]

Are we to consider emotions to be included in the enumeration of the five *vṛtti*-s? Or in the psychological dimension of the *guṇa*-s? Or only in the characterization of the *kleśa*-s? Anindita Balslev (1991, 86) argues that "an in-depth study of the Yoga analysis of *kleśa* is an illuminating source for an understanding of the profound impact that emotion has on the cognitive and volitional aspects of our lives," given that the YS does not settle on a strict division between the cognitive and emotional dimensions, thus agreeing with certain contemporary theories of mind that defend the partiality of any approach that claims to establish such a division. However, there is no doubt that neither the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* nor the *Yogasūtra*, nor their respective exegetical traditions, impinge too much on the emotional challenges of

[7] It is significant that one of the criticisms made of the Sāṃkhya has to do precisely with its omission of the perception of emotional and mental states in the terse definition of perception provided by SK 5: "One of the serious objections of the Sāṃkhya opponents (including Dignāga) was that the Sāṃkhya definition of perception did not account for different types of perception, such as the perception of satisfaction (*sukha*), anger (*krodha*), frustration (*duḥkha*), and so forth" (Harzer, 2006, 82). According to Harzer, the YD responds to these criticisms by arguing that the definition of perception in SK 5 would not only address external sensory perception, but would also include the mental perception of emotional states. However, when I refer to the absence of the emotional dimension in SK, I am referring primarily to such absence in the treatment of *tattvābhyāsa* and in the process of arriving at the threefold liberating negation reflected in SK 64.

[8] Regarding this absence of the discussion of emotions pointed out by Raveh, it is not superfluous to recall the passage from the *Bhagavadgītā* 2.54–2.72, in which Krishna recommends Arjuna to be completely detached from emotions.

the practitioners as they advance in their practice. In the case of the fundamental exercise that this essay addresses, *tattvābhyāsa*, this absence is quite noticeable. Certainly, the distancing exercise Menen performs could fit with the practice described by Harihārananda Āraṇya commenting on SK 64:

> In other words, the true path of liberation lies in the following three kinds of practice. One must practise on the feeling that "I do not possess anything" or that "I do not need anything" (*na me*). Then, one must practise withdrawal of identification with one's non-self adjuncts such as "I am, not even this body and the senses" (*na aham*). Finally, one must concentrate on the feeling that "I" in its purest sense, i.e. Puruṣa, is not even the knower of the subtlest experience, beyond the empiric pure I-sense (*na asmi*) (Āraṇya, 2005, 152)

Āraṇya further offers an appendix where he places each of the three negations in the meditator's body and calls this meditative exercise of distancing "jñāna yoga" (Āraṇya, 2005, 301). However, Āraṇya's treatment is rooted in the tradition of renunciation and asceticism, so here too we find no phenomenological description of the various emotions that can arise in the process of detaching ourselves from all that we had clung to throughout our lives. On the contrary, Menen's exercise, although it happens in the solitude of a room, is still an attempt to practice *tattvābhyāsa* in the midst of the world and with the aim of returning to it carrying the knowledge of his true self. The description of his exercise is colored by the emotional upheavals he had to face before he could definitively deny each of his false identities, and again and again Menen takes care to remind the seeker of this aspect of the exercise.

> As I found in my room, the road to the peace of the space within the heart is not straight and it is not easy. It is beset with storms of emotion such as mine when I went out into the rain. The solitude, the concentration, make the pictures in the mind vivid and harsh, like the colors of some once mellows masterpiece that has been cleaned by the restorers. They are pictures in which you see details that have, all your life, been comfortably hidden under the grime and the varnish (1970, 58)

Spiritual Convalescence: The Dialogue Between *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti*

Menen's process of negation follows certain well-marked steps. A key aspect of the exercise consists of repeatedly studying the narratives that one has reconstructed not simply using memory, but aided by external tools. The process of gathering all these narratives around identity can be done by means of a notebook or by means of a tape recorder. Again, the appeal here is to the honesty of the individual, and Menen reminds that the experiment is not about sweetening or embellishing these narratives; on the contrary, it is about stripping them bare once and for all. "After some days the seeker will have a number of the skins of the onion he is unpeeling safely in his notebook or on his machine," Menen (1970,164) indicates, "Let us call these his public selves. He should now go over

these repeatedly, like a student revising for an exam." The factor of repetition is fundamental in this exercise; otherwise, we could not call it *abhyāsa*. In the process of going over and over these narratives again and again, for the purpose of analyzing them scrupulously with the eye of the surgeon, there emerges spontaneously what Menen calls the "private self" which entails the phenomenology of *sattva guṇa*. It is a *sattvification* of *buddhi* and represents the sign of a certain kind of *nirodha*. The function of the private self is to sort out all the public selves and to shed light on the agitations that these may arouse in the person. Just as Menen warns us not to behave like a novelist in the style of Flaubert, who was moved by the vicissitudes of his characters, Menen equates the private self with Charles Dickens when he ordered all the characters that arose in his mind. Menen also refers to this private self as the "director" of a play. Two caveats, however, arise at this point. The first is to avoid any impulse to abandon the experiment when we have already finished stripping the skins of *prakṛti*, but the experience of the private self has not yet emerged on its own.

> It might happen that when the seeker has laid out all his Public Selves in order, his meditations are interrupted. The result is disastrous. [...] If the seeker has been honest with his survey of his Publics Selves, he will now see himself as the pawn of others' design, a leaf driven in the wind, a poor thing without any constant mind of his own. If he stops at this point and goes out into the world he will do so with all his confidence destroyed; nor will he find it again for a long time. (Menen, 1970, 165-166).

What Menen indicates is not a minor detail. Let us imagine an experience of the triple negation, *nāsmi name nāham*, that is not the result of the realization that "I am puruṣa," as Vācaspati Miśra indicated in his commentary. In that case, it would not be a liberating knowledge; it would simply leave us in the most desolate denial regarding our identity, and it is easy to see that the seeker could fall into nihilism or depressive states of mind. This is why Menen emphasizes the dangers of abandoning the experiment at such a delicate and vulnerable time for the person conducting it. "Above all, *stay in your room*," he recommends to the seeker, "if that is done, the private self will emerge, and all is well. The seeker can break off his meditation if he has to, and go back among his friends and enemies without fear" (1970, 167). From the way Menen describes the birth of what he calls the "private self," in my view it is undoubtedly a process of "cessation" or *nirodha*, especially in the second sense that Ian Whicher attributes to this term, namely:

> as a process through which knowledge (*jñāna*) or insight (*prajña*) is revealed, which can be called the "sattvification of consciousness", and which, grounded in knowledge of puruṣa (*puruṣa-jñāna*), allows for the corrected or right functioning of *vṛtti*, that is, *vṛttis* as appropriated through the illumination and purification of mind. (Whicher, 1998, 154)

This *sattvification* of consciousness is to be the decisive threshold to the experience of the "space within the heart," in which both public and private selves dissolve, to give way to a "core of consciousness" that Menen can now perceive with

illuminating rather than blinding clarity. But, again, this ultimate experience brings with it its own concerns and gives rise to an inner period of adjustment and adaptation that Menen is going to describe as a state of spiritual "convalescence." In this sense, Menen's second caveat is to point out that this private self is not yet the space within the heart. At this point in the exercise, the person has to harden his way of life, trying to eat and drink as little as possible and avoiding any tendency to leave the room. Menen describes the sudden perception of this space within as a "little death" in which the seeker must hold on.

> Then one hears a call. It comes from somewhere deep in the mind – the word "heart" is a metaphor. It calls one away from the public self and the private self. It is like a voice on an island, calling across the sea. Now you must be still, quite still. You must die a little death. Then a great tranquillity steals over you. It trickles like water through the cells of your mind, washing them clean. You think of nothing, nothing at all, but with a crystalline awareness, and it is the end of your search. (Menen, 1970, 167)

In his provocative reading of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, Rodney J. Parrott refers to this same process of "symbolic" death by commenting on SK 55. According to Parrott (1990), the decrepitude and death alluded to in this *kārikā* have to do with the spiritual process of the seeker who must now die internally in order for the knowledge of his true self to actualize and materialize.

> Verse 55 appears at this particular point in the Sāṃkhya's spiritual biography precisely because it is at this particular moment in one's spiritual discipline death fears arise most intensely; not because the seeker is suddenly old decrepit, not because physical death is immanent or that physical death just now become a psychic fact for the seeker. Rather, death fear now arises in full force for the seeker because he has to die in order that his knowledge of the true locus of the self can become factual. (Parrott, 1990, 100)

Although Menen knows that this experience, where there is knowledge but no longer thought, is the presence of an immortal witness consciousness, a "soul so self-assured it would be preprosterous to think it needed saving" (1970, 75), he equally wonders what happens to all those people who are unable to carry out this exercise because their personality has become so fragmented that they have needed psychiatric help. *Puruṣa*, that all-seeing, all-knowing, pacifying consciousness, will it have died in them?

> I can only say that the space within the heart seems to be some core of consciousness which has been overlaid by all the necessities of living, and it may be the core which sustains us against all the changes and chances we must suffer from the day of our birth, and even before. Most of us do manage to hold together some personality of our own, battered and twisted by others as it may be. Some unfortunates do not, and we lock them away in asylums. Is it because this tranquil, unchanging and unchangeable core dies in them? (Menen, 1970, 168)

When the experience of this space has stabilized, Menen begins to experience a sense of playfulness within himself, while acknowledging that he is in a state of convalescence. Not at the level of the body, but at the level of the spirit, as he feels unable to go out into the world again and resume his relationship with others. In a writing devoted to the *Yogasūtra*, Daya Krishna (2012b, 93) advocates that "not to be able to pursue *nivṛtti* would be as much a sign of bondage as not to be able to pursue *pravṛtti*." And it is this inability to pursue *pravṛtti*, after a long period of *nivṛtti*, that Menen calls "spiritual convalescence." In his case, Menen goes so far as to doubt that he can play a role in society again after his experiment. He is not sure that it is possible for him to live in the world again, to renounce solitude, with the consciousness of this Tranquil eye, this disembodied laughter.

> Could one live for any length of time in the world with the feeling that I now had? I had been alone a great deal. Was it perhaps a hallucination born of loneliness? [...] Could one live the life of a spectator without being a hermit? [...] I began to wonder whether I would ever play a normal part in society again. I began to doubt whether I would ever take on the responsibilities of living with other people... (Menen, 1970, 154-157)

Finally, it is this inner feeling of playfulness that helps him to overcome these barriers and makes him see that he can help his innermost environment by trying to prevent them from taking his empirical identities too seriously. He encourages his closest friends to get closer to this "core of consciousness" that dwells within them and, also for this very purpose, he puts down in writing his experiment in the form of this unconventional and thought-provoking autobiography, inviting us to perform this experiment of "nakedness" for ourselves.

Conclusion

Although Aubrey Menen made use of the reading of some Upaniṣads to carry out his experiment, in this essay I have tried to read his autobiography from the philosophy of the classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga. On the one hand, this exercise has a transcendental dimension that distances it from simple psychotherapy and also from psychoanalysis. In fact, Menen (1970, 141) devotes harsh criticisms to Freudian and neo-Freudian theories with which he is well acquainted. What he is looking for is the experience of a space within himself, eternal and beyond space and time, which endows the experiment with a transcendental purpose. On the other hand, there is no mention of God or of anything that establishes a hidden connection with that witnessing self, in the manner of an Upaniṣadic *brahman*. We find no macrocosmic correspondence. The basic program of the exercise is the repetition of the study of his own personal narratives with the aim of distancing himself from them one by one. As the experiment is described, it is tempting to interpret it in the terms of a contemporary and unusual *tattvābhyāsa*, performed outside of any tradition.

> One by one, you strip away those parts of your personality which consist of the things that you do because the world taught you to do them, or made you

> do them. Layer by layer -your parents' advice, your schooling, your job, your social position -all go. These are not you. Now it is the turn of your most intimate affairs, your secret hopes, your fears, your dreams. They, too, come from outside you, and they go. At last you come to your loves, your sexual life with others. You cling to those. Surely they are truly your own? But they go. It took me nearly a month, sitting in my quiet room, to see that they had to be discarded, like all the rest. (Menen, 1970, 10-11)

On the other hand, Menen does not take into account the metaphysical horizon of reincarnation. When he speaks of "past lives," he refers at all times to the series of impostor lives that were assigned to him by his relatives, friends, and social relations throughout his present life, before he locked himself in that room to unmask them once and for all. The absence of this metaphysical component means that unconscious tendencies and habits, accumulated over a series of lives, such as the *bhāva*-s (SK43,52) and even the *saṃskāra*-s, are left out of the exercise, or at least reduced to the dregs of the one life Menen takes into consideration. The karmic reservoir plays no role in his experiment, or if it does, Menen never gets around to formulating it explicitly. Nevertheless, although the process begins with intellectual analysis, the experiment ends in an experience that goes beyond the realm of thought and leads us to that transcendental sphere that Menen must know how to bring to the immanence of the world, for his purpose is not that of renunciation, but to be able to keep that experience alive and active in the midst of his worldly tasks. In short, his intention is to be able to live in the world carrying with him the liberating knowledge of SK 64, knowing at all times the distinction between his true self and the other public and ephemeral identities that, being functional and useful, turn out to be false and can give rise to a life rooted in erroneous knowledge (*viparyaya*). Rodney J. Parrott uses some of Gauḍapāda's and Māṭhara's comments to argue that the Sāṃkhya tradition was not made up of renounced ascetics, but of people who lived by observing the world in order to find themselves.

> The Sāṃkhya preceptor initiated a novice student with a straightforward charge: "Sit down, watch, observe the world around you!" This is the seeker's first lesson in Sāṃkhya meditation. This lesson remains in effect until releasing wisdom arises. There are no esoteric techniques to be revealed along the way. Throughout the seeker's career his meditation is a wide-eyed observation of the world for the purpose of finding the true self (Parrott, 1990, 93)

It is not my intention to question the nature—ascetic or otherwise—of the ancient traditions of the Sāṃkhya, but to indicate that Parrott's interpretation is entirely in keeping with the exercise undertaken by Aubrey Menen. He locks himself in a room to contemplate himself, but also to contemplate the world through the narratives it has imposed on him. Later, when he leaves that room, he does so already positioned in that "post of observation" which allows him to contemplate what surrounds him from a position of greater calm and lucidity. During his unusual, risky, and transgressive process of nudity, emotions are an important aspect and I have tried to show that Menen is aware of the importance of this emotional dimension, even though he does not allow himself to be dominated by it. As a professional writer, he resorts to similes linked to

the various ways in which novelists deal with characters and everything that befalls them. All the skins of *prakṛti* are reduced to characters from whom Menen detaches himself, one by one, and to whom his "private self" assigns their corresponding place in the plot of life, more and more from the domains of a *sattvified* mind. This *sattvification* leads to the ineffable experience of a self that knows everything without needing to think about it and that is not, and has never been, affected by any of the agitations and false assumptions of all those public selves. Finally, in attempting to read this contemporary self-inquiry experiment from the framework of an ancient soteriological philosophy, this same essay should also be considered an experiment that seeks to bring philosophy into dialogue with literature so that both may be placed at the service of life and self-knowledge.

Funding Open Access funding provided thanks to the CRUE-CSIC agreement with Springer Nature.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate The research did not involve human participants and/or animals. I give my consent to participate the Journal of Dharma Studies Issue.

Consent for Publication I give my consent to publish my article in the Journal of Dharma Studies Issue.

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

References

Āraṇya, H. (2005). *Sāṃkhya across the Millenniums*. Kapil Math.
Balslev, A. (1991). The notion of *Kleśa* and its bearing on the yoga analysis of mind. *Philosophy East and West, 41*(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/1399720
Foucault, M. (1986). "Of Other Spaces". *Diacritics*, *16* (1), 22–27. https://www.jstor.org/stable/464648
Ganeri, J. (2007). *The concealed art of the soul*. Oxford University Press.
Gokhale, P. P. (2020). *The Yogasūtras of Patañjali*. Routledge.
Harzer, E. (2006). *The Yuktidīpikā*. Shaker Verlag Aachen.
Jha, G. (1896) (trans.). *Tattva-kaumudī of Vācaspati Miśra. An English Translation with the Sanskrit text*. Bombay Theosophical Publications.
Krishna, D. (2012a). *Civilizations*. Sage Publications.
Krishna, D. (2012b). The undeciphered text: Anomalies, problems, and paradoxes in the *Yogasūtra*. In D. Raveh (Ed.), *Exploring the Yogasūtra* (pp. 90–104). Continuum.
Menen, A. (1953) *Dead man in the silver market*. Charles Scribner's Sons.
Menen, A. (1970). *The space within the heart*. McGraw-Hill.
Menen, A. & Beny, R. (1969). *India*. McGraw Hill Book Company.
Parrott, R. J. (1990). "The worth of the world in classical Sāṃkhya". *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, *71* (1/4), 83–108. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41693519. Accessed 13 Jun 2024
Raveh, D. (2012). *Exploring the Yogasūtra*. Continuum.

Wezler, A., & Motegi, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Yuktidīpikā*. Franz Steiner Verlag.
Whicher, I. (1998) *The integrity of the Yoga-darsána*. SUNY Press.