

***Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga: From the Early Tantras To the Haṭha Yoga**

Oleh:

I Putu Yudiantara¹

Universitas Hindu Indonesia

E-mail : putu@baliwisdom.com

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a historical review of the conceptualization of *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga within Tantric texts from the 7th to the 12th centuries and tracing their continuity in Haṭha Yogic literature. Its objective is to analyze the persistence and development of conceptual elements over time and to investigate key themes elucidating the ontological and practical dimensions of *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga. The findings reveal that early Tantric texts portray *Kuṇḍalinī* as a cosmogonic and mantric force, while *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga practices entail the utilization of mantras in conjunction with breath control techniques. In Haṭha Yogic texts, *Kuṇḍalinī* undergoes a transformation from a cosmogonic force to a personal energy intrinsic to individuals and subjects to physical manipulations. This study underscores the significance of contextualizing *Kuṇḍalinī* within its philosophical and spiritual framework, often overlooked in mainstream culture or studies concentrating solely on its physical manifestations.

Keywords: *Kuṇḍalinī*, *Kuṇḍalinī* yoga, *tantra*, *tantra* yoga, *haṭha*, *haṭha* yoga.

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga's global popularity has largely focused on its physical and mental aspects, often overlooking its profound metaphysical and soteriological dimensions. However, within contemporary yoga discourse, the mystical aspects, particularly those related to *Kuṇḍalinī*, cakras, and the yogic body, continue to captivate practitioners. As Sarbacker (2021) underscores, discourse on *Kuṇḍalinī* infuses a mystical and metaphysical nuance into modern yoga discourse. Historically, the discourse surrounding *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga has been dynamic and evolving. Some ideas later related to *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga, such as *nāḍī*

already mentioned in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Kaṭha Upaniṣads (5th century BCE), while *vāyu* and *prāṇa* appearing even earlier in the R̥g Veda, along with various Upaniṣads (Taittirīya, Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya). Despite these early associations, the discourse on *Kuṇḍalinī* is primarily regarded as an innovation of Tantra, subsequently becoming a dominant theme in later texts, up until Haṭha Yoga traditions (White, 2003; Hatley, 2015). The initial popularity of the *Kuṇḍalinī* in the West also can be attributed to Tantric texts from the 16th century, the *Ṣaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa* translated by Arthur Avalon. This text laid the groundwork for

Carl Jung's elaboration on "Psychology of Kundalini Yoga."

Despite the Tantric roots of the *Kuṇḍalinī*, discussions on *Kuṇḍalinī* in pre-modern texts remain relatively scarce, both in popular and academic contexts. While previous researchers, such as Padoux (1990), Flood (2005), and White (2006), have delved into aspects of *Kuṇḍalinī* in early Tantric texts, comprehensive studies, like Silburn's (1988), are rare. Hence, this paper aims to provide a historical summary of *Kuṇḍalinī* discourse in pre-modern Tantra, building upon the structure provided by Hatley (2015) for a concise summary of *Kuṇḍalinī*. This paper seeks to trace the development of *Kuṇḍalinī* in Tantra texts from the 6th to the 12th centuries and examine its evolution in Haṭha Yogic texts. However, this paper is constrained by several limitations: first, the Tantric and Haṭha texts referenced are those that have been studied and translated, either partially or fully, excluding manuscripts; and second, it primarily focuses on the ontological aspects of *Kuṇḍalinī*, leaving limited room for practical discussions and its interconnections with related topics like *prāṇa*, *nāḍī*, and *cakras*. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that this paper will provide a foundational basis for future, more comprehensive studies on *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga.

II. METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research method with a historical-philosophical approach to trace the evolution of the concept of *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga from early Tantric texts to its later development in Haṭha Yoga traditions. The historical-philosophical approach is employed to investigate shifts in the conceptualization and understanding of *Kuṇḍalinī*, focusing on the ontological and spiritual contexts of each period under

review. The data sources for this research include both primary and secondary texts related to *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga. Primary sources consist of early Tantric texts, ranging from the 5th to 12th centuries CE, and key Haṭha Yoga texts such as the *Gorakṣaśataka* and *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Secondary sources include scholarly analyses and translations by leading researchers in the field. It is important to note that the sources used in this study are limited to published critical editions and translations. Consequently, the research is constrained by the availability of these materials, which may not fully reflect the nuances or variations present in unpublished manuscripts or oral traditions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes—such as mantric energy, cosmogony, and corporeal practices—which were then organized according to their contextual relevance across historical periods. A qualitative data analysis was performed to examine how differing ontological contexts shaped the understanding of *Kuṇḍalinī* over time. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how the concept of *Kuṇḍalinī* evolved from a cosmogonic force in early Tantric texts to a more individualized and practical energy in Haṭha Yoga traditions.

III. DISCUSSION

Kuṇḍalinī and *Kuṇḍalinī*-yoga in Tantric Texts from the 5th to the 12th Century

In this section, we will examine the textual and historical progression of *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga within the scope of Tantric literature from the 7th to the 12th centuries. This textual investigation aims to clarify the conceptual structure surrounding *Kuṇḍalinī* during this historical period and identify the key themes that gained significance in the discourse surrounding *Kuṇḍalinī* within these texts.

***Kuṇḍalinī* in the Siddhānta Tantras**

The earliest corpus of Tantric texts is the *Nīśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*. This text comprises several layers, with the oldest (*Mūlasūtra*) dating back to the 5th century CE. In the *Guhyasūtra* layer, *Kuṇḍalinī* (referred to as *Kuṭilā*) is identified as mantric energy. Described as the creator and sustainer of the universe (*lokamātrkā*), *Kuṇḍalinī* is portrayed as the energy of sound, depicted as "moving upward" as the subtlest sound (Törzsök, 2016, p.143). In the *Nīśvāsakārikā*, *Kuṇḍalinī* is referred to as the movement of the goddess of syllables within the body (Williams, 2022). Thus, discussions on *Kuṇḍalinī* as mantric, syllabic, and sound energy, related to the emanation of *tattvas* and the entire universe, are present in these earliest Tantric sources.

The *Sārdhatriśati-kālottara* (700 CE) offer a more elaborate descriptions about the primordial *Kuṇḍalinī* (*ādyā-Kuṇḍalinī*). She is described as resembling a sprout (*aṅkurā*) and residing in the heart. It is also mentioned that within this *Kuṇḍalinī*, the *Omkāra* needs to be meditated upon while contemplating the body as divine (*divyarūpam*) and filled with nectar (*amṛta*). Furthermore, *Kuṇḍalinī* is described as conjoining with the sun, moon, and fire. Thus, in these *Saiddhāntika* texts, *Kuṇḍalinī* is persistently portrayed as a mantric energy with a primordial and cosmogonic role, while also simultaneously existing within the human body. Moreover, discussions concerning *Kuṇḍalinī* entail practical implications involving mantric and yogic body components.

The discussion regarding the mantric and cosmogonic aspect of *Kuṇḍalinī* continues in other *Saiddhāntika* canons. Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha (950–1000), in his commentary on the *Kiraṇatantra*, asserts that *Kuṇḍalinī* is the supreme sound (*parāvāk*) from which unstruck sound (*nāda*), bindu, and subsequently coarser sounds emerge. The same idea is reiterated in the

Mrgendratantra-vṛtti, *Kriyāpada* (1.2), which also describes *Kuṇḍalinī* as the Supreme Sound (*parāvāk*), from which *nāda* arises, characterizing it as the Unstruck Sound (*anāhata*).

***Kuṇḍalinī* in the Bhairava Tantras**

Building upon the framework established in *Saiddhāntika* texts, discussions on the primordial, cosmogonic, and sonic aspects of *Kuṇḍalinī* persist in the *Bhairavika* literature. In the *Brahmayāmala* (7th century CE), in addition to being conceived as syllables and sound in various aspects, *Kuṇḍalinī* is also conceptualized as one of the four *śaktis* of Śiva, known as *icchā śakti* (the power of volition). This association can also be observed in other texts such as the *Tantrasadbhāva* and the *Jayadrathayāmala*. In the *Brahmayāmala*, *Kuṇḍalinī* also referred to as *Avadhūtā*; awakens *nāda* and bindu and merges within all syllables (*svaravyaṅjana-saṃyuktā*). Additionally, it is stated that she is the creator of all *Devīs*, *Dūtīs*, *Yoginīs*, and *Mātrkāś*, and all of them reside within her. As we have seen in the previous texts, *Brahmayāmala* also associated *Kuṇḍalinī* with mantric energy, and She is awakened through meditation practices involving mantra—known as *Navākṣaravidhāna* [Procedure of Nine Syllables], another name for the *Brahmayāmala*—because she embodies the nine syllables (i.e., [OM] HŪṂ CAṆḌE KĀPĀLINI SVĀHĀ) (Hatley, 2007, pp. 251-58).

Advancing further, the *Tantrasadbhāva* (8th century CE) emerges as another seminal text offering a comprehensive portrayal of *Kuṇḍalinī* and its associated practices (i.e., *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*). Ontologically, the *Tantrasadbhāva* characterizes *Kuṇḍalinī* as *śakti* in its multifaceted manifestations, with these diverse facets serving as representations of varying functions, activities, and levels of subtlety. Despite the manifold aspects, the

Tantrasadbhāva emphatically asserts the fundamental unity of śakti, and elucidates that at its essence, śakti embodies consciousness. In its subtlest aspect, śakti is characterized as devoid of thought (amanaskā) and transmental (manonmanī), residing at the dvādaśānta. Once active, Parāśakti assumes two aspects: prabodhanī (she who awakens), moving upwards, and rodhanī (she who blocks), moving downwards. These dual aspects and movements of śakti are linked to the emanation-dissolution of the universe, involving an upward-downward motion from the heart to the dvādaśānta within the body. Furthermore, *Kuṇḍalinī* manifests into four śaktis—Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, Raudrī, and Nirodhī—personifying different aspects of śakti, while Śivaśakti serves as their 'stem.' The Tantrasadbhāva also discusses *Kuṇḍalinī*'s ontological aspect from a sonic perspective, noting that *Kuṇḍalinī*'s essence is sound (śabda), permeating the entire world.

Kuṇḍalinī is described as sleeping within the heart, akin to a serpent coiling the bindu as it slumbers. This portrayal symbolizes the cosmic energy's highest aspect (parāśakti), 'inactive' in its absoluteness while simultaneously active in lower and coarser aspects. As it sleeps, it veils its true essence as consciousness transcending existence, also referred to as Māyā. *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga, described as ascending through subtler layers, is comprehended within this framework, with *Kuṇḍalinī* guiding the soul upward and downward—emanation and dissolution.

Tantrasadbhāva also elaborates on the concept of cakras, encompassing three, six, and fifty variations. The three cakras are the Fire Cakra (agnicakra), Moon Cakra (samacakra), and Great Cakra (mahācakra). Each cakra is distinguished by a specific number of spokes, symbolizing the vowels constituting them. The Fire Cakra, located in

the heart, boasts 12 spokes, representing the ātmatattva. Meanwhile, the Moon Cakra, situated at the roof of the mouth, comprises 16 spokes, symbolizing vidyatattva. Finally, the Main Cakra, positioned at the dvādaśānta, features 32 spokes, signifying Śivatattva. These cakras serve as the dwelling places for groups of Yoginīs, with each cakra also housing the lord of the worlds (bhuvaneśa). Additionally, these cakras play pivotal roles in cosmic functions such as creation, separation, and dissolution. The three cakras are the abode of Māṭṛkā, where Māṭṛkā represents vowels, and vowels are the Great Wind (mahānilāḥ).

Meanwhile, the fifty cakras represent the fifty Devanagari letters, from a to kṣa. It is said that these fifty cakras of letters not only exist within the body but permeate the entire universe, all residing within the midst of Śakti. In practice, it is instructed to awaken each of these fifty letters, combined with 'fire' and 'wind', adorned with bindu; and simultaneously visualize Śakti in the form of tejas within the three previously mentioned cakras, until the practitioner merges into these three cakras.

Additionally, Tantrasadbhāva delves into the concept of nine lotuses (padma), which serve as another representation of cakras. These nine lotuses correspond to nine letters, and are utilized in nyāsa rituals, where they are placed on various parts of the body, creating a symbolic "mandala of letters" within. The primary lotus is envisioned with eight petals, symbolizing the central support for all the nāḍīs, forming their own mandala within the body. The stalk of this lotus is imagined as the location of the tenth prāṇa, while the eight aspects of the yogic body (puryaṣṭaka) are positioned in the centre of this stalk. The Ātma is visualized within the pericarp of the main lotus, accompanied by the mandala of fire, the sun, and the moon. While, *Kuṇḍalinī*, symbolized

as the 'sleeping serpent' and the vessel of nectar (*amṛtaKuṇḍalinī*), coils around the Ātma.

Overall, Tantrasadbhāva provides both metaphysical explanations and detailed practices involving cakras and various elements of the yogic body, including their functions, movements, interconnections, and their utility in yoga practice. In terms of practical application, Tantrasadbhāva emphasizes meditative practice as the attainment of a subtler state of existence (*bhāvaiḥ*), also known as *tyāga*—the act of abandoning coarser aspects of existence to penetrate and experience subtler aspects. The goal of *Kuṇḍalinī* meditation is to attain awakening, reaching a 'state' beyond time, division, movement, *tattvas*, and rebirth. Achieving Śiva-hood entails attaining *Kuṇḍalī-śakti* through the mind, transcending it (*Manonmanī*). When a yogi reaches the *unmana* condition, *Kuṇḍalinī* will merge with Emptiness (*śūnya*).

From this exposition, it becomes evident that the Tantrasadbhāva stands as one of the earliest texts to provide an intricate description of *Kuṇḍalinī*-yoga. However, according to Saraogi (2022), the systematic conception of *Kuṇḍalinī*-yoga first took shape in the Jayadrathayāmala (9th/10th century CE). In the Jayadrathayāmala, *Kuṇḍalinī* is described as the manifestation of sound and fundamentally embodies life force. The final 40 verses of the Jayadrathayāmala elaborate extensively on the procedure for awakening *Kuṇḍalinī*, depicted as coiled at the deepest part of the *kanda*. It is emphasized that upon its awakening, *Kuṇḍalinī* assumes a form akin to a fearsome serpent. The method of awakening involves *mahākaraṇa-yoga* (yoga with the divine body), which also entails the manipulation of *prāṇa* (life force). In summary, the Jayadrathayāmala also presents the conception of *Kuṇḍalinī*'s awakening through the cakras and meditation involving yogic body aspects.

Next, elaborations on *Kuṇḍalinī* can be found in the magnum opus of Abhinavagupta (975 – 1025 CE), the Tantrāloka, as well as in the commentaries (*viveka*) by Jayaratha. In the Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta quotes various earlier texts, providing insight into how *Kuṇḍalinī* is conceptualized in Tantric literature. In Tantrāloka 3.138-141, Abhinavagupta cites the *Trīśirobhairavatantra*, which divides the emissive energy (*visarga*) of Śiva into three aspects: first, as potential latent power (*Śaktikuṇḍalikā*), then when it becomes the life force (*Prāṇakuṇḍalikā*), and ultimately as *ParāKuṇḍalinī*, identified with nectar. In his commentary, Jayaratha explains that *ParāKuṇḍalinī* is manifested as nectar because she is indestructible and sustains the energy and all functions (organs) of humans. She embodies pure consciousness. *ParāKuṇḍalinī* is also referred to as the 'Space of Śiva' (*Śivavyoman*), Parabrahman, and is also called the 'Seat of the Soul' (*ātmasthāna*). As the Seat of the Soul, *Kuṇḍalinī* is described as a state that is devoid of discursive thought and phenomenal perception. This 'Space of Śiva' is also referred to as the support (*ādhāra*) of all existence.

Śaktikuṇḍalinī is the potential energy, dormant in a coiled form at the base *cakra*. Jayaratha also reveals that *Śaktikuṇḍalinī* means "without a tendency for externalization, and therefore rests within itself." It is called *Śaktikuṇḍalinī* due to its resemblance to a dormant snake. According to Jayaratha, as long as it remains in this *aparā* (non-externalized) form, it is pure consciousness. When the tendency for externalization arises, it is then referred to as *Prāṇakuṇḍalinī*. In this context, consciousness transforms into a life force (*prāṇa*). It is also mentioned that *Prāṇakuṇḍalinī* rises straight up through the cakras. Meanwhile, *ParāKuṇḍalinī* is also inherently latent like *Śaktikuṇḍalinī* but is

located above the crown of the head (dvādaśānta).

In verse 3.220, Abhinavagupta quotes Siddhayogīśvarīmata stating that *Kuṇḍalinī* is the seed of all that exists (Dyczkowski, 2023); she is the life force (jīvabhūtā), and her essence is consciousness (cidātmikā). It is also mentioned that from her emerge all letters (varṇā). Jayaratha reinforces this assertion by adding that she is the Unstruck Sound (anahatakalā). Jayaratha further explains that *Kuṇḍalinī* is "life" because all that exists [lives] exists within consciousness, i.e., manifestations of consciousness, and are not separate from consciousness.

Tantrāloka continues the discussion of *Kuṇḍalinī* as the mantric energy. In Tantrāloka 7.40, along with Jayaratha's commentary, the aspect of *Kuṇḍalinī* as letters (varṇa-*Kuṇḍalinī*) is discussed practically, involving the repetition of consonants along with the breath. In other words, *Kuṇḍalinī*-yoga is presented as the 'yoga of letters.' The discussion in this verse still relies on the teachings found in Siddhayogīśvarīmata (and is also taught in Yoginīkaula). It is mentioned that when *Kuṇḍalinī* merges with the breath force, she becomes Transmental and unites with Śiva.

Meanwhile, in his commentary on Tantrāloka 3.67, Jayaratha also explains that the movement of *Kuṇḍalinī* causes the written form of the letter A in the Devanagari script to emerge (Padoux, 1990, p.127). While moving and inscribing the letter A, *Kuṇḍalinī* also manifests three powers: icchā, jñāna, and kriya. It is interestingly emphasized that the coiled form of *Kuṇḍalinī*, resembling a serpent, is related to her manifestation as the written form of the letter A.

In addition to Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta also provides explanations about *Kuṇḍalinī* in Parātrīśikā-vivaraṇa. As elucidated in Tantrāloka, in this text,

Abhinavagupta also highlights *Kuṇḍalinī* in the context of cosmogony (Flood, 2005, pp.161-62). In Parātrīśikā-vivaraṇa, *Kuṇḍalinī* is considered the highest manifestation of energy (kaulikī-śakti), inseparable from Śiva, and resides in the heart. Furthermore, this energy is recognized as the creative force that manifests the body, breath, and the experiences of joy and sorrow in life (śarīra-prāṇa-sukhādeḥ). Besides being cosmic and primordial energy, *Kuṇḍalinī* is also acknowledged to manifest within the body as vital energy and sexuality. Soteriologically, *Kuṇḍalinī* is believed to play a crucial role; when she awakens, her radiance dispels all illusions that cause suffering.

Another seminal text for understanding *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga is the Kubjikāmatatantra from the 11th century. It is within this text that we find the system of six cakras as commonly known today (mūlādhāra, etc.) (Flood, 2005). However, it's essential to note that in Kubjikāmata, the term "cakra" denotes a 'circle of deities' (Heilijgers-Seelen, 1994, p.34), serving as visual aids for meditation and devotional practices, each associated with its unique sonic energy and tattva. According to Dyczkowski (1988, pp.88-90), in the Kubjikāmatatantra (11th century CE), *Kuṇḍalinī* is equated with the Goddess Kubjikā herself — the principal deity revered by the Kubjikā sect. The term 'kubjikā' itself connotes bent or curved, symbolizing the contraction and conditioning of consciousness within the confines of existence. *Kuṇḍalinī* is depicted as the matrix (yoni) from which all creation emanates and within which it resides. She is the origin of all mantras and manifests in three aspects: the highest (parā), intermediate (parāparā), and lowest (aparā). Kubjikāmatatantra 5.84 describes this energy as a 'dormant serpent' situated at the dvādaśānta and within the

abdomen, with this śakti energy being associated with mantras and varying levels of sound, facilitating her union with Śiva (White, 2006, p.229). Thus, in the Kubjikāmatatantra, *Kuṇḍalinī* encompasses anthropomorphic, sonic, and transcendental dimensions.

Next, a detailed description of *Kuṇḍalinī* can be found in the 12th-century text, the Śāradātilakatantra, compiled by Lakṣmaṇadeśika (Bühnemann, 2011). *Kuṇḍalinī* also referred to as Ambikā. She resides in the ādhāra, worshipping her husband (Śiva) with the nectar flowing through the moon in the thousand-petalled lotus (crown cakra), and returning to her abode in the base cakra after her worship is completed. The Śāradātilakatantra also dedicates many verses to extolling the glory of *Kuṇḍalinī*. From these hymns, we can discern how the text views *Kuṇḍalinī*. She is described as the mother of the universe (jagānmohinī) (65), and the mother of the alphabet (varṇa), which permeates all existence. She is also referred to as the goddess of the three worlds (paradevatā trijagatām), whose essence is filled with alphabets (77). It is reiterated multiple times that she flashes like lightning, curves like the crescent moon, and coils thrice, symbolically expressing the triguṇas. It is also stated that when *Kuṇḍalinī* ascends, piercing through the three knots towards the realm of Śiva in the crown cakra, she carries the soul along with her — leading it to unite with Śiva. *Kuṇḍalinī* is expected to yield the fruit of yoga practice; when she ascends, she becomes the fulfiller of all desires (kāmadhenu and kalpavallārī). *Kuṇḍalinī* is the light likened to lightning amidst darkness; she dispels darkness because she embodies knowledge.

So, in the Śāradātilakatantra, *Kuṇḍalinī* possesses cosmic aspects but also personal aspects — she exists as a force within the body — and can become a kind of

"energy" harnessed by a yogi. Additionally, *Kuṇḍalinī* is depicted as a goddess who bows down due to her large breasts — a symbol for fertility. Her roles as the "Mother of the Alphabet," the "Mother of the Universe," and the "Primary Deity" showcase various divine and mystical facets of *Kuṇḍalinī*, akin to other gods and goddesses.

***Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga In The Haṭha Yogic Milieu**

Haṭha Yoga delineates a distinct branch of yoga that accentuates physical methodologies in its praxis. Among the earliest texts imparting such yogic techniques is the Vajrayāna scripture known as Amṛtasiddhi, dating back to the 11th century CE. While this text abstains from detailed explication on *Kuṇḍalinī* or cakras, it expounds upon the goddess Madhyamā, alternatively termed Avadhūtī, Ādhārā, Sarasvatī, and Suṣumnā, that in other texts, are associated with *Kuṇḍalinī* (Mallinson and Szántó, 2022). Within Amṛtasiddhi, instead of the raising *Kuṇḍalinī*, the focus lies on the ascension of bindu, the male generative fluid, also denoted as nectar (amṛta). In the Haṭha Yogic milieu, two distinct streams emerge: one oriented towards the elevation of bindu and the other towards the raising *Kuṇḍalinī* (Mallinson, 2011). Nevertheless, both streams leverage akin corporeal techniques. Texts aligning with the raising bindu encompass Amṛtasiddhi and Dattātreya yogaśāstra, while those oriented towards raising *Kuṇḍalinī* include Gorakṣasataka and Khecarīvidyā.

The corporeal techniques previously deployed for raising bindu within Buddhist Tantra underwent adaptation to raise *Kuṇḍalinī*, to accommodate Śaiva teachings. A pivotal point of this adaptation of corporeal techniques akin to Amṛtasiddhi for raising *Kuṇḍalinī* surfaces in Amaraugha (12th century CE). As noted by Birch (2024, p.5, 23), Amaraugha stands as an early Haṭha

Yogic text delineating the practice of raising *Kuṇḍalinī* through corporeal techniques previously used to raise bindu. Subsequently, this framework metamorphosed into a paradigm in Haṭha Yoga texts that ensued in subsequent epochs, epitomized by works such as Haṭhapradīpikā. This historical inflexion point holds significance, particularly in comprehending the ascendant role of diverse physical methodologies within *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga. The techniques elucidated for *Kuṇḍalinī* elevation in Amaraugha encompass practices of mahāmudrā, mahābandha, and mahāvedha. Nevertheless, the corporeal aspect of *Kuṇḍalinī* remains inherent within early Tantric texts, especially concerning the nexus between *Kuṇḍalinī* and Prāṇa.

The meditation to raising prāṇa itself has a long history, from Kiraṇatantra, Parākhyatantra, to Kubjikāmata (Mallinson, 2007, p.20-22). Meanwhile, in Jayadratayāmala, *Kuṇḍalinī* is referred to essentially as vital breath (Saraogi, 2021, p.105). In Jayadratayāmala, *Kuṇḍalinī* is also depicted as the "five-headed serpent" — as a symbol of the five types of prāṇa (Saraogi, 2021, p.106); also as Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī with five faces, each representing the five types of prāṇa (Saraogi, 2021, p.108). In the typology of *Kuṇḍalinī* in Tantrāloka, it explicitly underscores that Prāṇa is one aspect of *Kuṇḍalinī* itself (i.e., Prāṇakuṇḍalinī), a manifestation of Parākuṇḍalinī, which epitomizes consciousness. In his commentary on Abhinavagupta's Paramārthasāra, Yogarāja also describes *Kuṇḍalinī* as Madhyamaprāṇa rising through suṣumnā (Bansat-Boudon and Tripathi, 2011, p.263). It is interesting to note that Haṭha Yoga itself was initially understood as a method of breath control (prāṇāyāma) (Birch, 2024, p.25). Its goal is to force prāṇa into the central channel (suṣumnā). Therefore, it is not

surprising that prāṇa becomes a central aspect of Haṭha Yoga.

Within the literary corpus of Haṭha Yoga from the 14th to the 15th century, the role of *Kuṇḍalinī* and its practices involving corporeal techniques became increasingly significant. One detailed Haṭha Yoga text describing *Kuṇḍalinī* is Khecarīvidyā, estimated to have been composed before 1400 CE (Mallinson, 2007). In this text, not much is elaborated upon the ontological nature of *Kuṇḍalinī*, except to refer to it as "the supreme feminine divinity" enthroned "between the anus and testicles" called the Base. Additionally, *Kuṇḍalinī* is mentioned as one of the five innate constituents (II.120). Furthermore, several characteristics of *Kuṇḍalinī* are described, such as its appearance resembling a spider's web, radiance akin to ten million suns, its manifestation like a dormant serpent, and thousands of lightning bolts. *Kuṇḍalinī* is also mentioned to be in the form of amṛta (nectar), yet it can also take the form of 'World-destroying fire' during practices aimed at cheating death. Khecarīvidyā explicates that *Kuṇḍalinī* is roused through the khecarīmudrā and breath retention techniques. *Kuṇḍalinī* acknowledged as one of the five innate constituents (II.120, p.129), also plays an essential role in Khecarīmudrā practice. In this practice, *Kuṇḍalinī* is aroused and placed in the suṣumnā; the tongue is placed against the palate, then the tongue 'enters' the area of Brahmā. After *Kuṇḍalinī* rises and enters the abode of Brahmā, which is also the ocean of amṛta (nectar), the yogin fills his body with this amṛta and *Kuṇḍalinī* is then guided back to its place in Base. The benefits of this practice include the destruction of all diseases, various supernatural abilities (e.g., flying), and even cheating death (which is its ultimate goal). As *Kuṇḍalinī* rises from the base to the abode of

Brahmā, it is said to penetrate the six lotuses (i.e., cakras).

In another seminal text of Haṭha Yoga, Gorakṣaśataka, detailed elucidations of *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga are presented. This text, believed to have been compiled in the 1400s CE, has served as a foundational source, with many of its verses incorporated into subsequent treatises such as *Yogabīja*, *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Yogakuṇḍalyupaniṣad*, etc. (Mallinson, 2012, p.264). However, within Gorakṣaśataka, scant attention is afforded to the ontological dimension of *Kuṇḍalinī*; rather, its portrayal is predominantly practical and teleological. Gorakṣaśataka delineates two methodologies for awakening *Kuṇḍalinī*: *sarasvatīcālana* (stimulation of Sarasvatī) and *prāṇarodha* (breath retention —kumbhaka). *Sarasvatīcālana* entails the act of elevating the tongue to the palate. It is expounded that by retracting the tongue, it inherently lifts the tip of the *suṣumnā* at the sacral region, the abode of *Kuṇḍalinī*, thereby eliciting its arousal and subsequent ingress into the *suṣumnā*, facilitated by *prāṇa*. The movement of the tongue is purported to parallel the movement of *Kuṇḍalinī*. Conversely, the *prāṇarodha* exercise is executed through *mūlabandha*, compelling the *apāna* breath, typically descending, to ascend alongside the internal fire and unite with *prāṇa*. Consequently, the resultant heat, coupled with breath manipulation, induces *Kuṇḍalinī*'s ascent into the *suṣumnā*. As *Kuṇḍalinī* ascends, it traverses the three knots (i.e., Brahmanā, Viṣṇu, Rudra) until ultimately dissipating and merging with Śiva.

Up to this point, it can be observed how the concept of *Kuṇḍalinī* undergoes corporealization, as also underscored by Hatley (2015). In other words, *Kuṇḍalinī* has become an inseparable part of the yogic body, subject to manipulation through bodily practices. Furthermore, it can be noted that the conception of *Kuṇḍalinī* yoga is increasingly geared towards practical

aspects, namely as something to be done, while its ontological discussion is increasingly marginalized. This trend towards corporealization of *Kuṇḍalinī* persists in the Haṭha Yoga tradition, notably in the seminal text *Haṭhapradīpikā* compiled by Svātmārāma in the 15th century. Within this text, *Kuṇḍalinī* assumes a pivotal role in the pursuit of yoga, serving as the key for unlocking the gates to enlightenment (3.105), and as the cornerstone of all yogic endeavours (3.1). Various epithets are attributed to *Kuṇḍalinī* in the text, including *Kuṭilāṅgī*, *Bhujāṅgī*, *Śakti*, *Īśvarī*, *Kuṇḍalī*, and *Arundhatī* (3.104). Furthermore, she is equated with the *Suṣumnā* in another section (4.64).

The objective of yoga outlined in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* is to attain a state termed *Rājayoga*, equated with *samādhi*, *unmanī*, *manonmanī*, *amaratvaṃ*, *laya*, *tattva*, *śūnyāśūnya* (4.3-4). To reach this state, *Kuṇḍalinī* must be awakened or stirred from her dormant state at the entrance of the *suṣumnā*. It is posited that upon *Kuṇḍalinī*'s awakening (and the cessation of all actions), *samādhi* will spontaneously ensue (4.11). The prerequisite for achieving *samādhi* is the simultaneous disappearance of *prāṇa* and the mind (4.6). To facilitate the cessation of *prāṇa*, it must be directed into the *suṣumnā* (4.19). Consequently, to enable *prāṇa*'s entry into the *suṣumnā*, *Kuṇḍalinī*—perceived as slumbering coiled at the *suṣumnā*'s aperture (3.106)—must be aroused (moved) (3.118, 4.19). Upon *prāṇa*'s penetration of the *suṣumnā*, the state of *manonmanī* (thoughtlessness, another term for *samādhi*) is attained (4.20), as *prāṇa* and the mind are viewed as a unified entity. Consequently, the disappearance of one leads to the other's dissolution (4.22-25). In this framework, *Kuṇḍalinī* is perceived as a form of "hindrance" in yoga (as she obstructs the *prāṇa*'s flow into the *suṣumnā* (2.79). *Kuṇḍalinī*'s arousal is facilitated through a

combination of āsana, kumbhaka, and mudra practices, which constitute the focal points of the Haṭhpradīpikā.

However, not all Haṭha Yoga texts disregard the metaphysical and cosmic dimensions of *Kuṇḍalinī*. For instance, in the *Śivasamhitā* (14th century CE), *Kuṇḍalinī* is ontologically depicted as the primordial energy responsible for the creation of the universe, revered as the deity continuously worshipped by the gods (2.24). Identified as the Great Goddess of Illusion (4.46) and also known as Kula, *Kuṇḍalinī*, nestled at the threshold of Brahma's gate, is roused through mudra practices (4.22). Apart from *Kuṇḍalinī*, the *Śivasamhitā* elaborates on various other constituents of the yogic body, including the delineation of the six cakras mirroring the symbolic representations found in the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, originating from the Kubjikāmata tradition. This correspondence is unsurprising, given the shared textual lineage of the *Śivasamhitā*, Kubjikāmata, and *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* (See Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). It expounds on the nāḍīs (2.13-20) and subsequently addresses the Ādhāra (2.21-23), wherein a triangular-shaped yoni is described. Within this yoni, *Kuṇḍalinī* is purported to reside, manifesting as lightning flashes, coiling three-and-a-half circles akin to a serpent. It is asserted that upon *Kuṇḍalinī*'s arousal, facilitated by the guru's grace, all lotuses and knots will be penetrated (4.21). Besides the *Śivasamhitā*, another text upholding philosophical discourse concerning the ontological aspect of *Kuṇḍalinī* is the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study yields several implications, notably regarding how to understand *Kuṇḍalinī* *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga within early Tantric texts. To comprehend the conceptualizations of *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga within early Tantras, it is

imperative to grasp several foundational aspects. These include the pivotal roles of śakti and its role in the process of emanation of the tattva, as well as their intricate interplay with the mysticism of mantra encompassing various components, from primordial sound (śabda; vāk) to syllabic representations (mātrkā, mālīnī, varṇa, and its written forms). Thus, śakti, tattva, and mantra emerge as the triadic pillars essential for understanding *Kuṇḍalinī* and *Kuṇḍalinī* Yoga within early Tantra texts.

Firstly, concerning śakti, while *Kuṇḍalinī* is commonly perceived as energy, such reductionist interpretations risk oversimplifying *Kuṇḍalinī*'s significance, leading to its conceptualization as a vague "floating signifier." Hence, it is crucial to approach *Kuṇḍalinī* through the nuanced lenses of śakti, tattva, and mantra, ensuring an appreciation of their tradition-specific nature. These concepts, as emphasized by Flood (2006), exhibit variegated conceptualizations across sectarian contexts and texts. Moreover, their historical evolution, from early Tantric scriptures to subsequent Haṭha Yoga texts, further underscores the dynamic nature of *Kuṇḍalinī*'s conceptualization.

Secondly, comprehending Tantric cosmogony elucidated through the gradual emanation of tattvas assumes paramount importance. Unlike creationist paradigms positing an instantaneous act of creation by a singular deity, Tantra articulates a gradual emanation of the universe from a primordial source. This source's multifaceted identity, whether envisaged as Śiva with diverse manifestations or Śakti (Devī) with her myriad aspects, underscores the diverse explanations within Tantric literature. Consequently, grasping this cosmogonic framework—characterized by a gradual emanation of the universe—provides crucial insights.

Thirdly, central to Tantric perspectives is the notion of the sonic nature of the universe, wherein the universe is construed as sound, resonating with waves and vibrations, embodied as mantra. The concept of the Supreme Sound (parāvāk, Śabdabrahman) signifies the primal source from which emanates The concept of the Supreme Sound (parāvāk, Śabdabrahman) signifies the primal source from which emanates the primal vibration (nāda), initial point (bindu), and subsequently, various syllabic formations. This ontological sonicity of the universe intertwines with the phenomenological experience of humans, depicted narratively as the emanation of syllables from the primal source. Consequently, understanding the mysticism of mantra in Tantra extends beyond mere linguistic formulations to encompass profound ontological and phenomenological dimensions.

In light of these discussions, the relationship between these themes and Kuṇḍalinī becomes apparent. Across diverse Tantric texts, Kuṇḍalinī emerges as a consistent conception, often construed as the "mantra" driving the cosmic process of emanation—a manifestation of primal energy (śakti) and the creative impulse itself. As the Supreme Sound (parāvāk), Kuṇḍalinī embodies the essence from which all other sounds, mantras, and scriptures emanate, reflecting the profound interconnections between cosmic creation and sonic vibrations. Thus, Kuṇḍalinī, as both the initial vibratory force and the primordial intent underlying creation, epitomizes the divine will (icchā-śakti) permeating the cosmos, transcending linguistic and anthropomorphic representations. Furthermore, Kuṇḍalinī's association with mantra intertwine with the role of breath (prāṇa) as the medium through which sound manifests audibly. This holistic understanding not only illuminates

Kuṇḍalinī's centrality within Tantric thought but also underscores its profound implications for cosmogony, ontology, and the human experience of the universe.

In the historical analysis of the conceptualization of Kuṇḍalinī and Kuṇḍalinīyoga, spanning from early Tantric texts to later Hāṭhayogic literature, a notable paradigmatic shift becomes evident between the two traditions. While the Tantras primarily delve into the ontological facets of Kuṇḍalinī, Hāṭha Yoga scriptures emphasize the practical dimensions of Kuṇḍalinī, particularly within the framework of Kuṇḍalinī Yoga. Within Tantric texts, discussions surrounding Kuṇḍalinī are embedded within cosmogonic discourse, intricately entwined with the metaphysical worldview of each text concerning the hierarchical structuring of tattvas and the cosmological dynamics of emanation and dissolution. In contrast, Hāṭha Yoga's discourse on Kuṇḍalinī revolves around yogic practices characterized by breath control and bodily manipulation. While Tantra attributes cosmic significance to Kuṇḍalinī, Hāṭha Yoga reconceptualizes Kuṇḍalinī as a primarily personal and individually oriented force, intimately connected to each practitioner's corporeal existence. Consequently, the cosmic dimensions that were once prominent in the Tantras recede into the background within Hāṭha Yoga treatises.

Moreover, from a practical standpoint, Hāṭha Yoga redirects its focus away from techniques characterized by sonic and mantra-based practices, which were prevalent in Tantra, towards methods grounded in physicality. Practices involving Kuṇḍalinī within Hāṭha Yoga, such as tongue stimulation, breath retention, and muscular contractions, underscore a prominent emphasis on bodily engagement. This shift signifies a departure from the sonic and mantra-centric approaches of Tantra towards

a more somatic orientation. Nevertheless, this transition does not negate the existence of corporeal practices within Tantric texts. Techniques centred on the arousal of Prāṇa were already integral to early Tantra, regardless of explicit references to Kuṇḍalinī. Thus, the Kuṇḍalinī practices within Haṭha Yoga represent, to some extent, a continuation of the perspectives and methodologies outlined in Tantra.

Within the domain of Haṭha Yoga, supplementary dimensions, often overlooked in Tantra literature, come to the forefront. Kuṇḍalinī is depicted as a form of "obstacle" within Haṭha Yoga, necessitating nuanced navigation. Nevertheless, this perspective aligns with the inherent concept within Tantra that Kuṇḍalinī embodies Māyā/Prakṛti, thereby necessitating transcendence or mastery to attain spiritual enlightenment (i.e., the realization of Śiva). This conceptual framework introduces an added layer of intricacy to the comprehension of Kuṇḍalinī within the Haṭha Yoga tradition, where practitioners are tasked with grappling with Kuṇḍalinī as both a transformative energy and a potential impediment along the path of spiritual ascent.

As a final note, the shift in focus and conception of Kuṇḍalinī and Kuṇḍalinī Yoga is not absolute, and there is also continuity in the understanding of Kuṇḍalinī between these two traditions. For instance, while Tantra texts may emphasize more on cosmic and metaphysical aspects, some Haṭha Yoga texts like Śivasamhitā still maintain these earlier aspects. Similarly, some practical elements such as the use of mantra and Prāṇāyāma persist within the context of Haṭha Yoga. Moreover, the shift in the conception of Kuṇḍalinī from Tantra texts to Haṭha Yoga does not necessarily imply a devaluation or loss of theological aspects. Instead, this shift often reflects the adaptation and reinterpretation of concepts according to

different practical purposes and philosophical contexts. Therefore, while some theological aspects may be marginalized in Haṭha Yoga, there is value in adjusting concepts to meet the needs of different spiritual practices. In conclusion, it is important to consider both sides of this shift and acknowledge the complexity and variation in the understanding of Kuṇḍalinī between these two traditions.

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