

Medieval *Haṭhayoga Sādhana*: An Indigenous South Asian Bio-Therapeutic Model for Health, Healing and Longevity

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Abstract

This paper looks at the medieval practice of *haṭhayoga* specifically in terms of its contribution to bio-therapeutic paradigms for health and longevity. The canonical or root texts of *haṭhayoga* clearly document a complex of embodied strategies that are considered immensely important to indigenous healing practices. An outline of the yogic body and an analysis of two advanced practices called *khecari mudra* and *kevala kumbhaka* are provided to show how this specialized path to optimum health culminates in the *haṭhayoga* notion of divine body or *divya deha*.

Keywords: Yoga, Śiva, Śakti, *advaita*, *prāṇāyāma*, *mudrā*.

1.1. Introduction

This paper addresses the subject of health and healing in Indian traditions of *haṭhayoga*. My analysis is based primarily on a reading of the 'canonical' texts of the *haṭhayoga* tradition.¹ I argue that within

1 The heritage of *yoga* scriptures in India is vast. However, medieval *haṭhayoga* or *kriyā* texts such as *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (HYP); *Gorakṣa Saṁhītā* (GS); *Gorakṣa Paddhati* (GP); *Gorakṣasatīka* (GoS); *Gheraṇḍa Saṁhītā* (GhS);

its conceptual matrix medieval *haṭhayoga* offers an indigenous bio-therapeutic paradigm for health, hygiene and the cessation of human suffering (*duḥkha*). Traditions of *yoga* in South Asia, particularly *tantra* and *haṭha*, frame their goal of cognitive non-duality (*advaita*) within a deeply embodied and profoundly natural (inner) science (*vidyā*) that promises long life and the attainment of divine body (*divya deha*). To support this thesis I also look in some detail at two specific practices, namely, *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka*, and show how the metaphysics of non-duality (*advaita*) is informed in the medieval *haṭhayoga* textual tradition² by an underlying preoccupation with purification, rejuvenation, and longevity. These concrete and pragmatic goals are not seen as ends in themselves, but, rather, they are linked to a broader template of embodied strategies that purport to remove ignorance (*avidyā*)—the root cause of illness—and claim to produce an internal elixir of immortality (*amṛta*) capable of bestowing long life. Thus in medieval *haṭhayoga* we find an indigenous system of bodily purification and an alternative paradigm of mind-body healing informed by coherent theories and practices premised on (but certainly not limited to) the underlying emancipatory assumption that the psychophysical complex holds the key to healing itself.

Khecarīvidyā (KV); *Śiva Saṁhitā* (SS); and *Haṭharatnāvali* (HR), to name just a few, represent a genre of Sanskrit aphoristic literature that concentrate mainly on a prescriptive regimen of corporeal practices that facilitate *samādhi* and longevity. Goraknāth of the Nāthayoga *sampradāya* first used the technical term ‘*haṭha*’ in the *Haṭhadīpikā* (HD). See Venkata M. Reddy (1982), *Haṭharatnāvali of Srinivasabhattacharya Mahayogindra* (Sanskrit and English), Arthamuru: Ramakrishna Reddy, 1982, for more details on two unpublished manuscripts of the HD in Darbar Library, Nepal and Government Manuscript Library Bhubaneswar, Orissa. See, also, David Gordon White 1996 for an excellent study of Nāth tradition in India.

- 2 *Haṭhayoga* is certainly not the earliest tradition of *yoga* in India, but its scriptures articulate how an adept can attain an understanding of the principles of health and hygiene. Indeed they provide the practitioner with clear maps designed to illustrate the underlying disciplines and principles of practice (*sādhanā*). For this reason, they are useful to help illuminate theories of health and healing in South Asia.

1.2. Substantive non-duality

Haṭha and *tantra yoga* traditions claim that the nature of ultimate reality is *advaita*³ (non-dual, monist). In Śaiva *yoga* lineages, the supreme god Śiva (pure consciousness) and his consort Śakti (energy, matter) represent interdependent and coexistent dimensions of a unified reality (*brahman*). What becomes clear is that this belief in absolute wholeness—though called by many names—is intricately woven throughout the complex and diverse philosophical, mythological, and iconographical socio-religious traditions of India dating back in some instances as far as the Vedas.⁴ Śiva-Śakti (also known as Ardhanārīśvara, see Goldberg 2002) conveys the normative *haṭhyoga* and *tantric* understanding of ultimate reality as well as the essence of the inner self (*ātman*). As I show, however, this state of transcendental wholeness (*yoga*), or what I call embodied or substantive non-duality, finds its most enactive⁵ expression not in speculative, metaphysical theories and static iconographical images, but, rather, in the wholly natural (i.e., physical) mind-body complex of living adept *yogins* and *yoginīs* (past and present).

As such, the profound therapeutic effects that the ideal of substantive non-duality has in ever more pragmatic and empirical terms is also of critical importance to studies of health and healing in South Asian traditions of mind-body medicine.⁶ Here I am referring to

- 3 We also see the concepts of non-duality and immortality paired in Buddhist *tantras* such as the *Kālacakra tantra* (Wallace 2001) and the *Hevajra tantra* (Snellgrove 1959).
- 4 The relationship between science or medicine and its interaction with religion in South Asia is a complex one. For example, both *yoga* and Āyurveda emerge as systems of thought from the Vedas (ca. 6th century B.C.E.) and, as David Gordon White claims, “both continue to share common methods and goals down to the present day” (White 1996: 19).
- 5 The term ‘enactive’ refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological philosophy (1962) that challenged entrenched ideas of Cartesian dualism and hierarchical modes fostered in classical Western thought. As an alternative he proposed an “enactive” approach based on the notion of the “lived body” wherein structures such as cognition, sensation, perception, and will originate with embodied subjects and lived experience.
- 6 Consider that cognitive scientists in the West have recently recognized the effectiveness and proven results of *yoga* (for example, *āsana* and meditation) in

a broadly defined template of embodied practices and techniques (*sādhana*) that could include *kriyās*, *bandhas*, *mantra*, *āsana*, *mudrā*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, and *dhyāna*, prescribed according to the *āgamas* by a recognized *guru* or *siddha* for the purpose of purification and hygiene, physical and psychological training, the prolongation of life, and the attainment of self-knowledge (*ātma-vidyā*). The therapeutic efficacy of these physical and psychological practices is well-documented in the medieval literature on *haṭhayoga* through extensive lists of remedial cures that include balancing the three humors (*doṣas*, i.e., bile, phlegm, and wind, HYP 1:31; 2:27–28), alleviating abdominal and digestive disorders⁷ (HYP 2:34, 52; 3:17; GS 1:20), destroying deadly diseases (HYP 1:28–29, 31; GS 1:16), eliminating obvious signs of old age such as deteriorating health, grey hair and wrinkles (HYP 3:29), conquering hunger, thirst, sleep, and fear (HYP 1:32; 2:55, 58; GS 3:28), and bestowing flexibility (HYP 1:17), radiance (GS 1:18–19), extraordinary strength (KV 1:70), endurance, and *siddhis* (perfections, SS 3:54)—while also revealing deeper and subtler states of consciousness (*samādhi*).⁸

We also see emphatic claims made in *haṭhayoga* literature written between the ca. twelfth and fifteenth centuries by Nāth Siddhas such as Gorakhnāth that *sādhana* leads to the attainment of immortality signified by a divine body (*divya deha*, *kāyasiddhi*, *jīvanmuktī*). By almost all accounts, as Mircea Eliade (1969) points out, the human

the treatment of various medical disorders including clinical depression, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and stress reduction, to name just a few. Western scientists also acknowledge that the biological system, particularly the endocrine, respiratory, cardiovascular, and central nervous systems, benefits tremendously from the mind-body interaction cultivated in various types of *yoga* practice. See, for example, Opsina *et al.* 2007; Goldberg 2005; McNamara 2001; Andresen 2000; D'Aquili and Newberg 2000, 1999; and Gelhorn and Kiely 1972, to name just a few.

- 7 We see that digestion is also critical to the Āyurvedic understanding of the body and its metabolic functions. See White 1996: 21 for specific details.
- 8 J. Bulbulia (2004) offers a cognitive-evolutionary theory of religion that requires more empirical research, but what he argues is that some religions recruit adherents through highly emotive, costly rituals while others appeal in much less costly ways due to their impact on fitness. As we see, *haṭhayoga* claims fitness and health are deeply embedded in the promise of enlightenment and liberation from *samsāra*.

body is valorized in the *śaivāgamas* in ways unknown before in the history of Indian religions (227). Purification, rejuvenation and longevity, eradication of all disease (HYP 2:16, 20; KV 1:1,15; 3:10, 45; SS 5:65), recognition of the human body as homologous to the cosmos, and the acquisition of a transfigured body beyond the grasp of death (*amṛta*, see HYP 1:29; 3:6–7; 30, 40, 44; 4:13, 27, 70, 74; see, also, KV 1:15; 3:10, 45, 55) are among the many possible *siddhis* (perfections) declared attainable through *tantra* and *haṭhayoga sādhana*, augmented in some cases by the ingestion and alchemical transmutation of base metals into gold.⁹

Thus within the root texts of the *haṭhayoga* tradition *sādhana* is considered vital because of its soteriological potential (*mukti*, *mokṣa*) and its regenerative, curative, and remedial properties. In other words, the substantive or embodied nature of *haṭhayoga* theory is made apparent through the extended health and therapeutic benefits experienced directly in the body and mind of the practitioner. As such *haṭhayoga* offers an indigenous bio-therapeutic paradigm based on a pragmatic understanding of the self-healing laws of nature (*śakti*). When we look more closely at specific practices such as *khecārī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* we see evidence to support the argument that within *haṭhayoga* tradition the convergence between liberation and optimum physical and mental health is completely natural and interdependent.

1.3. The yogic body

Popular conceptions of the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) in *haṭhayoga* literature are premised on the same intricate system that we find in some Upaniṣads (see, for example, *Praśna* (PU) 1:10; 3:6, *Kaṭha* 6:16; and *Śvetāśvatara* 2:8–5), *tantras* (Hindu and Buddhist), and schools of Indian alchemy (*rasāyana*¹⁰). Energy or the five vital

9 David Gordon White (1996: 9) writes, “Yogis were healthy, had good digestion, and lived for hundreds of years because they ingested mercury and sulfur as part of their daily regime.”

10 See, for example, the work of Gopinath Kaviraj (1966). He claims *siddhis* can be attained through the path of alchemy, *tantra*, or *haṭha* (392). We also see Daoist schools practicing inner alchemy (*neidan*). See Livia Köhn, 2008.

breaths (*udāna*, *prāṇa*, *samāna*, *apāna*, and *vyāna*), variously referred to in *haṭhayoga* as *prāṇa*, *śakti*, and *kuṇḍalinī*, circulates in the *yogic* body through an intricate system of seventy-two thousand *nāḍīs* (channels). Three main *nāḍīs*—the *idā* (left), the *piṅgalā* (right), and the *suṣumṇā* (central channel that runs along the spinal column, also referred to as *brahmamārga*)—are key to understanding this subtle and esoteric physiology. With the assistance of advanced *haṭhayoga* techniques including *śakticalana mudrā*, *khecarī mudrā*, *vajrolī mudrā*, *śāmbhavī mudrā*, *mūlā bandha*, *jālandhara bandha*, and *kevala kumbhaka*, the *sādhaka* (practitioner) attempts to stimulate, harness, and unite the flow of vital energy from the left and right channels at the *brahmādvāra* (gate of *brahmā*) and raise it (*utthā*) forcefully (*haṭha*) through the central channel and the six primary *cakras* (wheels or circles of energy) into the cranial vault located in the crown of the head (*sahasrāra cakra*). This is what the term “*haṭhayoga*” means—the union of the *idā* (*ṭha*, moon) and the *piṅgalā* (*ha*, sun, KV 2:45) by force (*haṭhayoga sādhana*). As White (1996: 72) states, similar *yoga* techniques are used in Indian alchemy to attain bodily immortality although supplemented by external metal and mineral based elixirs.

By emptying the flow of subtle energy from the peripheral channels into the central channel (also called *śūnyatā nāḍī*) and guiding it upwards into the crown *cakra* via a series of advanced practices including *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka*, the adept *yogin* or *yoginī* becomes aware of deeper and more penetrating levels of consciousness and witnesses (or visualizes) the progressive transformation of the material body (*śarīra*) into an immortal or divine body (*divya deha*).¹¹ It is this realization, or what we could call the binding (*yoga*) of Śiva (pure consciousness) and Śakti (matter, energy) in a mutually interdependent and coexistent unified reality (*brahman*), that is said to occur over and over again in the lived body of self-actualized adepts. This “binding” process identifies the underlying assumption behind numerous homologies¹² in *haṭhayoga*

11 The three bodies are referred to in the literature as *sthūla* (physical, material body), *śukṣma* (subtle, *yoga* body) and *para śarīra* (subtle most or divine body). Also, as Gavin Flood states, “visualisation is realization” (2006: 172).

12 See also the work of Brian K. Smith (1989). Here I refer to a complex network of culturally identified correspondences that establish links between the vital

literature between the body of the adept (microcosm) and the ideal of universal non-duality (microcosm) and once again reinforces the naturalness (i.e., physicality) of substantive non-duality. Although this speculative system of metaphysics poses a great challenge to modern medical research, it nevertheless illuminates a powerful indigenous paradigm of healing and health within medieval South Asian tradition.¹³

1.4. *Āsana and mudra*

Haṭhayoga manuals for all intents and purposes are *sādhana śāstras*. They explain a rigorous system of psychophysical exercises and austerities intended to extend the health, hygiene, and life span of the initiated practitioner. For this reason it is important to examine the logic of *haṭhayoga sādhanā* in some detail in order to understand how advanced, esoteric practices such as *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* guide the adept toward a direct experience of substantive non-duality—defined in my argument as both liberation and immortality.

Some initial observations are necessary. According to most *haṭhayoga* manuals we can divide *sādhana* into roughly six categories paralleling to some extent the practices outlined in the *aṣṭāṅga* (eight-limbed) system of Patañjali's *Yogasūtras*. The six limbs include: *kriyā* (bodily purification); *āsana* (postural exercises); *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercises); *mudrā* (seal); *dhyāna* (meditation), and *samādhi* (integration or wholeness). What is implied here is that the first five categories lead to *samādhi*—the goal of *all yoga* practice (Hindu and

centers in the body (e.g., heart, throat, navel, abdomen), colors (e.g., yellow, red, blue), sounds (e.g., drums, bells, conches, flutes), elements, geometrical shapes (e.g., triangle, square), sacred sites (e.g., rivers, mountains), indwelling deities, physical postures that often resemble zoomorphic forms (e.g., dog, lion, cobra), and the nervous system with its web of seventy-two thousand meridians and seven primary nerve plexuses that correspond to organs and other somatic areas. See also SS 2:1–5.

13 This model has also been used in the medicalization of modern *yoga* because it focuses primarily on physiological and psychological fitness. See Alter 2004, De Michelis 2004.

Buddhist) and the last of the three *antarāṅgas* enumerated in the classical *yoga* system (*darśana*) of Patañjali.

A coherent and programmatic approach to *haṭhayoga sādhana* typically begins with active purification and training of the physical body (*sthūla śarīra*) via prescriptive procedures intended to control and regulate the functions of the five sense organs (*karmendriya*). Within the tradition of *haṭhayoga* this is considered a prerequisite before mastering more advanced or “secret” practices such as *khecārī mudrā* (SS 5:52). Although bodily purification through *kriyā* techniques such as *tapas*, *dhauti*, *neti*, *basti*, and *navli* and training in preliminary movements such as *āsana* initially requires diligence and rigorous discipline, we read that in more advanced stages (*rājayoga*, *layayoga*) residual effects of preparatory exercises on the external and internal organs of the physical body actually neutralizes or suspends all physical movement. We learn for example from the earliest texts of the *yoga* tradition that *āsana* is considered attained when all effort to sustain it disappears (YS 2:47).¹⁴ Yet in *haṭhayoga* tradition we see that as preliminary postures are refined they evolve and mature into more advanced techniques, which are not even mentioned in the *Yogasūtras*, called *mudrā* (seal).

Practical instructions as stated in a variety of *haṭhayoga* root texts are often terse, incomplete and ambiguous. It is clear that initiated practitioners within each *yoga* lineage (*sampradāya*) must learn from a qualified *guru* (SS 3:11) or, in more advanced cases, directly through their own spontaneous (*sahaja*) *yoga* practice (*yoga yukti*). The *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, for example, catalogues the first seven postures in an abbreviated manner without disclosing details, results or curative benefits. However, from the eighth posture (*matsyendraśana*) onwards, *Svātmārāma* (author of the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*) provides the position of the body and the remedial effect of each pose in a more substantive way. He cites how *āsana* facilitates relaxation, arouses *kuṇḍalinī*, appeases the appetite, purifies disease, and churns the internal organs to eradicate toxins, illness and various disorders (often mythologized in Indian traditions of *yoga* by a reference to the poison lodged in Śiva Nīlakaṇṭha’s blue throat). Prolonged or sustained practice of *āsana*, as stated above, promotes more advanced

14 *Prayatna śaithilyānanta samāpattibhyām* (YS 2:47).

movements called *mudrās* that are purported to heal physical and psychological suffering (*duḥkha*), eradicate disease and death, and generate a divine body (GS 3:28; HYP 3:38–40, 44, 51, 88; SS 3:72). It is particularly evident that through disciplined and sustained practice and by the sheer force of *prāṇa* or *kuṇḍalinī* generated during preliminary exercises, particularly in the lower *cakras*, more advanced practices such as *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* arise spontaneously in the adept stages of *yoga sādhanā*.

By way of example, *siddhāsana* (as the name implies) is the seat or posture of the *siddhas* (“accomplished ones”)—implying that this practice is not intended for the ordinary practitioner. Nevertheless, it has what I would call a novice (willful) stage and an adept (spontaneous) stage. When an adept experiences *siddhāsana* in the higher stages of meditation (*dhyāna*, *samādhi*), it is typically accompanied by *kevala kumbhaka* and *khecarī mudrā*. *Kevala kumbhaka* and *khecarī mudrā* signal the internal purification of the seventy-two thousand *naḍīs*, the three *granthis* (*brahma*, *viṣṇu*, and *śiva*), the five primary or lower *cakras* (*mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *maṇipūra*, *anāhata*, and *viśuddhi*), and the awakening of the *siddhis* (perfections, SS 3:54) in the beginning phase of *unmanī* (no-mind, see HYP 1:41). In other words, *siddhāsana* accompanied by *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* reflects the advanced ideal of *sabīja samādhi* in embodied form and by most textual accounts secures a state of longevity and holistic health for the adept (HYP 1:43–44; KV1:1; 3:45, 55). The practice of *āsana* and *mudrā* navigates the adept through a process of internal bodily purification culminating in sustained conscious awareness (*samādhi*). In other words, practices such as *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* not only facilitate *samādhi*; they are seen as the bare corporeal evidence that it is actually occurring.

Still it is crucial not to confuse the means with the ends—as we often see in some modern postural approaches to *yoga*.¹⁵ According to the literature, *āsana* is a necessary though preliminary stage of *yoga* only, with physical and subtle therapeutic benefits and effective methodologies that move the practitioner toward the ultimate goal of *ātmavidyā* characterized in *haṭhayoga* tradition by *prajñā* (wisdom) and immortality. *Kriyā* manuals catalogue postural procedures and

15 See Alter 2004 and De Michelis 2004.

situate them in a hierarchical framework alongside other preliminary practices such as *mudrā*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *mantra* (for example, chanting the *praṇava*) making their preparatory role perfectly evident. Thus the overall importance of *āsana* and similar ritual techniques lies primarily in their therapeutic and purificatory benefits for body and mind, as well as in their ability to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*—the vital life force that lies dormant at the base of the spine of the subtle *yoga* body. Through *āsana* and *mudrā* the purified body becomes tranquil and steady and is rendered fit for deeper states of meditation (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*). Each posture as it were identifies an embodied experience with a corresponding state of mind. For example, in the HYP *siddhāsana* refers in its advanced stage to mental steadiness, entrance to *sabīja samādhi*, and so on (1:37–45). Furthermore, bear in mind that preliminary practices as described in the *haṭhayoga* treatises address the first five *cakras* from the base of the spine to the throat region only. When these *cakras* are pierced (*vedha*), then and only then does the final phase of *rājayoga* begin from the *ājñā cakra* (located between the eyebrows) moving upwards through the *mahāmārga* (great pathway) to the *sahasrāra cakra* (thousand petal lotus located in the crown of the head—hence, the term ‘*rāja*’).

By almost all ‘canonical’ accounts, *sādhana* is seen as the surest path to liberation characterized by bodily immortality. However, *haṭhayoga* manuals claim instructions should be kept “secret” (HYP 1:11; 3:9; SS 1:19; 5:25, 42, 168; GS 1:18; KV1:15–20). This implies, as stated above, that transmission of these instructions is passed down through the lineage from *guru* to initiated disciple. It also explains why instructions in the *āgamas* are often encoded and partial—described purposefully with omission, reservation and, at times, even incorrectly. It seems clear that one reason for couching advanced teachings in secrecy is to ensure proper and controlled oral transmission of the esoteric (inner) and exoteric (outer) techniques for awakening *kuṇḍalinī* (HYP 3:1) since, according to the *Haṭhayoga-pradīpikā*, it is the basis of all *tantra* and *haṭha yoga* knowledge. The awakening of *kuṇḍalinī* facilitates the concurrent purification of the six primary *cakras* and the piercing (*vedha*) of the three *granthis* (knots) over many years of dedicated practice, until the door of the upper central channel opens for *prāṇa* to ascend into the *mahāmārga* (great path) between the *ājñā* and the *sahasrāra cakras* (HYP 3:2).

These experiences mark the highest stages of meditation and the onset of *siddhayoga* (HYP 3:8; GS 4–5), also referred to as the “attaining stage,” and by all accounts must be protected by lineage holders.

1.5. *Prāṇāyāma*

In almost all *haṭhayoga* treatises, *sādhana* is described as the great path (*mahāmārga*) to enlightenment characterized by optimum health and the attainment of immortality. Configured in this way, the human body is viewed as both the means *and* the site of liberation. Once the body becomes steady (*sthira*) and comfortable through the practice of *āsana*, the practitioner can perform *prāṇāyāma* more effectively (HYP 2:1; YS 2:46–47). Here the word ‘*prāṇāyāma*’ refers to the critical practice of restraining the vital breaths (*prāṇā*). To accomplish restraint, textual guidelines again prescribe the practice of advanced esoteric *mudrās* (seals) such as *khecarī mudrā* with *bandhas* (locks, *jālandhara*, *mūla*, and *uḍḍiyāna*) to facilitate opening the *suṣumṇā nāḍī* (also referred to in the literature as *nīrvāṇa nāḍī*) and piercing the six *cakras* and three *granthis*. Brief descriptions of breathing techniques such as *anuloma viloma* (HYP 2:7–10), *kapalabhati* (HYP 2:35), and the eight *kumbhaka*s including *bhastrika* and *sūrya bhedana* (HYP 2:44) also are enumerated in the literature alongside the curative efficacy of each practice including the removal of disease and humoral disorders such as excessive *kapha* (phlegm), *pitta* (bile), and *vāyu* (air or wind), appeasing hunger, thirst, sleep, and fever, overcoming disease, and the purification of the seventy-two thousand *nāḍīs*. Of all the prescribed *prāṇāyāma* techniques, however, *kevala kumbhaka* (the suspension of breath) is considered “supreme” because it facilitates the adept’s ability to enter into deep and subtle stages of *sabīja samādhi* (integration) and *laya* (absorption). The literature also states quite clearly that disease is eradicated and a divine body is attained when the *yogin* masters *kevala kumbhaka* (GS 5:89).

Consider more carefully that the process of *sādhana* involves arousing the vital energies or *prāṇas* via disciplined practice of rigorous preparatory exercises such as *āsana*. Similarly, routine practice of various *prāṇāyāma* exercises aids in the conscious regulation of the respiratory rhythm to such an extent that in advanced

stages of *kevala kumbhaka* the vital breaths (*prāṇa*) are spontaneously and naturally suspended (*nirodha*) through prolonged inhalation (*pūraka*) and exhalation (*recaka*). When the central *nāḍīs* are purified and *kevala kumbhaka* occurs, this implies the adept has gained a measure of control over the modifications of the mind (*citta-vṛitti*). The physical signs of health that accompany these states are listed, for example, in the *Hāṭhayogapradīpikā* as slim body, joyousness, omniscience, control of *bindu* (vital fluids), the purification of the seventy-two thousand *nāḍīs*, and the eradication of disease and death. As such, these physical practices are not seen as an end in and of themselves, but rather as preparation for deeper states of meditation (HYP 2:78) and the attainment of a divine body through *khecarī mudrā*.

1.6. *Khecarī mudrā*

Svātmārāma discloses cursory descriptions of the three essential *mudrās*—*mahā*, *mahāveda*, and *khecarī*—despite their esoteric nature. He withholds instructions, however, for advanced *mudrā* techniques such as *vajrolī*, *sahajolī*, *amarolī*, and *śakticalana*, thus implying they must be learned from either an accomplished *guru* or through spontaneous *yoga* experience. Bear in mind, the information Svātmārāma provides in the HYP on the essential *mudrās* is hardly precise and his instructions can even be seen as misleading. In particular, instructions provided for the critical practice of *khecarī mudrā* are seen as ambivalent and might even distort the primary experience intended. To accomplish what Svātmārāma calls the “supreme” *mudrā* he advises the *sādhaka* to use a clean, sharp, smooth instrument to cut the frenum linguae (tendon) under the tongue regularly over a seven-month period (HYP 3:33–36). The *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* suggests a prolonged cutting period of three years (GS 3:25–26). The *Khecarīvidyā*—a root text that teaches exclusively on every possible variation of *khecarī mudrā*—recommends a minimum of six months to cut the frenum linguae (KV 1:45). Two things are certain from these somewhat contradictory timelines—the practice of cutting is believed necessary for spiritual liberation and the attainment of divine body, and the process occurs gradually.

Khecarī mudrā refers to the specific *haṭhayoga* practice of elongating the tongue through a process of milking (*dohana*), moving (*cālana*), and striking (*tāḍana*). These actions sever the tongue from the frenum linguae so that it can be inserted fully into the “three-peaked mountain” or cavity called the “diamond bulb” (KV 3:50) located behind the roof of the soft palate in the region above the uvula (*rājadanta*, HYP 3:32–53; KV 3:1, 15). When accompanied by the restraint of breath (*kevala kumbhaka*) and the three *bandhas*, *khecarī mudrā* facilitates the preservation and drinking of *candrājala* (also known as *amṛta* and *somasāsa*) by physically sealing off the cavity above the uvula with the severed tongue (HYP 3:47–50; KV 3:20–25). This sealing (or *mudrā*), it is claimed, physically prevents the “nectar of immortality” (*amṛta*) from being consumed by the lower *cakras*, particularly the *maṇḍipura cakra* in the navel region (*sūrya* or sun). As a result, the adept “cheats” death and attains an immortal body (KV 3:10–20). In terms of therapeutic benefits, the HYP states there is no more hunger, thirst, old age, disease, or death for the adept who “knows” the secret rejuvenation practice of *khecarī mudrā*, nor is the adept subject to the mundane laws of time (*kāla*) or *karma* (HYP 3:38–40; SS 3:66). The *Gorakṣaśatika* makes the explicit claim that *khecarī mudrā* alone renders the body immortal (GS 131–148 cited in Mallison, 2007). The KV and the HYP also explain that *khecarī mudrā* enables the *yogī* or *yoginī* to still the mind to such an extent that they enter deeper states of meditative absorption (*laya*). Thus, *khecarī mudrā* accompanied by *kevala kumbhaka* announce the onset of *sabīja samādhi* and *rājayoga* and are the corporeal evidence that the stage of *haṭhayoga* is now complete.

1.7. Conclusion

The *yoga* techniques discussed in this paper are premised on the fundamental presupposition that Śiva and Śakti represent an androgynous (non-dual) presence that dwells as matter and consciousness within each and every subtle body (KV 3:40; see, also, Goldberg 2002; White 1996: 252). By empowering the body and mind through *sādhana* the adept strives to become divine—like Śiva. This ideal of divinization (*śivatva*) characterized by bodily immortality, as Gavin

Flood (2006: 11) points out, “is arguably the most important quality in tantric traditions.” Indeed, as I have argued, it conveys the normative model of optimum health within the *haṭhayoga* tradition.

I have also shown that *haṭhayoga* tradition assumes an integral understanding of the human body and its corresponding states of consciousness. As we have seen, an intrinsic interrelationship exists in the tradition between mind-body, experience, and practice. To this end, an integrative indigenous approach unfolds in observable ways at the practical level in the life of the adept. Thus, at the core of this performative bio-therapeutic model lies a specialized program of techniques (*sādhana*) designed to navigate the adept through the complex systems of the body (for example, respiratory, circulatory, nervous, endocrine, and so on) to show that the means (self-cultivation) and the end (self-knowledge) of *yoga* are not only complementary—they are non-dual in both theory and substance. Their efficacy, as I have suggested, is verified in the material wellbeing, holistic health, and long life of the practitioner. Preservation of the body, according to the literature, is the direct result (*karma*) of specific purification and rejuvenation techniques such as *khecarī mudrā* and *kevala kumbhaka* that harness and retain *prāṇa* in the central channel and facilitate its ingestion in the form of an elixir of immortality (*amṛta-rasāyana*). This is made possible by various internal alchemical transformations and the curative efficacy of *sādhana*. The discourse of *haṭhayoga* no doubt is grounded in the language of the transcendental, but the transcendental, as I have argued, finds its most perfect expression in the realization of substantive non-duality in the lived bodies of *haṭhayoga* adepts. As such, it offers a profound paradigm of health and healing in South Asian tradition.

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