The Niśvāsamukha, the Introductory book of the Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā : critical edition, with an introduction and annotated translation appended by Śivadharmasaṅgraha 5-9

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Summary

A single 9th-century Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript preserved in the National Archives, Kathmandu, transmits what appears to be the oldest surviving Śaiva tantra, called the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*. The manuscript consists of five separate books called, in the order of appearance in the manuscript: *Niśvāsamukha*, *Mūlasūtra*, *Nayasūtra*, *Uttarasūtra* and *Guhyasūtra*. The *Niśvāsamukha*, which is divided into four chapters, serves as the introductory book prefacing the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*. This thesis presents the first critical edition, annotated translation and study of the *Niśvāsamukha*.

The *Niśvāsamukha* introduces the religious context in which the Mantramārga, the tantric Śaivism that is the subject of the four sūtras of the *Niśvāsatattvasaṃhitā*, emerged. This first book is subdivided into sections devoted to what the text calls Laukika (lay religion), Vaidika (Vedic), Ādhyātmika (spiritual), and Atimārga (transcendental). Its fourth chapter is historically the most significant, for, after dealing with the Vaidika and Ādhyātmika religious traditions, it expounds the Atimārga, i.e. the Pāśupata tradition. In this section, the text preserves otherwise unknown material about the Lokātīta sect of the Pāśupatas.

The *Niśvāsamukha* provides us with information that is—if at all—sparsely documented in other sources. Its most remarkable feature is its structural framework, which presents a large range of religious teachings as five streams of knowledge originating from Sadāśiva. A significant feature of this narrative is its incorporation of both Śaiva and non-Śaiva teachings. The text does not just put distinct traditions together or merely acknowledge their validity, but it effectively encompasses discrete beliefs, philosophies, and rituals, and makes them function in harmony under a single authority. This account of the five streams of knowledge is reminiscent of what some would call the inclusivist character of 'Hinduism', since it gives authority to all other systems of thought, at least to some degree. Thus the present research sheds light on the religious and cultural history of ancient India, particularly around the 7th century.

Five chapters (5-9) of the *Śivadharmasaṅgraha*, a work of lay Śaivism, appear to have borrowed heavily from the *Niśvāsamukha*. In order to contextualize the historical evolution of the *Niśvāsamukha* as a text, these five chapters are included as an appendix to the edition of the *Niśvāsamukha*.