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# YOGA BREATH

THE REINVENTION OF PRĀṆA AND PRĀṆĀYĀMA  
IN EARLY MODERN YOGA

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Magdalena Kraler



TO THOSE WHO SEE THE ALL, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE EXCEPT FORMAL WHEN LIFE IS  
MATERIALISED, OR WHEN MATTER IS VITALISED, OR WHEN SPIRIT IS MATERIALISED,  
OR AGAIN WHEN EVERYTHING IS SPIRITUALISED.

Pramathanatha Mukhyopadhyaya: “Life and the First Principles” (1922: 89),  
Appendix to John Woodroffe’s *The World as Power: Power as Life*.



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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this thesis, transliterations from Sanskrit follow the standard International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliterations (IAST). Exceptions, in which diacritical marks are not used, are place names as well as names and authors of the modern period. In all text titles and quotations, the original English rendering of Sanskrit terms is retained. In original quotations, the reader will therefore encounter a variety of spellings of Sanskrit words.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The years 2020 and 2021, during which substantial parts of this thesis were written, brought breathing to our attention in more urgent ways than would normally be the case. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impinged upon what we call “normal” with regard to several aspects of our lives, it also brought to the fore the life-sustaining function of breath. If we try to step away a bit from the current urgency that the pandemic still elicits (I am writing in late April 2021, a time in which India has been extraordinarily strongly hit), a similar issue also affecting breathing had to be dealt with 150 years ago: the rise of pulmonary tuberculosis, which was still experienced by generations around the fin-de-siècle. It was a health crisis that spread in Euro-American countries, but also caused troubles in India, and was said to be linked to the increasing pollution of the air that humans breathed, which weakened their lungs. Many were prone to this infectious respiratory disease. Nineteenth-century yogis and health experts responded to this crisis with a yogic technique that had been known for ages in India – *prāṇāyāma* or “breath control” – to invigorate the state of one’s health and overall mindset. In addition, techniques of deep breathing were promoted as a remedy against tuberculosis, along with other nature-cure methods by yogis and Euro-American health experts alike. While this is purely speculative, turn-of-the-century yogis, who are the main protagonists in this thesis, would probably also respond to the current health crisis with one piece of advice: “For peace of mind and health, practise *prāṇāyāma*”.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the context of the pandemic, however, there is a growing interest in breath practices. A brief glance at contemporary self-help culture reveals a broad interest in various forms of breath cultivation. What is often subsumed under “breath work” includes Stanislav Grof-inflected techniques (“holotropic breathwork”), “Rebirthing”, the “Wim Hof Method”, and even apnea diving. Bestsellers like Patrick

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there are voices in contemporary yoga and yoga therapy that promote *prāṇāyāma* as effective for preventing or curing COVID-19. See, for example, Taneja (2020) who advocates for the health benefits gained from producing nitric oxide during *bhrāmarī prāṇāyāma* (in which exhalation is prolonged by a soft hum). Generating nitric oxide by means of this breathing exercise leads to “reversed pulmonary hypertension, improved severe hypoxia and shortened the stay in ICU and ventilatory support” (Taneja 2020: 395). This was found in clinical trials during the SARS-COV pandemic in 2004, as Taneja makes clear. His hypothesis, then, is that the same effect can be expected in the case of COVID-19 infection. Likewise, to fight the disease and reduce “stress and tension”, Hansaji Yogendra from the Yoga Institute in Bombay also recommends *bhrāmarī* in a YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z1B4yxD3RA> (accessed March 1, 2022).

McKeown's *The Oxygen Advantage* (2015) to promote the "Buteyko-Method" and James Nestor's recent *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* (2020) have additionally magnified the topic's popularity within Euro-American contexts. Likewise, I hold that, within the international yoga scene, *prāṇāyāma* is also on the rise. There is a sense that one's own (teaching) practice can be deepened by including *prāṇāyāma*. Some practitioners even feel that once they turn to *prāṇāyāma* – apart from integrating breath techniques into *āsana* ("posture") practice – they get to the "real thing", and everything up to that point was preparatory.<sup>2</sup> Such a view is frequently justified by pointing out that *prāṇāyāma* indeed played a highly prominent role in premodern yoga. Hence, the wish to engage into *prāṇāyāma* may be motivated by a quest to discover yoga's "essence", "authenticity" or "true purpose" that highlights the potentiality of *prāṇāyāma* as it is transmitted by premodern texts to which practitioners may have access. This traditionalist inclination towards the practice is, as I would argue, a driving factor encouraging people to engage with *prāṇāyāma* today.

Despite a growing interest in *prāṇāyāma*, it could be also argued that it is still a niche or elitist endeavour within the modern yoga industry, which otherwise attracts millions of adherents. Indeed, a recent publication entitled *Yoga Rising: 30 Empowering Stories from Yoga Renegades for Every Body* (2018) compiled by Melanie C. Klein, which reflects upon insider perspectives on yoga, shows that the term *āsana* was mentioned 95 times, while the term *prāṇāyāma* was used only thrice in the entire book. Given its waning significance compared to premodern practice, some scholars hold that *prāṇāyāma* has become increasingly "superficial" (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 39) and in light of modern yoga's genealogy could be classified as "yet another technique of relaxation" (Singleton 2005: 294). As traditionalist, elitist, superficial, or marginal as *prāṇāyāma* may be, nevertheless, "along with stretching and relaxing, breathing might be said to form the third element of yoga in the popular imagination" (*ibid.*). It almost goes without saying that *prāṇāyāma* is no longer the practice given by yogis to individual disciples who prove themselves worthy. Rather, the techniques and their cultural settings have changed significantly. In many cases,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Paul Dallaghan, one of the prominent teachers of *prāṇāyāma* in the contemporary modern yoga scene, stated that *āsana* is like "moving in a car to arrive at the airport". Once you enter the "plane", which is *prāṇāyāma*, you move on a much faster pace (i.e., you develop faster on the spiritual plane) (own field data collected in the CCY Research Special at Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute from Feb 14 to April 1, 2019, which was conducted as part of Dallaghan's PhD project "Breath, Stress, and Health: A Biocultural Study of Hatha Yoga" at Elmhurst University).

*prāṇāyāma* courses are a profitable branch of the yoga industry, especially because the experts on the theme appear to be somewhat rare.<sup>3</sup>

*Prāṇāyāma* is indeed a technique that has ancient roots in South Asian religious traditions. In other words, from today's point of view, it is fascinatingly old, yet due to the at times overwhelming presence of *āsana*, its resurgence is quite a new phenomenon. From the perspective of today's practitioners, there are probably many blank spaces in one's inner landscape that could be filled through the exploration of the breath. It seems that many *prāṇāyāma* teaching curricula could be improved. But the most pressing concern here is that the historical research into *prāṇāyāma* has not been advanced within modern yoga studies up to the present, despite its importance within most yogic frameworks. Not only was *prāṇāyāma* crucial or even the most important practice of some Haṭhayogic textual traditions, but up to the 1930s yoga was, even in Euro-American contexts, still associated mainly with *prāṇāyāma*, not with *āsana* (Singleton 2010: 155-156).

Against this backdrop of popular interest and pending research, dealing with *prāṇāyāma* or “yogic breath cultivation”<sup>4</sup> fits with today's *zeitgeist* as well as that of early modern yoga.<sup>5</sup> The art historian Richard Shiff has pondered modern art theories in relation to individual autonomy and perception in light of modernity and attested that breath can be seen as a “figure of modernism” (Shiff 1997: 187). Indeed, “breath” and related notions seem to underpin the modernist musings on organic life in theories of art and expression (e.g., Veder 2009; Benjamin 1977 [1931]; Cowan 2007) as well as the vitalistic implications of the Euro-American hygienic culture with its strong emphasis on breathing exercises. In other words, these developments have shed new light on a phenomenon that is intrinsic to life – but what is probably truly new is not the reinvention of an old idea but that it, along with the cultural flows of modernity, opened doorways to an entangled history of breath cultivation.

This thesis aims to uncover crucial strands of such an entangled history and to fill parts of a considerable gap in research. The field of modern yoga research has certainly addressed highly relevant areas of modern yoga like the history of *āsana*

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<sup>3</sup> Exemplifying this trend, the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute charges approximately \$1,000 for a two-week *prāṇāyāma* course with O. P. Tiwari with a daily schedule of roughly five hours.

<sup>4</sup> I use this term to denote the extended meanings with which the term *prāṇāyāma* has been associated in the modern era, i.e., *prāṇāyāma as well as* imported techniques that were not part of the premodern *prāṇāyāma* set (e.g., “deep breathing” or “clavicular breathing”). The employment of this terminology will be more thoroughly explained in chapter 2.1.

<sup>5</sup> This thesis is concerned with the study of yogic breath cultivation in early modern yoga, a time frame that spans between c. 1850 and 1945 in my periodisation of yoga. For details, see chapter 2.1.

practice or “modern postural yoga” and its crucial intersection with physical culture (Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016), has uncovered the lives and teachings of individual modern yoga pioneers<sup>6</sup> and the institution of the “guru” (Singleton & Goldberg 2013), and examined modern yoga’s adoption of esotericism (De Michelis 2004) and occultism (Bogdan 2014; Cantú 2022), to name a few areas. In short, while the study of *prāṇāyāma* itself is still pending, the field has provided a basis for such an investigation, which is outlined in the following section.

## 1.1 Current State of Research

Sketching the current state of research in two main threads, I firstly address the works of innovative scholars that established major coordinates for the field of modern yoga studies (mainly Sjoman 1996; De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Singleton 2010). They describe modern yoga as a global transnational phenomenon, and hence these studies are different from earlier ones that described yoga in a comparative religionist and phenomenological mode (Eliade 1958 [1954]; Morley 2001) or that were primarily concerned with the history of yoga’s reception in Europe (Fuchs 1990; Baier 1999).<sup>7</sup> Their approach can also be demarcated against the attempts to show the efficacy of yoga in medical terms that started to flourish in the 1930s, but which had even older roots in the late nineteenth century (Singleton 2010: 50-53). Secondly, I will address the works of scholars that have analysed certain aspects of *prāṇāyāma*, *prāṇa* (“breath”, “vitality”)<sup>8</sup> or breath-related themes within a somewhat wider framework consisting of modern yoga studies, anthropology, or religious studies. The broader categories of modern yoga studies as well as the narrower focus of some studies that have engaged in breath-related themes are equally seminal to this research project.

As to the first concern of this survey, the term “modern yoga” first appeared in an explicit scholarly context in Norman Sjoman’s *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* (1996). Sjoman had viewed Krishnamacharya’s *āsana* teachings at the Mysore

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the term “modern yoga pioneers”, see chapter 2.1.

<sup>7</sup> Eliade’s definition of *prāṇāyāma* as a practice to induce a “paradoxical state” is certainly relevant and captures some of the core features of *prāṇāyāma* (Eliade 1958 [1954]: 98). For him, the “paradox” lies in the fact that everybody appears to be dependent on the partly involuntary function of breath, yet the yogi aims to control, temporarily restrain, and master it (*ibid.*: 58, 98). Yet his “Excursus” (*ibid.*: 59-65), which compares Chinese, Sufi, Hindu, and Christian breath practices, resembles the universalist endeavour of some theosophists that likewise found their theories reflected in the breath practices of various religious cultures from the Middle East to the Far East. For example, Tatya (1885 [1882]: 198, 211-212) mentions Buddhist breathing techniques and Hesychast mentions meditation in correlation with the breath, a passage that echoes Samuel Beal’s *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (1871). For details on these theosophical texts, see chapter 4.3.1.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the notion’s premodern understanding, see chapter 3; further usages of *prāṇa* will be explained in various parts of the thesis.

Palace as part of a modern endeavour that highlighted the themes of posture and postural flows as the most important aspect of modern yoga at the expense of other yoga practices like *prāṇāyāma* (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 43, 50-56). However, the first publication to locate modern yoga discourses in a broader historical discussion is Elizabeth de Michelis's *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (2004). The main contribution of her work lies in uncovering the syntheses between yoga and esotericism that emerged in the cultic milieu of the Hindu reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj of the nineteenth-century (De Michelis 2004: 51-90). This set the stage for her analysis of key figures of nineteenth-century modern yoga like Vivekananda (*ibid.*: 91-126) and also of the role of later figures like B. K. S. Iyengar in integrating a kind of personal mysticism into what De Michelis terms "Neo-Haṭha Yoga" (*ibid.*: 225). Her discussion of Vivekananda's usage of *prāṇa* as a "vitalistic element" and a "healing agent" as applied in (mesmeric-styled) "healing techniques" is one of the few outlines that treat *prāṇa* as a key element to underpin modern yoga practices (*ibid.*: 159-168). Besides offering such historical landmarks, De Michelis should also be credited for establishing a typology of modern yoga that highlights modern postural yoga as the most successful among other siblings (for a further discussion, see chapter 2.1).

Joseph Alter's equally seminal *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (2004) reads modern yoga mainly through the lens of medical anthropology. It highlights, as the subtitle suggests, the categories yoga-as-science and yoga-as-philosophy, which are combined in the works of several yogis and authors of modern yoga up to the 1990s. Not strictly historical in nature, Alter's study nevertheless yields valuable thoughts on the possible historicisation of yoga as well as the complex metaphysics of premodern yoga that still inform modern practices (including some thoughts on *prāṇa*) but that are also increasingly paired with concepts of "science". On this basis, the study offers crucial insights into the trend of medicalised yoga in the 1930s by also investigating the prominent example of Swami Kuvalayananda and his experiments with *prāṇāyāma* (Alter 2004: 73-108). Moreover, it is the first monographic in-depth study to analyse overlaps between modern yoga, twentieth-century Ayurveda, and nature-cure practices (*ibid.*: 209-210).

Another landmark publication is *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (2010) by Mark Singleton, which elaborates on "transnational anglophone yoga" in light of *āsana* practice. Inquiring into the networks that became instrumental in producing modern posture practice from about the 1880s onwards, this work

highlights the intertwined paths of physical culture, “harmonial gymnastics” (a term to designate systems of holistic movement that evolved mainly in North American contexts), and *āsana*. De Michelis had already employed the adjective “harmonial” (in the context of religion and to describe bodily practices) to denote a “[m]etaphysical and mesmeric” component of bodily practices (De Michelis 2004: 151, 160, 208). In referring to religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom, Singleton applied the term more narrowly to denote an influence of unchurched religiosity as found in the American New Thought movement, and more specifically in the works of the Delsartist Genevieve Stebbins and the self-taught yogini Cajzoran Ali (Singleton 2010: 143). With regard to the former, Singleton briefly touches on the pivotal notion of “rhythmic breathing” popularised by Stebbins that would soon inform several subsequent *prāṇāyāma* instructions including Vivekananda’s (*ibid.*: 146-147). Singleton’s aim, then, is to unravel the significance that New Thought, suggestive therapeutics, the broader physical culture movement including YMCA, harmonial gymnastics, and bodybuilding had in India and on a transnational scale. In brief, physical culture, an antiquated term but also useful to denote a field of practices for this study, is the thread that connects several strands of Singleton’s convincing narrative.

While these studies serve as a base for my discussion, there are several later ones that elaborate on modern yoga themes and yield further insights. Among these, Elliott Goldberg’s *The Path of Modern Yoga: The History of an Embodied Spiritual Practice* (2016) adds numerous details to the account of the evolution of modern postural yoga (at times hinting at the role of breath therein) by contextualising these with in-depth biographical studies of several yoga pioneers. Anya P. Foxen’s *Biography of a Yogi: Paramahansa Yogananda and the Origins of Modern Yoga* (2017) is another valuable study that mainly addresses the life of Paramahansa Yogananda and his Yogoda system as popularised in North American contexts. Her work, however, is not just a case study of Yogananda’s transnational organisation, but also discusses the role of cosmological agents like *prāṇa*, and particularly *ākāśa* (“space”, “ether”) (Foxen 2017a: 59-62). In a different mould, to address the wider field of yoga and meditation practices that are prevalent in today’s landscape, the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* (2020) edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O’Brien-Kop, is a rich survey of practices and their socio-cultural contexts. Although there is no full article (historical or otherwise) elaborating on *prāṇāyāma* in this handbook, its role is mentioned in various contextual frameworks, for instance, in the sociological study “Yoga and Meditation as Health

Interventions” (Newcombe 2021), as part of a historical analysis in “Yoga and Meditation in Modern Esoteric Traditions” (Strube 2021c), and within a phenomenological approach in “Yoga: Between Meditation and Movement” (Ciołkosz 2021).

As to the second concern of this survey, within the broader field of East and South Asian studies, I draw on two pertinent studies with a comparative and context-dependent focus. First, Peter van de Veer’s “Global Breathing: Religious Utopias in India and China” (2007) has inquired into breath practices within yoga and Qigong as “historical and political phenomena”, including the transformation that these disciplines underwent in the modern era (van de Veer 2007: 316). Linking these breath practices to the construction of modernity and national identities, the study’s value lies in its contextualisation, as opposed to an isolated investigation, of the instructions and effects of these breathing techniques. It furthermore understands Vivekananda as a “cultural translator” and one of the crucial protagonists to promote “Hindu spirituality” (*ibid.*: 318-319). Elucidating the role of colonialism, nationalism, and scientific discourse as important cultural contexts, this study has inspired my own approach to analysing the practices. Second, Nile Green’s “Breathing in India, c. 1890” (2008) contextualises yogic and Sufi breath practices including *prāṇāyāma* and meditation techniques of the high colonial period as part of vernacular as well as English-speaking cultures. Like van de Veer, Green also throws light on the practices being moulded through colonialism, nationalism, and the emergence of print media. Remarkable in its scope and detail, the article uncovers the overlaps and demarcations between Sufi (Urdu) and yogic (Hindi and Bengali) vernacular interpretations of breath practices, the latter echoing Vivekananda’s notion of *prāṇa*. However, it only marginally touches upon the influence of occultism and hygienic culture, and does not address the works of various protagonists as part of a history of transnational modern yoga.

Furthermore, Karl Baier’s encompassing *Meditation und Moderne* (2009) addresses breath practices in the light of four main protagonists that are relevant for this study. Within the context of Hindu reform movements, Baier has brought Dayananda Sarasvati’s role in the nineteenth-century yoga revival to the fore (Baier 2009: 311-315). He has further discussed yogic practices including breath cultivation and *kuṇḍalinī* arousal as understood by Vivekananda and contextualised them with spiritism, mesmerism, and New Thought (*ibid.*: 467-485). As protagonists of North American fin-de-siècle occultism and physical culture, the breath practices of Genevieve Stebbins and William Walker Atkinson, the latter publishing under the

pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka, are addressed (*ibid.*: 454-464, 485-497). Baier shows how breath cultivation termed “yogi breathing” in these milieus was informed by occult practices that, moreover, were blended with strands of physical culture and voice culture. The recognition of these amalgamations to inform yoga in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, relaxation, and meditation is a crucial starting point for this study.

As one of the most pertinent texts to treat breathing practices as part of “Western”<sup>9</sup> esoteric strands to inform yoga and physical culture, Anya P. Foxen’s *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern Yoga* (2020) is briefly introduced here. In partly following De Michelis (2004) and Singleton (2010), it offers a kind of grand narrative of “harmonialist” breath cultivation. However, Foxen adopts this term for a “much broader application” (Foxen 2020: 20). In her monograph, “harmonialism” does not only imply techniques informed by spiritism, Swedenborgianism, Euro-American physical culture, and American Delsartism, but she links them to an underlying pervasive network of harmonialism that is traced, for example, to Greek Antiquity, Plato, and the theurgy of Iamblichus. In mainly addressing “Western” esotericism and physical culture, however, Foxen, barely touches upon the notion of *prāṇāyāma* as it can be demarcated from these spiritualised breathing practices. Her approach almost completely ignores South Asian sources to explain yoga or breath-related themes, and instead “harmonialism” serves to elucidate almost all explications of modern yoga. Accordingly, her interest in discussing figures like Sri Yogendra and Paramahansa Yogananda, who became popular during the 1920s and 1930s, lies in how they appropriated harmonialism (*ibid.*: 223-255), but the author does not highlight them as figures that reinvented *prāṇāyāma* at least partly on the Sanskrit/vernacular base of yoga.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, her discussion of breath practices in harmonial and yogic contexts uncovers several helpful details of turn-of-the-century physical cultures that I will refer to. In contrast to Foxen’s study, my own embarks from a position that highlights *prāṇāyāma* as a set of practices deeply informed by South Asian religious cultures which, however, started to embrace certain innovations and cultural appropriations as early as the 1850s.

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<sup>9</sup> It has become apparent in various scholarly discourses that the terms “Western” and the “West” are problematic due to their vagueness and ideological connotations. In this thesis, this broad category is mostly circumscribed by the descriptive adjective “Euro-American”. However, the adjective “Western” is nevertheless sometimes used, particularly, when authors of some (primary and secondary) sources to which I refer to utilise it to demarcate ideas and practices from South Asian ones.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed critique of Foxen’s *Inhaling Spirit*, see Kraler & Mullan (2021).



As this survey has shown, although there are some analyses of a modern understanding of *prāṇa* (De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Zoehrer 2021) and some case studies of *prāṇāyāma* in the context of meditation, breath practices, and relaxation (Singleton 2005; van de Veer 2007; Green 2008; Baier 2009; Foxen 2020) that laid foundations for further research, there is no systematic monographic study that places *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* centre stage. We do not yet have answers to crucial questions as to the various ways that key notions like *prāṇa* and the “breath of life” were understood in modern yoga, or how they relate to questions of cosmology, vitalism, and self-cultivation. Neither is there a detailed analysis as to the relationship between premodern forms of *prāṇāyāma* and modern ones, between inherent yogic techniques and imported ones that started to complement or even substitute *prāṇāyāma* such as “deep breathing”, “rhythmic breathing”, or “clavicular breathing”. What is further at stake is an investigation of the practices within their socio-cultural contexts including their political implications and the analysis of yogic breath cultivation as part of a “history of practices” within religious studies. In brief, despite the centrality of *prāṇāyāma*, which has “remained a key element of yoga practice since the earliest description of yoga practices” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 134), the topic has received only scant attention.

## 1.2 Outline and Research Questions

It has already been hinted at why the study of yogic breath cultivation is relevant. From the vantage point of a historical approach within modern yoga studies, there are additional factors to point at its importance. Outstanding protagonists of modern yoga like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Kuvalayananda, Sri Yogendra, and Swami Sivananda have either explicitly published *prāṇāyāma* manuals or have dedicated several chapters to the theme, as is the case in Vivekananda’s famous *Rāja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* of 1896. All of these seminal texts have been published in English, and this thesis is therefore mostly concerned with yoga as an emerging anglophone transnational culture. Since a modern understanding of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* cannot be solely set forth in light of yoga’s premodern roots,<sup>11</sup> several

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<sup>11</sup> There are several crucial works on premodern yoga without which research into modern yogic breath cultivation would be impossible. This holds particularly true for the emerging study of Haṭhayoga (the definitions of which are currently evolving) in the medieval period of South Asia which has started to thrive through the efforts of scholars like Jason Birch, James Mallinson, Mark Singleton, and many others. For the present context most relevant are Peter Connolly’s *Vitalistic Thought in India* (1992), Jason Birch’s articles on Haṭhayoga, Rājayoga, and Ayurveda that include developments up to the early modern period (Birch 2011; 2013; 2018; 2020a; 2020b), James Mallinson’s studies on the early roots

additional cultural and religious influences must be considered to properly investigate the role and meaning that *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* adopted. Of these, the most salient are the impact of hygienic culture, biomedicine, and nature-cure practices, alternative religious strands like nineteenth-century occultism, and, not least, science discourses. All these diverse strands of socio-cultural life were present in nineteenth-century colonial India and led, through being intermingled with yoga as an oral, praxeological, and textual tradition, to the amalgamation that we today know as modern yoga. As such, the study of yogic breath cultivation exemplifies how the history of modern yoga evolves along the lines of transnational exchange of body technologies to engender health and well-being. Such a history further needs to consider the forging forces of imperialism and colonialism that pushed the modern reinvention of yoga as an ancient “science”. These ideas continue to underpin the orientalist orientation of many yoga practitioners today as well as the religiopolitical discourse within India that tries to negotiate (and dominate) the role of yoga worldwide.

To carve out the most important developments that shaped yogic breath cultivation, this investigation starts to consider some crucial publications from c. 1850 onwards. It aims to establish trajectories of development from their respective origins and salient interpretations of *prāṇāyāma* practice, and as such in many ways it explores new shores. Due to the influence of various cultural strands the notions of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* were subject to considerable change during the nineteenth century. For example, in light of the theosophical practice of synonymisation (Hammer 2004: 164-166; Asprem 2011: 142), *prāṇa* adopts meanings that are less related to breath than to the notion of a kind of subtle force-substance that produced phenomena like electricity and magnetism, to name but two (Zoehrer 2020: 159; White 2014: 107, 129-130). Correspondingly, *prāṇāyāma* becomes a rather large container for a variety of practices including Hāṭhayogic forms of breathing and purificatory techniques, ritualistic forms of *prāṇāyāma* as outlined in various prayer books for Hindus, and breathing techniques described by Euro-American gymnasts and physical culturists.

For the investigation of this complex interplay of forces with regard to breath cultivation in early modern yoga, the thesis is structured in two main parts. The aim of Part I, “Contexts and Concepts”, is to introduce some salient premodern ideas on *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* (chapter 3) as well as influential strands that pervade the

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of Hāṭhayoga including surveys of the field (Mallinson 2007a; 2011; 2020), James Mallinson’s and Mark Singleton’s incredibly helpful *Roots of Yoga* (2017) as well as the equally comprehensive anthologies *Yoga in Practice* (2012) by David Gordon White and *Yoga Powers* (2012) by Knuth A. Jacobson.

discourses on yogic breath cultivation in the “formation phase” of early modern yoga (i.e., c. 1850 to 1896 with Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga* as the tipping point) (chapter 4; chapter 5). Part II, “Pioneers and Practices”, then starts off to further contextualise the practices in regard to their socio-cultural and corporeal implications (chapter 6; chapter 7). This lays foundations for the core analysis of this study, in which I engage ten leading figures and their individual approaches to influencing, contextualising, and applying yogic breath cultivation (chapter 8; chapter 9). Hence, Part II mainly addresses the “main phase” of early modern yoga as reflected in the developments of yogic breath cultivation (i.e., 1896 to 1945).<sup>12</sup>

To address dominant strands that created the discursive net of yogic breath cultivation, various research questions linked to topical threads run through this thesis. They will be briefly introduced here as part of a preliminary outline of each chapter. The theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis as discussed in chapter 2 revolves around the questions as to what place can be ascribed to (body-centred) practices in historiographies, and how such practices are analysed within the main methodological approach of a historical discourse analysis. Major theoretical lenses are the theories of entangled history, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice, Michel Foucault’s notion of the “care of the self”, and its extension by Philipp Sarasin’s study of hygiene and self-cultivation within nineteenth-century hygienic cultures. This chapter also builds on theoretical agreements within modern yoga studies and highlights the notion of soteriology as part of a theoretical framework in which modern yoga can be placed. These methodologies aim to unlock the potential of a historical investigation of these practices. This includes examining the practices themselves, but also recognising the value that these practices have for historical research, i.e., whether they can – to a certain degree – rewrite the history of modern yoga.

Chapter 3 then discusses the most salient features of premodern *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*. As such, it aims to clarify basic religious, philosophical, and praxeological strands of premodern yoga traditions that are relevant for yogic breath cultivation. Indeed, up to the modern period, the influence of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*, in which *prāṇāyāma* is the fourth limb, and the role of Haṭhayogic forms of *prāṇāyāma* cannot be overstated. These traditions and some meanings of *prāṇa* set forth as early as in the

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<sup>12</sup> For details of the periodisation applied in this study, see chapter 2.1; figure 1. If a few post-Second-World-War publications of authors like Kuvalayananda, Sivananda, and Krishnamacharya are treated, it is only to elucidate their point and to give a rounded argument. There will be no in-depth discussion of the historical material and the emerging discourses post-1945 other than a few exceptional works and the tip-of-the-iceberg-discussion in the Outlook (chapter 9.3).

Vedas built a cultural and religious capital on which modern yoga pioneers clearly drew. As should be noted, the history of premodern *prāṇāyāma* has wide ramifications, and practices found in Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga were also integrated into Advaita Vedānta and vernacular Advaita-related movements (e.g., through the impact of the highly influential *Yogavāsiṣṭha*).

The main contexts in the formation phase of early modern yoga are the influence of various socio-cultural and religious movements before 1900 (chapter 4). These are the nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements like the Arya and Brahmo Samaj, nineteenth-century occultism with emphasis on the Theosophical Society that was based in India since 1878, and the ideas and practices derived from transnational hygienic and physical cultures including American Delsartism and gymnastics. The purpose here is to uncover the formulation of guiding ideas in these networks and to describe the practices that proliferated in the works of later yoga pioneers. This includes such disparate topics like the propagation of *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite practised by Hindus at dusk and dawn, the employment of breath cultivation in sexual magic that influenced the notion of “rhythmic breathing”, and the emergence of concepts like “psycho-physical culture”. Chapter 4 also investigates the extent to which these contexts were already intertwined before figures like Vivekananda and thus already prefigured the amalgamation of practices and ideas in modern yoga. Key concepts such as transnationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, science discourses, and media culture also emerge in these contexts.

The main concern of chapter 5 is then to describe various worldviews that underpin yogic breath cultivation. These are cosmological and anthropological theories that built a backbone to explain how practices work from the viewpoint of authoritative voices in the field. The main protagonists to forge these perspectives are Genevieve Stebbins, Rama Prasad, and Swami Vivekananda. They bring modern yoga’s main cosmological agents to the fore, which are “*prāṇa*”, “*svara*” (“breath”, “sound”), the “breath of life”, “*ākāśa*” (“space”, “ether”), and “ether”. These principles interact on “subtle” and “gross” levels of the cosmos to form and constantly reshape the macrocosm and human realities. All these “ideas in practice” have not been substantially treated in modern yoga studies until today. The scrutiny of the contexts and concepts in Part I as to their productivity for *prāṇāyāma* yields new results that do not appear on the radar of an analysis of yoga-as-*āsana*, or do so only marginally, and actually rewrites parts of modern yoga’s history.

As an overture to Part II, chapter 6 investigates crucial cultural settings in which discourses of yogic breath cultivation were negotiated. In establishing an analytical tool that I have termed the “*prāṇāyāma* grid”, it uncovers a complex net of multilateral relations (religion, hygienic culture, the appeal to tradition and innovation) that considers statements of various yoga pioneers as well as external forces (nationalism, scientific discourse, and media culture). The latter appear to additionally filter, accelerate, and disseminate modern yoga discourses. This chapter focuses on how yogic breath cultivation was determined and shaped by several prevailing cultural factors and trends. Practices were both *utilised* to propagate *prāṇa*-as-power and yoga-as-science, and consequently *shaped* by these labels. It thereby shows how phrases like the “science of breath” were persuasive precisely because they rode the wave of these discourses. The contextualisation in chapter 6 is complemented by a zooming in on the practices themselves and their corporeal level in chapter 7, which asks how the practices can be structured within a typology that foregrounds some underlying physiological principles.

Chapter 8 applies several research questions in discussing the individual approaches of ten yoga pioneers to formulate and influence yogic breath cultivation. Most of the pioneers draw on several contexts or conceptions that have been explored up to this point. As to the cultural settings into which the practice is placed, several yoga pioneers understand yogic breath cultivation in light of nationalism and even as a tool to pronounce India’s superiority over Euro-American cultures. I further investigate how they draw on discourses of science, medicine, hygiene, and physical culture, often with the aim of substantiating the claims regarding the efficacy of yogic breath cultivation. This is also achieved by an appeal to premodern yoga traditions, and both premodern practices and those emerging from hygienic culture are incorporated into the curricula of many pioneers. Various practices claim to lead to the acquisition of occult or magical powers (*siddhis*) like clairvoyance and distant healing. One of the main aims of this chapter is to highlight the discursive nature of the field in which protagonists often copy and plagiarise each other, which sets the interpreter the task of unravelling the sources (both pre-modern and modern) drawn upon for modern forms of yogic breath cultivation. Thus, a discursive net of power struggles between the pioneers that reiterate certain statements and ferociously dismiss others is uncovered. It is further asked how yoga pioneers harness *prāṇa* or related vital principles for their respective forms of breath cultivation and how they conceive of the potency of the practices for hygienic-therapeutic and soteriological purposes. The pool

of both premodern and modern practices as well as the contexts in which they are placed is so rich that only a few practices and their outlines in yoga or *prāṇāyāma* manuals can be discussed in detail. However, every protagonist highlighted in chapter 8 features a practice which is often not as explicitly brought to the fore by other yoga pioneers, and thus their respective and unique contributions will be addressed.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, in modern yoga the category “yoga” has never stood alone. One of its sister genres being occultism, the overlaps between yoga and occultism is a theme laced through in this study. As a final move, chapter 9 deepens the inquiry into these overlaps by presenting two case studies that link these genres as part of the promotion of yogic breath cultivation.

To sum up, a multifaceted analytical raster is designed to interpret *prāṇāyāma* practices. Moreover, a constant zooming in and out between the exploration of individual contributions and the larger networks is required. To recapitulate the most important research questions and topical threads, these are the investigation of:

- 1) the role and adoption of premodern practices as mediated through translated Sanskrit texts and how these practices are reinterpreted through, paired with, or even substituted by practices that were alien to earlier yoga traditions;
- 2) the entanglement of modern yoga, hygienic culture, and occult ideas and practices as exemplified by yogic breath cultivation on a transnational scale;
- 3) how *prāṇa* and related notions are conceived within cosmological outlines of modern yoga and the extent to which they are crucial to inform *prāṇāyāma* practice;
- 4) how modern yoga pioneers harness *prāṇa* (i.e., the details of practices) and to what ends (“self-cultivation” to include soteriological and mundane benefits);
- 5) how they draw on multifaceted networks (including plagiarising from others) to gain the upper hand in a discursive battle, and how they nevertheless carve out their individual outstanding contributions to yogic breath cultivation.

I should further briefly mention what is not part of the study and which research questions can therefore *not* be addressed. Firstly, I do not intend, for the most part, to analyse breath practices in relation to *āsana* practice, but focus on breath cultivation

as practised in *stationary* seated, lying, or standing positions. An analysis of the connection between *āsana* and breath practices is well beyond the scope of this study, but these connections are considered (though not to their fullest) by various other scholars (Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016; Foxen 2020). In most cases, I do not discuss the large number of preliminaries that are frequently listed before one should consider practising *prāṇāyāma* – for example, appropriate diet, housing, clothing, and timing. An exception is my treatment of Kuvalayananda’s binary prescription of preliminaries for the “physical” and “spiritual culturist”, respectively. Although *bandhas* (“locks”) are an important *prāṇāyāma*-related technique (chapter 3.3.3), they are, to limit the material under scrutiny, by and large not considered in this study, though their application is at times mentioned as a side note.

The notion of *prāṇa* and the contexts of *prāṇāyāma* practice are manifold and multilayered, as will become apparent. In applying various lenses, this thesis will cut through the layers of the soteriological, the vitalistic, the energetic, the physical, the cultural, and the political, and aims to relate yogic breath cultivation to a longitudinal section of these layers. Uncovering several aspects that constitute yogic breath cultivation as we know it today, we will delve into multiple historical contexts. Studying breath and breath cultivation at the interface of yoga, occultism, physical culture, and hygiene is, as I would put it at the termination of this research project, a challenging, but promising endeavour.





# PART I

## CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTS



## 2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter discusses theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches by means of which the historical topic of this thesis is conceived and investigated. To adequately treat yogic breath cultivation, this chapter will first introduce and discuss some theoretical grounds of modern yoga studies (Singleton, De Michelis). It will then proceed to shed light on the notion of soteriology (Smart, Flood, Moise), the concept of entangled history (Appadurai, Jobs & Mackenthun, Baier), and mark out key aspects of theories of practices (Bourdieu, Foucault, Sarasin). These various theoretical considerations are then tied together in a discourse-theoretical approach (Foucault, Landwehr, Sarasin) to give a base for the main methodological approach of this thesis, i.e., historical discourse analysis.

To clarify a basic methodological tool, I briefly touch on how to differentiate between the terminological phrase “modern yogic breath cultivation” and “*prāṇāyāma*”. As has been briefly mentioned in the Introduction, modern yoga incorporated a variety of breath practices that were not part of the premodern *prāṇāyāma* set. This results in a semantic shift of the term *prāṇāyāma*, and some practices subsumed under this term were formerly unknown to Haṭhayoga or Pātañjalayoga.<sup>13</sup> In other words, these “new” practices were discussed in the context of yoga and *prāṇāyāma*, and they were either contrasted to *prāṇāyāma* or integrated into an understanding of the same. This is, for example, the case with the notion of “deep breathing”, or “clavicular breathing” as opposed to “abdominal breathing”. Whatever the interpretation of various modern yogis regarding non-yogic practices – and imported breath-related medical terminology – these adjunct practices and terms became an important part of modern yoga’s reasoning about *prāṇāyāma*. They often shaped the practices and sharpened their description. To use a clear-cut terminology, I subsume all these practices under the terminological phrase “modern yogic breath cultivation”, or simply “yogic breath cultivation”. I use it as an umbrella term that includes *prāṇāyāma* and all associated breath-related practices in modern yoga. In contrast, I employ the term “*prāṇāyāma*” only when it is used by the respective author

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of *prāṇāyāma* in light of premodern Haṭhayoga and Pātañjalayoga, see chapter 3.2; chapter 3.3.

(notwithstanding that what is termed *prāṇāyāma* by a certain yoga pioneer may not have been classified as such in premodern yoga).<sup>14</sup>

## 2.1 Theoretical Grounds within the Framework of Modern Yoga Studies

Some theoretical agreements within the field of modern yoga studies and conceptual considerations that frame this study are introduced here. Scholars in the field agree that there was a shift in theorems and practices of yoga that started to manifest roughly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, but at the latest in 1896, which is when Vivekananda's pivotal *Rāja Yoga* appears (De Michelis 2004: 2-3). This historical shift marks, roughly speaking, a transition from premodern forms of yoga to "modern yoga". However, I would like to posit that it is helpful to speak of "early modern yoga" for the developments from c. 1850 onwards. It was then that evolutionary theories, early psychology, scientific materialism, medical discourse, and hygienic culture as well as strands of esotericism and occultism started to trickle in.

Additionally, I suggest that early modern yoga – which in my periodisation ends as late as 1945 – can be divided into two main phases (figure 1): the "formation phase" (c. 1850–1896), in which the influential voices of theosophists, theosophical translators, and Hindu reformers emerged and started to shape modern yoga as well as yogic breath cultivation, and the "main phase" (1896–1945) of early modern yoga, which consists of contributions from a "first generation" and a "second generation". First-generation modern yogis of key importance are Vivekananda, Abhedananda, and William Walker Atkinson (alias Yogi Ramacharaka) who start to integrate occultism into modern yoga, and in this first generation we already see a fully developed modern yogic (and occult) *prāṇa* theory. The impact of the first generation ended in c. 1910 when the last alias-Ramacharaka publication appeared. The second generation of yogis emerged around 1920 when Yogananda and Yogendra sailed to America, Sivananda wandered off to Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas, and Kuvalayananda established the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute in Maharashtra. All these second-generation yogis, including Krishnamacharya and Sundaram, added crucial ingredients to yogic breath cultivation and its conceptualisation. These are medicalised

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<sup>14</sup> A good example of the semantic shift of the term *prāṇāyāma* is Sri Yogendra's integration of "breathing methods" into his system of *prāṇāyāma* techniques. He first integrated "clavicular breathing" or upper-chest breathing (a jargon/practice developed in the context of nineteenth-century medical discourse and physical culture) into his "breathing methods" (Yogendra 1932: 51-53). But nevertheless, all techniques described in his *Breathing Methods* (1932) were later termed "Yogendra Prāṇāyāma" (Yogendra 1940: 9), which accounts for the fluidity within the wider delta of breath practices that became "*prāṇāyāma*".

experiments on *prāṇāyāma*, the employment of detailed physiological-anatomical description of the practices, illustrated manuals of yogic breath cultivation, the thorough reception of premodern yoga texts, and the linking of breath cultivation to *āsana*. My study terminates with the end of the Second World War, which brought major disruptions within fields that were grounded on transnational exchange. It is therefore reasonable to have the study naturally pause at this point (as after a long and deep exhalation).

Modern yoga as a transnational movement did not recover from this before the late 1950s, and roughly from the 1960s onwards, the second wave of *āsana*-based modern yoga practices hit American and European shores. At this time, the term yoga ceased to be primarily associated with *prāṇāyāma*, as was still the case in the 1930s (Singleton 2010: 155-156). When *āsana* became the dominant practice in the popular imagination, this marks, in my periodisation, “modern yoga” in its fullest expression. It was not until what I term “contemporary yoga” – which may be characterised with a further merging of lineages and schools by the 1990s, leading to a hybridisation of practices and new forms to teach and learn, including online classes – that *prāṇāyāma* again gained new inspirational strength and impact in the yoga community.

As to further terminological clarifications, in following Singleton (2010), I employ the phrase “modern yoga pioneers” for figures who were actively engaged in theorising as well as teaching of yoga techniques through personal instruction, talks, yoga manuals, pamphlets, articles, and treatises.<sup>15</sup> Modern yoga being generally an English-speaking endeavour, most pioneers considered here have read, published, and taught in English. They may have done so rudimentary (as in the case of Krishnamacharya) or extensively (as in the case of all other pioneers). The ultimately deciding factor for being termed “yoga pioneers” is their engagement in both the theory and practice of yoga, thereby propelling its development further, and it is evident that the early phase of modern yoga was crucially shaped by their pioneering acts. Not all figures analysed in this study are to be considered as pioneers of modern yoga.<sup>16</sup> In turn, though many influential modern yoga pioneers came from India to teach in the West, not all pioneers were Indian, and they were not necessarily yogis. For example, William Walker Atkinson contributed with significant theoretical and practical elements to shape yogic breath cultivation.

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<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, I use “protagonists of modern yoga” to denote this group of individuals.

<sup>16</sup> For example, I would not call N. C. Paul, H. P. Blavatsky, Rama Prasad, or J. P. Müller “pioneers of modern yoga”, although they contributed to certain discourses and shaped some key aspects of the field.

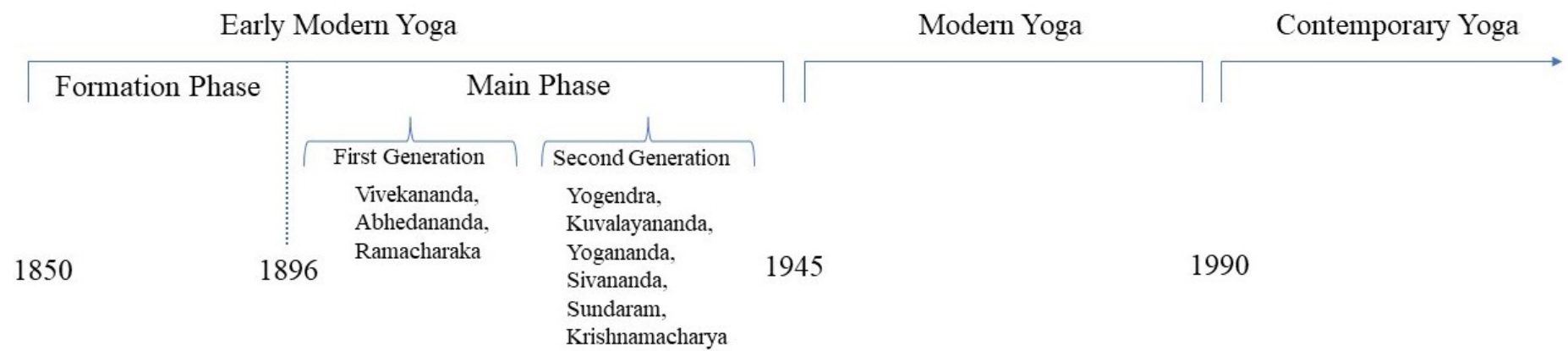


FIGURE 1: PERIODISATION OF EARLY MODERN YOGA, MODERN YOGA, CONTEMPORARY YOGA (AUTHOR'S ILLUSTRATION).

Apart from coining terminology, useful steps have been taken towards classifying modern yoga. De Michelis (2004: 187-189) has categorised the practice as “modern psychosomatic yoga”, “modern denominational yoga”, “modern postural yoga”, and “modern meditational yoga”. This shows that several shades of modern yoga were not only focused on a physical mode of practice, but rather a variety of forms were established. Locating, as De Michelis has suggested, *prāṇāyāma* mainly within the category of modern postural yoga (*ibid.*: 187) is up for debate. I argue that yogic breath cultivation is practised within all these categories, since it is often applied in meditational and/or devotional settings, and the “psychosomatic” as well as physical aspect of *prāṇāyāma* which can be experienced before, after, during, or instead of *āsana* practice is equally apt. As far as such a classification of modern yoga practices concerns the further analysis of *prāṇāyāma*, it will be addressed in the respective analysis. For example, I will treat extensively on the notion of “psycho-physiology” (which is a precedent of “psychosomatics”) and its usage by various yoga pioneers (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 5.2.3; chapter 8.3).

De Michelis has also shed light on various factors of modernisation that forged modern yoga practices. An important factor here is the increasing individualisation. Individualised practice forms an important nexus for a person’s physical, mental, and spiritual development (De Michelis 2004: 34-35). The question of the individual’s spiritual or religious growth<sup>17</sup> also entails mapping the benefits and goals of the practices. Various modern yogis have suggested different trajectories along which yogic breath cultivation can develop. Next to mundane benefits that yoga practitioners derive from practice, the soteriological component is crucial in both premodern and modern yoga. Due to the centrality of this theme, the concept of soteriology is elucidated in the following.

## 2.2 Soteriology: A Crucial Notion in this Study

Though originating in Christian theology, the term soteriology (from Greek *sōtēria*, “salvation” and *logos*, “doctrine”) can also be conceived more broadly to flag a central

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<sup>17</sup> Although yogic breath cultivation could be equally framed as “spiritual” as opposed to “religious” practice, I will henceforth apply the broader term “religion” and various derivatives for etic purposes. While most practitioners of modern yoga will tend to view their own practice as “spiritual” rather than “religious”, “religion” implies here any form of spiritual practice in which yoga pioneers and practitioners of modern yoga are engaged. The main reason *not* to speak of spirituality as a generic etic term is that it was co-shaped by the field of investigation. It can be safely said that Vivekananda is one of the main architects of the prevalence of “spirituality” in modern yoga and even in New Age contexts. The term spirituality is therefore used in this study to denote emic religious perspectives and concepts.

theme in religious contexts regardless their denomination.<sup>18</sup> Comparative religion adopted the term to denote doctrines of salvation within different cultures and religions. A basic soteriological model that is arguably found in many religions is based on the diagnosis that human existence is somehow unfortunate and defective i.e., linked to suffering, old age and death, misconduct and ignorance (Smart 2005; Flood 2018). In responding to this diagnosis, religions promise a release from the basic deficiency through a *summum bonum* that allows for an “ultimately good state” (Smart 2005: 8526).<sup>19</sup> Various religions mark out a final goal or conception of connecting with the *summum bonum* which could be, for example, communion with God (expressed either through unison or a sense of intimacy and love) or merging the self into an ultimate reality beyond death and suffering (e.g., *nirvāṇa*) (*ibid.*: 8527). To achieve the promised state, religions offer different “means of salvation” that include ethical dimensions, moral virtues, contemplative practices, study of scriptures, ritual practices, and devotion (*ibid.*: 8527-8529). Further specifics are outlined about who can achieve these goals (a widely accessible soteriological goal versus achievable by the few) and in which dimensions of time and space these goals are placed (in relation to the here-and-now, in the afterlife, attained in one life or several lives, or the *summum bonum* as a specific locus, e.g., “heaven”) (*ibid.*: 8529-8530).

Within South Asian religions – the main religious background against which yogic breath cultivation can be read – a doctrine of salvation is often conceived as “separation” or “liberation” (*kaivalya*, *mokṣa*, *mukti*) from worldly suffering through a self (*ātman*, *jīva*) that recognises its essential detachment. Worldly suffering is, broadly speaking, created by the self being enmeshed with the world through its actions (*karman*) which leads to an unbroken cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) (Moise 2020: 15, 20). Final liberation is conceived as recognising the self’s ultimate distinctness from the transient world, thus South Asian soteriologies often bear an ontological notion as to the nature of the self, and a gnoseological one as to the recognition of the same. In emphasising the ontological dimension within these soteriologies, the Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass has termed them “soteriontology”

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<sup>18</sup> A good overview of the concept in Judeo-Christian contexts as well as in Hinduism is provided by Flood (2018).

<sup>19</sup> Martin Riesebrodt (2010 [2007]) has argued that the *promise* of salvation is a crucial element of religions in response to the precarity and vulnerability of human life (cf. Flood 2018: 629). According to Riesebrodt, calamity (*Unheil*) or salvation (*Heil*) is experienced within three domains, i.e., “nature, the body, and social relationships” (Stausberg 2009: 273). However, *Heil* may be promised to be attained in the afterlife, hence the *promise* of salvation appears to be more central to religions and constitutes their “rather pragmatic core” (*ibid.*: 272-273).



(*ibid.*: 13). To briefly exemplify various approaches to liberation, in Vaiśeṣika<sup>20</sup> such a liberated state is one of non-action or renunciation (*nivṛtti*) leading to the annihilation of any attachment (*ibid.*: 48, 71), and *mokṣa* is a “radical disembodied form of liberation” (*ibid.*: 4). In contrast, highly influential texts like the *Bhagavadgītā* (transmitted as part of the *Mahābhārata*, which was composed between the 400 BCE and 300 CE)<sup>21</sup> and the Kashmiri *Mokṣopāya*, better known as its pan-Indian version *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (eleventh to fourteenth century CE),<sup>22</sup> try to reconcile the “path of activity” (*pravṛtti*) and the “path of inactivity” (*nivṛtti*) (Moise 2020: 38, 172; cf. van Buitenen 1994 [1981]: 21, 87, 140-141, 164).<sup>23</sup> Consequently, these texts emphasise the technologies of yoga which imply some form of action as opposed to an approach that is primarily gnostic (Moise 2020: 174).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the *Mokṣopāya/Yogavāsiṣṭha* opens up the possibilities of liberation for householders, and this text was influential for the concept of liberation-in-life (*jīvanmukti*) (*ibid.*: 38).<sup>25</sup> The concept of *jīvanmukti* allowed for a dynamic form of liberation as opposed to a fixed irreversible state (*ibid.*: 40), in which the self could still act and be involved in the world – for teaching others, but even for the sake of pleasure (Birch 2020b: 214, 223).

Liberation-in-life became the prevalent model within Haṭhayoga and was also influential for some texts of Advaita Vedānta (Birch 2020b: 200; Madaio 2018).<sup>26</sup> According to Jason Birch (2020b: 229-230, n. 108), there are allusions to the concept of *jīvanmukti* (though not termed as such) even in Pātañjalayoga. In Haṭhayoga, liberation-in-life could be attained in one lifetime as a result of attaining *samādhi* (a supreme state of absorption, often conceived as the highest aim in yoga).<sup>27</sup> Generally speaking, much of the practicability of Haṭhayoga lay in attaining mundane benefits

<sup>20</sup> Vaiśeṣika is one of the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy with emphasis on a philosophical naturalism, one of its seminal texts (Candrānanda’s *Vṛtti*) being composed between 700 and 1000 CE (Moise 2020: 37).

<sup>21</sup> Dating according to Flood (1996: 96).

<sup>22</sup> Dating according to Moise (2020: 38).

<sup>23</sup> The *Bhagavadgītā* also distinguished between the terms *karman* (“action”) and *akarma* (“non-action”) (Malinar 2007: 103).

<sup>24</sup> However, yoga was nonetheless also seen to synthesise *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* paths in South Asian traditions that otherwise highlighted liberation through non-action (e.g., Vaiśeṣika, and to some extent Sāṃkhya), yet it was conceived as an indirect path to liberation (Moise 2020: 42, 87, 172, 174).

<sup>25</sup> The *Bhagavadgītā* also reconciles renunciation (crucial for getting rid of *karman*) and one’s action in the world (the latter being crucial for the concept of *karman* as ritual action, and thus, *dharma*) by erasing personal attachment to the fruits or merits of actions (Malinar 2007: 73).

<sup>26</sup> Advaita Vedānta has adopted much of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*’s musings into its textual explications, e.g., in Vidyāranya’s fourteenth-century *Jīvanmuktiviveka* (Madaio 2018).

<sup>27</sup> In a survey of various Haṭha- and Rājayoga texts between the eleventh and the fifteenth century, Birch (2020b) has found that the main technique to attain *samādhi* and therefore liberation is Rājayoga (“king-yoga”). For further discussions on *samādhi* and premodern forms of Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga, see chapter 3.3.5; chapter 8.1.1.

like gaining health and magical powers,<sup>28</sup> but the final emphasis in most Haṭha texts was still laid on liberation (*ibid.*: 225, 234).

However, the characteristics of such a liberated state, be it *mokṣa* or *jīvanmukti*, are elusive and statements about its attainment remain somewhat speculative. Along these lines, Moise has noted that, in the context of the *Mokṣopāya*, *jīvanmukti* is “an interiorisation of liberation whose marks are known only to the person involved”, and the nature of detachment is “spiritual, not external” (Moise 2020: 38). It is probably this elusiveness that led to the fact that several schools highlight the more traceable concept of a *path* to liberation to mark out specific steps and tools, captured in the Sanskrit term *mārga* (“path”, or Pāli: *magga*). While the term *mārga* is not ubiquitous in Haṭha texts that start to emerge from roughly the tenth century onwards, it is found in Buddhist texts of the common era (Gethin 2001 [1992]: 336-337), and in tantric ones that often highlight the *mantramārga* (“the path of mantra”) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 260). However, there is one Haṭha text from the eve of the colonial era that even employs *mārga* in its title, i.e., the *Yogamārgaprakāśikā* of the seventeenth century (*ibid.*: 182). Within modern yoga, Sivananda’s *The Path of Renunciation (Nivritti Marga)* (1937) evidences that the concept of *mārga* as a path to liberation through non-action still exists or is at least used as an umbrella for modern yoga practices.

In dissecting the Eurocentric connotations that many terms like “religion” and “soteriology” have, several scholars of religion suggested that the notion of *mārga* could be suitable for a comparative usage within the field. Buswell and Gimello (1990) understand *mārga* to denote a broader category of religion to create “a commonality of concern that reticulates all the various strands of its religious endeavor – moral values, ritual observances, doctrinal teachings, and contemplative exercises – into a unified network of practices focused on liberation” (Buswell & Gimello 1990: 81). In brief, they equate it with “soteriology” (*ibid.*: 80). Quite obviously, South Asian religions that often employ yoga feature these dimensions of *mārga*.

As should be added, yoga as a set of technologies was incorporated into various doctrinal environments (or “*mārgas*”) and, in its basic form, as Gavin Flood has argued, is “constructed to facilitate the transformation of consciousness” (Flood 1996: 94). If we acknowledge that yogic breath cultivation carries an enormous cultural baggage of *prāṇāyāma* as practised in various contexts of South Asian religion, it is

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<sup>28</sup> For further examples, see below.

helpful to see it as part of a path, or several paths, that are mapped out to attain final liberation. However, since “soteriology takes place gradually”, yoga (and therefore also *prāṇāyāma*) is often conceived of as an “indirect means to liberation” (Moise 2020: 172). *Prāṇāyāma* is then mainly applied to purify and balance the body, enhance health, bestow extraordinary powers (*siddhis*), still the mind, and prepare one for higher yogic states such as *samādhi*. However, in Haṭhayoga, one of the main religious paths to concern us here, some texts even ascribe superior soteriological potential to *prāṇāyāma* that can lead directly to liberation (chapter 3.3.7).

The possibility of liberation and liberation-in-life through Haṭhayoga and related religious paths (Pātañjalayoga, Advaita-related movements, Advaita Vedānta) are thus worth keeping in mind when examining modern yoga’s soteriological explications. Although modern yoga as a hybrid form of theories and practices has a life on its own, many of the soteriological themes persist. Huge soteriological potential is still associated with *prāṇāyāma*, and modern yoga discourses highlight *prāṇāyāma* as a promising practice suitable for attaining both mundane benefits and soteriological goals. From this perspective, it may be less surprising that yogis like Vivekananda, Sivananda, and Yogananda were celebrated as accomplished yogis (despite the above-noted elusiveness of such a state). The concepts that they highlight are “freedom” (*kaivalya*) as part of an exegesis of the *Yogasūtra* (Vivekananda 1896: 117, 205), self-realisation (*ātmajñāna*) as part of an Advaita Vedāntic set of thoughts (*ibid.*: 223; Abhedananda 1906: 36-37; Sivananda 1937: 6, 8),<sup>29</sup> and liberation-in-life (*jīvanmukti*) as prevalent in Haṭhayoga and Vedānta (Sivananda 1929: 45; Yogananda 1946: 297). An intermediate goal appears to be *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, which is often induced by *prāṇāyāma* and eventually bestows certain powers (e.g., Vivekananda 1896: 54-55), or at least extraordinary forms of perception (Kūvalayananda 1931: 96). All yoga pioneers highlight *prāṇāyāma* as an important tool on the yogic path to enhance health and to still the mind. Although the claims that such practices may lead to the attainment of final liberation are not necessarily explicit, yoga pioneers seem to suggest that one can attain these states of final liberation in this life if one follows the practice accordingly. The final goals appear to function as a soteriological potentiality which could, eventually, be realised in any given moment.

Since premodern South Asian traditions and thinkers were seminal for modern yoga theory in this regard, the doctrine of liberation informed modern yoga on a

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of self-realisation that includes the premodern notions of *ātmajñāna* and *brahmajñāna* in modern yoga, see De Michelis (2004: 127-146).

transnational scale.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, self-enhancement in American New Thought was somewhat compatible with the yogi on his quest for health, magical powers, and liberation. In other words, all these approaches were suitable for an individual seeking perfection. In some Euro-American contexts, as in American Delsartism, this perfection was also linked to the notion of self-expression. However, the self (*ātman*) in the tradition of Advaita Vedānta in quest for its unity with the ultimate (*brahman*) is not necessarily the self to be developed by New Thought advocates like William Walker Atkinson, Adelia Fletcher, and Elizabeth Towne. Self-cultivation – a concept discussed in detail below – could still denote a great many trajectories. What persists is a continuum conceived as extending from the cultivation of the body to soteriological ends of the practices; what may shift, however, is the focus as to what to attain in the final analysis, or, at least, the terminology employed. To summarise the foregoing discussion, I would like to suggest a basic scheme that involves both soteriological and mundane goals, and also allows for transitions between these categories.

Ensuing from the above discussion, the “soteriological” category is conceived as two-fold, entailing

- (I) soteriological *goals*
- (II) and soteriological *becoming* or paths (*mārga*) that lead to these goals.

Since *prāṇāyāma* is in many texts an *indirect* soteriological tool, category (II) is generally more important in this analysis than (I). Besides the soteriological outlook, another broad category comprises

- (III) mundane benefits.

In my scheme, the third category consists of three different subcategories. Although some of these subcategories have only briefly been mentioned above, their significance will be set forth in the course of this study. These are practising yogic breath cultivation for

- (a) hygienic purposes,
- (b) the attainment of occult powers,
- (c) self-expression and to enhance artistic skills.

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<sup>30</sup> This was achieved, in the case of Vivekananda and others, in an often polemic attitude toward the Christian belief in salvation, which allegedly included the belief in a self in need of liberation by an authoritative personal god.

One of the main aims of *prāṇāyāma* is, as will become apparent, its function of stilling the mind. A calm mind, as any daily practice would show, is beneficial for both mundane and soteriological endeavours. The benefits of a calm mind being only one example, I would argue that most practices within the broad mundane category (III) can also be read as preparatory for (I) and (II). The category of soteriological becoming (II) is therefore an interface category – or literally “in-between” (I) and (III) – which is marked, if a practitioner so intends, by the overlap between several mundane goals that could also be utilised within a soteriological frame. For example, hygienic benefits of gaining and maintaining health (IIIa) are an important prerequisite for progressing on the yogi’s path. Occult powers that appear on the path can be acquired for mundane purposes that include (sexual) pleasure and power over other beings (IIIb), but they can also be read as “signs of success” (i.e., the literal meaning of “*siddhis*”) and translated into a soteriological endeavour. Finally, some protagonists that will be addressed in this study hold that self-expression (IIIc) can have religious and soteriological implications. For all these reasons, it is plausible that several techniques are relevant within various categories. The dialectic of the mundane and the soteriological on the yogic path – the implications of such a “mārgalogy” – will concern us throughout. In the examples that will be given, it should be kept in mind that in many cases the mundane and the supermundane are addressed more on a spectrum of progress than as incompatible opposites on the yogi’s or yogini’s path.

The preceding sections have traversed existing theoretical grounds of modern yoga that help to structure a discussion of modern yogic breath cultivation. I have first relied on established terminologies by adopting basic assumptions of modern yoga research on which many scholars of modern yoga agree. On this base, I have opened up a discussion as to the relevance of a soteriological interpretation of the practices for the present study. Modern yoga (or at least modern postural yoga) is often said to be concerned – almost exclusively – with the physical: physical vigour, vitality, and strength. While *prāṇāyāma* discourses reflect these tendencies, they also impart a somewhat different image. Although salvation or liberation from the bonds of earthly life may not concern many practitioners of modern yoga directly, these themes nevertheless underpin much of *prāṇāyāma* discourse, as will be shown. And, if modern yoga practitioners seek the supermundane in the mundane through meditation and breath practices – the conquest of the subtle body or peace of mind – it could be read as a somewhat less explicit form of a quest for liberation (Flood 2018: 625, 629).

As the term modern yoga implies, factors of modernity are constitutive for such a field of study. Modernisation and globalisation further call for a tool to read yogic breath cultivation through the lens of what has been called an “entangled history”, which is a useful theoretical tool to be described for the analyses to come.

### 2.3 Theories of Entangled History

Over the past decades, scholars have realised the vast interconnectedness of nations, societies, and cultures that were previously thought separate and distinct. Summarised in the term “entangled history”, several scholarly frameworks have been produced that consider the necessity of global perspectives on history. As previous works of modern yoga studies have shown (De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Singleton 2010), modern yoga exemplifies the interconnectedness of ideas and practices that are dependent on various religious, cultural, social, and political factors. Already between 1850 and 1890, a transnational frontier of interlocutors, for example participants of the Brahmo and Arya Samaj and the theosophists, shaped the early history of modern yoga. Thus, in its formative phase, modern yoga already builds its ideas and practices on a globally expanding discursive network, finding its standing within negotiations of politics and science. Although entangled history existed before modernity, certain factors of modernity propel a constant distribution of ideas and practices along networks that interact globally. Availability of cheap print media that produces a vast amount of literature, and relatively smooth travel opportunities foster an accelerating transnational and transcultural exchange of ideas and practices (chapter 6.4).

In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), Arjun Appadurai, among other scholars, has developed theories of entangled history. His viewpoint transcends the idea of the “nation-state” (Appadurai 1996: 19) and emphasises the fluidity of modern societies with its key factors of “media and migration” (*ibid.*: 3). In his model he calls non-crystalline structures of cultural exchange “global cultural flows” (*ibid.*: 33). The so-called landscapes resembling dune-like shapes that evolve from this are temporary structures of cultural processes. One can observe and describe their temporary fixation only from a specific point of view. As a result, the actors are the last part in a chain of condensation for the respective processes of cultural flows: “[T]he individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes” (*ibid.*). In this sense, pioneers of modern yoga are located in a network of global cultural flows of influence and information that is reified in their individual innovative expressions. Within these forms of cultural exchange, it

is useful to understand agents, agency, and objects (the latter also include texts) and their inherent dynamics in contrast to cultural fixation of single phenomena within singular contexts.

In landscapes of transcultural exchange, yoga pioneers act as agents of transculturation. Jobs & Mackenthun (2013) have described agents of transculturation as border-crossers, mediators, and go-betweens. The perspectival set of landscapes of this study considers these agents as important nexuses for the dissemination of modern yoga techniques and concepts. In often precarious situations of teaching abroad and in their homelands (which could be India, but also other countries) the mediators of modern yoga had to develop multicultural identities and stability in their social roles (Jobs & Mackenthun 2013: 8). Through an outstanding ability to adapt, these cultural and religious border-crossers functioned as teachers, healers, authors, lecturers, yogis, and visionaries. Protagonists of modern yoga gain agency from a fertile cultural exchange and mould subsequent historical developments. Drawing from several sources, they apply certain sets of concepts and practices which are themselves products of transcultural exchange. Speaking again with Appadurai, these concepts and practices are, together with their agents, also located at the end of a perspectival set of landscapes. The practices and concepts are further activated in the protagonist's embodiment and in a worldview that entails certain cosmological and anthropological ideas (chapter 5). The bodies of the yogis and their embodied practices are "both the product and the source of numerous cultural processes" (Jobs & Mackenthun 2011: 9). Like other agents of transculturation, yogis too were inscribed by "cultural values, sentiments, and discursive inscriptions" and they enacted "cultural imaginings and representations" (*ibid.*).

Another useful concept to described transcultural exchange was introduced by Karl Baier in the article "Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer: Annotations on the Appropriation of the Cakras in Early Theosophy" (2016). Therein, he has coined the terminological phrase "welcoming structures" to denote structures that invite cultural exchange in a given cultural environment (say, culture A) which enable the easy reception of a concept from a reference culture (say, culture B). This is to say that in the process of cultural transfer, a compatible concept or practice was already available in culture A that adopts concepts or practices from culture B. This is complemented by "releasing structures" that exist in culture B from which a concept or practice is adopted, which denotes the willingness to release certain ideas

and practices (Baier 2016b: 317). In this process of intercultural transfer, the cultural asset that is exchanged likely adopts new forms and interpretations.

So far, this discussion has only briefly touched upon considerations of the social and the physical body as key notions within an analysis that highlights bodily practice. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, addressed below, engenders further discussion of the bodily interconnectedness between the social and the individual.

## 2.4 Bourdieu: Field, Habitus, Capital

By providing a “theory of practice”, Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) is one of the key theoreticians of the present study. However, since the notion of practices as expounded, for example, in Bourdieu (1992b) tends to be elusive (Rey 2014: 143, n. 2), the following discussion prioritises the related terms field, habitus, and capital.

Field, habitus, and capital are interdependent and relational terms, characteristics well described by the Bourdieu scholar Deborah Reed-Danahay:

For Bourdieu, social fields (*champs*) are sites of struggle over “symbolic capital” that are organised around interests such as education, art, politics, and literature. Social agents (Bourdieu's term for individuals) interact within social fields through their habitus (inculcated dispositions and cultural capital – including values, beliefs, tastes, etc.) (Reed-Danahay 2004: 11).

I will first elucidate here the category of “field”. A “field” is constantly re-established within societal processes, and it is linked to claims of power and superiority between various agents and institutions. This dynamic constitution of societal relations is also described by Bourdieu as a “force field” or “battlefield” (Rey 2014: 44). This is not to say that fields are only confined by dynamics of contestation, but they are also marked by reciprocal agreements and joint activity of the participants of a field (Steinmetz 2016: 114). Generally, a field, which confines a specific area in society, is always marked by hierarchical relations between individuals and representatives of institutions that possess various material and/or symbolic capital (see below). Each field has its specific rules and regulations. Large societal fields (like politics, economics, culture) are divided in smaller entities, or subfields (for example, the field of culture into the field of music, the field of literature etc.).

As a second key notion, the term “habitus”, lies at the core of Bourdieu's thought. Having its roots in Aristotelian philosophy and medieval scholasticism, Bourdieu's specific usage of “habitus” ties in, although in an evolved manner, to the ideas of several thinkers in the modern era, among them Edmund Husserl, Max Weber,



Martin Heidegger, Émile Durkheim, and Marcel Mauss (Reed-Danahay 2004: 104). In Bourdieu's thought, habitus is defined as a system of culturally appropriated dispositions (Bourdieu 2005: 196, n. 1). The term disposition denotes "a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body), [...] and a tendency, or inclination" (*ibid.*). In other words, habitus, as a distillation of a "system of dispositions" (Bourdieu 1992a: 135), is a specific way to perceive, think, and act. Deeply related to a person's thoughts and emotions, it is engraved into the individual body and its corporeality, movements, posture, language, gestures, clothes, and behaviour expressing a certain attitude and mode of conduct. Habitus is not biologically inherited, but a socially acquired state of being that is manifested and mirrored in corporeal existence (or bodily *hexis*).<sup>31</sup> As categories of social class and stratification, disposition and habitus are both the outcome of a specific social history (*ibid.*: 136), and through their constant moulding of perception and taste, they also create choices for future events (Reed-Danahay 2004: 108). In relation to his theory of practice, habitus was also described as a set of "virtualities, potentialities, eventualities" (Bourdieu 1992a: 135) which is only activated in reference to a definite situation and in relation to a certain structure that a specific field may demand (*ibid.*). This marks the interdependence of field and habitus.

It should be further noted that for Bourdieu, the notion of habitus avoids a clear categorisation into the objective and subjective, because practices produced by the habitus are neither conceived as a mechanical reaction (pure objectivity without an agent), nor as a fully conscious intention (pure subjective agency) (Reed-Danahay 2004: 121; Bourdieu 2005: 183).<sup>32</sup> According to Bourdieu, agents are not fully conscient about their actions and practices, but the habitus ensures the production of objective meaning (*ibid.*). In other words, practices are co-shaped by fields (the structures that themselves produces practices) and the individual's contribution including their obscure and conscious intention (*ibid.*: 183). Although Bourdieu sheds light on the obscure part of practices (which is dependent on the objective adaptation to other practices) and states that habitus is "socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu 1992a:

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<sup>31</sup> Although the Greek *hexis* and the Latin *habitus* are in fact synonyms, Bourdieu used the term "hexis" to denote the perceivable aspect of the "habitus" in its corporeal expression (Rehbein & Saalman 2014: 114).

<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu holds that habitus "is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable'" (Bourdieu 2005: 183).

126), the concept of habitus is, as Bourdieu assures, not fully deterministic and does not exclude conscious individual strategies of action (*ibid.*: 131).<sup>33</sup>

As an interface category, habitus is mainly concerned with action, or how the subject engages its preconditions within a field. In this regard it might be useful to briefly touch on the fact that Bourdieu developed his habitus theory while observing farmers in colonial Algeria in the late 1950s (Sunderland 2014: 127). It was in this colonial encounter that he observed a phenomenon that he termed *habitus clivé*, or divided habitus. Such a habitus form within colonial settings tended toward suspended or interrupted action – which reflected an inflexibility with regard to reacting to changing environments (*ibid.*). In other words, new requirements of political change encountered habitus forms that were inclined towards perpetuating those formed in the past (Bourdieu 1992b: 62-63). While this points to the necessity to adapt habitus forms within new political environments – of which modern yoga is certainly a good example – Bourdieu’s concept was prone to describing a hiatus of action as part of a *habitus clivé* rather than the potential for empowerment that lies in such an encounter.

Indeed, critique of Bourdieu’s understanding of the habitus points directly at the notion that it is too deterministic to be utilised to describe subjects capable of socially empowering themselves (e.g., Bennett 2007; Alexander 1995: 128-217; Rehbein & Saalman 2014).<sup>34</sup> In a way, modern yoga is an endeavour that is precisely positioned to empower Indian subjects against a perceived overruling system of British colonialism (chapter 6.2). As Nile Green has pointed out in “Breathing in India, c. 1890”, such an empowerment was, however, not an immediate response, but the result of a decades-long negotiation that was enacted at the political level as well as at the level of individual bodies and bodily practices (Green 2008). At this point, it could again be argued that the negotiation between handed-down yoga practices and forms of Euro-American physical culture imported by the British initially interfered with the habitus of many South Asian subjects, and at least some classes could not easily catch up with these hybrid cultural forms. On the other hand, creative hybridisation of practice eventually took place. A factor that may additionally reflect the notion of *habitus clivé* is the fact that most literature of modern yoga was produced in English – at least the one that had a transnational impact. Somewhat ironically, salient ideas of

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<sup>33</sup> “This being said, one can utilize such analyses precisely to step back and gain distance from dispositions” (Bourdieu 1992a: 136).

<sup>34</sup> Bennett (2007: 202) even argues that the extent to which Bourdieu’s investigation of “taste” (which is linked to the habitus) of the working class “repeats the terms in which this discourse has disqualified the working classes from full political entitlement and capacity”.

modern yoga often emerged in a decisively anti-colonialist mould, but it was, among other factors, the English language that enabled modern yoga to become a transnational endeavour with a global impact. Summing up, despite Bourdieu's negligence in failing to consider social upheaval, reform, and change (Rehbein & Saalman 2014: 116-117), I hold that the notion of the habitus has some explanatory power for the investigation of turn-of-the-century subjects of modern yoga. Moreover, as this discussion is placed in the context of colonialism, it makes sense to consider the notion of a divided habitus which allows for the idea of rupture and dissonances within these subjects and the practices that they were promoting – and thereby the emergence of the new (see below).

As a third notion within a theory of practice, Bourdieu introduces the concept of capital. In tripling Karl Marx's notion of the capital (Rey 2014: 52), he introduces three main forms, the economic capital (material assets and money), the social capital (knowledge, education, titles), and the cultural capital (social structures, networks, and relationships and their inherent benefits). As will be shown, there are, however, various subcategories of these forms of capital. As a general remark, Bourdieu is mainly interested in the latter two forms (Bourdieu 1992a: 119). Cultural capital is represented by agents and institutions that provide education and accumulate objects representing cultural values like books or musical instruments. This produces social distinction (Rey 2014: 53). A derivative of cultural capital is symbolic capital, ascribed to an often dominant participant of the field (*ibid.*). It tends to function as a category enabling social legitimisation (Kajetzke 2008: 59-64). A person's capital is further linked to their habitus: habitus is moulded by a person's economic, cultural, and social capital, and by investing their capital into a field the habitus is affected reciprocally. The structure of the field itself is defined by the agents' investment of their capital, thus creating a dynamic situation between field, habitus, and capital (*ibid.*: 54).

Bourdieu frequently draws upon religious metaphors, and for him the religious field is significantly charged with symbolic capital (Urban 2003: 361). In his sociology, religions partake in a competitive marketplace, and although placing themselves with respect to a transcendent horizon, their institutions' and agents' interests are thoroughly this-worldly (*ibid.*: 362). In the article "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field", Bourdieu speaks of religious capital as distributed among "orthodox", "heterodox", or "heretical" religious agents and institutions (Bourdieu 2000: 83). Tying in with Max Weber's terminology (yet applying it in a new sense), the orthodox "priests" gain their capital mainly from a position within an established

institution, while the heterodox “prophets” or “magicians” derive agency from their charisma (*ibid.*: 79-80). The specific “capital of charisma” (*ibid.*: 82) is thus descriptive of a religious reformer who aims for a reallocation of power in the religious field. According to Bourdieu (2009: 246), reformers so endowed accelerate the dissolution of the (orthodox) religious field in the modern age, and the battle between orthodox and heterodox religious agents for acquiring material and symbolic resources is unleashed. Although such reallocations can happen at various stages in the history of religion, they are also apt to describe developments within the field of modern yoga. From this perspective it is notable that Bourdieu has observed the fringed and undefined boundaries within the religious field that include new religious specialists who, for example, often incorporate the healing arts (Bourdieu 2009: 244-246). Among these, Bourdieu mentions caretakers of body and soul like healers, psychologists, (psycho)therapists, medical doctors, and also teachers of corporeal practices – and he especially underlines “Asiatic” practices here – with focus on expression and/or martial arts (*ibid.*: 245). While these developments can be observed since the Age of Enlightenment, they are also relevant for the hybrid field that is modern yoga, and such an observation is suggestive of the role that modern yogis and also several teachers of modern yoga have in the discourses under consideration.

#### 2.4.1 Applying Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

Some historians and ethnographers of religion have already applied Bourdieu’s theory of practice in South Asian contexts and to transnational yoga. They have employed notions like “marketplace”, “sacred capital” (Urban 2003), and “spiritual capital” (Verter 2003; Di Placido 2018). Di Placido also speaks about “*embodied capital* and its plausible *conversion*, from [...] *physical capital* to *social capital*” (*ibid.*: 6, his emphasis). These authors have implemented, adapted, and criticised Bourdieu’s core categories. For the present context, the main concern is to translate and apply the key terminologies for the field of modern yoga in general and for yogic breath cultivation in particular. The field of modern yoga can be defined as a conglomerate of various intersecting fields. Since the exact composition of the field is also critical for defining the discourse of modern yoga and *prāṇāyāma* practice, the ingredients of this field are discussed below in chapter 2.6.2. The notions of habitus and capital, are, however, directly applied to modern yoga discourses in the following.

In settings of embodied practices, religion and physical culture engrave a certain habitus and bodily *hexis* into pioneers and practitioners. This holds also true

for yogic breath cultivation. If we look at illustrations of *prāṇāyāma* of the first half of the twentieth century, they often show specific forms of practice, including certain seated postures and a typical appearance of the yogi (dress, hairstyle, a lion skin or deer skin as “yoga mat”). On the other hand, illustrated yoga manuals also depict the “modern yogi” who wears Euro-American-styled training pants. A good example is Yogacharya Sundaram, who is indeed depicted in both styles (figure 2). The different ways to style the modern yogi may reflect the abovementioned notion of the divided habitus, including the innovations and possibilities that lay within the range of “tradition” and “innovation” (chapter 6.1). This also entails the question of “authenticity”, which is negotiated via the exact bodily reproduction of breathing exercise.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the habitus of the yogi (or the yogi-cum-physical-culturist) is shaped by regular practice and prescriptions. Although this is not made explicit by yoga pioneers, their followers and students had to incorporate a specific form of practice into their respective habitus in search of “correct” and “effective” practice. In processes of assimilation, the students’ habitus was likely altered by practice, and those imitations that were rendered habitual can also be observed in photographic material. While the approach of analysing photographic material is not foregrounded in this study, it should be noted that Bourdieu theorised photography in relation to the notion of habitus (e.g., Bourdieu et al. 1990).

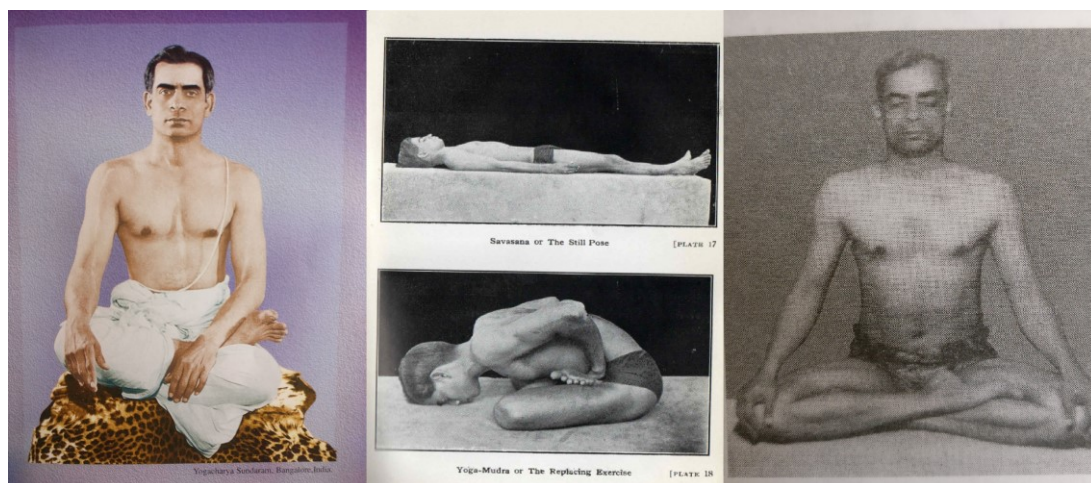


FIGURE 2: SUNDARAM WITH *DHOTI* AS IN FRONTISPIECE OF *THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS: OR YOGIC PHYSICAL CULTURE*, PRINTED IN 2000 (LEFT) AND IN PANTS DURING *SIDDHĀSANA* (RIGHT) IN THE SAME EDITION; SUNDARAM IN PANTS DURING *ĀSANA* AS PREPARATION FOR *PRĀṆĀYĀMA* (MIDDLE) IN THE FIRST EDITION OF *YOGIC PHYSICAL CULTURE* (SUNDARAM 1929: 62).

As should be made clear, the yogi style, the appeal to physical culture, and even nationality were also capitalised among our protagonists. When modern yoga spread

<sup>35</sup> For example, the distinction between “deep breathing” and *prāṇāyāma* that involves pressure changes as is found in Swami Kuvalayananda’s articles in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* (chapter 7.2; chapter 8.3.1).

in South Asia, America and Europe, Indian pioneers gained agency through their cultural capital of being both Indians and yogis – aspects which constituted a potent cultural capital in the West. Their yogi-ness bestowed additional symbolic capital and authority on the protagonists in question, while the appropriation of Western-styled physical culture proved them to be “up-to-date”. Moreover, knowledge of *prāṇāyāma* and its efficacy, applicability, and conceptualisation could be successfully transformed into cultural and symbolic capital. Charismatic capital and its *hexis* is efficacious and evident when, for example, disciples of Ramakrishna perpetually refer to him as a person who was spontaneously entering *samādhi*, having a specific expression on his face (Abhedananda 1967: 211, 277, 284). Ramakrishna is said to have experienced *samādhi* by merely looking at one of his favourite disciples, the famous Vivekananda (*ibid.* 315). Both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda seemed to have a certain radiance of authority derived from a charismatic capital and habitus. Another example of this is the Hindu reformer Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, who was a teacher and yogi consulted by Helena P. Blavatsky and Henry S. Olcott and with whom they would also collaborate for a short period (chapter 4). It was said by one of his enthusiastic followers that Dayananda appeared as a “‘monk’ powered by ‘energy ... from a chaste life’” (as quoted in Dobe 2011: 93). These charismatic prophets (in Bourdieu’s sense) were reformers who propelled new ideas and new paths within the emerging field of modern yoga. These new paths were initially heterodox – for example, before Dayananda’s propagation of the Hindu mission abroad it was considered to be adharmic to move beyond India’s border (Sharma 2015: 32) – but over time became part of Hindu and alternative religion’s orthodoxy. In the dissolution of the orthodox religious fields, caretakers of body and soul, as pioneers of modern yoga often appear, are typical agents for the reallocation of cultural, symbolic, and religious capital.

As has been shown, Bourdieu has interpreted the self in the interface category between subjectivity and objectivity of the habitus. Highlighting the *relational* aspect of the human interface is, in my opinion, part of the category’s genius. Although there are certain overlaps in Pierre Bourdieu’s and Michel Foucault’s theories in considering the interdependence of self and society, the late Foucault responds to the question of the socially entangled self in a less deterministic, but more empowered way. I will discuss Foucault’s notions of technologies and care of the self below. The advantage of drawing on both Bourdieu and Foucault lies in the possibility of addressing practices from different perspectives. While Bourdieu’s approach highlights how practices are linked to both the body and the field, Foucault addresses the notion of practices

through the lens of a set of technologies. Although Foucault had a particular set of technologies in mind that he linked to Greek antiquity, such a lens can be applied to modern yoga practices, particularly if incorporating the extended reading of these by Philipp Sarasin, as will be shown.

## 2.5 Foucault: Technologies of the Self and Care of the Self

Throughout his academic life, the philosopher-historian Michel Foucault (1926–1984) dealt with the theme of subjugation through social and political structures that constitute the individual and determine its place in society. By investigating the key notions of power and governmentality, Foucault’s work is situated at the threshold of analysis of the socio-political and the individual with regard to the latter’s mental health, behaviour, and sexuality. Since Foucault’s interest in history was never antiquarian, he aimed to write a “history of the present” (Flynn 2005: 611), as exemplified in his work on the history of psychiatry and the history of sexuality. Although at times he unearthed material dating back to ancient Greece and Rome, he looped the historical back into an analysis of contemporary societal structures. Practices in enclosed environments that impose power on the subject, such as psychiatry and prison, dominated Foucault’s analysis over decades. Although his work always implied various forms of subjectivation, it was in the last years of his life that Foucault turned to an investigation of the “individual that acts upon himself” (Foucault 1988: 19), resulting in the notions of “technologies of the self” as well as “care of the self” (*souci de soi*).

These two notions – the technologies of the self and care of the self – are interlinked in Foucault’s thought, but nevertheless have a different genealogy as to their terminology. It was Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) who first spoke about techniques of the body in an article entitled “Les technique du corps” (1935). In this anthropological investigation, he suggested that the specific forms of body techniques like walking, swimming, and running in various societies were determined by their direct societal environments (Sarasin 2001: 14). In following the basic conceptual framework of Mauss, Foucault established a strategy to investigate the body in its relation to power and knowledge, laying the foundation for further historical inquiries into bodily practices (*ibid.*: 16, 464). This is, in brief, the focus and scope of the terminological phrase “technologies of the self”. The notion of “care of the self”, on the other hand owes its description to Greco-Roman antiquity, particularly to the philosophical school of Socrates and Plato as well as to the teachings of the stoics.

However, Foucault's theory of technologies of the self should be read against the backdrop of the problem of the subjugated self in environments of power.

In Foucault's lectures *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, held at the Collège de France in 1981-82 (first published in 2001), the central theme is the relation between the care of the self and the knowledge of the self in Greek antiquity. Against the backdrop of Greek antiquity, Foucault argues that the Delphic "know thyself" (*gnōthi seauton*) and the Socratic "take care of yourself" (*epimeleia heautou*) were interrelated. Through an analysis of the Platonic Dialogues, to which the *Alcibiades* (fourth century BCE) belongs, Foucault shows "how the *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self) is indeed the justificatory framework, ground, and foundation for the imperative 'know yourself'" (Foucault 2005 [2001]: 8).<sup>36</sup> According to Foucault, at the time of the stoics and Seneca, the care and knowledge of the self was widely disseminated in antique Greece and Rome and applied in political professions, but also beyond the political (*ibid.*: 9, 44-45, 55). These forms of practices – here contextualised as "spirituality" – as found in Greek stoicism and early Christian ethics were, in the argument that Foucault provided, subsequently incorporated into priestly power, and later into practices that had an educational, medical, and psychological outlook (Rose 1996: 135). In describing the subsequent fall of the "care of the self" through the emergence of the Enlightenment, Foucault further mentions the "Cartesian Moment" that philosophically requalified the knowledge of self, while simultaneously discrediting the care of the self (Foucault 2005 [2001]: 14). It seems that only in his late years did Foucault ponder the question of whether there were forms of subjectivation that were outside the frame of normative laws, theologies, and philosophical constructs (Sarasin 2016: 180-182, 200).

It is important to note that Foucault does not argue for a resurrection of the Greco-Roman practices of the self. However, he calls for the necessity of a theory of self-cultivation that helps to map a path of empowerment within structures of a societal field-of-forces (Sarasin 2016: 199). To establish a larger analytical framework for the "care of the self", Foucault introduces the meta-terminology of the "technologies of the self", which he places into a set of technologies that are designed to define the structural organisation of society. The Greek *technē* means "to gain the upper hand" (Foucault 1988: 24), which signifies that technologies imply actions in a field-of-forces that also aim to change the power relations within the field. Foucault mentions

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<sup>36</sup> For a critical reading of Foucault's understanding of morality and sexuality in Greco-Roman antiquity, see Detel (2005).



four forms of technologies which are aligned with a “matrix of practical reason” (*ibid.*: 18). The first three are technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, and technologies of power, the latter designed to objectivise the subject (*ibid.*). In contrast, technologies of the self

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, or immortality (Foucault 1988: 18).

Foucault couples the technologies of power and the technologies of the self in the notion of “governmentality” (Foucault 1988: 19). Technologies of the self are therefore not entirely disentangled from technologies of power, although the self, as it matures, gains more self-empowerment over societal structures.

A definition of the technologies of the self as quoted above necessarily has direct bearings on what Foucault has termed “spiritualité”. He speaks here of a transforming process of the self that leads to states which are, at least possibly, located in the realm of religion. In a similar vein, he has described practices of *epimeleia heautou* as “actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself” (Foucault 2005 [2001]: 11). This definition of the care of the self is constituted by a “purifying” and “transformative” process. To give a yet clearer outline of the practices that Foucault had in mind, I also refer to a definition that his teacher and expert in Greco-Roman history, Pierre Hadot (1922–2010), offered. This included the practice of paying “attention [...] to the body and the soul [...]”; exercises of abstinence; examination of the conscience; the filtering of the representations; and, finally, the conversion toward and possession of the self” (Hadot 1995 [1987]: 206).<sup>37</sup>

However, Foucault’s notion of the care of the self also found critique among several scholars. In Hadot’s own treatment of Marcus Aurelius (second century CE), the stoics, and practices that he described as *exercices spirituels* in his *Philosophy of a Way of Life* (1981), he sets some demarcations against his own approach and Foucault’s. He disputed that Foucault’s understanding of these practices led to an “aestheticism” of the self rather than providing a transcendental framework that was pivotal in the texts of antiquity (Hadot 1995 [1987]: 207-208). Furthermore, Hadot

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<sup>37</sup> Several points described as Foucault’s reading of a care of the self (according to Hadot) are surprisingly close to the argument of modern yoga pioneers for successful (*prāṇāyāma*) practice. For more on the overlap between Foucault’s approach, hygienic practices, and modern yoga, see below.

reminds Foucault's readers that the self in these texts was not only indulged in "a relationship of the self to the self, or pleasure that can be found in one's own self" (*ibid.*: 208), but that it was also not to be dissociated from a larger social network. As Philipp Sarasin has argued, a relevant aspect of Foucault's reading of "spirituality" was that it appeared to engender a more empowered notion of the self within his late oeuvre (Sarasin 2016: 193, 195). However, as to the question of *who* is empowered through self-cultivation, Lynn Hunt has ascribed a highly selective reading to Foucault's perspective (reflected in his androcentric writing style) on the history of sexuality and practices of the self in which "upper-class adult men [were] the only ones who possess selves" (Hunt as quoted in Sarasin 2001: 462). According to Hunt and others, Foucault had read modern gender perspectives into his interpretation of the antique practices of sexuality (*ibid.*).

To sum up, in Foucault's notion of a socially entangled subject, a certain constructivism remains in which the subject is at least co-defined by means of technologies of production, sign systems, power, and – one could add – gender (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 44-45). This socially entangled subject is one of the main Foucauldian categories that is not fully abandoned when Foucault talks about technologies of the self, and it will remain significant once it comes to discussions of Foucault's discourse-theoretical approach. Nevertheless, as Nikolas Rose has noted, practices of the self provide a framework for being in touch with oneself in several ways. They "require one to relate to oneself epistemologically (know yourself), despotically (master yourself) or in other ways (care for yourself)" (Rose 1996: 135). Rose's summary is useful in so far as it includes "mastery of the self" into these technologies, a notion that is also applicable to *prāṇāyāma* techniques. *Prāṇāyāma* is often described as the mastery of *prāṇa*, a notion which denotes breath in the narrowest sense but is at times equated and controlled together with *jīva* ("individual vital principle"). Thus, technologies of the self – comprising both mastery and care of the self – describe various levels of the application of *prāṇāyāma* practice.

As has been shown, several critics have inferred that Foucault's reading of practices of the self lacks a transcendental horizon. Foucault's negligence to be more explicit here, is, I would argue, an opportunity to interpret his approach in various lights such as those of religion and hygienic culture, which is a trajectory that this study takes. A revealing criticism and reinterpretation of Foucault's care of the self, uncovering some of its blind spots, is further provided by the Swiss historian Philipp Sarasin.

### 2.5.1 Sarasin's Reading of Foucault's Care of the Self

For the present study, the most pertinent critique and extension of Foucault's thought is Philipp Sarasin's *Reizbare Maschinen* (2001). In a way, this monograph provides a raster for the present study, insofar it constructs a history of the body in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by delineating discourses of hygiene, read through the lens of Foucault's notion of the care of the self. In the period of his investigation, "hygiene" (from Greek, *hygieia*, lit. "health") meant an encompassing programme of self-cultivation which considered several factors of "natural" environment like the quality of air and water, but also factors of immediate environment and bodily practices like work, housekeeping, clothing, food, gymnastics, cleanliness, mental hygiene, procreation, and sexuality (Sarasin 2001: 17). It was not before the emergence of scientific bacteriology which evolved towards the end of the nineteenth century that the term "hygiene" was used in the contemporary sense of alert cleanliness and sterility. The discourses of hygiene analysed by Sarasin therefore incorporate a vast field of knowledge, practices, and technologies (*ibid.*). Of specific interest here is the fact that practices of hygiene in Europe are directly related to practices of modern yoga, which are concerned with a largely congruent idea of "hygiene" in its wider sense.<sup>38</sup> The historical link between these discourses is evident and will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.4.

Foucault's conception of knowledge-power relations constitute the main theoretical lens for Sarasin's historical discourse analysis of nineteenth-century hygiene. Simultaneously, Sarasin has also critically re-examined Foucault's notion of the care of the self. Sarasin's main points of observation and criticism are the following: Firstly, Foucault and the hygienists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century aligned their understanding of the care of the self with Greco-Roman antiquity (however, they referred to different sources: Foucault appealed to Socrates and the stoics, while the hygienists referred to Hippocrates). Secondly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, practices of hygiene were related to discourses of the socially undetermined "free" individual that has mastery over the self (Sarasin 2001: 25), a notion that probably influenced the late Foucault. From these perspectives, Foucault is linked in a twofold manner to discourses of hygiene: he provided groundbreaking analytical tools for these fields of investigation, *and* his strategy of the care of the self that undermines knowledge-power relations must be read as a product of the discourses

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<sup>38</sup> See for example a seminal publication of modern yoga, Yogendra's *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931).

of hygiene after the Enlightenment. In other words, Foucault the hygienist is less indebted to Greco-Roman antiquity than to the discursive arguments and practices of the self of nineteenth-century discourses of hygiene, according to Sarasin (*ibid.*: 28, 463-464).

Apart from this important insight, Sarasin develops additional theoretical perspectives that are of interest for the present study. Regarding the paradox between power/governmentality and the care of the self, Sarasin detects a useful middle way, which is a “relative autonomy” of the self (Sarasin 2001: 256). This is a self situated between the tension of forging discursive powers (objective impressionability) and self-care-induced subjectivity (subjective autonomy). Furthermore, Sarasin establishes the male, white, middle-class subject as the main participant in discourses of hygiene from a historical viewpoint (*ibid.*: 25). It seems that the middle class as a representative class of modern societies after the Enlightenment had to empower itself from earlier hegemonial classes like aristocrats and the traditional religious elite. As could be argued in continuation of Sarasin’s study, in modern yoga, it is mainly the Indian male middle class that challenges its white colonial counterparts in an anti-colonial struggle of discursive power in the field. What is more, as Sarasin argues, a history of the body – or a history of breath practices in transnational modern yoga – also must incorporate the history of media that multiply these discourses. Books, articles, discursive statements, their materiality and discursive structures portray the body and simultaneously constitute it (*ibid.*: 26). The connection of bodily practices and their discourses as materialised in media is a central analytical tool of historical discourse analysis (see below; chapter 6.4).

### 2.5.2 Applying a Foucault-Sarasin Approach to Self-Cultivation

Because of the significance of Sarasin’s reading of Foucault, I will henceforth speak of a Foucault-Sarasin approach to “self-cultivation”. I employ the term “self-cultivation” because it allows for a broader understanding of practices to include Foucault’s care and technologies of the self as well as the ambience of hygiene that Sarasin has outlined. The term self-cultivation is conceptualised here as a category to include practices with both mundane benefits and soteriological goals. The question as to the nature of the “self” to be cultivated, as alluded above (chapter 2.1), is to be asked in close consideration of the historical strands and practices analysed. However, it should be made clear that this “self” is never a universal category, but inherently

context-dependent and as such, it can only be analysed within a respective doctrinal context.<sup>39</sup>

From a perspective of a Foucault-Sarasin approach, it is the intersecting point between politics and self-cultivation that makes the concept germane for this study. Pioneers of modern yoga often conceived of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* as a form of self-cultivation. They applied them in their own practice, taught them to their students, and contributed to the materiality of the discourse by writing and lecturing about these practices. However, to some extent, “care” of the self also became “care” of the nation (in this case India),<sup>40</sup> and there were few, if any, exponents of modern yoga who were completely uninvolved in political explications of yoga. Along these lines, yogic breath cultivation as a form of “self-cultivation” can also be read as a form of “cultural capital” in Bourdieu’s sense. Integrating both culturally inherited (“Indian”) and adopted (“Western”) techniques, *prāṇāyāma* raised the agency of yogis and practitioners, and it could be “invested” into political agency.

Looking at Foucault’s reading of the Greco-Roman distinction between the care and knowledge of the self also has methodological implications. Investigating the field through the lens of the care of the self necessarily leads to an investigation of religious and bodily *practices*, which is a historically often neglected and only recently discovered content of religious studies. These practices of the self also generated discursive elements, reflections, and epistemic statements (like cosmological, anthropological, occult, and scientific speculations).<sup>41</sup> Vice versa, these meta-discourses of *prāṇāyāma* techniques which often relate to *prāṇa*, or other energetic currents within subtle body conceptions, rebound into shaping the practices themselves. Both levels of the discourse – bodily practices as well as associated epistemic statements – are critical for the present study.<sup>42</sup> This leads us to a discussion

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<sup>39</sup> As to further theoretical implications of “self-cultivation”, they were considered in a conference organised by Jens Schlieter at the University of Bern in August 2021, titled “Intentional Transformative Experiences: Theorizing Self-Cultivation in Religion and Philosophy”, which will yield a forthcoming publication. For a discussion of self-cultivation as an interface category within transcultural religion and philosophy, see also Schmücker & Heubel (2013). The implications of the term self-cultivation as it has been applied to East Asian philosophies, particularly Confucianism, cannot be considered here.

<sup>40</sup> Sarasin (2001: 30, 259) offers a similar reading for what he calls the discourse of hygiene in European states (mainly Germany). He sees a historical shift after 1900 when the care of the self was politically tied into eugenics and biopolitics. His study therefore terminates in 1914, or at the end of the so-called long nineteenth century.

<sup>41</sup> The notion of the “episteme” *sensu* Foucault will be discussed below.

<sup>42</sup> Also Bourdieu points to the relation of epistemic statements and the production of practices – the manipulation of a specific worldview, in his terms – which then in turn effect specific forms of practices (Bourdieu 2009: 245).

of Foucault's discourse-theoretical approach as the last theoretical aspect to be outlined in this chapter.

## 2.6 Foucault: Historical Discourse Analysis

Michel Foucault contributed extensively to the notions of discourse theory, discourse history, and discourse analysis, and, in scholarship, he is one of the main names associated with discourse-based analyses (Sarasin 2016). For Foucault's work, the term discourse is decisive for understanding the relationship between knowledge, power, and the subject (Kajatzke 2008: 75). Therefore, the following discourse-theoretical considerations tie into the discussion above. But also Bourdieu referred to discourses in the sense of their embeddedness in the structures of the fields that are determined by invested capital (*ibid.*: 73). Participants in discourses enact their symbolic capital (a product of the economic and cultural habitus) in the form of their habitus of speech. However, for Bourdieu discourse is not one of his major analytical categories, and as a sociologist mainly interested in contemporary phenomena, he did not apply the notion of discourse within historical research. In the following, discourse-theoretical aspects relevant for the present study will therefore be discussed mainly by relating to Foucault and his explications on discourse theory from the late 1960s onwards, which then dovetails into an exposition of how historical discourse analysis is applied to this study.

### 2.6.1 Discourse-Theoretical Aspects

In Foucault's work, "discourse" has several implications and emphases in various phases of his work. Thus, this term needs to be considered as it evolved chronologically (Landwehr 2009: 66). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (first published in French in 1969), Foucault consequently started to base discourse-analytical approaches on discourse-theoretical grounds. Although discourses are materialised in signs and language, for Foucault they represent *practices* of social participation which constitute, reproduce, and change societal realities (Foucault 2002 [1972]: 54; Landwehr 2009: 92). Foucault conceives of discourses as constitutive for social reality, and they also form the "objects" of which they speak, among these, the "objects of knowledge" and the "objects of social life" (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 41). Foucault continues by suggesting that, in their representing form, discourses are further "groups of statements" that belong to the same discursive formation (Foucault 2002 [1972]: 54). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault was mainly interested

in delineating the discourses of the human sciences such as medicine, psychiatry, grammar, or economics, but these considerations can be translated to other disciplines and discourses (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 38). For the formation of these discourses and disciplines, Foucault puts four analytical dimensions to the test that constitute “rules of formation” (*ibid.*: 42). These four dimensions are (1) “objects” (objects of knowledge, targets of investigation), (2) “modalities” (participation by the subject/speaker), (3) “concepts” (which result from rhetoric patterns and intertextuality), and (4) “strategies” (the materiality of themes and theories), explained in greater detail in the following.

The first dimension (1) investigates the formation of objects in a particular discourse, and analyses rules for the emergence of “objects of knowledge”, including the “targets of investigation”, for instance, the constitution of “nation” or “race” (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 41; Foucault 2002 [1972]: 44-54). The second (2) deals with the formation of “enunciative modalities” and asks for the participation of the subject in the discourse, and the question who speaks from where. This includes the position of institutions and subjects from which enunciations regarding the objects of discourses are expressed (*ibid.*: 55-56). Foucault also distinguishes here between enunciations (singular appearance) and statements (multiple appearance) (*ibid.*: 118). Hence “modalities” also include the relation between and the forms of statements. The third dimension (3) analyses the formation of “concepts”, including rhetoric patterns, intertextuality, and “interdiscursive” relations that are in constant flux through exchange (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 45-46). He mentions three main features to refer to other texts: statements can be repeated, affirmed or discarded; they can be “concomitant” to other texts, i.e., pulling together and synthesising the statements of various texts; or they are no longer repeated and hence discontinued (*ibid.*: 46). The fourth analytical dimension (4) is concerned with the formation of “strategies”, which are “themes and theories” that emerge from objects, enunciations, and modalities (Foucault 2002 [1972]: 71). The “coherence, vigour, and stability” of the first three aspects bring the themes and theories of a discourse to the fore (as opposed to their existence as mere potentialities) (*ibid.*). This is also marked by a “materiality” of the discourse, which means that they acquire a certain status within a particular institution, which points at a novel idea in Foucault’s work: “outside” forces and non-discursive constraints that forge the discourse (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 48-49).

The rules of formation provide a certain framework for the analysis:<sup>43</sup> First, statements are not to be analysed by themselves, but as constituted by their institutional and social environment, the enunciating subject, and the organisation of statements and relation to other texts, as well as discursive strategies. Secondly, in these analyses, the main concern is not the subject as the author of a certain statement.<sup>44</sup> The main concern is the existence or positivity of the discourse that justifies the analysis. What is further in question is the dominance of statements (as opposed to singular enunciations) and their specific emergence at a given time in their respective function within the discourse. It should be also considered that the expansive scope of discursive fields is limited through their structural determination within a discursive framework, and that they are therefore not universal. This calls for a context-dependent analysis in all stages of historical discourse analysis.

In “The Order of the Discourse”, which was the inaugural address at the Collège de France of 1970, Foucault further distinguishes three groups of procedures that control discourses. According to him, discourses imply tremendous structural and political forces. Discourse-controlling procedures are therefore designed to “ward off its [the discourse’s, MK] powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault 1981: 52). First, he distinguishes between external processes of discourse control with the primary focus on exclusion. These formative structures include regulations like prohibition, division, and rejection (e.g., in the case of madness), and the constraint of truth. In other words, the “three great systems of exclusion which forge discourse [are] the forbidden speech, the division of madness and the will to truth” (*ibid.*: 55). Foucault stresses the truth-producing faculty of science in the nineteenth century which put pressure and a certain power of constraint on other discourses (*ibid.*: 55-56). Furthermore, the exclusive constraint of the “will for truth” also, by and by, tends to swallow the other two forging elements (*ibid.*), which results in science as one of the main forces to control a discourse by exclusion (chapter 6.3).

Secondly, the internal procedures of the regulating function of discourses exercise control and function as “principles of classification, of ordering, of distribution” (Foucault 1981: 56). These are often “ritualised sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances” (*ibid.*), and often religious, juridical,

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<sup>43</sup> This paragraph is based on Landwehr (2009: 70-71).

<sup>44</sup> On the role of the author and the “author function” as conceived by Foucault within discourse analysis, see below.



literary, or scientific texts. Their production is nevertheless not fully stable, but the discourse includes both repetition and innovation. Here, in the interior structure of discursive processes, Foucault again clarifies the role of authors who are ascribed a certain “author function”. Author function allows for mastery over a “principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence” (*ibid.*: 58). The author decides what is said and what is left out, and “this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn” (*ibid.*: 59). Hence, repetition and innovation are the push and pull factors of this internal constraint of discourses, moulded by the embeddedness of participants within the discourse.

The third constraint is the rarefaction of the speaking subject, a regulation of the access to discourse, which delineates who is allowed to participate in it at all. Again, specific rules define the position and status of the qualified speaker, “the gestures, behaviour, circumstances, and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse” (Foucault 1981: 62). Here, Foucault also ties into the author who perceives his writing as singularity, looking from the outside on a certain discourse, but who is nevertheless part of a “society of discourse” (*ibid.*).<sup>45</sup> Thus, even scholarly work which intends to speak *about* certain discourses ultimately participates in the same discourse, and academic discourses also produce “forms whose main rhythms are analogous” (*ibid.*: 64). Subjects (also authors) are regulated by doctrines that group certain subjects together and exclude others, thereby forming “doctrinal allegiances” (*ibid.*). Systems of education are political institutions wherein the individual and (the way of) its participation or exclusion in discourses is forged.

Already in “The Order of the Discourse”, the complex of power and knowledge become crucial for the category of discourse, and in all subsequent work Foucault closely linked the three notions in his discourse-theoretical considerations (Landwehr 2009: 72). These categories also persist in his later genealogical works like *Discipline and Punish* (first published in French in 1975). Discourse and language are implicit forces contributing to the formation of power in modern societies, and these categories lie at the heart of the study of social practices and processes. These also include the important notions of “discipline” and “disciplinary power” that produce the modern

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<sup>45</sup> “It is fully acknowledged that the research results are themselves elements of the discourse under scrutiny; hence, they do not represent the ‘truth’ about the issue at stake but provide insight into the mechanisms, historical dimensions, and implications of the construction of meaning in a discourse community” (Stuckrad 2014: 18).

individual, including the question as to “how techniques work on ‘bodies’ [...], bodily dispositions, habits, and movements” (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 49-52). In other words, the individual body is not just reshaped by body-related disciplines of, for instance, education, training systems, and medicine, but these influences also constitute the *social body* in its interconnectedness. The notion of power is, however, not understood in a merely oppressive sense. Rather, discourse is distributed among various participants who share access to its power, and it has cracks and gaps in which proactive contribution and changes are encouraged (Landwehr 2009: 76). Although participating in discourses already implies access to a certain amount of power, discourse is also the object that is aimed for in order to further produce one’s own power (*ibid.*: 73; Kajetzke 2008: 44). In this constant battle for redistribution of discursive power, the notion of discourse in which participants aim to gain the upper hand is close to Bourdieu’s understanding of the field as the main locus in which social and institutional power is enacted.

It has been noted in various accounts that one of Foucault’s concerns was to investigate the formation of human sciences in various epochs as well as the hegemonial structure that science imposed upon other discourses. In this regard, one of the notions coined by Foucault is the “episteme” (*epistémè*), to denote “the historical *a priori* that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch” (Stuckrad 2010: 159). While, in *The Order of Things* (first published in French in 1966), this was conceived as being a *singular* concept underlying an entire epoch, in later works he acknowledged that there could be several epistemes at a given moment (Stuckrad 2010: 159). Moreover, in later works, he identified them with an apparatus to single out specific statements and limit their scope to their acceptability within a specific “scientific theory”, or “field of scientificity” (Foucault 1980: 197). He held that “the *episteme* is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific” (*ibid.*, his emphasis). In other words, an episteme is an underlying concept to filter statements that become accepted and, hence, to allow for statements to become discursively powerful. While I will not try to delineate an episteme that would have such a status within the modern period, I hold that, within modern yoga, certain epistemic constraints are active, and in many cases, they are linked to the notion of *prāṇa*. This is most evident in *prāṇa* as a key notion for Vivekananda’s cosmological outline, which continues to legitimise and underpin the efficacy of yogic breath cultivation (chapter 5.4). Moreover, such a cosmology and

associated claims are understood as “science”, which again points at the relevance of speaking of such a construction as an *epistemic* one. It is in this sense that the terms *episteme/epistemic* will be used throughout the thesis.

Discourse-theoretical aspects, as they have been discussed above, were applied by other scholars in various studies on historical material. In doing so, they established a link between discourse theory (which tends to be, at least in Foucault’s texts, rather abstract) and historical discourse analysis. In the next paragraphs, I aim to transfer some salient discourse-theoretical aspects into an outline of a historical discourse analysis as a research perspective for yogic breath cultivation. Additionally, this study investigates “real practice and real text”, which is an “important corrective to Foucault’s overstatement of the constitutive effects of discourse” (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 57, 60). Some additional tools tailored for this particular study will therefore be outlined. The theoretical discussions above serve to sharpen the analytical tools applied in this historical discourse analysis.

#### 2.6.2 Applying Historical Discourse Analysis: A Research Perspective to Analyse Yogic Breath Cultivation

Modern yoga is a multifaceted field that incorporates discourses of Indian religions, occultism, and esotericism as well as those of science, nationalism, physical culture, medicine, and health. The terminological phrases “discourses of modern yoga” and the “field of modern yoga” are closely linked to each other in the sense that they define a common conglomerate of themes and practices. Following Keller (2011: 60), I shall therefore speak of the “discursive field” of modern yoga in which *prāṇāyāma* discourses are embedded. Bourdieu’s and Foucault’s approaches are further conceived as complementary in several other aspects. Discourse analysis also adds to theories of cultural flows because these flows often run along lines of hegemony and the aim of gaining the upper hand in discursive practices. With regard to Bourdieu’s category of the field, the multifaceted field of modern yoga expands in both global and local fields of collaboration and contestation. Certain local sites of modern yoga can be viewed as subfields of modern yoga’s transnational expression. The discourses within the field of modern yoga are tinged, for example, somewhat differently in Calcutta<sup>46</sup> than in New York, as will be shown, although they belong to the same discursive field.

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<sup>46</sup> In this thesis, Indian places (e.g., Calcutta, Bombay, Madras) are referred to by the names used in colonial India.

As mentioned above, discourses of modern yoga combine various aspects of adjacent (and even seemingly disparate) fields. It is the strength of a discourse-analytical approach to tie together all these strands that would normally transcend the boundaries of an academic field (Stuckrad 2014: 1). The discourse of yogic breath cultivation within modern yoga equally incorporates these disparate-yet-adjacent discursive strands. It functions like a narrower circuit of the larger field of modern yoga, yet these fields share several discursive strands and patterns as common denominators. In its specifics, the discourse of yogic breath cultivation is constituted by a plurality of themes and simultaneously by a regularity of statements regarding the notion of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*. Due to the plurality of themes, I address various fields that contribute to the main discourse in question. As for the notions in focus, as already indicated, the epistemic statements regarding *prāṇa* and the practice-oriented aspects of *prāṇāyāma* are interdependent and can be analysed on various levels of the same discourse. Therefore, the analysis in this study necessarily revolves around discourses of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*.

This study follows basic principles of discourse analysis such as contextualisation, the analysis of repetition and sameness of statements, the attribution of power to certain statements, and the thoroughly intertwined notion of discursive and bodily practices (Fairclough 2006 [1992]: 55-56). The view of discourses as constitutive processes is significant for the analysis of yogic breath cultivation insofar as it is considered – at least to some extent – as an object and product of them. In modern yoga, the term *prāṇāyāma* underwent, as mentioned, a semantic shift, starting to incorporate various forms of breathing techniques that were marked as “correct” yogic breathing. In other words, *prāṇāyāma* became what the discourse made of it and there is an ongoing process of negotiation what it is and what it is not. As an interpretive endeavour, this study therefore reconstructs salient *prāṇāyāma* discourses between c. 1850 and 1945, but refrains from cementing a “canon” of practices that would constitute “*prāṇāyāma*” in its essential form. Instead, the methodology presented here suggests that studying these discourses can detect the *change* that key notions like *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* underwent in this time frame, i.e., their reinvention (Stuckrad 2014: viii).

Furthermore, this study sheds light on external forces of discourse production such as politics, science, and the hegemony of religions. But, in doing so, it also elucidates that these factors were tools of empowerment for modern yogis, and that they managed to integrate these external forces into their internal shaping of the

discourse. Hence, pioneers of modern yoga were acutely aware of and utilised discursive power that implied questions of political, cultural, and religious hegemony. The notion of internal forces of discourse production is further applied in the analysis of “author functions” that produce various statements of modern yoga pioneers. As pointed out, they are individuals co-shaped by a field-of-forces and constant battle of participation in the discursive field. The rarefaction of the participating subject is reflected in the choice of pioneers of modern yoga analysed in this study. The authors treated here were the most prominent participants in discourses of yogic breath cultivation and they were attributed a highly specific qualification and authority in the discourse. This implied a certain kind of habitus, or, more bluntly, a “yogi-ness”, to which, next to the dress code, pen names also contributed.

As to the material and media analysed in this study, modern yoga pioneers participated in the discourses through an oral, praxeological, and written tradition. The aspects of an oral and praxeological tradition can be analysed through personal instruction, demonstrations, and informal meetings, as far as they are documented. This material is, however, scarce. What is far more accessible - provided that these materials were composed in English language – is the written tradition as manifested in (published) public lectures, *yoga/prāṇāyāma* manuals, books, and pamphlets, as well as newspaper and journal articles. Several yoga pioneers and the organisations established by them had their own journals through which their work was disseminated on a transnational scale. This also meant access to knowledge production such as discourses of science, or even the production of scientific data. Several of these *prāṇāyāma* manuals and the related discursive material became part of what could be called “the text corpus of modern yoga”. Because modern yoga was mainly an anglophone movement (Singleton 2010), my focus lies on textual material in English language.

As von Stuckrad and others have noted, historical discourse analysis provides a research perspective that needs to be complemented with a specific set of methodological tools that suit the discourse under study (Stuckrad 2014: 9-10, 18; Hjelm 2011: 134, 142). In light of the material and “text corpus” to investigate in this study, my toolkit therefore further consists of content analysis (Nelson & Woods 2011), and textual interpretation (Hjelm 2011: 134) as well as a “historico-critical method” (Rüpke 2011: 286). As should be clear by now, the aim is not to reconstruct a history of “how it really was” (*ibid.*), but to apply a reflective approach as to the choice of sources, their intertextuality, and their contribution to forging the discourse

of yogic breath cultivation. As a general remark, Part I is more concerned with the question of how salient discourses of *prāṇa* and (yogic) breath cultivation are forged in various (premodern and modern) contexts, and therefore, the research perspective of a historical discourse analysis is brought to the fore. In the close reading of seminal texts of modern yoga pioneers in Part II, the practice-related categories of Bourdieu and Foucault again become significant. It should be further noted that my toolkit is complemented by an analysis of influential factors and trends within yogic breath cultivation, which are the fields of religion and hygienic culture, the appeal to tradition and innovation, and the dynamic factors of nationalism, science discourse, and print media. The impact and implications of these are discussed at the outset of Part II (chapter 6). Another aspect is to look at the practices as determined by their corporeality, which helps to zoom in on the corporeal logic of the practices (chapter 7).

As to the constraints of the author function mentioned above, a brief self-analysis of the positioning of the author of this study (a PhD candidate from Vienna) within the process of writing this thesis is attempted here. Written from a certain perspective which is shaped by many factors, this study necessarily cuts out a specific trajectory of events and discursive practices that is defined as relevant. In describing discourses that revolve around breath, it aims for an analysis of an embodied practice. In this self-analysis I follow Sarasin (1999), who holds that discursive practices (which involve language) that refer to bodily practices can only be grouped *around* that which cannot be said or stored in historical data. Since the body and its sensations are not fully representable on a symbolic level, Sarasin opines that historians investigating practices of the body have to deal with the “transition from body to text and the empty spaces of systems of representation. Here the physical is present in our discourses – as a gap, around which language orbits” (Sarasin 1999: 450, my translation). In that sense, a historical study accepts that it can only shed light on material expressed in texts, and although discourses point at the practices that lie behind them, they cannot be referred to directly in the analysis. In this study, the practices of breath in their immediate reality fall short of description: what participants in discourses *felt*, *perceived*, and *experienced* remains largely inexplicit, and if described it could only *mirror* a certain historic reality at a given time.

As a result, this study mainly investigates individuals that I earlier called pioneers or protagonists of modern yoga that have the habitus of a “yogi”. I focus on these individuals not because their students would not be relevant for an investigation,

but because most of the non-teaching students of yogic breath cultivation hardly left any historical trace (other than in demographics yet to be collected). In the discourses under scrutiny, “powers” that may even claim omnipotence ascribed to *prāṇāyāma* practice, as in the prominent case of Vivekananda, are highlighted. In these prominent cases, reiterated by the many, mastery of the self is ranked higher than care of the self. Through *prāṇāyāma*, the individual may gain full agency over their actions and eventually control those actions and even the cosmos at large. The disposition between the claims of the analysed material and my mode of analysis (which highlights, to a certain degree, the socially determined self) opens a space of interpretation to negotiate claims of universality-to-omnipotence and claims of cultural contextualisation and dependency.

### 3 PRĀṆA AND PRĀṆĀYĀMA IN PREMODERN YOGA TRADITIONS AND SOUTH ASIAN THOUGHT

From the different modifications of the *prāṇa*, it receives various names. All of them cannot be stated here.

*Śivasamhitā* 3.3 as translated by Sris Chandra Vasu: *The Esoteric Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Sanhita* (Basu 2004 [1887]: 16).

*Prāṇa* as a vital principle is ubiquitously found throughout various Indian religious and philosophical traditions, and it appears to underpin various interpretation of the yogic practice in focus here. Although the key aspects to describe it are “vitality” and “breath”, the interpretation of *prāṇa* varies in different contexts and eras. Since yoga pioneers of the nineteenth and twentieth century recur on this principle and its semantic shades with its roots in the late *Rgveda*, my exposition of *prāṇa* starts with this period. Though limited in scope regarding a premodern exposition of *prāṇa*,<sup>47</sup> the most salient aspects will be addressed in this chapter. Likewise, *prāṇāyāma* has a long and varied history in the Indian yogic traditions. The earliest references to rudimentary forms of *prāṇāyāma* are found in the *Atharvaveda*. However, the breath practices of direct relevance in this study are the ones developed in Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga.

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed discussion of *prāṇa* in various Indian traditions from the Vedas onwards, I recommend Peter Connolly’s remarkable study *Vitalistic Thought in India* (1992).

Accordingly, I will first briefly discuss *prāṇa* and early forms of breath cultivation in the Vedas (including the Upaniṣads) and outside yogic traditions (chapter 3.1), and then give an outline of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (chapter 3.2). This is followed by a detailed discussion of these notions in Haṭhayoga (chapter 3.3). I will also briefly shed light on late-medieval amalgamations of Advaita Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and yoga (chapter 3.4) as an influential backdrop for discourses of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in the modern period.

The term *prāṇāyāma* is generally translated as “breath control” and in tantric contexts also as “breath extension” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 128, 484, n. 9). The compound consists of *prāṇa* (from prefix *pra* + Sanskrit root *an*),<sup>48</sup> here mainly denoting “breath”, and *āyāma* (from prefix *ā* + Sanskrit root *yam*), which means “control” or “extension”.<sup>49</sup> *Prāṇāyāma* is an umbrella term that comprises various forms of premodern breath control such as the four types mentioned by Patañjali, the eight types described by Svātmārāma in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, or yet another variety like alternate-nostril breathing and *prāṇāyāma* in combination with recitation of mantras. All these forms of *prāṇāyāma* as well as various meanings of *prāṇa* yet to be mentioned below provide the base for yogic breath cultivation within the Hindu traditions.

### 3.1 *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in Early Indian Thought

#### 3.1.1 Aspects of *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇa*-Related Practices in Pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic Literature

The connection between life, wind, and breath around which the notion of *prāṇa* revolves has deep roots in the South Asian traditions. This connection is already found in the *Puruṣa* Hymn, a rather late addition to the *Ṛgveda*, and was further developed in the *Atharvaveda* (both c. 1500–1000 BCE) (Zysk 2007: 105).<sup>50</sup> In Vedic language as well as in Sanskrit there is no word for “air”, but only for air that *moves*. Air that moves can be perceived, observed, and named: wind is *vāta* or *vāyu*, and breath is *prāṇa*. According to Zysk (1993: 199), in Vedic times, *prāṇa* is the manifestation of

<sup>48</sup> The root *an* means “to breathe” and the prefix *pra* means “in front”. Through an internal *sandhi* (assimilation of phonemes) the result of *pra* + *an* + stem *a* is *prāṇa*.

<sup>49</sup> Gharote (2017 [2003]: 13) mentions various synonyms of *prāṇāyāma* in yogic texts. These are *prāṇapīḍana*, *prāṇarodha*, *prāṇanirodha*, *prāṇamahānirodha*, *prāṇanigraha*, *prāṇasaṃyama*, and, in some texts, also *kumbhaka*.

<sup>50</sup> References made to various Sanskrit sources and their exact bibliographical data were extracted from secondary sources as mentioned and translated therein.



cosmic wind blowing in the atmosphere (*vāyu*, *vāta*) in humans and animals. The obvious connection of life, which breathes, and death, which is characterised by the absence of breath enforces the vital importance of breath for the Vedic thinkers. Simultaneously, wind was worshipped as a life-giving and healing faculty, insofar as it blows medicines to the people, and bestows strength to live and the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) (*ibid.*: 199, n. 2). However, the wind blowing in the atmosphere could not be harnessed for human benefits in its outer realms. Only the ever-moving cosmic wind that entered the human body as *prāṇa*, was, if fully understood, a doorway to respond to the laws of life and death (Zysk 2007: 106). Hence, the correspondences between wind and breath as moving air that bestows life introduced a millennia-long elaboration on breath as a religious and soteriological focal point in the Indian traditions.

Although not yet termed *prāṇāyāma*, it was in the pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic period that rudimentary forms of breath control already appeared. It seems that methods of chanting and visualisation produced the earliest insights into the soteriological significance of breath-based practices (Connolly 1992: 185). For example, the *Atharvaveda* describes the joining of two breaths to attain immortality (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 128). Furthermore, the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (c. 1000 BCE) instructs practitioners not to breathe during the recitation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra (a crucial Vedic mantra invoking the god Savitṛ as the bringer of light and insight) (*ibid.*).<sup>51</sup> These two examples that provide a possible frame for the purpose and context of breath cultivation prefigure later features of *prāṇāyāma*, as will become evident.

Already in pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic texts, there were nuanced speculations about the nature of breath and its functions in the body. While the function of the lungs for respiration was unknown to the Vedic thinkers, the principal seat of *prāṇa* was said to be the heart, but various other places in the body like the nose and mouth were associated with *prāṇa*-as-breath (Zysk 1993: 205). Additionally, several physiological functions were represented by a multiplicity of *prāṇas*, or “bodily winds”, of which *prāṇa* is the foremost. These bodily winds were thought to be responsible not only for respiration but also for functions like swallowing, speech, digestion, excretion, childbirth, and movement (*ibid.*: 201). In other words, all these bodily functions were dependent on some expression of *prāṇa*, which accounts for the centrality of the

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<sup>51</sup> For possible interpretations as to the roles and functions that Savitṛ adopted in the Veda, see Haas (2020). For contexts and usage of the *Gāyatrī* mantra up to approximately the tenth century CE, see Haas’s forthcoming dissertation.

concept in terms of physiology. However, various schemes with varying attributions as to their function and number were discussed, until a codified system of five *prāṇas* evolved (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, *samāna*) (*ibid.*: 203-204).<sup>52</sup> The Vedic doctrine of the five *prāṇas* yielded both Ayurvedic and yogic interpretations.<sup>53</sup> Although this concept was widespread and influential on subsequent periods, yogic contexts only occasionally mention the five bodily winds, and due to the later developments in Haṭhayoga, we are mainly concerned with the first two of these here, namely *prāṇa* and *apāna*.

Both Blezer (1992) and Zysk (1993) have argued that the time span of the late Brāhmaṇical period (documented in texts between c. 1000 to c. 700 BCE)<sup>54</sup> was crucial, because the Vedic fire ritual became internalised and transmuted into an inner sacrifice of austerity. In this context breath control started to gain definite soteriological significance (Zysk 1993: 203-204). This period also accounts for the rise of *prāṇa* in its close association with *ātman*. The inquiry into *prāṇa* as linked to *ātman* enabled mystical experiences which resulted in the emancipation from earthbound circumstances (Blezer 1992: 39-40). According to Blezer, *prāṇa* can even be described as “the closest associate of the immortal element in man, *ātman* and *puruṣa*, occasionally even representing it” (*ibid.*: 38). In this close association, *prāṇa* is “intimately and indissolubly interwoven with individual physiology, psychology, and soteriology (as far as the designation individual holds in that context)” (*ibid.*: 39). This, however, can only be experienced through practices that try to harness *prāṇa*.

While *prāṇāyāma* as a defined terminology and practice was yet to appear on the horizon, Blezer mentions *prāṇa*-related practices that foreshadowed these yogic developments. He argues that, as a phenomenon open to everyone, respiration was “a

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<sup>52</sup> Like *prāṇa*, these are also derivative nouns with the root *an* and a prefix that, it could be argued, indicates their physiological function: *pra*, (“forward”), *apa* (“down”), *vi* (“apart, through”), *ud* (“up”), *sam* (“together”). Hence, Blezer translates them (by using the umbrella term “breath-movements”) as follows: “*prāṇa* (exhalation or forward breathing; possibly inhalation), *apāna* (inhalation or downward breathing; possibly exhalation or off-breathing), *vyāna* (through-breathing), *udāna* (upward breathing), and *samāna* (pervasive or central breathing)” (Blezer 1992: 24). It should further be mentioned that the interpretations of the bodily winds often disagree, especially for *prāṇa* and *apāna*: “*Prāṇa*, the first breath, is [...] associated with the olfactory faculty and therewith suggesting inhalation, but it is also a namesake of the mukhyaḥ *prāṇaḥ* [here ‘breath in the mouth’, M.K.] associated with chant and hence implying exhalation; *apāna* is identified with *vāc* [‘speech’, M.K.], therewith indicating exhalation or off-breathing” (Blezer 1992: 41-42, n. 11). These semantic overlaps unleashed a heated discussion among Indologists in c. 1900 as to whether *prāṇa* denoted inhalation or exhalation (Zysk 1993: 198-199, n. 1).

<sup>53</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the five *prāṇas* in early and classical Ayurveda, which are expounded in Zysk (1993).

<sup>54</sup> This is the period of the Brāhmaṇas, which partly overlaps with the early Upaniṣadic period that starts around 700 BCE. I will, however, give examples of the Upaniṣadic notions of *prāṇa* and breath cultivation in the section below.

probable means for a (mystical) experience of self” (Blezer 1992: 23). These *prāṇa*-related experiences included the “depth and rhythm of breathing and consciousness, as witnessed in the phenomena of sleep, ecstasy, and mind-control through breathing-exercises” (*ibid.*: 22-23). Such observations also point at *prāṇa* as functioning in the subtle body to induce colour-perceptions during deep sleep and death, when *prāṇa* moves up the central channel that connects the heart and the head (*ibid.*: 40). As such, these *prāṇa*-related practices and the notion of *prāṇa* were intimately linked to the emerging *ātman-brahman* mysticism and to speculations surrounding life, death, and immortality (*ibid.*: 22, 40).

To sum up, in the pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic period, *prāṇa*, in its widest sense, is a kind of omnipresent “vital principle” from which the universe springs and which sustains life. Along these lines, Connolly succinctly outlines *prāṇa* as connected to both cosmic creation and individual physiology: “At the material level of creation [*prāṇa*] diversifies itself to produce both the physical aspects of existence and the more subtle aspects which animate the physical ones” (Connolly 1992: 67). It should further be mentioned that in this sense *prāṇa* was equated with other life-sustaining principles like *jīva* (“individual vital principle”), *vīrya* (“vital power”, “energy”) or even *brahman* as ultimate reality (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 128; Blezer 1992: 24; Zysk 1993: 204; Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 43).<sup>55</sup> However, in a much narrower sense *prāṇa* simply denotes “breath”, and it is usually located in the heart (Zysk 1993: 198). As the foremost of five bodily winds, *prāṇa* has its seat in the nose or mouth and in this function either signifies the in-breath or the out-breath (Blezer 1992: 41-42, n. 11). When *prāṇa* appears together with *apāna*, e.g., in the compound *prāṇāpāna*, it denotes the twofold mechanism of inhalation and exhalation (Zysk 2007: 106-107). In another fivefold set, *prāṇa* is the foremost of the five *prāṇas* located in the head that approximate the five senses (*indriyas*) in the later Upaniṣads, with *prāṇa* in the nose being linked to the olfactory sense (Blezer 1992: 24-25; Connolly 1992: 22).<sup>56</sup> Thus,

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<sup>55</sup> As to the intimate connection of *prāṇa* with *ātman* and *brahman*, Connolly (1992: 186-187) argues that in pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic literature *prāṇa* carried several connotations that were later ascribed to both *ātman* and *brahman*. In the Upaniṣads, two main strands of interpreting *prāṇa* are found that either equate it with or subordinate it to *ātman/brahman* as the supreme principles (of these, the latter appears to be the younger strand). Medieval Vedāntic commentators such as Rāmānuja (c. eleventh century) and Śaṅkara (c. eight century) who are the founders of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Advaita Vedānta school respectively, further diminish the role of *prāṇa* in the Upaniṣads vis-à-vis that of *ātman/brahman* (*ibid.*: 186, 188). It could be argued that modern yoga discourses (despite drawing on Advaita Vedānta) counteract the tendency of lowering the status of *prāṇa*, since Vivekananda and several subsequent authors invoke *prāṇa* as a fundamental vital principle (chapter 5.4). In a way, this re-establishes or at least resembles the concept’s significance that it had in the Veda.

<sup>56</sup> The other *prāṇas* located in the head are *vāc* (speech, located in the mouth), *cakṣus* (sight of the eye), *śrotra* (audition of the ear), and *manas* (the mental faculty or mind) (Blezer 1992: 24). Blezer explains

*prāṇa* in its various semantic shades “has no parallel equally comprehensive meaning in the English language” (Blezer 1992: 25), but *prāṇa* denoting vitality and breath are the two key aspects to keep in mind. While *prāṇa*-related phenomena as experienced in chanting, deep sleep, and ecstasy were already recognised, more systematised formulations of breath cultivation as *prāṇāyāma* were yet to be developed.

The discussion in this chapter section has spanned the pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic time including the Brāhmaṇical period that transitions into the Upaniṣadic period. As a next step, a brief survey of the “classical Upaniṣads” (which can be roughly dated to 700–100 BCE, Cohen 2018: 16), and their explication of *prāṇa*-related themes is provided. Regarding the time span between 400 BCE–300 CE, in which the *Mahābhārata* was composed (Flood 1996: 96), a few references to *prāṇāyāma* that predate Pātañjalayoga will be mentioned. Though not as often referred to as the authority in yoga that is Patañjali, these references, especially those in the classical Upaniṣads, still represent a highly relevant stratum of religious thought, and the readings of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* found therein remain influential up to the present day.

### 3.1.2 Examples of *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in the Upaniṣads and in other Contexts that Predate Patañjali

*Prāṇa* as the main indicator of life is tied to several physiological and psychological functions, as has been stated. Several Upaniṣads continue this theme. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.2.1–14 (700–500 BCE) a metaphorical battle of various body functions is described, wherein *prāṇa* turns out to be superior to less important functions, like speech (*vāc*), sight (*cakṣus*) or mind (*manas*) (Connolly 1992: 67; Boland 1997: 137). *Prāṇa* leaving the body at the time of death also results in the decay of the other functions. It is said that by the end of a life cycle, all of them enter into *prāṇa*, whereas *prāṇa* itself merges into *vāyu* (Boland 1997: 137; Bodewitz 1992: 55). It is also in this text (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.12.3–4) that the attribution of the heart as the principal seat of *prāṇa* was established and became authoritative (Zysk 1993: 205, n. 69).

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that these are “by approximation the indriyas [senses, M.K.] of the later Upaniṣads” (*ibid.*). Both Blezer and Connolly reference *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9.2.2.5 to mention the “prāṇas in the head” (*ibid.*: 42, n. 15; Connolly 1992: 22).

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* further dwells on one of the most relevant tropes around which premodern (and modern) forms of breath control revolve, which is the connection between *prāṇa* and the mind (*manas*):<sup>57</sup>

Just as a bird tied by a string flies off in all directions and, on not reaching any other place to stay, returns to where it is tied, in the very same way, dear boy, the mind flies off in all directions and, on not reaching any other place to stay, returns to the breath. For the mind, dear boy, is tied to the breath (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.2 as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 138).

The *prāṇa*-mind nexus established in this analogy refers to the relationship between these two faculties that are part of the human being. At the level of subtle physiology, the vital and the mental (*manas*) are intimately connected and tied to each other by a “string”. This analogy of the mind as a restless bird may also reflect the notion that the mind can be centred and stilled by “returning to the breath”, a theme that reverberates throughout yogic tradition and resurfaces in various contexts (chapter 3.3.6). It should be briefly noted that the Upaniṣads negotiated the question as to whether a fundamental principle should be conceived either “vitalistically or mentalistically” (Connolly 1992: 94). Several Upaniṣads steered a course for a middle ground, although the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is an example that ultimately emphasised the consciousness aspect (*ātman* or *brahman*) and subordinated the vital (*prāṇa*) (*ibid.*: 80-83, 94-95).

Some of the middle Upaniṣads such as the *Kaṭha*, the *Maitrī*, and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which were probably composed around 400–200 BCE (Cohen 2018: 13) allude to yoga in general and breath control in particular. In the *Maitrī Upaniṣad*, *prāṇāyāma* is included in a sixfold (*ṣaḍaṅga*) system of yoga that likely gave rise to later systematisations of yoga as in Patañjali (Zysk 1993: 205). The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* attempts to “integrate numerous and divergent cosmologies and theologies into its religious doctrine” (Olivelle 1998: 413). While it does not mention the term *prāṇāyāma*, the text mentions a specific breath practice in which one “presses one’s breath” (*prāṇān prapīḍyeha*) among other yoga-related themes (Flood 1996: 95). Being quite persuasive as an early reference to *prāṇāyāma* and yoga, it is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>57</sup> It should be briefly noted that, in this context, *manas*, which can be translated as “mind” or “individual mental faculty” is only one aspect of the self (*ātman*, which is said to dwell in the heart and is one with *brahman*), as *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1–4 explains (Connolly 1992: 83; Olivelle 1998: 208-209). This self is “made of mind” (*manomaya*), and has a body constituted by *prāṇa*. It possesses a luminous form, and has space (*ākāśa*) as its essence (*ibid.*). This shows that both *prāṇa* and *manas* are subordinate principles to the *ātman-brahman* monism that is alluded to here.

Having made the body straight with its three parts upright and used the mind to insert the senses into the heart, the wise man may cross all terrifying rivers by means of the raft of Brahman.

With his actions controlled, the wise man should press the breaths in [the body]. When the breath is expended, he should exhale through one nostril. He should restrain the mind vigilantly, as if it were a chariot yoked to badly behaved horses.

In a hidden, wind-free, sheltered [spot], which is flat, clean, free from stones, fire and sand, by quiet, flowing waters and the like, agreeable to the mind, but not oppressive to the eye, he should practise yoga (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 2.8–10 as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 60).

In terms of breath cultivation, it is notable that the Upaniṣad emphasises exhaling through one nostril, a theme that later recurs in alternate-nostril breathing. Influenced by the evolving Yoga-Sāṃkhya doctrine (Olivelle 1998: 413), it also alludes to *āsana* (though not termed as such) by prescribing holding “the body straight”. In instructing the “wise man” how to practise yoga, this foreshadows some of the details that later Haṭha texts introduce as to the preliminaries of the practice. It relates to restraining the breath, the senses, and the mind, as well as to the ideal place in which to practise yoga.

Further mentions of breath control that predate Pātañjalayoga are the record that Buddha had practised “non-breathing meditation” before he established a more moderate practice for soteriological ends (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 127, 138). Breath control is further described in the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Mahābhārata* 12.294.6–9 as one of two kinds of meditation (*dhyāna*) (*ibid.*: 127). The *Bhagavadgītā* 4.28–29, a text which was transmitted as part of the *Mahābhārata*, mentions *prāṇāyāma* as the offering of the inbreath into the outbreath (*prāṇāpāna*) and vice versa (Malinar 2012: 68). *Prāṇāyāma* is also mentioned in the *Manusmṛti* 6.70 (c. third century CE) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 129). The *Manusmṛti* is the most influential of the *Dharmaśāstra* texts to set forth rules for how participants of the four main castes (*varṇa*) should accomplish their dharmic (religious and societal) duties. Several texts of the *Dharmaśāstra*, including the *Manusmṛti*, suggest controlling the breath in combination with the mantra *om* or the invocation of the seven worlds (in an abbreviated form, only three are mentioned, i.e., *bhū*, *bhuva*, *sva*) for purposes of expiation (Kane 1941: 317). In this case, the breath is held until exhaustion, and Manu,

the author of the *Manusmṛti*, adds that this practice burns up faults in the sense organs (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 129-130).<sup>58</sup>

Before I turn to a discussion of *prāṇāyāma* in the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali, it should be briefly mentioned that a later set of Upaniṣads makes frequent references to yoga and *prāṇāyāma*. The so-called Yoga Upaniṣads are “part of a recent recension compiled in south-India in the first half of the eighteenth century and commented on by Upaniṣadbrahmayogin” (Birch 2018: 10, n. 42).<sup>59</sup> Though not overly theistic in their nature, they include Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva teachings as well as tantric doctrines and Nāth *siddha* practices (Ruff 2002: 5, 23). As texts that further integrate a variety of doctrines such as Pātañjalayoga and Advaita Vedānta as well as Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga (Birch 2018: 10, n. 42; Bouy 1994: 85-110), they were influential on modern yoga pioneers. Thus, the Yoga Upaniṣads’ doctrinal plurality prefigures that in texts that treat modern yogic breath cultivation. Since the references to *prāṇāyāma* are numerous therein, it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss various *prāṇāyāma* doctrines of the Yoga Upaniṣads in general here. Moreover, the portions of them that are derived from Haṭhayoga are described to some extent in the section on Haṭhayoga below. However, the influence of some texts (e.g., the *Śāṇḍilya* and *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī/Yogakuṇḍalī Upaniṣad*) will be further marked out in contexts that employ specific teachings of these texts (e.g., chapter 4.3.3; chapter 8.4.2).

### 3.2 *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*

The scriptural base of Pātañjalayoga (“the yoga in the lineage of Patañjali”) is both the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali and the commentary on the *sūtra*, called the *Yogabhāṣya* or *Vyāsaḥāṣya*. According to Maas (2013) the author of the commentary, which is traditionally attributed to Vyāsa, is most likely also Patañjali. The *Yogasūtra* and the *Vyāsaḥāṣya* are together referred to as the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (“the learned tradition of yoga in the lineage of Patañjali”),<sup>60</sup> and the work can be dated with some certainty between 325 and 425 CE (Maas 2013: 65).

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<sup>58</sup> Manu’s reading of *prāṇāyāma* as expiation becomes relevant for the Brahmin’s ritual at dusk and dawn (*sandhyopāsanā*), on which, see chapter 4.1.

<sup>59</sup> The term “Yoga Upaniṣad” is not an emic or sectarian term applied to the text (the authors of these texts simply used the term Upaniṣad), but was introduced by Albrecht Weber and employed by Paul Deussen (Ruff 2002: 19). There is another recension of the Yoga Upaniṣads from North India which comprises older strata of the texts dating back to the ninth to thirteenth century CE (*ibid.*: 22, 25). This recension includes ten brief Upaniṣads with not more than ten to twenty verses that have been considerably extended in the South Indian-recension Upaniṣads under the same titles. The North Indian recension has first been translated into German by Deussen in 1897 (*ibid.*: 22).

<sup>60</sup> Translation according to Larson (2012: 78–81).

The wider philosophical background of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* depends on the philosophical school of Sāṃkhya, and they are often together referred to as the Yoga-Sāṃkhya system of thought, or as “common traditions” (*samānatantra*) (Larson 2012: 74).<sup>61</sup> Sāṃkhya itself has a long and complex history with early, classical and late developments, the earliest strata reaching back to the last centuries BCE (Larson 1979). The classical developments are outlined in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (“Verses on Sāṃkhya”) composed by Īśvarakṛṣṇa in about 350–450 CE, thus being roughly contemporary with the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (Larson 2012: 74). Classical Sāṃkhya is a soteriological system of thought that is concerned with freeing the human being from suffering, which is brought about through the realisation of consciousness (*puruṣa*) as ontologically distinct from materiality (*prakṛti*).<sup>62</sup> While the details are more complex, suffice it to say here that Pātañjalayoga, which assumes the metaphysical principles of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, aims to disentangle ordinary awareness (*citta*) from the “witnessing translucent presence” or *puruṣa*, which results in isolation (*kaivalya*), or liberation (*ibid.*: 78). This emancipates the yogi from the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

The *Yogasūtra* comprises four chapters (*pādas*). The first one (*samādhipāda*) refers to one-pointed concentration (*samādhi*).<sup>63</sup> It contains the famous *cittavṛttinirodha*, denoting the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind as fundamental yogic practice. The second chapter (*sādhana-pāda*) deals with a host of practices that prepare the yogi to attain *samādhi*. Starting off with a definition of “the yoga of action” or Kriyāyoga (*Yogasūtra* 2.1),<sup>64</sup> it lays out the famous eightfold path of yoga (*aṣṭāṅga*) (*Yogasūtra* 2.29). Certain *sūtras* of the second and third chapter (*vibhūtipāda*) are often referred to as the *yogāṅga* section (*Yogasūtra* 2.28–3.8) which gives a full treatment of the eight auxiliaries or limbs of yoga (Larson 2012: 75). The third chapter further expounds the nature of extraordinary powers, and the last one (*kaivalyapāda*) comments on final liberation (*ibid.*: 78-79).

<sup>61</sup> In the widely known system of six Indian philosophical schools (*darśanas*), first mentioned around the twelfth century, Sāṃkhya and Yoga appear as a pair. As a result, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* acquired canonical status (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: xvii).

<sup>62</sup> A detailed description of the metaphysics of Sāṃkhya including its cosmological presuppositions is provided in chapter 5.4.

<sup>63</sup> In the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, *samādhi* is the highest state of mental refinement and additionally includes a state beyond cognition. In its twofold expression, it is hence either practised with cognition (*saṃprajñāta samādhi*) or without cognition (*asaṃprajñāta samādhi*) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 324).

<sup>64</sup> In all further direct references to the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, I use the GRETEL edition: [http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpustei/sa\\_pataJali-yogasUtra-with-bhASya.xml](http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpustei/sa_pataJali-yogasUtra-with-bhASya.xml) (accessed, Nov 19, 2020) which is based on the Sanskrit edition by Kāśinātha Śāstrī Āgāṣe (1904) (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 47), Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaye.



What is of further direct concern here is a brief discussion of the eightfold path, in which *prāṇāyāma* is the fourth limb. The first five limbs of the eightfold path are behavioural restraints (*yama*),<sup>65</sup> purificatory ritual observances (*niyama*), meditation posture (*āsana*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), and sense-withdrawal exercises (*pratyāhāra*). These “outer limbs” (*bahiraṅga*) are a prerequisite for the “internal limbs” of yoga (*antaraṅga*) which together are also called “perfect discipline” (*saṃyama*). The three last limbs of yoga are fixation on the object of meditation (*dhāraṇā*), even flow of concentration regarding the object of meditation (*dhyāna*), and meditative or one-pointed concentration (*samādhi*). It should be noted that *yoga* is mostly understood here as the final goal of the practices itself and as such largely synonymous with *samādhi* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 4, 17-18). However, *yoga* can also denote a *practice* leading to a final goal by eight auxiliaries (*aṣṭāṅgas*),<sup>66</sup> thus the term *yoga* adopts a twofold meaning of both the practices and their goal (*ibid.*).

Following the logic of the eightfold path, *prāṇāyāma* is a prerequisite for the higher *saṃyama* practices that lead to liberation. *Prāṇāyāma* is explained in *Yogasūtra* 2.49–53, mentioning four types of *prāṇāyāma* practices. It is also stated that *prāṇāyāma* is the highest *tapas*, or ascetic practice;<sup>67</sup> and furthermore that *prāṇāyāma* lessens the karmic “covering of the light” (*prakāśāvaraṇa*) and that it makes the yogi fit for practising *dhāraṇā* (*Yogasūtra* 2.52–53; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 285).

I will first attempt to explain the first three types; however, it should be noted that only future scholarship including a critical edition of the *sādhana-pāda* can fully clarify the meaning of all four types of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>68</sup> *Yogasūtra* 2.49 states: “When *āsana* is [steady and comfortable], *prāṇāyāma* is cutting the flow of the inhalation and exhalation”.<sup>69</sup> As this *sūtra* seems to make clear, *prāṇāyāma* is defined by breath *retention*. *Yogasūtra* 2.50 explains that one action is “external” (*bāhya*), one is “internal” (*ābhyantara*), and one is “stopping” (*stambhavṛtti*); thus practised, the

<sup>65</sup> I have adopted the translation of the technical terms in this paragraph from Larson (2012).

<sup>66</sup> It is in that sense that the translation of *aṅga* as “auxiliaries” makes sense because it connotes that the auxiliaries are not an end in themselves (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 7). *Aṅga* literally means “limb”, a translation which I only apply when a literal translation is at stake, as in this and the next paragraph.

<sup>67</sup> This led to the interpretation that *prāṇāyāma* was part of Kriyāyoga (consisting, as *Yogasūtra* 2.1, states of *tapas*, *svādhyāya*, and *īśvarapraṇidhāna*) in the modern period (chapter 8.4.1).

<sup>68</sup> Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Nov 12, 2020; Philipp Maas in a personal correspondence, Nov 15, 2020. While a critical edition of the first chapter was produced by Philipp Maas (2006), the rest of the *Pātañjalayogasāstra* has not been critically edited. Regarding the five *sūtras* on *prāṇāyāma* in question, it appears that various commentaries on these *sūtras* are either contradictory in regard to some specifics or need to be critically edited.

<sup>69</sup> *Yogasūtra* 2.49: *tasmin sati śvāsapraśvāsayor gativicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ* (Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

breath becomes long and subtle (*dīrghasūkṣma*). While this leaves significant space for interpretation, the *Yogabhāṣya* 2.50 again hints at three forms of breath *retention*:

The external [action] is that in which there is an absence of flow preceding the inhalation. The internal [action] is that in which there is an absence of flow preceding the exhalation. The third, the action of stopping, is that in which an absence of both [flows] arises because of immediate effort. Just as water poured on a hot stone evaporates on all sides, so the absence of the flows of both occurs simultaneously.<sup>70</sup>

There are two possible interpretations of how the breath flow is stopped in the first three types. Patañjali may have indicated (1) that the first two types mean the natural absence of breath or pause after exhalation and inhalation respectively as opposed to the third type, which would be a deliberate (*sakṛtprayatnād*) holding of each action (*stambhavṛtti*); alternatively, (2) Patañjali may have referred to retention after exhalation and inhalation, whereas the third type could have meant a spontaneous retention in the sense of what later was termed *kevalakumbhaka* (on which, see below).<sup>71</sup> The second option is also suggested by Mallinson and Singleton (2017: 131). While these interpretations are certainly plausible given the idea of “cutting the flow of the breath” (*śvāsapraśvāsayor gativicchedaḥ*) in *Yogasūtra* 2.49 and the “absence” (*gatyabhāvaḥ*) of breath in *Yogabhāṣya* 2.50, later commentators did not follow them, as will be further expounded below.

As to the fourth type of *prāṇāyāma* (*caturtha*), *Yogasūtra* 2.51 states: “The fourth [breath-control] casts aside the external and internal spheres of action” (as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton: 141).<sup>72</sup> The “spheres of action” are related to the spheres of exhalation and inhalation, which are both inside and outside the body as the *Yogabhāṣya* 2.50 seems to suggest (*ibid.*).<sup>73</sup> The breath made long and subtle by the practice of the first three types, this is likely a form of cessation of breath that comes by itself rather than achieved by effort. Indeed, as we shall see, the fourth type was later correlated with *kevalakumbhaka*.

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<sup>70</sup> *Yogabhāṣya* 2.50: *yatra praśvāsapūrvako gatyabhāvaḥ sa bāhyaḥ. yatra śvāsapūrvako gatyabhāvaḥ sa ābhyantarāḥ. tṛtīyaḥ stambhavṛttir yatrobhayābhāvaḥ sakṛtprayatnād bhavati. yathā tapte nyastam upale jalaṁ sarvataḥ saṁkocam āpadyate tathā dvayor yugapad gatyabhāva itī* (Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

<sup>71</sup> Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Nov 12, 2020. I wish to thank Dr. Jason Birch for sharing his insights on Pātañjalayoga in detail with me. As to the second option, it is an open question what the fourth type would look like, which is also often suggested to be *kevalakumbhaka* in later commentaries. It could denote an advanced form of *kevalakumbhaka* that involves the “inner and outer spheres” in a specific way, as suggested by Śivananda’s *Yogacintāmaṇi* (Śarma 1927: 187), and as further explained below.

<sup>72</sup> *Yogasūtra* 2.51: *bāhyābhyantaraviṣayākṣepī caturthaḥ*.

<sup>73</sup> This is indeed the most salient interpretation in later commentaries.

In medieval commentaries that presuppose the emergence of Haṭhayoga, there is far less ambiguity as to the meaning of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma* than there is in the early rather obscure outline in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* itself.<sup>74</sup> Both Vidyāraṇya in his fourteenth-century *Jīvanmuktiviveka* (3.24) and Śivānanda in his seventeenth-century *Yogacintāmaṇi* reconciled the threefold Haṭhayogic scheme of exhalation, inhalation, and retention (*recaka*, *pūraka*, *kumbhaka*) with Patañjali's threefold action of *bāhya*, *ābhyantara*, and *stambha*. Vidyāraṇya holds that the fourth type is *kevalakumbhaka* “which is being practised without the *recaka* and *pūraka*” (*Jīvanmuktiviveka* 3.28).<sup>75</sup> Śivānanda's interpretation in the *Yogacintāmaṇi* likewise equates Patañjali's *caturtha* with *kevalakumbhaka*, but adds that one holds the breath in the spheres of inhalation (i.e., the *cakras* in the heart and navel) and exhalation (i.e., the *dvādaśānta*),<sup>76</sup> a place twelve finger-widths from the tip of the nose or above the head (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 178).<sup>77</sup>

Leaving aside the discussion of possible interpretations of *prāṇāyāma* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, I should briefly mention that the role of *prāṇa* in Yoga-Sāṃkhya is not a highly prominent one, and, since Sāṃkhya is not directly concerned with the practices of yoga, *prāṇāyāma* is not mentioned at all in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 29 mentions *prāṇa* as one of the five bodily winds. In Sāṃkhya, they are associated with the functions of the intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahaṃkāra*), and mind (*manas*) and help to maintain the body's entity (Zysk 1993: 210). Furthermore, *vāyu* is mentioned in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* as one of the five elements (*mahābhūtas*). As has been shown, the term *vāyu* as one of the five elements can designate the cosmic wind blowing in the atmosphere, but in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* as well as in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* it is used in the context of the human body as a synonym for

<sup>74</sup> However, Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Yogasūtra* (*Vivaraṇa*) (c. eighth century) leaves some ambiguity as to the later common interpretation of *bāhya* as *recaka* and *ābhyantara* as *pūraka*, since it correlates the “external” action (*bāhya*) with inhalation (*pūraka*), and the “internal” action (*ābhyantara*) with exhalation (*recaka*) (Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Nov 12, 2020). Pending further investigation, this should be kept in mind, because the *Vivaraṇa* may have preserved primary readings of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (Maas 2006: 166).

<sup>75</sup> *Jīvanmuktiviveka* 3.28:

*recakapūrakāv anādṛtya kevalakumbhako 'bhyasyamānaḥ pūrvatrayāpekṣayā caturtho bhavati* (Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

<sup>76</sup> *Yogacintāmaṇi*: *bāhyaviṣayo dvādaśāntādih | ābhyantaraviṣayo hrdayanābhicakrādih | tau dvau viṣayāv ākṣipyā paryālocyaiva stambharūpo gativicchedaḥ sa caturtha prāṇāyāma iti* (as quoted in Śarma 1927: 187 and as translated by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves: 2020). I wish to thank Jason Birch (personal correspondence Jan 2, 2021) for providing me with this reference and source material. For details on the *Yogacintāmaṇi* in the context of *āsana* see Birch & Singleton (forthcoming).

<sup>77</sup> Regarding the *dvādaśānta*, it is a good example for the common belief in tantric and Haṭhayogic contexts that breath was not only inhaled through the mouth and the nose, but through all nine openings in the body, one of them being the fontanelle at the top of the head (*brahmarandhra*) (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

*prāṇa* (e.g., in the *Yogabhāṣya* 2.49), and *vāyu* can therefore be translated more specifically here as respiratory air (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 14; Gharote & Devnath 2016 [2000]: xxxvi). Three of the five bodily winds are mentioned in the *Yogasūtra* (*prāṇa*, *samāna*, and *udāna*) (Zysk 1993: 209), but *Yogabhāṣya* 3.39 mentions all five, interpreting them as the base of the life process (*jīvana*) (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 12; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 191). While *prāṇa* as a vital principle is not emphasised, Patañjali's focus lies on the concise, if somewhat hermetic, introduction to *prāṇāyāma* as the fourth auxiliary of yoga that prepares the yogi for *saṃyama* practices.

As the example of the interpretation of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma* by Vidyāranya and Śivānanda shows, the outline of *prāṇāyāma* in the *Yogasūtra* remained influential into the late medieval period. Additionally, the re-emergence of Pātañjalayoga within the modern period (White 2014) leads to ubiquitous and highly diverse references to the four types of *prāṇāyāma*, which are, however, often interpreted in light of Patañjali's later commentators. While Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga can be reconciled to some extent, Haṭhayoga incorporates numerous practices that are rooted in tantric traditions that do not necessarily presuppose Pātañjalayoga. The interpretation of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in Haṭhayoga hence diverts to a considerable degree from Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma*. The rise of Haṭhayoga offers a quite well-defined set of *prāṇāyāma* practices that also became very widely recognised in the modern era.

### 3.3 *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in Medieval Haṭhayoga

*Prāṇāyāma* reaches a climax in medieval Haṭhayoga, where at times it is described as the defining technique for the physical aspects of yoga. For example, the c. fourteenth-century *Amaraughaprabodha*,<sup>78</sup> while explaining the characteristics of four different types of yoga, refers to Haṭhayoga as “that which is focused on stopping the breath” (*Amaraughaprabodha* 4 as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton 2013: 32). However, the role of *prāṇāyāma* and its sophisticated application is manifold in Haṭhayoga. It teaches techniques for stopping the breath which involve the active modulation of *prāṇa* (and occasionally the bodily winds), but it also aims for higher meditative states that in turn happen to make the breath temporarily cease. Accordingly, its function to act as a lever for controlling the mind is supreme, and the spontaneous cessation of the breath (i.e., *kevalakumbhaka*) is often conceived to be a prerequisite for *samādhi*

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<sup>78</sup> Regarding the dating of Sanskrit sources in this section, I adopt the dates from Mallinson & Singleton (2017: xxxix-xl), if not otherwise specified.

(Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 18).<sup>79</sup> In general, *prāṇāyāma* is not an isolated practice but is related to the application of yogic seals or *bandhas* and to various aspects and functions of the subtle body. Haṭhayoga emphasises three phases of the breath, which are inhalation (*pūraka*, or “the one that fills-in”), retention (*kumbhaka*, or “holding a full pot”), and exhalation (*recaka*, or “the one that loosens”).<sup>80</sup> In cultivating the phases of the breath, Haṭhayoga mainly focuses on the retention as well as the slow and controlled exhalation of the breath, whereas the inhalation is of minor importance (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).<sup>81</sup> Hence, in such important texts as the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *prāṇāyāma* is equated with *kumbhaka*, as will be further discussed below.

At the present state of research it can be assumed that the earliest source text describing several techniques that became part of the Haṭhayoga corpus is the eleventh-century Vajrayāna (i.e., tantric Buddhist) *Amṛtasiddhi*, of which several passages appear in the c. fourteenth-century *Amaraughaprabodha* and in other subsequent yogic texts (Mallinson 2020: 409-410, 412, 421). The *Amaraughaprabodha* and its earlier shorter version, the twelfth-century *Amaraugha*, are the first texts to teach physical yoga practices under the name *haṭha* (*ibid.*: 421). In medieval Haṭhayoga, there are outlines that employ both eight and six auxiliaries (*aṣṭāṅga*, *ṣaḍāṅga*), and *prāṇāyāma* is always included in these systems. Indeed, several texts hold that the yogi masters all the other auxiliaries of yoga through *prāṇāyāma*, including *samādhi* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 127). Although it can be assumed that attaining liberation is a complex interplay of a variety of factors, including correct manipulation of the subtle body and control of the mind, *prāṇāyāma* has a significant role in this process. At various stages of the practice magical powers or *siddhis* may arise. However, in its preliminary role it is mainly practised for purificatory reasons that help to gain or maintain health.

Although several references to earlier texts will be made here, the seminal fifteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikā* that opens the era of “classical Haṭhayoga” (Mallinson 2011) should be briefly introduced here. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* is one of the best-known Haṭha texts, and, by compiling and systematising several prevalent concepts and practices from earlier traditions its teachings are crucial for all

<sup>79</sup> Here again, “*samādhi*” may refer to a *technique* to reach the highest goal of yoga, or the *goal itself* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 4).

<sup>80</sup> My translations. According to Birch (2011: 548, n. 146) the terminology for *pūraka*, *recaka*, and *kumbhaka* hails from tantric sources.

<sup>81</sup> This corresponds with the common *mātrā* 1-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale), which allots the least time to the inhalation.

subsequent Haṭha texts. Together with the fifteenth-century *Śivasamhitā* and the eighteenth-century *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* was considered to be part of a “classical triad” of Haṭhayoga in the yoga revival of the late nineteenth-century. While their importance for the modern period is addressed in chapter 6.4, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* is treated here as a source for compiling key practices of Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*, being, for example, the first text to describe the eight *kumbhakas*. In the remainder of this chapter, the most important key principles of *prāṇāyāma* in medieval Haṭhayoga are outlined. Like in earlier strata of Indian thought, *prāṇa* is interpreted as an agent to denote both vitality and breath, and its role as the first of the bodily winds persists. To introduce the reader to the subtle-body-related practice that is *prāṇāyāma* within Haṭhayoga, the yogi’s body is mapped in the next section as an important reference point.

### 3.3.1 The Haṭhayogic Subtle Body: Sun, Moon, and Bodily Winds

Channels for the sun and the moon respectively (*nāḍīs*), whirling energy centres with lotus buds and flowers (*cakras*), the goddess *kuṇḍalinī*, who is a subtle force lying at the base of the spine coiled like a snake, and the five cardinal and five further bodily winds (*prāṇas*)<sup>82</sup> are some of the prominent features that constitute the Haṭha yogi’s subtle body.<sup>83</sup> What may sound like a too-imaginative body-vehicle with which to travel during a yogi’s lifetime voyage is indeed the blueprint of the Haṭhayogic subtle body. By incorporating representations of the sun, the moon, and the wind, the yogic subtle body echoes some of the early speculations on the correspondences between humans and the cosmos. These are also an important reference point for the traditions that engender this yogic body: the tantric traditions which become crucial for the religious life in South Asia from the sixth century onwards.<sup>84</sup> The term *tantra* (literally “woven together”) can be used to describe a specific set of texts, but, more specifically, “it indicates a body of soteriological knowledge, ritual and praxis regarded as distinct

<sup>82</sup> The additional five subsidiary bodily winds are first mentioned in the *Niśvāsataṭṭvasaṃhitā* *Nayasūtra* (sixth to tenth century CE) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 174).

<sup>83</sup> A major contribution to a broader discussion of subtle-body concepts in various religious practices and forms of self-cultivation is Samuel & Johnston (2013). In the Introduction to the anthology *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West*, the editors explain that concepts and practices that involve a subtle body scheme treat “mind” and “matter” as continua (Samuel & Johnston 2013: 1). These practices make accessible states of consciousness in which one perceives the body as composed of a finer material existence, and they also coincide with “subtle levels of thought and consciousness” (*ibid.*). It should also briefly be noted that members of the Theosophical Society coined the term “subtle body” (by translating the Sanskrit term *sūkṣmaśarīra*), but it has now been accepted as a generic term for systematic approaches within the history of religions and comparative cultural studies (*ibid.*: 2-3).

<sup>84</sup> Though originated in Śaiva contexts and thriving between the sixth and the thirteenth century, tantra also informed Vaiṣṇava, Buddhist, and Jain traditions (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: xviii).

from, and more powerful than, Vedic revelation” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: xviii). Notions of the yogic subtle body, and also various practices in Haṭhayoga, were derived from tantric traditions (Sarbacker 2021: 163), and it is therefore worthwhile to mention some aspects of tantra as a source for Haṭhayoga.

The Śaiva tantric traditions add core aspects to the yogi’s anthropological features, although some aspects like the subtle channels in which *prāṇa* flows were already mentioned in the early Upaniṣadic period (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 172; Blezer 1992: 40). For example, the existence of ten *nāḍīs*, with *idā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā* as the foremost to spring from a “bulb” (*kanda*) situated below the navel, were already described in the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara* 10.1–3 (a tantric text belonging to the Śaiva Siddhānta text corpus composed before 950 CE) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 173).<sup>85</sup> This model to describe the *nāḍīs* and their origin was subsequently adopted by later yoga texts, for example, the twelfth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* (*ibid.*: 173). Like the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara*, the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 2.1–55 teaches that the moon-*nāḍī*, called *idā*, relates to the left nostril; the sun-*nāḍī*, called *piṅgalā*, is connected with the right; the central channel *suṣumnā* lies between *idā* and *piṅgalā*, and, though emerging from the *kanda* like *idā* and *piṅgalā*, follows the line of the spine (*ibid.*: 193-196).

The idea that several plexuses or *cakras* are located in the subtle body is also found in Śaiva tantric traditions of the first millennium CE, and also in non-tantric texts such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 176). While it should be made clear that various systems also suggest either a lower or higher number of *cakras*, a six-*cakra* model that locates the plexuses along the spine became particularly successful (*ibid.*).<sup>86</sup> Additionally, several texts mention three knots, or *granthis*, also distributed along the spine, to be pierced during yogic meditation (*ibid.*: 174-176). The six-*cakra* system is also found in the c. tenth-century *Kubjikāmatatantra*, a text that belongs to the “Western Transmission” of Kaula Śaivism invoking the goddess Kubjikā (*ibid.*: 176).<sup>87</sup> It is then appropriated by texts

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<sup>85</sup> Dating of the text and details about the text according to Marion Rastelli in the course *Yoga in the tantric traditions: Yogic physiology and regulation of breath across doctrinal and geographical boundaries*, held at University of Vienna, summer term 2021. For an in-depth discussion of the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara*, see Rastelli (forthcoming).

<sup>86</sup> In the modern period, it is Woodroffe’s/Avalon’s translation of the *Ṣaṭcakra-Nirūpaṇa*, a text belonging to the “Southern Transmission” of Kaula Śaivism, or Śrī Vidyā (see below), that ultimately renders the system of six *cakras* plus one located above the top of the head as the “universal” one. The *Ṣaṭcakra-Nirūpaṇa*’s translation was first published in *The Serpent Power* of 1919 under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon. For more on this text and its influence on Sivananda, see chapter 8.4.2.

<sup>87</sup> Some chapters of the *Kubjikāmatatantra* list only five *cakras*, as treated in Heilijgers-Seelen (1994).

of the “Southern Transmission” of Kaula Śaivism, a tradition that later came to be known as Śrī Vidyā (*ibid.*). Śrī Vidyā texts like the fifteenth-century *Śivasamhitā* further disseminated the six-*cakra* system. Although mentioned already in earlier Śaiva works, *kuṇḍalinī* is also part of the core teachings of the yoga system of the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (*ibid.*: 179). *Kuṇḍalinī* as Śakti, or female goddess, belonging to the Śaiva tantric devotional set, is said to travel upward through the spine and to unite with Śiva, her male counterpart, at the crown of the head (*ibid.*: 178-179).

In key moments of yogic practice, the central channel *suṣumnā* conduits various vital forces including *jīva*, *prāṇa*, *kuṇḍalinī*, and semen (*bindu*) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 179).<sup>88</sup> *Prāṇa* that normally flows in *idā* and *piṅgalā* may be directed to move in *suṣumnā*; alternatively, also the “down-breath” *apāna* can be forced upwards in the central channel (Birch 2011: 537-538).<sup>89</sup> Bringing together *prāṇa* and *apāna* is often referred to as the union of sun and moon (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 23, 129). Various features of the subtle body have “varying levels of empirical existence” and are thus addressed and manipulated either through physical techniques and/or visualisation (*ibid.*: 171). The details of various ways of manipulating the breath in relation to the subtle and physical body will be discussed in the following chapter sections.

### 3.3.2 *Prāṇāyāma* for Purification

Addressing here some preliminary *prāṇāyāma* techniques and their effects, it should be noted that *prāṇāyāma*, within Haṭhayoga, in its basic forms is mainly practised for expiatory and purificatory reasons. In this function it is connected to generating *tapas*, or an inner heat produced through ascetic practices (already mentioned, as stated above, in the *Yogasūtra* as well as in the *Manusmṛti*) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 129). Besides its expiatory function, *prāṇāyāma* also purifies the channels in the yogic (subtle) body, a process which is called *nāḍīśuddhi* or *nāḍīśodhana*. This function also makes *prāṇāyāma* a relevant prerequisite for tantric rituals, and several texts describe

<sup>88</sup> The female counterpart of semen is *rajas*, or menstrual blood. *Amṛtasiddhi* 7.8–9 states: “Know that *bindu* to be of two kinds, male and female. Seed is said to be the male (*pauruṣeya*) [*bindu*] and *rajas* is the *bindu* which is female (*strīsamudbhava*). As a result of their external union people are created. When they are united internally, one is declared a yogi” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 220). On the role of premodern *yoginīs*, see Mallinson & Singleton (2017: 53-54).

<sup>89</sup> According to Birch (2011: 537) the application of force occurs mainly in the context of *kuṇḍalinī*, *bindu*, and *apāna*, and not so much in the context of *prāṇa*, which flows upwards anyway. Force needs to be applied mainly for anything that normally moves downwards (*bindu*, *apāna*) or is dormant (*kuṇḍalinī*).



to perform three rounds of *prāṇāyāma* to purify the body before ritual (e.g., in the c. seventh-century *Svacchandatantra* 2.33ab) (*ibid.*: 130, 485, n. 18).

Some of the earliest references that mention *prāṇāyāma* to bring about *nāḍīśodhana* are found in the c. eleventh-century *Dharmaputrikā* and the thirteenth-century *Dattātreyayogaśāstra*. The *Dharmaputrikā* 4.39–80, a text which features numerous intricate details on breath control, prescribes alternate-nostril breathing as one of three techniques that bring about *nāḍīśodhana* (Barois 2020: 45).<sup>90</sup> In alternate-nostril breathing, which is prescribed for the same purpose in the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* 60–63ab, one inhales and exhales through one nostril while the respective other is closed, alternating the closing of the nostril after each inbreath (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 130, 155–156). The *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* teaches that after three months the channels will be purified and signs of success (*siddhis*) will arise, such as an increased digestive fire, leanness of the body, and also command over wild animals (*ibid.*: 156). While it may be conceived as a preliminary purificatory technique, the twelfth-century *Śāradātilaka* 25.16cd–18 gives more importance to alternate-nostril breathing practised in the ratio 1-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale) and equates it with *prāṇāyāma* itself (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).<sup>91</sup> Later Haṭha texts equally prescribe alternate-nostril breathing with considerably varying descriptions regarding the duration of each phase of the breath and the number of repetitions (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 129–131). It should be briefly noted that, in the modern period, alternate-nostril breathing is often termed *nāḍīśuddhi* or *nāḍīśodhana*, although, strictly speaking, this term describes either a *prerequisite* for or a *result* of a practice, not the practice itself.<sup>92</sup> Another purificatory technique that involves breath, which is generally not subsumed under *prāṇāyāma* but under the six cleansing processes (*ṣaṭkarma*) is *kapālabhāti* (lit., the “skull-shine”) (*ibid.*: 478). In *kapālabhāti*, one exerts rapid pushes from the lower abdomen to expel the breath through the nose. This practice reduces impurities, especially phlegm and mucus in the body, and prepares the yogi for breath control (*ibid.*: 49, 73).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The other two involve (1) manipulating *prāṇa* as the foremost of the five bodily winds, and (2) manipulating *samāna*, *apāna* or *udāna* to affect various parts of the body that are afflicted with impurities (Barois 2020: 45).

<sup>91</sup> On breath ratios and the principle of *mātrā*, see below.

<sup>92</sup> Alternatively, alternate-nostril breathing is termed *anulomaviloma*, a technical term that is applied in the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* 2.47, which in turn cites the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

<sup>93</sup> For a detailed discussion of *nāḍīśuddhi* in premodern texts, including a variety of techniques, see also Gharote et al. (2015 [2010]: 181–184, 197–206).

### 3.3.3 *Prāṇāyāma* as Breath Retention: The Eight *Kumbhakas* and *Kevalakumbhaka*

*Prāṇāyāma* in its most narrow and specific sense in Haṭhayoga becomes synonymous with the term *kumbhaka*, which means “breath retention”.<sup>94</sup> Breath retention, especially the holding of breath after inhalation, is the defining practice for *prāṇāyāma* in later Haṭha texts (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 131). It is practised in two forms: “accompanied breath retention” (*sahitakumbhaka*) and “unaccompanied” or “pure breath retention” (*kevalakumbhaka*). *Sahitakumbhakas*<sup>95</sup> are “accompanied” by inhalation and exhalation, and they are preliminary to *kevalakumbhaka*. The thirteenth-century *Gorakṣaśataka* is the first text that describes four *kumbhakas*: the solar (*sūryā*), the victorious (*ujjāyī*), the cool (*śītalī*), and the bellows (*bhastrī*) (*Gorakṣaśataka* 30–49b; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 157–158). The *Haṭhapradīpikā* adds four more, which results in the encyclopaedic eight *kumbhakas*: The whistler (*sītkārī*), the buzzer (*bhrāmarī*), the swoon (*mūrcchā*), and the floater (*plāvinī*) (*Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.54–70; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 162–163).<sup>96</sup> They bear the common feature of holding the breath after inhalation, but they differ, somewhat paradoxically, in the manner of inhalation or exhalation (and not, as one might suppose, in a specific way to retain the breath) (Mallinson 2011: 777).

The following table to list the eight Haṭhayogic *kumbhakas* substantially draws on Mallinson (2011: 777), which describes them in a concise manner and provides a useful overview:<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> This denotes conscious or voluntary breath retention which is therefore entirely different from unconscious holding of the breath that happens in most people’s ordinary breathing patterns.

<sup>95</sup> For the sake of conciseness, I use the term *kumbhakas* (plural) to denote four or eight varieties of *sahitakumbhakas* that are described in the *Gorakṣaśataka* and the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (see below). In contrast, the term *kumbhaka* (singular) is applied for the generic meaning of breath retention. It should be noted that there is no plural form of *kevalakumbhaka*.

<sup>96</sup> *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.44 terms *sūrya* “*sūryabhedana*” and *bhastrī* “*bhastrikā*” (Digambarji & Kokaje 1970: 54).

<sup>97</sup> A detailed discussion of the eight *kumbhakas* as they evolved over time in premodern yoga is beyond the scope of this study. It should however be briefly noted that at least some of the practices found various interpretations. For example, Gharote & Devnath (2017 [2001]: 89–90) discuss a variety of approaches to *bhastrikā* as variously prescribed in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* with ten chapters (eighteenth-century), and Brahmānanda’s *Jyotsnā* of c. 1830. The fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* 6.44 combines *śītalī* with *khecārīmudrā*, as is further discussed in chapter 8.5.2. Regarding *mūrcchā*, which is here described to induce fainting, Jason Birch has noted that it was more likely that the practice was meant to induce a tranquil state of mind than actual fainting (Birch & Hargreaves 2020). While most premodern Haṭha texts from the *Haṭhapradīpikā* onwards list these eight *kumbhakas* with little variation as to their number, the nineteenth-century *Kumbhakapaddhati* explains a total of 57 *kumbhakas* (Gharote & Devnath 2016 [2000]: x, xiii).

<i>Sūryā or Sūryabhedana</i> (the “solar”)	Inhale through the solar, or right, nostril, hold the breath, and then exhale through the lunar, or left, nostril.
<i>Ujjāyī</i> (the “victorious”)	Inhale through both nostrils while making a rasping sound with the palate and epiglottis, hold the breath, and then exhale through the left nostril.
<i>Śitalī</i> (the “cool”)	Inhale through the rolled tongue and exhale through both nostrils.
<i>Bhastrī or Bhastrikā</i> (the “bellows”)	Breathe in and out repeatedly and rapidly through both nostrils before slowly inhaling through the right nostril, holding the breath, and exhaling through the left nostril.
<i>Śītkārī</i> (the “whistler”)	Make a whistling sound while inhaling through the mouth. Exhale through the nostrils. The yogi becomes like a second god of love.
<i>Bhrāmarī</i> (the “buzzer”)	Make a buzzing sound while inhaling and exhaling; this brings about bliss.
<i>Mūrcchā</i> (the “swoon”)	At the end of inhalation, apply <i>jālandharabandha</i> (see below) and then breathe out slowly, bringing oneself to the point of fainting.
<i>Plāvinī</i> (the “floater”)	Fill up the abdomen with air in order to float on water.

FIGURE 3: THE EIGHT *KUMBHAKAS* AS OUTLINED IN MALLINSON (2011: 777).

The *kumbhakas* affect the physical body by reducing various impurities, but they also act on the subtle body by guiding *prāṇa* or *apāna* in the central channel, and especially *bhastrikā* is said to lead to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (Mallinson 2011: 777). For steadying the breath and manoeuvring it into the central channel certain locks (*bandhas*) should be applied. Of these, the most important are the root lock or contraction of the perineum (*mūlabandha*), the pulling in and lengthening of the abdominal muscles (*uḍḍiyanabandha*),<sup>98</sup> and the chin lock or pressing the chin to the chest (*jālandharabandha*) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 240-242).<sup>99</sup>

Once these yogic “hydraulics” for manipulating the breath are accomplished (White 1996: 72, 253-254), the yogi will, quite spontaneously, experience *kevalakumbhaka*. The rich descriptions of the eight *kumbhakas* contrast with the rather

<sup>98</sup> “It is the *bandha* by means of which the breath flies up (*uḍḍiyate*) into the *Suṣumnā*, which is why yogis call it *uḍḍiyāna*” (*Gorakṣaśataka* as quoted in Mallinson 2012: 269-270).

<sup>99</sup> All three are mentioned in the *Gorakṣaśataka* (Mallinson 2012: 269-270). Although *bandhas* as well as *mudrās* are essential for many *prāṇāyāma* practices, they are not part of the core analysis in this study. For notes on the combined practice of *prāṇāyāma*, *mudrā*, *bandha*, and *āsana* in premodern yoga see Birch (2011: 547, n. 141).

scarce elaborations on *kevalakumbhaka*, but the latter nevertheless became the ultimate practice of breath control in medieval Haṭhayoga. *Kevalakumbhaka*, according to the *Dattātreya yogaśāstra*, is “spontaneously retaining the breath for as long as one wishes, with no regard for inhalation or exhalation” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 131). Its descriptions never disclose a step-by-step instruction because it appears to *happen* after the yogi has mastered the *kumbhaka*s, which are more deliberately performed practices. As has been shown, medieval compilers such as Śivānanda and Vidyāraṇya equate Patañjali’s fourth type of *prāṇāyāma* (*caturtha*) with *kevalakumbhaka*, which is said to transcend the other three. *Kevalakumbhaka* can further be conceived as the bridge from the yogic physical practices such as *āsana* and the deliberate forms of *prāṇāyāma* to the more meditative states leading to *samādhi*, which is described, among other synonyms, as Rājayoga (lit. “king-yoga”) in *Haṭhapradīpikā* 4.3–4 (Birch 2013: 407).

### 3.3.4 *Mātrā* and Mantra in *Prāṇāyāma* Practice

As part of manipulating the breath, premodern texts often prescribe following certain time units (*mātrā*) in all phases of the breath (*pūraka*, *kumbhaka*, *recaka*). However, Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* can also be accomplished without *mātrā*, in which case the breath is held according to the yogi’s capacity (*yathāśakti*) (e.g., *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.59; Thomi 1993: 48). The concept of *mātrā* hails from the usage of *prāṇāyāma* in a ritualistic setting described in tantric Vaiṣṇava texts such as the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* and also in the twelfth-century tantric *Śāradātilaka* 25.16cd–18 (Birch & Hargreaves 2020). *Mātrā* in combination with alternate-nostril breathing and by meditating on the letters of *om* (A-U-M) is mentioned in the *Yogakāṇḍa*-section of the twelfth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.10–16.<sup>100</sup> This section instructs the yogi to inhale (*pūraka*) for 16 *mātrās*, to hold the breath (*kumbhaka*) for 64 *mātrās*, and to exhale (*recaka*) for 32 *mātrās*, which results in the ratio of 1-4-2 for inhalation, retention, and exhalation, respectively. Later, this ratio enters texts of the Brahmanical canonical tradition like Śivānanda’s seventeenth-century *Yogacintāmaṇi*, which comments on Pātañjalayoga, the *Yogayājñavalkya*, and prescribes alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio of 1-4-2.<sup>101</sup> It also appears in the eighteenth-century *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.38–46 (Thomi 1993: 46–47) and in the nineteenth and twentieth century it was widely accepted that *mātrā* is

<sup>100</sup> I wish to thank Jason Birch (personal conversation, Aug 2, 2018) for hinting at the relationship of *mātrā* and *prāṇāyāma* that originated in ritual settings and for providing me with several references of Sanskrit texts, of which some are mentioned below.

<sup>101</sup> Jason Birch in a personal conversation (Aug 2, 2018).

an innate part of Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*. Although this ratio is a highly popular one, different texts and traditions also suggest others.<sup>102</sup> Also, the length of the time unit (*mātrā*) varies. Depending on the source, one *mātrā* may be the duration of the twinkling of an eye, the pronunciation of a short syllable like *om*, or circling the kneecap with one's hand (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 148). Several texts, following the principle of *mātrā*, furthermore differentiate between a threefold hierarchy of *prāṇāyāma* defined by the duration of the breath retention, for instance, the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 5.55–56 (*ibid.*: 131, 164). Some of the earliest texts to mention this threefold hierarchy are probably the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 36.13–16 and the *Mṛgendratāntra* 27c–28b (both composed between the sixth and the tenth century CE), and the latter calls these three states inferior, intermediate, and superior (*ibid.*: 148, Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

Besides the application of *mātrā*, *prāṇāyāma* can be practised with or without mantra. As has been shown, the syllable *om* can be used as *mātrā* (e.g., *Gorakṣasāta* as quoted in the seventeenth-century *Yuktabhavadēva* 7.22; Birch & Hargreaves 2020; *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* 3.1–17; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 269). If *prāṇāyāma* is practised with mantra (and often in connection with visualisation), it is “full”, or “pregnant” (*sagarbha*); if practised without mantra, it is “empty” (*agarbha*), as suggested in the *Mṛgendratāntra* 28c–29b (*ibid.*: 133, 148).<sup>103</sup> As has been mentioned above, the link between recitation and breath control is ancient, and the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* had already established it. In tantric texts, *sagarbha prāṇāyāma* is superior to *agarbha prāṇāyāma*, but Haṭhayogic texts show some ambivalence towards reciting complex Vedic or tantric mantras during *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 134). Instead, they often use the Vedic syllable *om*,<sup>104</sup> or prefer to rely on the *ajapa* (“unuttered”) mantra, the silent *haṃsa* mantra which is said to be silently “recited” with each in- and out-breath (*ibid.*). Because the out-breath is said to produce the sound “*ha*” and the inbreath “*sa*”, one breath-cycle produces the noun *haṃsa* (“goose” or “gander”) which is considered to be a symbol of breath (*ibid.*: 263). However, if it is recited repeatedly, *haṃsa* turns, by reversing the syllables, into the Upaniṣadic dictum *so 'ham* (“I am that”) (*ibid.*).<sup>105</sup> Originally rooted in Śaiva tantra, the *haṃsa* mantra is mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 28–30 as *Ajapā Gāyatrī*, where it is described as a most

<sup>102</sup> According to Yogendra (1940: 40, n. 30), the ratio 6-8-5 is found in the *Gorakṣasamhitā* 2.3.

<sup>103</sup> The *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 5.47–57 teaches the same idea calling it *sabīja* and *nirbīja*, i.e., with seed (*bīja*) mantra or without (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 163-164).

<sup>104</sup> As in Pātañjalayoga, it is the only Vedic mantra applied (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 494, n. 4).

<sup>105</sup> *So 'ham* results from a *sandhi* (melting of phonemes) between *saḥ* (“that/he”) and *aham* (“I”).

unpretentious way to bestow liberation (*ibid.*: 263, 273). The seventeenth-century *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.79–91 teaches a combination of *haṃsa* and *kevalakumbhaka*, which helps the yogi achieve omnipotence (*ibid.*: 164–165).

So far, the most important technicalities of Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* have been discussed. Since *prāṇāyāma* is not an isolated technique but interwoven with the larger conceptual and practical framework of Haṭhayoga, some additional factors that relate to *prāṇāyāma* should be mentioned in the following. Of these, the most salient ones are *prāṇāyāma*'s relation to other auxiliaries of yoga, *prāṇa*'s link to the mind, and *prāṇāyāma* to bestow *siddhis* and final liberation.

### 3.3.5 *Prāṇāyāma* in Relation to Other Auxiliaries of Yoga

*Prāṇāyāma* is often directly linked to other auxiliaries of yoga. First of all, many texts mention that a steady posture (*āsana*) has to be acquired before *prāṇāyāma* can be practised (e.g., *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.1; Digambarji & Kokaje 1970: 35). Mallinson and Singleton (2017: 283) describe *pratyāhāra* (“withdrawal”), *dhāraṇā* (“fixation”) and *dhyāna* (“meditation”) as a “continuum of practice” that leads the Haṭha yogi to liberation. *Prāṇāyāma* is sometimes conceived as an equivalent of certain stages of *pratyāhāra* or *dhāraṇā*, aligning *prāṇāyāma* with the higher states of yoga (*ibid.*: 284–285, 287). There are also texts that subordinate *pratyāhāra* under *prāṇāyāma*; for example, Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* 5.8 (eleventh century) classifies *pratyāhāra* as the fourth of seven stages of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 285). Moreover, *samādhi*, as the most advanced yogic practice, is sometimes described as a multiple of *prāṇāyāma* (in terms of the length of which the breath is held), for example, in the thirteenth-century *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 94–95 (*ibid.*: 287). In other words, *samādhi* is then conceived as an extension of *prāṇāyāma*, and, in turn, *prāṇāyāma* is sometimes presented as being the best method of *samādhi* (*ibid.*: 326). It is worth noting that *samādhi* has prismatic meanings in premodern yoga contexts, ranging from *samādhi* as synonymous with yoga itself as in Pātañjalayoga, to *samādhi* as an auxiliary practice in tantric texts (*ibid.*: 324–327). In Haṭha contexts, *samādhi* is a kind of altered state in which the yogi becomes insensible to external stimuli and, depending on the respective metaphysical background of his practice, immersed in the union of Śiva and Śakti or another form of (deific) absorption (*ibid.*).

*Prāṇāyāma* in relation to *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā* techniques deserves special attention here. Besides describing certain *kumbhakas* and purificatory processes involving the breath, the texts often proceed with engaging *prāṇa* in withdrawal and

fixation techniques. *Prāṇa* seems to adopt a meaning here that could be translated as “sensation” (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 11-12), and the texts often advise moving *prāṇa* through certain channels or body parts during *pratyāhāra* or *dhāraṇā*. For example, the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.74 as well as the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* 7.6–31 (both are Vaiṣṇava yoga texts) mention a practice of *pratyāhāra* wherein the yogi mentally moves *prāṇa* through a sequence of eighteen vital points (*marman*) in the body (Qvarnström & Birch 2012: 374; Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 16-18; Birch 2018: 25).<sup>106</sup> Additionally, *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 4.1–16 teaches a *dhāraṇā* technique, in which *prāṇa* together with a syllable and the visualisation of a deity is fixated on one of the five elements (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 287, 301-302). Moreover, *dhāraṇā* often denotes mentally holding *prāṇa* in some body part associated with one of the five elements (Birch 2011: 548, n. 146). The techniques thus conceived often adopt a terminology that involves both *prāṇa* and *dhāraṇā*, such as *prāṇādīdhāraṇā* or *prāṇadhāraṇā* (*Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.32; Gharote 2017 [2003]: 16; Birch & Hargreaves 2020). It seems that sensory withdrawing, the rotation of one’s awareness, and holding *prāṇa* in certain body areas or vital points is not necessarily connected with a certain form of breath control during these practices, although *prāṇāyāma* probably precedes these techniques. Accordingly, *nāḍīśuddhi*, in tantric contexts also referred to as *prāṇajaya* (“conquest of the breath”), may have been a prerequisite for these practices, because once the breath is conquered, it can be moved in the body wherever the yogi wants (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 133). In any case, *prāṇa* seems to be understood here in a broader sense as a vital current flowing in the body, which was the object of concentration in these practices.

### 3.3.6 *Prāṇa* and the Mind

In both premodern and modern yoga, the connection between the breath and the mind is a highly relevant frame for *prāṇāyāma*. As has been mentioned, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, one of the oldest Upaniṣads, already established a powerful analogy that links the breath and the mind. This connection seems to underpin notions of breath control in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and in later texts that cultivate certain mental and meditative states through *prāṇāyāma* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 132). *Prāṇāyāma*

<sup>106</sup> The same technique and description of the vital points is also mentioned in the c. ninth-century *Vimānārcanākalpa*; the *Kṣurikopaniṣat*, one of the Yoga Upaniṣads written before the fourteenth century, mentions a similar form of *pratyāhāra* practice; *Yuktabhavadēva* 8.17–40 quotes from *Yogayājñavalkya* 7.6–31 explaining sensory withdrawal (Birch 2018: 25, 27, 34, n. 23). For a discussion of this form of application of *prāṇa* in modern yoga, see chapter 8.1.1; chapter 8.2.1.

is used to still the mind, and the temporary cessation of breath reciprocally brings the mind's fluctuations to an intermissive halt (e.g., in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.2; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 329, 351-352). In turn, *prāṇa* or the breath is conceived as a symptom of the mind's fluctuations. Depending on their respective foci, different types of yoga stress the stopping of the breath as in Haṭhayoga texts, or the cessation of the mind's modifications. For example, the *Amanaska* (c. twelfth century) postulates the superiority of the effortless Rājayoga, which is the cultivation of a tranquil mind, over the “forceful” Haṭhayoga that attempts to control the mind through the breath (Birch 2011: 527; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 329). A third component added to *prāṇa* and the mind is semen (*bindu*). The innate connection between these is first mentioned in the eleventh-century *Amṛtasiddhi* 7.16–20, an idea subsequently purported in most Haṭha texts (Mallinson 2020: 415; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 220-221). A restless mind results in the instability of the breath and the semen, and to pacify one component of the triad means to pacify all (*ibid.*: 181, 221). Steadying the breath and the mind is so central to the yogic soteriological agenda that certain texts state that controlling the mind through the breath leads directly to liberation (e.g., *Gorakṣaśataka* 8–10; *ibid.*: 127, 132-133, 157).

### 3.3.7 *Prāṇāyāma* for *Siddhis* and for Liberation

In yogic and tantric contexts, the acquisition of magical powers (*siddhis*)<sup>107</sup> often lies, so to speak, on the path to liberation (chapter 2.2). Though in most cases the final goal is liberation, *siddhis* are occasionally stated to be an end in themselves. For example, in teleological classifications of Śaiva tantric systems it is fully legitimate that an ascetic seeks liberation while a householder aspires to attain yogic powers (Vasudeva 2012: 271).<sup>108</sup> As a third option, liberation and *siddhis* are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as is evidenced, for example, in the fact that *kaivalya*, the highest goal of *Pātañjalayoga*, is listed among other *siddhis* (*Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 3.50; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 361). The *Yogasūtra* lists eight magical powers, two of them resulting from the mastery of two bodily winds, namely *udāna* and *samāna* (*Yogasūtra* 3.39–40; Chapple 2012: 238). The thirteenth-century Haṭhayogic *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* 75–83 mentions various *siddhis* attained through *kevalakumbhaka*: It teaches a fourfold series of signs of success, which are sweating, trembling, leaping like a frog, and

<sup>107</sup> There are numerous other names for supernatural powers used in the texts, see Mallinson & Singleton (2017: 357, n.1).

<sup>108</sup> This distinction is also referred to as *mokṣa/mukti* (in the sense of asceticism and other-worldliness) versus *bhoga/bhukti* (in the sense of this-worldliness) (Vasudeva 2012: 271).



levitation in the lotus pose (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 156). Then, the power over wild animals and exceptional beauty attracting the other sex ensues (*ibid.*: 156-157). The four signs of success are an oft-quoted theme in later texts, for example, in the *Śivasamhitā* 3.46–47 (Mallinson 2007b: 51). Yogis having acquired various *siddhis*, especially levitation, is a theme resurfacing in folk tales of vernacular traditions until the modern period. In echoing the material of the yogic texts, these folk tales of wrestlers, fakirs, and Nāth yogis alike add to the theme of supernatural feats acquired through *prāṇāyāma* (Green 2008: 306, 310; Alter 1992: 323-324).

Having no consensus in regard to its definition across traditions and texts, the final stage of yoga is variously referred to as *mokṣa* or *mukti* (“liberation”) in Haṭhayoga, or in Pātañjalayoga as *kaivalya* (“isolation”), as chapter 2.2 has explained. *Jīvanmukti* or liberation-in-life is another important concept that gained currency in the medieval period. Regarding the definition of the final goal in “*haṭha*-inflected eightfold yoga”, Mallinson and Singleton (2017: 396) observe that at the eve of colonialism “we see a situation in which one path leads to many goals”. *Prāṇāyāma* – at times described as directly leading to liberation – and *prāṇa*-related techniques are linked in various ways to the attainment of this variety of goals. Several texts across yogic traditions, e.g., the *Yogabhāṣya* 2.50 and some tantric texts mention the “eruption” (*udghāta*) of *prāṇa* from the navel to the head; as the c. seventh-century *Svacchandatantra* 5.54 explains, several *udghātas* can pierce the knots (*granthis*) by which the yogi becomes Śiva (*ibid.*: 132). Maybe the most relevant of these techniques of bestowing final liberation is what is nowadays often translated as “yogic suicide”, or *utkrānti*, already mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* 12.305.1–7 (*ibid.*: 401-402, 423). Here, the yogi moves the vital principle (*prāṇa*, in this case often equated with *jīva*) up through the central channel, projecting it out of the top of the head, or the cranial vault (*brahmarandhra*) (*ibid.*: 401-402). It should be noted that this is not a desperate act, but rather a form of control over one’s body that the yogi has aimed for during his physical earthbound life (Barois 2020: 47, n. 127). A variety of tantric and yogic texts prescribe the yogi to exit the physical body by *utkrānti* to attain final liberation (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 361).

### 3.3.8 Summary: *Prāṇāyāma* in Haṭhayoga

This chapter section on Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* has traversed a variety of themes related to the practice. Haṭhayoga suggests that *prāṇāyāma* has various effects on the yogi. Sometimes viewed as preparatory or even superfluous (as in the *Amanaska*), it

can also bestow liberation. Between the preparatory function of purifying the *nāḍīs* (*nāḍīsuddhi/nāḍīsodhana*), at times conceived as “conquest of the breath” (*prāṇajaya*), and the final goal (*mokṣa*; *jīvanmukti*) lies a range of possible benefits. In the *Haṭhapradīpikā* the eight *kumbhaka*s are described to have curative functions for certain ailments. As to its functions in the context of religious practice, *prāṇāyāma* stills the mind and thereby bridges the physical practices and the meditative states of yoga. Covering a vast array of potential effects, *prāṇāyāma* is indeed a crucial technology in Haṭhayoga, standing at the heart of the yogi’s progress on the path to liberation. *Siddhis* attained or not, the accomplished yogi will leave his physical body through the cranial vault with no grey hair on his head.

### 3.4 A Note on Late-Medieval Amalgamations of Advaita Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Yoga<sup>109</sup>

It should be briefly noted that medieval Advaita Vedānta became an important philosophical haven also for the yoga traditions.<sup>110</sup> By the late medieval period it started to incorporate Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga, and several authors reframed yogic practices within Advaita Vedānta. Already around the fourteenth century, the Advaita Vedāntic *Aparokṣānubhūti* incorporated the eight auxiliaries of Pātañjalayoga in a fifteenfold system of Rājayoga (Birch 2013: 406-407).<sup>111</sup> Interaction and adaption across sectarian boundaries on the issue of yoga is also evidenced in the aforementioned fourteenth-century *Jīvanmuktiviveka* by Vidyāraṇya (Madaio 2018). Another case in point is the sixteenth-century Vijñānabhikṣu, who aimed to reconcile dualistic Sāṃkhya with the (for him superior) Vedāntic viewpoint in his commentary to the *Sāṃkhyaparavacasūtra* (probably compiled in the fourteenth century), thereby triggering a renaissance of Sāṃkhya in the late-medieval period (Larson 1979: 152; Keith 1918: 101-102; Nicholson 2010: 203). In his *Yogasārasaṃgraha*, Vijñānabhikṣu furthermore quotes from the fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* as well as from the *Yogasūtra* (Jha 1894). Other examples, equally written in Brahmanical contexts, are the abovementioned *Yogacintāmaṇi* of Śivānanda and the seventeenth-century *Yuktabhavadēva* of Bhavadēva, which in addition to Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga

<sup>109</sup> This chapter section is based on Kraler (2021).

<sup>110</sup> For an account of the Advaita Vedānta school founded by Śaṅkara (c. eight century), see Flood (1996: 239-243).

<sup>111</sup> The *Aparokṣānubhūti* was ascribed to Ādiśaṅkara, the founder of the Advaita Vedānta school, but there is evidence that the text is younger than the ninth century, probably composed between the twelfth and fourteenth century (Birch 2013: 407, 423, n. 32). For a detailed discussion of Rājayoga, see Birch (2013).

contain references to the Upaniṣads, the *Dharmaśāstra*, and the epics (Birch 2011: 548, n. 147). These syncretisms then influenced the commentator of the South Indian recension of the Yoga Upaniṣads that likewise integrate Haṭha- and Rājayoga within Advaita Vedānta (Birch 2018: 8, 10, n. 42).

The amalgamation found in these Vedāntic texts is seminal for the emergence of certain strands of modern yoga that claim to be primarily Vedāntic (Burley 2007: 34). Especially Swami Vivekananda appears to use these earlier philosophico-practical syntheses for his own explications of yoga. Vivekananda was, for instance, aware of Vijñānabhikṣu's endeavour, and he appraises that of Vidyāranya, who integrated the teachings of Patañjali and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* into Advaita Vedānta (Madaio 2017: 4). In a similar vein as Birch (2013) and Madaio (2017), I therefore argue that it is important to see Vivekananda's approach to yoga – seminal for other subsequent yoga pioneers – as part of a long tradition of adaption and integration within Advaita related movements (Kraler 2021). Other yoga pioneers like Swami Sivananda were inspired to highlight yoga as a universalist endeavour, a notion which was comfortably seated on the shoulders of these late-medieval amalgamations.

### 3.5 Summary: Premodern *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* as a Cultural and Religious Capital for Modern Yoga

*Prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* carry tremendous cultural and religious capital, lying at the base of modern yoga practices. Some Upaniṣads equate *prāṇa* with the highest ontological principles (Connolly 1992: 61-67). Indeed, in the pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic period and still maintained in some Upaniṣads, *prāṇa* is a fundamental principle from which the universe springs and that constitutes the body's vital functions, its sensory faculties, and human existence in general (*ibid.*: 96). Though having lost its prestigious position during and after the Upaniṣadic period, older strata of such a reading of *prāṇa* tend to reappear in tantric traditions (*ibid.*: 165). Additionally, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that became influential in the medieval period defined *prāṇa* not just as the *movement* of respiratory air in and outside the body, but as a subtle *vibrating entity* that was entirely dependent on the fluctuations – and ideation – of the mind, and vice versa (Zysk 1993: 210-211). Such readings of *prāṇa* indeed foreshadow Vivekananda's idea of *prāṇa* as force-substance which is most intimately linked to the mind. All these levels point, as modern yoga scholar Joseph Alter has noted, at the importance of *prāṇa* “in understanding both the structure of supramental physiology and the body's

manipulation through practice” because it “quite literally, cuts through the body and can influence both that which is subtle and that which is gross” (Alter 2004: 58).

To summarise the various functions of *prāṇa* as used from the late Vedic texts onwards, it is helpful to differentiate between three basic meanings of *prāṇa*. While this categorisation does not reflect the complexity of the term in various eras of Indian thought, within the perspective of modern yoga, it is sufficient to speak of *prāṇa*

- (1) denoting a major cosmic force that creates and sustains all living beings as a “vital principle”;
- (2) in its function associated with the phenomenon of respiration as “breath”;
- (3) in its function as the foremost of the five or ten *prāṇas*, as “bodily wind” denoting inhalation or exhalation.

Regarding the first two, I also use the phrase (1) *prāṇa*-as-vitality as opposed to (2) *prāṇa*-as-breath, a useful terminology that I have adopted from Zoehrer (2020). For Vivekananda and several subsequent yoga pioneers, *prāṇa*-as-vitality implies an inherent vitalism that also underpins (yogic-occult) theories of the cosmos and the human embeddedness therein (chapter 5). In these contexts, which form a major part of my analysis, *prāṇa* is the centrepiece of a specific doctrine, and I therefore also speak of it as a “vitalistic principle” (as opposed to *prāṇa* as a “vital principle” that is not tied to a specific doctrine).

It should be noted that *prāṇa* has been associated with additional functions roughly since the 1880s, such as conveying life force to others through hands-on or distant healing, which seem to be mostly derived from mesmerism and related forms of alternative healing. In this function, which appears to be a modern product, *prāṇa* is referred to as *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent (e.g., chapter 8.1.1; chapter 8.2.2). Whatever the weighting of *prāṇa* in its traditional and modern aspects, its rich cultural and religious capital moreover lies in its function of bridging various practical and theoretical discourses. This potential also came to fruition in the early developments of modern yoga’s theory and practices. *Prāṇa*’s polyvalent formulations lingered in Indian thought for many centuries before modern yoga pioneers started to chisel the term according to influential modern ideas. The term *prāṇa* was elastic and at the same time tangible enough to be highlighted by modern yoga pioneers – and it was tangible through *prāṇāyāma*.

*Prāṇāyāma*, as one of the central practices of Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga that could directly lead to *samādhi* or even liberation, is certainly charged with

religious capital. Although *prāṇāyāma* is the main technique to harness *prāṇa*, its relevance is maintained in certain techniques of *pratyāhāra*, and *dhāraṇā*, as has been shown. Here, the cultivation of *prāṇa* through breath is used as a key to advanced meditational practices. Hence, *prāṇāyāma*'s capital lies in its manifold premodern techniques and their promise of soteriological progress as well as preliminary aims like physical purification and well-being. Like its central notion *prāṇa*, *prāṇāyāma* is located at the threshold between the physical and the subtle body, involving the tangible and the imaginative, the breath and the mind.

In modern yoga, *prāṇāyāma* becomes a container for several premodern and modern practices such as the eight *kumbhakas*, rhythmic breathing, deep breathing, and the emphasis on the threefold division of breath space. In this plurality of forms, the emphasis on breath *retention* as found in Haṭhayoga is somewhat lessened. Likewise, there are numerous interpretations of the four types of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma*, since the respective *sūtras* leave much space for interpretation. Thus, the notion of *prāṇāyāma* as a quite well-defined practice in Haṭhayoga appears to become blurry, untamed, and equally polyvalent as *prāṇa* within discourses of modern yoga.

## 4 CONTEXTS OF YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION: THE IMPACT OF VARIOUS (TRANSNATIONAL) SOCIO-CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS NETWORKS

This chapter provides an overview of the socio-cultural and religious networks that would prefigure important notions of yogic breath cultivation during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>112</sup> I utilise the term “network” to denote a loosely knit organisational structure, but one that also allows for a higher degree of organisation. This term is deliberately broad to encompass movements with several more or less organised centres (and their ties to each other). A good example of such a loosely organised movement is the transnational physical culture movement treated in this chapter. However, in the case of religious or occult societies like the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society, or the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (all treated here), it is equally apt to speak of a dynamic “cultic milieu” (Campbell 1972). The cultic milieu enabled religious seekers to learn from a variety of doctrines. It typically contains a plurality of institutions, each of which may be organised hierarchically and with centralised structures. Within these, several “organisations”, “associations”, or “societies” (in Hindi/Bengali: “*samāṇ*”) relied on their own journals and presses as publishing organs and they disseminated their teachings as part of an educational programme. As will be shown, several protagonists described in this chapter were engaged in various organisations – and created loose ties between them, thereby contributing to a larger network to disseminate ideas without having a clearly defined organisational centre. The transnational flow of ideas enabled the emergence of new practices. Thereby, exchange between various agents (“nodes”) and their way of interacting (“ties”, “edges”) is crucial (Newman 2018 [2010]: 47; Wasserman & Faust 1994: 4). Such ties were text-based interactions (including writing texts, reading them, and correspondences)<sup>113</sup> as well as grasping new ideas and practices from direct encounters like dyadic meetings and group sessions between (travelling) teachers and students.

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<sup>112</sup> My usage of the term “network” is derived from outlines of social network theories (Wasserman & Faust 1994; Bearman et al. 2003; Newman 2018 [2010]: 47-88).

<sup>113</sup> A very loose connection to a network might be the mere reading of a book written by a person that represents a particular idea, e.g., a book by an American Delsartist. Such a “tie” to the network can, however, be neglected, since it has no rebound effect on the network itself if the interaction is entirely “asymmetrical”.

As to the networks described in this chapter, I treat the Hindu reform movements known as the Brahmo and Arya Samaj (chapter 4.1); nineteenth-century occultism (chapter 4.2); in particular theosophy (chapter 4.3);<sup>114</sup> and the networks of transnational physical culture (chapter 4.4). While all these organisations or networks and the ideas that they employ have deeper historical roots, the order applied here is not strictly chronological since they were often operating parallel to each other. As already alluded to, to some extent, these networks permeated each other. For example, the early Theosophical Society was institutionally linked to the Arya Samaj, and Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the latter, was also the formal head of the Theosophical Society between 1878 and 1882.<sup>115</sup> Another example is that occultism started to intermingle with the emerging physical culture scene in the 1880s. Moving from meso-local developments in Bengal and India to trans-local occult and physical culture movements, the most relevant contributions made by these networks to yogic breath cultivation will be outlined. Some of these contributions reach back to the eighteenth century (in the case of Franz Anton Mesmer and Emanuel Swedenborg), but the main discussion focuses on the time frame between c. 1850 and 1890 – which I understand as the formation phase of early modern yoga (chapter 2.1).

As generally in Part I, I will consider here only developments that primed the discussion of *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation in early modern yoga. In doing so, I dwell on the most influential ideas of the precursors that impacted first-generation modern yoga pioneers. An important line of transmission runs from the Brahmo Samaj and theosophy to Vivekananda, who echoed several themes posited by these organisations. Other sections that treat nineteenth-century occultism as well as physical culture prepare the investigation of the influence of American contributors (Stebbins and Atkinson/Ramacharaka). The ideas and practices forged by these first-generation protagonists of yogic breath cultivation swiftly entered the emerging modern yoga hubs and, from there, became widely popular (chapter 5; chapter 8.1; chapter 8.2). Ideas and practices of physical culture, however, also directly rebounded on second-generation yoga pioneers that entered the stage in the 1920s, for example, Kuvalayananda, Yogendra, and Sundaram (chapter 8.3; chapter 8.5.1). In this complex

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<sup>114</sup> All mentions of theosophy in this thesis refer to the Theosophical Society established by Helena P. Blavatsky and Henry S. Olcott, as distinct from the Christian theosophy of the sixteenth-century German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) and his followers.

<sup>115</sup> The joint movement was at that time referred to as the “Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart” (Baier 2009: 305).

networking of ideas, the meso-local developments in Bengal – which, however, had pan-Indian effects – are first carved out here.

#### 4.1 The Bengali Epicentre: Samajes, Tantra, and Theosophy in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta and India

What has at times been called “the Bengali epicentre” (Green 2008: 289), meaning the seismic cultural renewal that first centred in Greater Bangla and then spread all over India, had a far-reaching effect on modern yoga’s development. While political factors of nationhood are the main subject of chapter 6.2, here I will focus on ideas that emerged within the landscape of Hindu reform movements and featured the superiority of Hindu religion understood as both “universal” and “rational”. It was in this context that the earliest formulations of modern yoga ideas and practices germinated. With regard to the socio-cultural and reforming religious milieus, I will discuss the late-nineteenth-century Brahmo Samaj under the leadership of the eclectic and Anglophilic Keshab Chandra Sen, who was an inspiring role model for Vivekananda (De Michelis 2004: 87, 100). The Arya Samaj founded by Dayananda Sarasvati in Maharashtra in 1875, which propagated a Vedic religion and *prāṇāyāma* within ritual settings, will also be addressed. However, it must be kept in mind that the formation of the Brahmo and Arya Samaj is only the tip of the iceberg of a vast network constituting a newly emerging reformist community.

It should be noted that the Bengali religious landscape was transnationally informed, encompassing such diverse currents as tantra, aspects of “Western esotericism”,<sup>116</sup> spiritualism, and theosophy. Bengal was a stronghold of tantra, especially in its expressive worship of Kali, the fertility-bestowing but also cruel giver-and-taker-of-life goddess. One of the most distinguished saints of nineteenth-century India is the Bengali Kali-devotee Paramahansa Ramakrishna, the guru of Swami Vivekananda. Although mainly following a tantric form of *śakti* worship, Ramakrishna explored several religious doctrines and hence is often considered a

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<sup>116</sup> The term “Western esotericism” was coined by Faivre (1994) to refer to a conglomerate of theories and practices rooted, among other sources, in the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* (one of its late collections being compiled in the second or third century CE) and adopted by (Italian) Renaissance thinkers, which then re-emerged in various modern alternative-religious movements such as Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Swedenborgianism, mesmerism and theosophy (Faivre 1994: 51, 58). “Western esotericism” was subsequently established as a definite field of study by Wouter Hanegraaff. However, recent developments in the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE) have increasingly challenged the notion of “Western” in “Western esotericism” due to its (geographical) vagueness and ideological connotations. For a critical reading of the term, see Granholm (2014) and Strube (2021b).



religious polymath who at least superficially dived into several major religious currents. The influence of tantra on modern yoga's *prāṇāyāma* was not extensive, although it clearly played a role.<sup>117</sup>

As for the occult and esoteric undercurrents, Calcutta and the other main centres of colonial India, Bombay and Madras, had established a distinguished occult milieu by the end of the nineteenth century that had adopted central strands of Western esotericism. Freemasonry (purporting partly secular and partly esoteric ideas) had been taking root since the mid-eighteenth century in Calcutta, and in the late nineteenth century it became fashionable to be a member of a masonic lodge. Mesmerism was already effectively practised there, e.g., for anaesthetic means by the physician and surgeon James Esdaile (1808–1859). Whereas Esdaile's *Mesmerism in India* (1846) shows that he conceived of mesmerism as a pragmatic medical tool, the theosophists would also employ it to explain yogic phenomena and to reinterpret yogic techniques (e.g., the manipulation of *prāṇa*). The Theosophical Society had transferred its headquarters from New York to Madras in 1878. Spreading its ideas through the occult journal *The Theosophist* (first edition 1879) and the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund, it was a highly relevant player in the occult milieu of Bengal and India, as will be discussed below.

Although here I will restrict my analysis to salient ideas of some leading figures, it is important to note that the broader movements proactively created conditions for reinventing yoga on a modern scale. The Bengali Renaissance provided a culturally fertile ground that supported the rise of progressive liberal thought; discourses on nationhood, nationalism, and anti-colonialism; the influx of European philosophy, and finally yoga's qualitative and exponentially influential reinvention. Cultural, religious, and political negotiations reinforced each other, creating a unique setting that prepared the ground for the emerging field of modern yoga.

#### 4.1.1 The Brahmo Samaj, the New Dispensation and Yoga: Keshab Chandra Sen's Divine Dynamo

Founding the Brahmo Sabha in 1828, the philosopher Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) created a socio-religious reform movement with a universalist programme. Roy's project was both inspired by the American Unitarian Church and based on a

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<sup>117</sup> Chapter 5.3 and chapter 6.4 will further briefly treat on tantra by discussing tantric texts that were translated into English by Indian theosophists. The most prominent among these were the *Śivasvarodaya*, translated by Rama Prasad and the *Śivasamhita*, translated by Sris Chandra Vasu. Chapter 9.1 explores T. R. Sanjivi's "Indian Occultism" that included tantric practices.

reformulation of Advaita Vedānta.<sup>118</sup> Roy's *Vedāntasāra* (1815), written in Bengali and translated into English in 1817, became one of the most instructive texts for Neo-Hinduism. It contained a reinterpretation of Śāṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, the *Brahmasūtra* being one of the source texts of Advaita Vedānta (Lipner 2013: 153).<sup>119</sup> Roy is often considered the "father of modern India" because of his social-reformist ideas concerning the education of the masses, especially women. His criticism of the Hindu orthodoxy represented by the Brahminic authorities shaped much of the socio-religious sentiment from his time onwards. The movement was reformed both institutionally and doctrinally by Roy's successor Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) (De Michelis 2004: 58-67). He introduced a form of initiation into the Brahmo Samaj, as the movement came to be called after 1843, and made initiates take a vow of non-adherence to idolatry. Tagore, father of the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), further departed from the dependence on scripture, particularly the Vedas and the Vedāntic texts, as a source for religious revelations. In this phase of the Brahmo Samaj, rationalism and the appeal to the natural sciences as analytical approaches became crucial for the study and practice of religion, explicated in the project of a universal "science of religion".<sup>120</sup>

A third leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884), enters the scene after a schism with Tagore lead to the Brahmos' further bifurcation. In 1881, Sen founded the Church of the New Dispensation (Bengali: *Naba Bidhan*; Hindi: *Nava Vidhan*), another universalist Brahmo branch, yet distinctly coloured by Sen's prophetic personality. Of the Brahmo leaders, his work is closest to modern yoga projects, both institutionally and rhetorically, and therefore for the present context most relevant. By acknowledging these influential factors as first unearthed by De Michelis (2004: 74-90), I partly build on her analysis of this Brahmo leader that

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<sup>118</sup> A detailed account on the history of the Brahmo Samaj is provided by Kopf (1979). De Michelis (2004: 52-90) offers a well-versed discussion of the Brahmo Samaj and its most important leaders as a prehistory of modern yoga. The nineteenth-century Brahmo Samaj faced factionalism, hence several names were given to the movement and its various branches. The most important factions are, in historical order: Brahmo Sabha, Tattvabodhini Sabha, Brahmo Samaj, Adi Brahmo Samaj, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, and Nava Vidhan or Church of the New Dispensation. At the risk of oversimplification, I only highlight the distinction between the Brahmo Samaj and Keshab Chandra Sen's last faction, the Nava Vidhan, or Church of the New Dispensation, which is of relevance for the present context.

<sup>119</sup> There is a text entitled *Vedāntasāra*, written by the fifteenth-century Sadānanda, which is one of the medieval texts integrating Sāṃkhya and Vedānta (Keith 1918: 103). Despite these texts being homonymous, Roy's *Vedāntasāra* appears to be rather unrelated to Sadānanda's, except than that both comment on Vedānta.

<sup>120</sup> This idea was first expressed by Akkhoy Kumar Dutt (a.k.a. Akshay Kumar Datta, 1820–1886), a close collaborator of Debendranath Tagore. He also formulated the idea of God's expression in a so-called divine design, speaking hence also of Brahmoism as a "natural religion" (Kopf 1979: 51).

positions Sen as a role model for Vivekananda. However, I will also delve deeper in analysing how Sen conceived of yoga and the concept of *prāṇa* by unearthing texts that have not been considered by De Michelis.

Sen was an educated representative of Calcutta's rising middle class, which strongly promoted the vision of a modern Anglicised India. Inspired by the Unitarian Church and American Transcendentalism the dialogue between devotion (*bhakti*) and the admiration of the Christian gospel was a theme of his public religious life (Kopf 1979: 23). It was towards the end of his short but charismatic life of forty-six years (approximately during the last ten years) that he explicated himself as a *bhāṅka*-yogi.<sup>121</sup> In the *Jeevan Veda* ("Life Scriptures", also translated as "Spiritual Autobiography")<sup>122</sup> he declares:

It was the grace of God that descended on me in the shape of *bhakti*. In like manner the wind of *yoga* came blowing into my soul I know not whence. [...] *Bhakti* sweetens *yoga*, *yoga* transmutes *bhakti* into a holy passion (Sen 1956 [1882]: 94).

For him, yoga means the "mystic union with God", and the yogi is a "mystic seer", perceiving a "Divine Force [...] operating at any point" (Sen 1956 [1882]: 92-100). In other words, yoga meant harnessing this divine force (which is the yogi aspect), but in Sen's case this was not by yogic techniques or learning from a guru, but by divine grace (which is the *bhāṅka* aspect in his work). In merging yoga and *bhakti*, the notion of yoga also implied the theistic viewpoint of a *bhāṅka*. This combined approach also constitutes the main theological ground for Sen's last (unfinished) work, which is *Yoga: Or Communion with God* (1885).<sup>123</sup> In this work, Sen does not highlight a specific yogic technique. For the present context it is nevertheless worth looking into some of his notions of a divine, god-like force and its accessibility through yoga, as this may be increasingly relevant for the study of *prāṇa* as an omnipotent force in modern yoga contexts as formulated by Vivekananda and subsequent yoga pioneers.

In *Yoga: Or Communion with God* (1885), Sen elaborates on three kinds of yoga that aim to achieve a reunion with God ("communion", or "harmonious union") (Sen 1899 [1885]: 3). The three yogas outlined by Sen are "Vedic yoga", "Vedāntic

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<sup>121</sup> In this summary of Sen's ideas, I mainly follow the script of Sen as a *bhāṅka*-yogi – a person that, in Sen's definition, unites both worship (*bhakti*) and yogic techniques in his religious practice – whereas De Michelis (2004: 74) has mainly depicted him as a "Neo-Vedāntic leader".

<sup>122</sup> This was first published in Bengali in 1882, incorporating a series of lectures, translated into English by Koar (1956).

<sup>123</sup> This unfinished text, originally entitled *Yoga: Objective and Subjective (Yoga or Communion with God)*, was first published in the *Independent* newspaper of New York in 1883 and again in 1884 after Sen's death. In 1885, it was published in book format by the Brahmo Samaj Tract.

yoga”, and “Bhakti yoga” (*ibid.*: 5).<sup>124</sup> The Vedic or “objective” yoga is concerned with the observation and praise of the material world or “nature” as well as with the “communion with nature’s God” (*ibid.*: 25). Vedāntic or “subjective” yoga that surfaced in the time of the classical Upaniṣads is immersed in the study and the uprooting of the self. The third kind of yoga that took shape in the Purāṇic period is the yoga of providence, or *bhakti* yoga (the explication of which, however, did not come to completion). From the three yogas only objective yoga is relevant here, because it highlights yoga as part of a “force-worship” that underpins Sen’s understanding of *prāṇa* (whereas the other yogas do not engage such a notion).

“Vedic yoga” was, in a way, theistic, and it included the worship of a universal force that was observable in nature. Sen explains that the worship of Vedic *ṛṣis* (“seer”) of various forces like fire and wind, resulting in the formation of the Vedic gods, is paralleled by the “force-worship in modern science” (Sen 1899 [1885]: 10, 12). Both Vedic seers and modern scientists are enthralled by the beauty of the cosmos and its material expression. Their inspired observation led to the study of nature. However, the *ṛṣis* expressed their visions through devotion and poetry, whereas the scientists cultivated agnosticism and philosophy. It is only the yogi of the nineteenth century that can combine the *modus operandi* of the *ṛṣi* and the scientist. This means that “the seer and the scientist are one” (*ibid.*: 25-26).

Sen conceptualises a “prime force” as an expression of a monotheistic understanding of God (*ibid.*: 26-27), mirrored in the far-reaching discoveries and application of nineteenth-century physics and their conception of energy by modern science. This God then becomes, as perceived by the “yogi scientist”, the “science-God”:

Steam and electricity, light and heat directly reveal Him. The force of gravitation is only a beautiful vista through which He is described. [...] In his studies, his thoughts, his observations and his devotion, he [the “yogi scientist”] feels he is constantly encompassed by the presence of this science-God (Sen 1899 [1885]: 30-31).

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<sup>124</sup> “Vedic yoga” is an anachronistic term and either a construction by Sen or by contemporaries promulgating it. Sen seems to subsume several references from the “early” period (not further specified) under the term “Vedic” (Sen 1899 [1885]: 5). For him, this period is to be demarcated from the Vedāntic one (in his system, probably to include the Upaniṣads that emerged c. 700–100 BCE) and, finally, from the Purāṇic period (*ibid.*). However, although Vedic sources (the term “Veda” normally also comprises the classical Upaniṣads like *Kaṭha*, *Maitrī* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, see chapter 3.1.2) mention the term yoga, these fragmented references cannot be viewed as part of an early systematic formulation. Instead, these are “yoga-like elements in vedic mantra and ritual practices” (Birch 2018: 3, n. 11). In contrast, there were assimilations of yoga into Vedānta in the medieval period (chapter 3.4) and the term *bhaktiyoga* (“yoga of devotion”) is mentioned as early as in the *Bhagavadgītā* 14.26 (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 6).

Such is the all-encompassing vision of Keshab Chandra Sen's objective yoga: The yogi and the scientist become one by nature of their "scientific" investigation of a single primary force as expressed in the physical world with its gravitational and electric forces, governed by natural laws (*ibid.*: 25-26). No longer are the distinguishing factors the old or the modern, the East or the West, science or religion (although these dichotomies had to be established in the first place). The unifying factors of the New Dispensation of Sen are God-consciousness or yoga communion: "God-absorbed Rishis, whether of the old or the modern school, eastern or western" (*ibid.*: 32) are the players in this envisioned blend of yoga and science. This is, in brief, Sen's "science of yoga" with a universalist bent (*ibid.*: 24).

The notion of an ultimate force equally constituting the cosmos and nourishing the self is the bridge between the self and the divine. In a lecture on "God and our Relations to Him",<sup>125</sup> Sen elucidates this force as an "active principle" being synonymous with God, by finally introducing the keynote *prāṇa*:

All our power, sense and energies, our very being derive their strength, their vitality from that *active principle* which is working within us, and which is synonymous with God. It is thus that our relations to God are determined.....: *they are found in the very constitution of our self*. Something is intimately connected with an all-pervading not-self, and it *derives its entire vitality from that active, central principle*. God is, in the language of the Upanishads, *Pranasya Pranam*, or the Life of all Life (Sen as quoted in Koar 1956b: ix, his emphasis).

It is natural for Sen, as shown above, to present *prāṇa* or the "active principle" as a god-like entity, in this case expressed through the Upaniṣadic notion of *prāṇasya prāṇah*, which corresponds to the notion of life at large.<sup>126</sup> This, however, implies that the yogi must uncover and reconnect with this force by his own investigation of *prāṇa*-as-vitality.

Although at times recalling the authority of the *ṛṣis* and the Vedas, the leader of the New Dispensation was engrained in the theme of progress, as well as technical and cultural acceleration, as mirrored in the many metaphors alluding to a force-generating power. What his translator specifies as participating in the action of a "Divine Dynamo" (Koar 1956a: x) is the driving force in the yogi's ventures, foreshadowing the scientific style of Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*. It is not unlikely that the

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<sup>125</sup> First published in the newspaper *Indian Mirror* on Feb 23, 1879.

<sup>126</sup> The full quote from the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 3-2, also found in the *Kena Upaniṣad* 2 is: "He said 'I am Life'. The Life of all lives. Adore Me who [I] am Life", as quoted in Woodroffe (1922: 1).

conglomerate of yogi-science, the Upaniṣadic “active principle”, and the integration of yoga with the mechanics of contemporaneous physics influenced some aspects of Vivekananda’s polyvalent notion of *prāṇa*. It should nevertheless be noted that, while Vivekananda certainly promoted yoga as “science”, in some ways he also took Sen’s vision of placing yoga and the natural sciences together on the same plane further: Vivekananda stated that the “internal” science of yoga was superior to the “external” natural sciences that aimed to conquer and rule the material world (chapter 8.1.1). As mentioned earlier, further parallels between the two are their rhetoric and their appearance as celebrated religious figures in Bengal and India. But, in general, Vivekananda’s patriotic sway is more closely attuned to a nationalist sentiment, which was substantially advanced by the formation of the Arya Samaj.

#### 4.1.2 *Prāṇāyāma* in Ritual Contexts of the Arya Samaj

One yogi did not appreciate Sen’s pro-Christian and Anglophilic confessions. This was the Gujarati-born pandit and yogi Dayananda Sarasvati (born Mul Shankar Tiwari, 1824–1883), who founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875.<sup>127</sup> Aged twenty-three, Tiwari was initiated into the monastic discipline of the *dāṇḍīs*,<sup>128</sup> which is when he received his *saṃnyāsī* name by which he became famous. However, Dayananda did not stay too long at the monastery, and from 1848 onwards, he roamed the forests and Himalayas in search of a true yogi – without success. The conclusion dawning upon him was that yoga could only be learnt from one reliable source, which was Patañjali’s *Yogaśāstra*.<sup>129</sup> In search of authentic yogic teachings that could be empirically verified, Dayananda also had to reject Haṭhayogic subtle-body physiology, including the *nāḍīs* and *cakras* (Baier 2009: 309; Singleton 2010: 51-52). In his rigid exclusivism, truth could only be found in the Vedas and Śāstras, and Dayananda held all religions but Hinduism, or more precisely, “Vedic religion” (Sarasvati 1984 [1915]: 75), in utter contempt.

<sup>127</sup> For a detailed account on Dayananda’s biography see Jordens (1960) and Scott (2016). For a discussion on Dayananda as a “*ṛṣi*”, or saintly Vedic seer, and the mythic implications of this title given to him by his disciples, see Dobe (2011).

<sup>128</sup> According to Jordens (1960: 20-21), Dayananda was initiated into the monastic branch of the Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs called the “*Sarasvatī dāṇḍīs*” in Shringeri Math (Karnataka), which is when he received his monastic name. Though generally being associated with the Śaiva sect, the *Sarasvatī dāṇḍīs* claimed to be directly descended from Ādiśaṅkara and, in terms of their philosophical orientation, they promoted Advaita Vedānta (*ibid.*). For an in-depth study of this order, see Clark (2006).

<sup>129</sup> In his later *Satyarth Prakash*, Dayananda repeatedly refers to Patañjali’s work by utilising the term “Yoga Shastra”.

This revivalist approach, recalling a Golden Age to inspire the remodelling of contemporary society, made him one of the most influential Hindu reformists in nineteenth-century India. Dayananda came to Calcutta in 1872, where his Hindu reformist ideas became enmeshed with the growing nationalist and anti-colonial movement.<sup>130</sup> In his monumental tract, the *Satyarth Prakash* (“The Light of Truth”, 1875), Dayananda draws from the authority of an eclectic canon and translates its teachings and laws for India’s contemporary everyday life. His reformist suggestions argued – as Rammohan Roy already had – against “socially regressive practices like child marriage and widow immolation” (Nanda 2010: 312) and promoted relatively equal education for participants of the three upper castes (*varṇa*). His text mainly opposes Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and tantric commentaries on the Vedas and their practices, including their idolatry, pilgrimage and over-embroidered rituals of marriage and death ceremonies.<sup>131</sup> The Arya Samaj was mainly active in Maharashtra, the Punjab and the North-Western Provinces, and the majority of its members were law practitioners and government servants (Chand 1899 [1894]: 7-8). Despite the movement’s local focus in its early stages, its ideas unfolded and had a Pan-Indian effect over the next couple of decades.<sup>132</sup>

Yoga was a crucial part of Dayananda’s reformist educational programme. His vital contribution to the formation phase of modern yoga is at least fourfold: first, Dayananda highlighted the importance of handing down oral tradition from guru to disciple (*paramparā*).<sup>133</sup> Second, his movement called for participants of the Vedic religion to extend their influence over other countries, thus forming one of the first Hindu missions beyond India.<sup>134</sup> Third, he enforced daily ritual practices that contain *prāṇāyāma*. Fourth, he exalted the authority of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* as a seminal

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<sup>130</sup> Especially influential in this regard was the encounter with strands of the Brahmo Samaj, namely Rajnarayan Bose’s lecture “Superiority of Hinduism”, and Debendranath Tagore’s *Brahmo Dharma*. According to Jordens (1960: 78-81), these texts and encounters had a great impact on the formulation of the nationalist framework of Dayananda’s *Satyarth Prakash*.

<sup>131</sup> Dayananda endorsed the Vedas and the Śāstra texts, such as the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and the *Manusmṛiti*. He ferociously dispelled the text corporuses of the Purāṇas and the tantras, especially the texts and practices of the *vāmamārga* (the so-called tantric “left-hand path”) (Sharma 2015: 25, 28, 38-39).

<sup>132</sup> Dayananda’s obituary in *The Theosophists* (Blavatsky 1883a: 105) acknowledges his pan-Indian influence: “There are few towns and but one province we believe – namely Madras – that Pundit Dayananda did not visit in furtherance of his missionary work, and fewer still where he has not left the impress of his remarkable mind behind him.”

<sup>133</sup> Dobe (2011: 87-90) has shown that, tying on to Manu and the *Mahābhārata*, Dayananda highlights a guru-disciple relationship. Gurus, or “wise men” refute false gurus and defeat them with a superior doctrine. A role model for this is Śaṅkara, in whose lineage Dayananda finds himself to be placed. Hence, the company of yogis, along with the practice of Patañjali’s eightfold path, is also recommended in the *Satyarth Prakash* (1984 [1915]: 214-218).

<sup>134</sup> Dayananda reformed the then common belief that travelling outside the borders of India was adharmic and meant a loss of caste and character (Sharma 2015: 32).

foundational text for modern yoga. Claiming lineage from guru to disciple as well as teaching abroad are relevant themes for overall modern yoga speech acts. For the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, the latter two aspects – *prāṇāyāma* in ritual contexts and the emphasis on the *Yogasūtra* – are of major importance, which will be elucidated in the following.

Zooming in on Dayananda’s conceptualisation of *prāṇāyāma*, it is first outlined in his work in context of the daily rite at dusk and dawn (*sandhyopāsanā*) (Sarasvati 1984 [1915]: 214-215). *Sandhyopāsanā* (“worship at the juncture”), or, simply, *sandhyā* (“juncture”, in this case, of day and night, or the twilight), has a long-standing, if not ancient, history in Indian religious ritual contexts.<sup>135</sup> It was probably first mentioned in the *Gṛhyasūtra*<sup>136</sup> and it is also described in the third-century CE *Manusmṛti*, one of the most influential *śāstra* texts for law-oriented Brahmanism (Eino 1992; Kane 1941: 313).<sup>137</sup> In both contexts the *sandhyā* rite is prescribed as one of the Brahmanical duties to be performed daily (*ibid.*). Containing various ritual actions including *prāṇāyāma* and the worship of various deities (Belnos 2002 [1851]; Vasu 1979 [1918]), its core element is the recitation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra (Srinivasan 1973). *Sandhyā* ritual practices were probably first described and depicted in English by S. C. Belnos’s *The Sundhya: The Daily Prayers of the Brahmins* (1851). In her account, alternate-nostril breathing is practised as part of the rite (figure 4). Dayananda likely added to its popularisation with his programme of reformed Hinduism.

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<sup>135</sup> On the history of *sandhyopāsanā* see Eino (1992), Kane (1941: 312-321), and Srinivasan (1973). I thank Dominik A. Haas for providing me with these references.

<sup>136</sup> The *Gṛhyasūtra* can only roughly be dated as predating the common era.

<sup>137</sup> As part of a larger textual complex called the *Dharmaśāstra*, this text entitles various participants of the four main castes (*varṇa*) with their dharmic (religious and societal) duties and tasks, which are timed according to the four stages in life (*varṇāśramadharmā*).





(Sarasvati 1984 [1915]: 34-36). The *Manusmṛti* is the epitome of Brahmanical ritualism and legalism, and it is curious that Dayananda, the Hindu reformer rebelling against Brahmanical orthodoxy, draws extensively on Manu, albeit with his own twist: significantly, the *sandhyā* rite should not only be obtained by religious specialists, but by every participant of the three upper *varṇas*, including women (Dobe 2011: 85).<sup>141</sup>

In the same chapter, Dayananda further elaborates on education, while meditation and breath control also have a meaningful role to play in it. Apart from the *sandhyā* rite, he also refers to the *Yogasūtra* as a source for information on *prāṇāyāma*. As described therein, *prāṇāyāma* is of four kinds: stopping the breath after inhalation; after exhalation; during inhalation; and breathing “in which the ordinary course of breathing is reversed” (Sarasvati 1984 [1915]: 35).<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, Dayananda mentions parts of the practice which may hint at a Haṭhayogic influence. The breath should be expired “forcibly”, and should be “held out as long as possible by drawing up the pelvic viscera”, “according to one’s desire and strength” (*ibid.*).<sup>143</sup> *Oṃ* recitation was practised in addition to breath retention to calm the mind. *Prāṇāyāma* is further said to increase “bodily strength and activity”, to render the intellect highly receptive, and to “preserve and perfect the reproductive element in the body” (*ibid.*: 36). The latter probably refers, again, to a Haṭhayogic connotation of restraining breath and semen, making a person virile and even “potent” in soteriological terms.<sup>144</sup> Notwithstanding the androcentric sphere of yoga practice, as evident in these connotations, Dayananda’s plea is that *prāṇāyāma* should also be taught to women (*ibid.*: 36).

Dayananda was on the one hand learned in a specific Vedāntic tradition, and on the other hand devoted to Hindu reform. Blavatsky and Olcott had corresponded with him already during their years in New York (after having founded the Theosophical

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<sup>141</sup> Dobe (2011: 87) argues that in order to cover the breadth of his societal-reformist programme the only possible authoritative source for Dayananda to draw on was Manu and related *smṛti* texts: “Since the *saṃhitās* contain mainly hymnic and ritual material, Dayānanda, we might say, is forced by the encompassing nature of *dharma* itself to appeal to *smṛti* texts that deal with these wider spheres of life. [...] Not surprisingly then *SP* draws heavily on the *Manusmṛti* to organise life according to the traditional order of caste and life stage.” In this sense, Dayananda’s *Satyarth Prakash* is not only a reformist, but simultaneously a thoroughly traditionalist tract, and is therefore an example of blurring the lines between the “static categories of tradition and modernity” (*ibid.*: 94).

<sup>142</sup> It is important to note that the interpretation of the four types of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma* greatly varies in both premodern and modern commentaries. Regarding a detailed discussion of *prāṇāyāma* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and its various interpretations see chapter 3.2.

<sup>143</sup> “Drawing up the pelvic viscera” could allude to a Haṭhayogic *udḍiyanabandha* (Baier 2009: 312), and “according to one’s [...] strength” is a phrase often used in Haṭhayogic texts (*yathāśakti*).

<sup>144</sup> For a short discussion on the Haṭhayogic triad of restraining breath, mind, and semen, see chapter 3.3.6.

Society in 1875), and had invited Dayananda to the United States, which he declined (Chand 1899 [1894]: 9). However, in search of mahatmas and yogis they had to come to India, where they hoped to learn authentic yoga theory and practice. In Dayananda they believed to have found a profound guru for their own quest for a Vedic truth rooted in Indian soil. Yet the collaboration between the two parties remained a brief interlude in the history of the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society due to doctrinal disagreements and substantial disappointments on both sides. However, Dayananda's contribution was essential for Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* to become one of the authoritative texts in theosophy and, subsequently, in modern yoga. He was also influential on members of the Arya Samaj and for some members of the Theosophical Society, who also highlighted the *sandhyā* rite for the "Aryan" religious adept. The traces of Dayananda's influence lead to Lahore in (pre-partition) Punjab – and back to Calcutta.

#### 4.1.3 Distributing Ritualistic *Prāṇāyāma*: A Flood of Prayer Books

In 1883, Ratan Chand Bary published a small booklet titled *The Prayer Book of the Aryans*, containing parallel descriptions of *sandhyā* as outlined in the *Satyarth Prakash*. Stationed in Lahore (pre-partition Punjab, nowadays Pakistan), R. C. Bary was engaged in the Theosophical Society and a close collaborator of the theosophist Sris Chandra Vasu.<sup>145</sup> As Punjab had been a stronghold of the Arya Samaj, it is not surprising that Bary was also a member of the Arya Samaj. His *Prayer Book* gives instructions on bathing before *prāṇāyāma*, the sipping water, and the recitation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra. *Prāṇāyāma* is described in a similar mode and detail as in Dayananda's case by mentioning breath retention after exhalation, after inhalation, and then "suspend[ing] the breathing altogether" (Bary 1883: 19). Bary also stresses the importance of practising *prāṇāyāma* according to the devotee's strength and ability without causing discomfort (*ibid.*). He gives a similar account of the effects of *prāṇāyāma* as Dayananda, but omits any mention of strengthening the reproductive tissue (*ibid.*). Also, Bary's *sandhyā* closes with prostrations to four directions and the utterance of mantras into each direction. In the early twentieth century, his Calcutta-

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<sup>145</sup> Vasu and his influential translations of the *Śivasamhitā* and *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* will be discussed extensively in chapter 6.4. Bary's Aryan Press published further highly relevant books for *prāṇāyāma* contexts, most importantly the first and second edition of Rama Prasad's *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884; 1892) (chapter 5.3). Bary also published two articles in *The Theosophist* in the November 1879 issue and the April 1880 issue under the title "Hints to the Students of Yog Vidya". He was one of the proponents of *prāṇāyāma* and other yogic practices within the Theosophical Society and thereby opposed the opinion of its leading members (Baier 2009: 327).

based collaborator Vasu published a more elaborate version, entitled *Daily Practice of the Hindus: Containing the Morning and Midday Duties* (1918). Vasu's book contains ritual protocols and elaborations on *prāṇāyāma* (more specifically alternate-nostril breathing) for various Hindu religious groups like *tāntrikas*, the Brahmos, or the Vaiṣṇavas (Vasu 1979 [1918]).

Emulating Dayananda's work, the combined appraisal of the *sandhyā* rite and the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* is further found in a tract by the Arya Shivgam Chand, titled *The Divine Wisdom of Indian Rishis* (1894).<sup>146</sup> Chand was a Punjabi member of the Kāyastha community which is presented in his text as a subdivision of the Arya Samaj.<sup>147</sup> This tract (Chand 1899 [1894]: 3) mentions a vernacular version of the prayer book by the same author, the *Sandhya Paddhiti* ("Prayer Book", before 1894, date as yet unknown). In a summary, the prayer book is described as containing well-selected instructions for the *sandhyā* ritual, including Vedic mantras translated into Hindi and Urdu. The spreading of the "Vedic religion" and its daily practice has thus been secured. The prayer book

has been very favourably received by the Kayastha Community as well as by the general public. It was designed in consultation with many men with a view to facilitate the performance of religious ordinance twice a day, i.e. every morning and evening, according to Vedic religion and has met with exceptional success (Chand 1899 [1894]: 3).

Chand claimed that the Kāyastha Community had over two million members on the subcontinent.<sup>148</sup> He reports that, through his lecturing activity, over 300 local groups were built and supplied with the pamphlets of what was significantly called the "Social Reform Series". By explaining the six doctrines of Indian philosophy, the *Divine Wisdom of Indian Rishis* further mentions *prāṇāyāma* in the context of the *Yogasūtra*, and, as an internal ritual, of purifying the five vital airs (Chand 1899 [1894]: 13, 32, 45, 65-66). It is probably due to Dayananda's influence that Chand declares the yoga

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<sup>146</sup> This tract was written as Chand's proposal for participating in the World Parliament of Religion that took place in 1893. However, his delegation to the Parliament did not materialise. Intending to introduce the Arya Samaj to the secretary of the World Parliament, Chand describes various religious movements, among which, in his contemporary view, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society, and the Sanatan Dharma Sabha were most important. His description of these movements makes it a historically valuable contribution to the study of the socio-religious landscape of that time.

<sup>147</sup> Chand explicitly rendered the Kāyastha community as part of the Arya Samaj. However, the roots of the Kāyastha community reaches back to medieval India. As a non-cohesive group, they are spread over several regions in India yet over time adopted a specific rank in the *varṇa* system, often occupying the positions of scribes and administrators. For a historical discussion, see Vendell (2020).

<sup>148</sup> He mentions activities and groups in Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Rajputana, the Central Provinces, the North-Western Provinces, Oudh, and the Punjab (Chand 1899 [1894]: 3).

philosophy, both theoretically and practically, to be his favourite study subject (*ibid.*: 6, 24). Written roughly twenty years after Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash*, Patañjali, however, has already been tinged by the physical-culture movement and his teachings mingled with promises of "perfect health":

Patanjali has prescribed four grades of Pranayama and it is in the fourth grade that the whole of the body with senses and understanding attains perfect health (Chand 1899 [1894]: 45).

All of the abovementioned prayer books followed Dayananda's lead in uncovering an ancient practice and reinventing it for the modern period. Not least, these instructions also appealed to Patañjali. Thus, the prayer books of Bary, Vasu, and Chand were fruits of the confluence of ritual and yogic practice as outlined in the *Satyarth Prakash*.

Dayananda's *Satyarth Prakash* suggests the existence of a monolithic Vedic religion, wiping out heterodox Indian beliefs, in particular those whose roots lie outside of India. Consequently, the theory and practice of *prāṇāyāma* was further employed as a tool of power, and supported Hindu superiority claims over other belief systems. From his days in Calcutta onwards, Dayananda was reconceptualising Hinduism as having unique divine revelations, unparalleled in any other religion. His polemics against the Islamic and Christian belief systems and missionary activities were ultimately political statements underpinned by anti-colonial motives. In sharp contrast to the embracing of Christianity by the Brahmos, Dayananda downplayed Jesus of Nazareth's spiritual authority in several ways. For instance, opposing the emerging theme of Jesus being an (oriental or Western) yogi by Keshab Chandra Sen and other Brahmos, Dayananda claimed that as a yogi, Jesus would have been able to save himself from the humiliating death by crucifixion, if he only knew the art of *prāṇāyāma* (Dobe 2011: 84; Sarasvati 1984 [1915]: 361). In light of the prayer books introduced by Dayananda's *sandhyā* revival, *prāṇāyāma* becomes the supreme and superior "prayer", bestowing mastery even over death.

Dayananda himself was perceived by his followers as a reformer, debater, and travelling teacher endowed with a fierce ascetic power (Dobe 2011: 93). Tracing back his knowledge to the *ṛṣis* of old, yet representing them in the modern age for a novel purpose, Dayananda is situated at the threshold between the mythical yogi-*ṛṣi* and the modern reformer (*ibid.*: 82). It was said by one of his enthusiastic followers that Dayananda appeared as a "monk" powered by 'energy ... from a chaste life' (as quoted in *ibid.*). Though it was not explicitly stated that this energy was "prāṇic" (which is, however, in the context of Dayananda's promulgation of yoga, likely), his

yogic personality with its energetic aura became an emblem for the habitus of subsequent yoga pioneers. In this regard, Meera Nanda noteworthy reports that Vivekananda “held Dayananda in great esteem” (Nanda 2010: 319). Claims of omnipotence and a prāṇic personality, as for example commingled in Vivekananda, were ideal conditions for implementing modern yoga’s notions of superior power, and its thorough political implications (chapter 6.2).

As has been mentioned the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society had early institutional ties. While Dayananda was ferociously dismissive of other creeds and probably had no interest in occult endeavours, theosophy was inclusive in many ways, and significantly contributed to the vast arrays of nineteenth-century occultism. Before theosophy is discussed here, I will turn my attention to the broader occult movement in the nineteenth century that infused both theosophy and modern yoga.

## 4.2 The Impact of Nineteenth-Century Occultism on Modern Yoga

Nineteenth-century occultism and its key figures influenced various readings of yogic breath cultivation. Being a heterogenic alternative-religious strand that hails from Euro-American environments, occultism soon spread beyond Europe and North America, entering India in the nineteenth century. From there, it was easy for our yoga pioneers to integrate these lines of thought into their teachings. This chapter will delineate the most salient ideas that were relevant for them.

In following Karl Baier (2009: 253-256), occultism is understood here as a historical and context-dependent category that integrates the two strands of mesmeric magic<sup>149</sup> and American spiritualism from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.<sup>150</sup> Baier has extended the context-dependent definition of occultism as outlined in Galbreath (1983) by prioritising the analysis of emic explications of specific occult currents over generic analyses of occultism as a macro-historical phenomenon.<sup>151</sup> Key figures of nineteenth-century occultism were Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875),

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<sup>149</sup> In Baier (2009), the term “mesmeric magic” denotes the confluence of mesmerism and magic, which was by the mid-nineteenth century prevalent in London and Paris (*ibid.*: 253). One of the main figures to integrate these strands was Baron Dupotet, from whom several nineteenth-century occultists, including Randolph, Blavatsky, and Olcott, had learnt (for details on all these figures, see below).

<sup>150</sup> In a somewhat wider yet still context-dependent definition, one could also include theosophy, masonic high-degree systems, and Rosicrucian associations (Baier 2020: 2). All of these currents gravitated towards the implementation of “occult sciences” that aimed to harness subtle forces and to uplift human capabilities (*ibid.*). In addition, a specific current was parapsychology, which understood itself as distinct from theosophy and spiritualism, as well as modern psychology, and was labelled as “scientific occultism” (*ibid.*).

<sup>151</sup> In contrast, Galbreath had reservations about employing the context-dependent analysis as the main approach (Baier 2009: 256, n. 11).

Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1899), and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), all of them applying occultism in an emic sense. They exerted an ideological influence that reached far into the alternative religious milieus of the twentieth century. While the theosophy of Blavatsky and Olcott will be discussed in chapter 4.3, I will treat here first two figures that did not consider themselves occultists, yet had profound influence on the movement in the nineteenth century: Franz Anton Mesmer and Emanuel Swedenborg. In this chapter, the discussion of mesmerism and Swedenborgianism mostly relates to pre-theosophical developments. The Rosicrucian teachings and sexual magic of Paschal Beverly Randolph will be treated below, as well as the New Thought explications and eclectic ideas on breath of Warren Felt Evans. The sexual magic of Paschal Beverly Randolph and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor is roughly contemporaneous with early New Thought and early theosophy.

#### 4.2.1 Mesmerism and Swedenborgianism

The Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) was the founder of a therapeutic intervention that came to be known as “mesmerism” or “animal magnetism”.<sup>152</sup> However, mesmerism was not purely therapeutic, but also had crucial theoretical implications. An influential axiom of his work was that the success of his healing practice was based on the existence of an invisible but universally distributed fluidum permeating the cosmos and all organic life. This fluidum could be balanced in an ailing patient through mesmeric interference (Goodrick-Clarke 2008: 174-175). The mesmerist applied passes over the body by either directly touching the patient or running the hands for short distances over the body; another technique was looking intently at the patient or breathing on them (Baier 2019: 112-113). Mesmerism prospered and developed in various branches over roughly 150 years, before it was widely forgotten after the Second World War, though traces of it (or even references to Mesmer) can be found among contemporary energy healing practices (Zoehrer 2020: 146). Thriving over decades, it was a highly influential phenomenon that impacted various forms of cultural, religious, therapeutic, and scientific strands (Baier 2019: 101). Romantic Mesmerists were also at the forefront in the comparison of crucial elements of religious traditions such as meditation, trance, and ecstasy in terms of their explanatory frameworks. In doing so, they developed theories about

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<sup>152</sup> The term “animal magnetism” alludes to the magnetism of living beings, which was also called life-magnetism (Baier 2019: 101). For a concise account of the complex and varied history of mesmerism, see Ellenberger (1994 [1970]: 53-109) and Goodrick-Clarke (2008: 173-190).

clairvoyance, visions, and ecstatic religious and experimental settings to induce these “altered states”, as they are commonly called today (Baier 2012: 151). It was in its comparative and theorising function that mesmerism became mainly influential in theosophy, although it must be stated that Henry S. Olcott also engaged in mesmerism practically as a magnetic healer (Baier 2009: 321; Zoehrer 2021: 93).<sup>153</sup> Through the works of Vivekananda and Atkinson/Ramacharaka, both indebted to theosophy (Albanese 2007: 359), mesmeric healing practices with *prāṇa* (not the fluidum) as the healing agent entered modern yoga (De Michelis 2004: 163-164; Zoehrer 2020: 164-170; 2021: 96-104).

However, the correlation of *prāṇa* and the fluidum was already virulent long before the emergence of modern yoga. Baier has traced it to the first Latin rendering of the Persian translation of the Upaniṣads (1657) by the French scholar Abraham H. Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), a text that came to be known as the *Oupnek’hat* published in 1801 and 1802 (Baier 2009: 203-205; cf. Winter 2013). More precisely, the correlation was made in the Introduction to the *Oupnek’hat* that, among other aspects, sought to explain the influx of the heavenly bodies on earthly organic life which was allegedly found in ancient Indian, Persian, Greek, and Roman thought (Baier 2009: 203). In explaining this influx, the fluidum first became equivalent to *prāṇa*. This equation was then adopted by German romantic mesmerism as purported, for example, by Carl Joseph H. Windischmann (1775–1839) and Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854).<sup>154</sup> Ennemoser’s *Geschichte der Magie* (1819, second edition 1844) and its English translation *A History of Magic* (1854) were an important source of information on Indian thought, animal magnetism, and magic on which theosophists relied (Baier 2009: 257-260). In modern yoga, most of the intersections between yoga and mesmerism can be grouped along the correlation of *prāṇa* and the fluidum. Apart from the crucial potency of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent that is relevant for some techniques and the explanatory framework of yogic breath cultivation, mesmerists and

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<sup>153</sup> Already in her *Isis Unveiled* (1877), Helena P. Blavatsky began to point out similarities between yogic meditation techniques and mesmeric concepts along similar lines as German mesmerists, who frequently “drew parallels between Indian methods of meditation, Christian hesychasm and the mesmeric technique of centering the magnetic fluid in the pit of the stomach” (Baier 2012: 152). For Blavatsky and Olcott, the concept of mesmerism was on the one hand relevant for providing a theoretical framework of yogic meditation practices, and on the other, it highlighted certain bodily areas and subtle currents between them which produced certain “altered states”. For further details on the impact of mesmerism on theosophy and its implications for *prāṇāyāma*, see chapter 4.3.2.

<sup>154</sup> Windischmann, who was a professor of philosophy and medicine in Bonn from 1818 onwards, acknowledged the Indian *prāṇa* as one expression of the vital principle that he also referred to as *pneuma*, life force, life spirit, life ether, nerve spirit, and electric or magnetic fluidum (Baier 2009: 239). Correspondingly, Windischmann interpreted the outcome of yogic practices in light of mesmerism (*ibid.*: 240-243).



magnetic healers predating the emergence of modern yoga were hardly interested in breath cultivation. It was not until the 1890s that mesmeric healing practices were explicitly correlated with physical culture and yogic breathing techniques, which will be addressed in the chapter on Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2). Therefore, mesmeric healing practices and their influence on modern yoga are not focused on in this thesis, although it is recognised that mesmerism was one important strand informing modern theories of *prāṇa*.

Another protagonist of alternative religion, the Swedish scientist and visionary Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and the movement that followed his religious concepts, Swedenborgianism, impacted modern yoga's breath-related musings. It adopted Swedenborg's idea that breath influences states of mind and emotions and vice versa. In the following the main landmarks for understanding Swedenborg and his concept of breath and breathing are discussed, providing a base for further elaborations on Swedenborg in subsequent chapters (chapter 4.3.1; chapter 5.2.1; chapter 8.3.2).

At the peak of his scientific career, the successful and innovative scientist, inventor, and engineer Swedenborg had a spiritual crisis during Easter in 1744. This made him a spiritual seer with a specific religious task to fulfil: a vision of Jesus called him to explain biblical scripture to the world, and ever since then he claimed to possess the gift of visionary sight to explore otherworldly realms. As the illuminating research of religious scholar Friedrich Stengel has shown, Swedenborg's seership was already foreshadowed in a voluminous excerpt that he compiled in his pre-visionary years, the *Codex 36* (Stengel 2008: 152-158). This work reveals that the main sources to influence the theme of visionary sight were a neo-Platonic text entitled *De spiritu et anima* that was attributed to the Church Father Augustine (354–430) as well as passages of the Bible (in relation to visionary experience, particularly 2 Corinthians 12.2–4), among others (*ibid.*: 194, 196). The *Codex 36* further shows that Swedenborg was also acquainted with the complete works of Plato, Aristotle, and further texts of Augustine (*ibid.*: 154). Most relevantly in our context, his visionary approach (which was, in his view, “empirical” and “rational”) was shaped in a phase in which he pondered the question of the relationship between the soul and the human body (*commercium corporis et animae*) (*ibid.*: 177). In this phase, Swedenborg established a doctrine of the soul including its post-mortal existence (*ibid.*: 177-178). This led to a detailed mapping of the afterlife as well as the realm of spirits and angels (*mundus intelligibilis*) (*ibid.*: 154, 177).

In his pre-visionary years, Swedenborg was a well-known scientist and philosopher engaging with the natural sciences and medicine. Stengel argues that Swedenborg's theories that revolved around medical and philosophical problems can be explained through his reception of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century post-Cartesian science and natural philosophy (Stengel 2008: 197, 202). These propelled the themes of rationalism and empiric methodology (*ibid.*). In his attempt to explain the nexus between the mind and the body, Swedenborg is thus, on the one hand, to be placed in the lineage of René Descartes's (1596–1650). Descartes had posited mechanistic natural philosophy with a strict dualism between mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (*res extensa*) that was, however, linked through a fluid termed (in reference to Galenic medicine) *spiritus animales* (Stengel 2011: 163). On the other hand, for Swedenborg this dualism was additionally weakened through a neo-Platonic *influxus* of the soul on the body, which marks the influence of the Cartesian thinker Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) on Swedenborg (*ibid.*: 160; 2008: 178-179). Swedenborg, then, conceived of the soul as a *substance* and *active principle* that merged with the physical body (the soul was capable of uniting itself with the body, but not vice versa), and it had an existence of its own (Stengel 2011: 141, 171). Moreover, the soul was united with God (not with the physical body, of which the soul was just the “builder”) (*ibid.*: 171). In other words, the soul was clad in a physical body, but ultimately independent of it (thus immortal), and it was conceived as the receptacle (*receptaculum*) to receive God's love that animates all (Stengel 2008: 162-164, 177, n. 169, 181-182).

However, Swedenborg the seer also remained Swedenborg the scientist, even if he was excluded from most historiographies of natural or medical science. As is, however, increasingly acknowledged by historians of medicine,<sup>155</sup> he had profound insights about the anatomy and physiology of the human body (particularly brain physiology). In being mainly recognised as a religious seer who also largely abandoned the terrain of Protestantism, Swedenborg's complex theories suffered the fate that they were mostly disseminated indirectly through the works of more

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<sup>155</sup> For example, the Swedish professor of anatomy Martin Ramström appraised Swedenborg positively for locating certain cerebral activities in the cerebral cortex in his 1910 text *Emanuel Swedenborg's Investigations in Natural Science*, among other features (Stengel 2011: 156-157). During the twentieth century medical historians continued to recognise Swedenborg's achievements in the field of anatomy and physiology; for example Eberhard Zwink's *The Swedenborg Manuscripts: A Forgotten Introduction to Cerebral Physiology* (1988) or, Charles G. Gross's works (e.g., “Emanuel Swedenborg: A Neuroscientist before his time”, 1997). See Stengel (2011: 154-158) for a detailed and nuanced discussion that also points at limitations in Swedenborg's understanding of brain physiology.

acknowledged scientists. Nevertheless, his anthropology that sought to explain the relationship between the soul and the body slipped into the theories of subsequent proponents of German Enlightenment Vitalism (*aufgeklärter Vitalismus*) like Albrecht van Haller (1708–1777) and Caspar Friedrich Wolff (1733–1794) (Stengel 2011: 156, 164).

To understand Swedenborg’s approach to exploring the human body and soul by visionary sight, it should be mentioned that he based his observations on a “doctrine of correspondences and representations” (*doctrina correspondentiarum atque repraesentationum*). This doctrine had evolved over years before it was first presented in *Regnum animale* (1744) and, in a more elaborated version, in the unpublished *Clavis hieroglyphica arcanorum naturalium et spiritualium* (1784) (Stengel 2011: 173; cf. Jonsson 1969).<sup>156</sup> As an underlying key to unlock the mysteries of the universe, Swedenborg found that by delving into human experience, one could also gain insight about macrocosmic realities such as the heavens, other planets, and their inhabitants, and vice versa.<sup>157</sup> His observations resulted in a “fragmentary encyclopedia of correspondences” which attached meanings to each “animal, plant, and mineral, as well as figures, colors, movements, gestures, and objects that are found in the Bible” (Goodrick-Clarke 2008: 163). The networks of symbolism that emerged from these correspondences were also applied to his visions and dreams (*ibid.*).

In studying the human body and soul, he also investigated the theme of breathing. As will be shown, the brain, heart, and lungs were central to the seer’s understanding of the soul’s communication with spiritual realms. As is explained in Swedenborg’s *Spiritual Diary* (written between 1747 and 1765, translated into English in 1883), the heart and lungs constitute the individual’s integrity; the heart represented the will and the lungs the intellect, both functions being mutually dependent on each other, and, additionally, the brain unites the functions of the will and the intellect (Swedenborg 1883: 70; White 1868: 235).<sup>158</sup> It is probably on this basis that

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<sup>156</sup> Both texts have been thoroughly analysed and contextualised with philosophical positions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century by Jonsson (1969).

<sup>157</sup> Swedenborg held that the human soul is linked to heavenly worlds inhabited by angels and spirits and (if unconsciously) in constant communication with them (Stengel 2008: 164-165). It was through God’s grace, Swedenborg declared, that he was permitted to consciously communicate with these beings and enter their habitats (*ibid.*: 193).

<sup>158</sup> The biographer and Swedenborg interpreter William White additionally explains: “Owing to the correspondence of Heart and Lungs, the Celestial Angels in whom love is predominant ‘are called the Cardiac Kingdom of Heaven’, and the Spiritual Angels in whom wisdom is predominant ‘are called the Pulmonic Kingdom of Heaven’” (White 1868: 441). White (*ibid.*: 444) connotes the heart also with charity, and the lungs with faith: “So great indeed is the similitude between the heart and Charity and between the Lungs and Faith, that in the Spiritual World it is known by a person’s breathing what is the nature of his Faith, and by the beating of his Heart what is the nature of his Charity.”

Swedenborg establishes the notion that human “respiration corresponds with thought” (Swedenborg 1883: 23). In analogy with the human function, certain angelic beings communicate by means of respirations and “the ideas of angels, even of the celestials, are nothing but respirations” (*ibid.*: 24). In classifying human ways to breathe, he mentions the “natural and voluntary respiration”; the natural respiration “rules at night, and the mixed voluntary by day” (*ibid.*: 23). In other words, we breathe naturally or involuntarily at night, and partly voluntarily during the day. In wakefulness, the “variously mixed” breath adjusts according to the “qualities of the sensations and acts of the body”, a process that is highly varied and fine-tuned in each activity (*ibid.*). The seer observes that this complex respiratory process is scarcely recognised by anybody (*ibid.*).

As the *Spiritual Diary* copiously reports, these insights were taught to Swedenborg by angelic beings. Significantly, from childhood onwards, Swedenborg’s religious experience was induced by what he called an “internal” or “interior” respiration. A report about this process is worth quoting in full:

I was thus during many years, from the period of childhood, introduced into such respirations, especially by means of absorbing speculations, in which the breathing seems to become quiescent, as otherwise the intense study of truth is scarcely possible. Afterwards, when heaven was opened to me, and I was enabled to converse with spirits, I sometimes scarcely breathed by inspiration at all for the space of a short hour, and merely drew in enough of air to keep up the process of thinking. Thus I was introduced by the Lord into interior respirations (Swedenborg 1883: 70).

What Swedenborg also called “tacit respiration” or “hold[ing his] breath” happened both purposely and involuntarily, and it served him to focus either on the functions of the will and heart, or of the intellect and lungs (Swedenborg 1883: 23, 70-71). As diverse as the forms of respirations of various angelic “societies” might have been, Swedenborg was able to tune into these variations (*ibid.*: 71).

The influence of the Swedish seer on the occult and esoteric milieu of the nineteenth and twentieth century cannot be overstated (Hanegraaff 1996: 426; Boehinger 1994: 272-280). One significant Swedenborgian notion was the conflation of spirit and matter, which was further augmented by the American Transcendentalists and linked to Swedenborg’s idea of a “divine influx in the natural world” (Albanese 1986: 494). This influx was compared with the mesmeric axiom of the fluidum during the nineteenth century (*ibid.*), an influential publication being George Bush’s *Mesmer and Swedenborg* (1847). More importantly, by the mid-nineteenth century, the

“peculiar habit of breathing” of the visionary Swedenborg was already compared with the “feats of Hindoo fakirs” and the hibernation of animals (White 1868: 150). On this base, Swedenborg’s correspondence thought between the lungs and the brain, or breathing and cerebration, served to underscore the relevance of *prāṇāyāma* derived from yoga tradition, as will be shown in detail below (chapter 4.3.1). But Swedenborg was also an important point of reference on the side of the gymnastic practices that influenced modern yogic breath cultivation. Most notably, the Delsartist Genevieve Stebbins drew from Swedenborgian ideas in her influential *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) (chapter 5.2.1). This was, in turn, a source for the reception of Swedenborgian ideas for subsequent yoga pioneers like Yogendra (chapter 8.3.2).

#### 4.2.2 Paschal Beverly Randolph and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor

Initially being a spiritualist medium, the African-American Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875) became, after returning from a journey to Europe, an occultist, Rosicrucian, and sexual mage.<sup>159</sup> During his trip to Europe he encountered Jules Denis Dupotet (a.k.a. Baron Dupotet, 1897–1881) and other French and English mesmerists from whom he learnt the practice of mirror and crystal magic for developing clairvoyance, as well as the intake of mind-altering drugs like hashish. He also ventured to the Near East, from Egypt through Palestine to Turkey as far as the borders of Iran, borderlands in which he met dervishes and “fakirs” and places to which he later attributed the origin of the sexual magic he taught. Back in the United States, he denounced the passivity of a spiritualistic medium and rather promulgated an active mediumship by means of which he was in contact with celestial beings and hierarchies on the clairvoyant level. For Randolph, the goal of these encounters was the uplifting of the individual to spiritual heights, achievable in this life, and for this purpose he founded various Rosicrucian groups in the United States. His teachings on sexual magic were compiled in the manuscript *Mysteries of Eulis* (c. 1870).<sup>160</sup> The Brotherhood of Eulis, one of the groups he founded, organised the dissemination of Randolph’s teachings (Deveney 1997: 228).

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<sup>159</sup> This paragraph is based on Deveney’s account on Randolph in Godwin et al. (1995: 40–45), if not otherwise noted.

<sup>160</sup> This manuscript was first composed in c. 1870, and, according to Deveney, only one copy has survived, which dates between 1870 and 1874 (Deveney 1997: 362, n. 42). It was then published in book form as *Eulis! The History of Love* (1874), named after the highest degree in his teachings on sexual magic (Deveney 2006b: 978). I use the version of *Mysteries of Eulis* that is printed in Deveney as “Appendix B” (Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]).

Owing to the wide dissemination of his practical teachings in the occult networks, Randolph deserves special attention in the present context. Some of the practices of sexual magic involved breath cultivation in the form of drawing in certain energies, among these “ether”, through the breath.<sup>161</sup> During sexual intercourse, the male seed was charged with “divine energy” and the child that was being created could thus be bestowed with this energy. Randolph “pictured the omnipresent divine monads clustering around the head of every mature man and being drawn in with his breath to quicken the sperm and to take on their load of the father’s characteristics” (Deveney 1997: 186). This aimed for the procreation of superior children (*ibid.*: 223). Randolph further emphasised the role of the personal will that was capable of manifesting either damnation or divinisation through sex in *The Mysteries of Eulis*:

At the moment his seminal glands open, his nostrils expand, and while the seed is going from his soul to her womb he breathes one of two atmospheres, either fetid damnation from the border spaces or Divine Energy from heavens. Whatsoever he shall truly will and internally pray for when Love [...] is in the ascendant, that moment the prayer’s response comes down (Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 340).

The simultaneous opening of the seminal glands and the nostrils is literally charging and discharging in one breath, and it is the “most solemn, energetic and powerful moment he [a man, M.K.] can ever know on earth”, provided it was not under the “influence of mere lust” (Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 339). The obvious androcentric perspective of Randolph expressed in these lines is somewhat relativised in the next quote from his *Eulis!* (1874), a later edition of *The Mysteries of Eulis*, when he speaks of both male and female being suffused in the “breath of God” in sexual union: “[J]oy ... is *diffused* over both beings, and each is bathed in the celestial and divine aura—the breath of God, suffusing both bodies, refreshing both souls!” (Randolph 1906 [1874]: 126, his emphasis).

As can be deduced from these lines, in Randolph’s teachings breathing has a human and a divine side, and both can be experienced and cultivated. On the one hand “human breath” can be charged with divine energy, and on the other, the “breath of God” as a kind of “divine aura” can be perceived and dwelled in during ecstatic sexual experience.<sup>162</sup> To cultivate breathing, the advice is to take an “air-bath” twice a week succeeded by deep breathing and breath retention: “Draw in the breath *slowly*, and

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<sup>161</sup> For details on the concept of “ether” in relation to breath cultivation, see chapter 5.

<sup>162</sup> The notions of the breath of life or the breath of God are briefly treated below in the context of Warren Felt Evans and theosophy (chapter 4.2.3; chapter 4.3). They will be discussed more extensively in chapter 5.2.2.

emit it the same; holding it in as long as possible, for every additional minute it is so held, will add ten days to the sum of life” (Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 339, his emphasis). Whether Randolph was aware of *prāṇāyāma*, indicated by his suggestion of retention, is an open question. Taking an air-bath in sunlight twice a week points towards a physical-culture influence.

Randolph’s occultism was practical through and through, and it was therefore exemplified by the motto “Try!”. The motto highlighted a path that enabled one to indulge in spiritual heights if one only “tried”. In addition to the use of mind-altering drugs, it offered mirror magic, three principles of practical magic,<sup>163</sup> and sexual magic which included breath cultivation. All these practices were intended to induce communication with the celestial hierarchies. They were subsequently applied by the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor which, however, often veiled the origins of these teachings.

The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (henceforth H. B. of L.) was a short-lived secret society with activities in England, France, and the United States that first came to notice in 1884.<sup>164</sup> The H. B. of L. recruited its members largely from the Theosophical Society. Other than later theosophy with its emphasis on philosophical occultism, the H. B. of L. aimed to “gain individual spiritual advancement” through practical magic and ritual work (Deveney 2006a: 486-487). Its constitutional dependency on the Theosophical Society made it “for a period [...] a practical order within the T.S. composed of most of its leading lights”, such as Rev. William Alexander Ayton, F.-Ch. Barlet (pseud., Albert Faucheux), J. D. Buck, or Eliot B. Page. Max Theon (pseud., Louis Maximilian Bimstein; c. 1848–1927) was the “Grand Master of the Exterior Circle”. Its practical occultism consisted of developing clairvoyance and astral travelling through applying mirror magic and often involved sex and drugs (Godwin et al. 1995: 4). These practices were almost entirely derived from Randolph’s sexual magic. Although the H. B. of L. was already on the wane in the late 1880s, its influence spread widely in the persisting occult networks. The large number of influential members in the H. B. of L. were able to carry forward its doctrinal and practical teachings into other esoteric movements in the twentieth century (*ibid.*: ix).

Randolph himself was not highly appreciated in the H. B. of L., but his teachings were. Neophytes of this order were made aware of Randolph’s unbalanced

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<sup>163</sup> These are Volantia, Decretism, and Posism. They will be further discussed in chapter 5.2.5.

<sup>164</sup> This paragraph is based on Deveney (2006a), if not otherwise noted.

character (judged by his own account of often being at the edge of insanity, and the fact that he later committed suicide), and that he was only “half-initiated” (Godwin et al. 1995: 44). As a result, those of his teachings that were earlier introduced into the H. B. of L. through *The Mysteries of Eulis* were now adopted into *The Mysteries of Eros*, compiled by Thomas Henry Burgoyne in 1886 or early 1887 (chapter 5.2.5). Simultaneously, the H. B. of L. officially distanced itself from Randolph as a person (Godwin et al. 1995: 44-45). Randolph can nevertheless be credited as being the originator of a whole pedigree of sexual magic practices, which were at least partly combined with breath cultivation. For the present context, the reception line of Randolphian teachings through Stebbins is the most relevant one (chapter 5.2.5).

#### 4.2.3 Warren Felt Evans and Conceptualising Breath in New Thought

The New Thought movement – also known as New Thought, Mental Science, Christian Science, or Mind Cure, among other names – began to flourish in the 1870s in the Boston area of the United States, and spread over to the West Coast between 1885 and 1895 (Hanegraaff 2006: 861). As a reinterpretation of mesmerism and its offspring, hypnotism, it belongs to the complex reception history of mesmerism (*ibid.*: 862). Phineas P. Quimby (1802–1866), who is often considered the originator of New Thought, observed in his own mesmeric healing sessions that the patient’s belief in a cure and the abilities of the practitioner was essential for their recovery (*ibid.*). Next to Quimby’s healing practice, the theorising influence of Warren Felt Evans (1817–1889), which predates some of Quimby’s own explications, cannot be neglected. As Mitch Horowitz has argued, Evans had developed substantial portions of what could be called “mind-based metaphysics” before he met and collaborated with Quimby (Horowitz 2016: 30-33).<sup>165</sup> In any case, the main premise of New Thought was that mind shaped reality, and the cultivation of bright and positive thoughts was crucial for effecting cures or for any material pursuits. The principle of “mind over matter” is fundamental to New Thought, and it was employed in its healing practices (Hanegraaff 2006: 861). These included silent meditation in the presence of the healer who telepathically transferred their healing thoughts to the patient, prayer, mental suggestion, and positive thinking. It should also be noted that participants of the New Thought movement were part of a broader cultic milieu which was permeated by the

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<sup>165</sup> Another key figure of New Thought was Mary Baker Eddy (born Mary Glover Patterson, 1821–1910) who, like Evans, encountered Quimby and owed to him some insights of her own subsequent philosophy. Eddy coined the term Christian Science in 1875 and presented a more Christianised version of the New Thought idea with “a categorical denial of matter” (Albanese 2007: 308).



literature of American Transcendentalism, Swedenborgianism, spiritualism, and theosophy.

Evans drew on several influences to establish his mind-based metaphysics. They were an amalgam of Swedenborg's ideas, the German Idealism of Schelling and Hegel, and the spiritistic theology of Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910), sprinkled with traces of Indian philosophy. His metaphysics of the concordance between the lungs and the brain, which reverberated throughout his work, were clearly influenced by Swedenborg (Baier 2009: 444, n. 52). Moreover, Evans drops a few Sanskrit terms into his theoretical framework for healing séances, like *ekagratā* (“one-pointedness”) or the Buddhist concept *tṛṣṇā* (“thirst”) (*ibid.*: 442; Evans 1886: 154). In combining and interpreting various sources, Evans's works amounted almost to the eclectic style of the theosophists (Albanese 2007: 304). Although his own work was distinct, Evans was aware of theosophical literature, and he explicitly cited Blavatsky with regard to the notion of the “universal life principle” (*ibid.*: 308). Evans was instrumental in the development of meditation techniques and the emphasis on silent contemplation in New Thought (Baier 2009: 441), often stressing the role of breath in both religious and healing purposes. Although Evans was probably not directly influential on modern yoga pioneers, this section treats several of his breath-related ideas that became diffused into this movement. Since New Thought practices were adopted by protagonists of physical culture and voice culture, the main hotspots for this blend being fin-de-siècle Chicago and New York, these ideas were indirectly influential on modern yoga pioneers who, in turn, appropriated New Thought practices.

In his late *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics* (1886), Evans speaks of a “Universal Life Principle” that signifies “the intelligent, animating force of the world and of the human body” (Evans 1886: 92), active as “one Life, one Love, one Intelligence, and one Power or Force” (*ibid.*: 94). This principle was called by different names in various cultures, such as the Greek “*Æther*”, the Hindu “*Akasa*”, the “*Adonai*” of the Kabbalah, the “Holy Spirit” of the new and the “breath of God” of the Old Testament, recognised by both alchemists and hermetic philosophers (*ibid.*: 91–95, his emphasis). Human breath lies at the intersection of individual and universal life: “*By our breathing we are connected with the Universal Life-Principle. At that point my particular life meets and mingles with the One Life*” (*ibid.*: 95, his emphasis). Like Blavatsky and many other leaders within the cultic milieu, Evans was

preoccupied with the notion of “ether” (Albanese 2007: 308),<sup>166</sup> and he closely linked it to the “breath of life”. Evans refers to the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) when he avers that all movement is rhythmical, including the action of the lungs during breathing, which is “a double motion of the universal aether, an active and reactive movement [...], a self-moving dual action [...] that gives the breath of life” (Evans 1886: 96-97). The breath of life is an “androgynous principle”, and it is “the breath of God in man” (Evans 1886: 97).<sup>167</sup> In Evans’s perspective of the cosmos, this notion is embedded in an understanding of the male principle of spirit, and the female principle of matter (or divine, cosmic substance), both “co-eternal and co-extensive, and equally divine” (*ibid.*: 62).<sup>168</sup> Breath as an androgynous quality is inherent to both spirit and matter, and capable to connect the two.

Emotions and thoughts correspond to breath: being a proponent of “mental therapeutics” who worked with the interdependence of body and mind, Swedenborg’s nexus of thoughts, emotions, and breath was crucial for Evans.<sup>169</sup> Consequently, Evans holds that “[r]ight *thinking* and right *breathing* are the two things most essential to happiness and health” (Evans 1886: 95, his emphasis). In breath thus lies a “curative principle” which is not only congruent with the action of the mind, but can also be harnessed by the “will, faith, and imagination of man” and “accelerated in the divine curative and saving process” (*ibid.*: 98).<sup>170</sup> Evans did not prescribe specific breathing techniques for this curative process, as would be common in later New Thought (Baier 2009: 444-445). Rather, he praised the efficacy of automatic and involuntary breath during wakefulness, as if one was in the passive state of sleep, as bestowing the greatest healing potential (Evans 1886: 97). In his earlier *Mental Medicine* (1874), he, however, suggests deep breathing as one of the most potent remedies that a physician could prescribe (Evans 1873: 157). With the pragmatic understanding of a physician, he further refers here to the correlation of the healthy respiratory system with a

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<sup>166</sup> On the correlation of the ether with Éliphas Lévi’s “astral light” in both Blavatsky and Evans, see Albanese (2007: 308-309).

<sup>167</sup> The Swedenborgian Reverend Thomas Lake Harris (1823–1906), who described God as an androgynous principle (Chajes 2016) published *The Breath of God with Man* (1867), the title being echoed here by Evans. Most likely, there is a cross-fertilisation of ideas between Harris and Evans. For a discussion of Harris’s employment of the “breath of life”, see chapter 5.2.2.

<sup>168</sup> For a detailed discussion on this polarity, see Albanese (2007: 309) and Baier (2009: 448-449).

<sup>169</sup> Evans refers to this important Swedenborgian theme already in his *Mental Cure* (1869) and in *Mental Medicine* (1873) (Baier 2009: 444, n. 52).

<sup>170</sup> On the notion of faith and its importance for the healing process, probably directly following Swedenborg, Evans (1886: 36) remarks: “An act of faith inaugurates a change in the action of the lungs, which is communicated as an impulse in the direction of health to every part of the body.”

voluminous voice and the health of the reproductive organs, and to the imbalance of the same resulting from incomplete respiration (*ibid.*: 157-158).

In modern yoga, it is mainly through the works of William Walker Atkinson, under the pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka, that New Thought ideas trickled in (chapter 8.2.2). Atkinson himself was part of a wider occult and New Thought scene that started to combine mesmeric healing practices with breath cultivation. He gathered various elements of breath cultivation and integrated them into what was just about to become modern yogic breath cultivation. This blend was certainly highly influential on several subsequent yoga pioneers (chapter 8). While these innovations were largely introduced in North America and then became influential transnationally, the Theosophical Society, to which I now turn, sprouted their ideas at least partly on Indian soil, both philosophically and geographically. Theosophy, as one of the main players of nineteenth-century occultism, is partly indebted to Swedenborgianism, but even more so to mesmeric magic and bits and pieces of Indian philosophy, being a most creative blend of ideas from all these sources.

#### 4.3 Introducing Theosophy: The Theosophical Estuary Leading into the Occult World and Yoga

The founder figures of modern theosophy are Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). The society was established in 1875 in New York, and transferred to India, in Adyar, a part of Madras, in 1879. The relocation of the society was a new start after Blavatsky’s success had dimmed in New York. It was also motivated by an appreciation of “Eastern” forms of spirituality, preferably Buddhism and specific forms of Hindu Brahmanism, and these religious currents were increasingly interpreted in occult terms. Theosophical syncretism was enriched by and shared among various members of the Theosophical Society, who had various nationalities. However, the Indian participants with their indigenous knowledge of South Asian religion, culture and languages played a crucial role in distributing the “ancient wisdom” among the society’s members – and to students of occultism and yoga. Translators of Sanskrit texts like Tukaram Tatya (1836–1898), Sris Chandra Vasu (1861–1918) and Rama Prasad (c. 1860–1914) were transmitters of a rich history of ideas encoded in a language that had hardly been accessible to the public before.<sup>171</sup> The philosophical discourse around the *Yogasūtra*, Hāṭhayoga texts, and tantric

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<sup>171</sup> Chapter 6.4 elaborates on the “agency of translation” that I ascribe to these translators.

traditions carried vast culturally implicit knowledge. Made accessible through the translations and the availability of print media, a wave of yoga practices and philosophy swept through theosophical circles, and from there was further distributed.

Being itself marked by the confluence of several disparate strands of thought, the theosophical estuary yielded ideas that, along with subsequent occult movements, informed modern yoga. As for the “universal brotherhood”, the establishment of which was one of the main objectives of theosophists, it was by definition a transnational network which was not limited to the developments within a nation-state. Theosophical pathways allowed for the dissemination of several ideas. Exchange occurred through publications (journals and books), publishing houses, and members, stationed in India, Europe, and America, and frequently commuting between. Even swamis who were not members of the organisation would literally travel on theosophically paved roads: Swami Vivekananda, although not publicly favouring theosophical ideas, for example, received help from the theosophist E. T. Sturdy (1860–1957) from London while travelling the English-speaking world.<sup>172</sup> Sri Yogendra’s books were distributed in India by the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, among other sellers.

In this chapter, the founding figures of the Theosophical Society, the translators of Sanskrit texts, and the Indian teachers – among them Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), Tallapragada Subba Row (1856–1890) and Damodar Mavalankar (1857–1885) – in addition to some other prominent authors, are conceived as first-generation theosophists. Second-generation theosophy is mainly represented by Annie Besant (1847–1933), Charles Leadbeater (1847–1934), William Q. Judge (1851–1896) and Katherine Tingley (1847–1929). To filter influential ideas for the emerging field of modern yoga, I will consider theosophical ideas mainly before Vivekananda’s publication of *Rāja Yoga* in 1896, i.e., texts of the first generation. An exception, though, are some statements by Annie Besant. This chapter highlights both early theosophical developments in the 1880s and later developments of the 1890s regarding *prāṇāyāma* and related notions. It will be shown how theosophists both highlighted and dismissed *prāṇāyāma* practice. In doing so, it delineates the main early theosophical notions revolving around *prāṇāyāma* that prefigured crucial developments of yogic breath cultivation.

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<sup>172</sup> Sturdy was part of the Inner Group forming around Blavatsky in London from August 1890 until April 1891 (Spierenburg 1995 [1985]: xiii).

#### 4.3.1 The Breath and the Mind: Swedenborg in Theosophy

Breath cultivation does not belong to the main themes in theosophy. The “breath of life” in its metaphysical expression, however, has its place, as well as the related notions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* (“ether”, “space”) (see below; chapter 5). To start with, the connection of breath and mind in theosophy will be highlighted by taking a closer look at a highly influential quotation that was falsely attributed to Emanuel Swedenborg. In depicting its reception history, we will also encounter important texts for modern yoga, like the first full translation of the *Yogasūtra* in English.

As has been mentioned, Swedenborg’s influence spread widely over the occult milieu in the nineteenth and twentieth century and particularly influenced the emergence of spiritualism as well as exponents of New Thought and nineteenth-century occultism (Bochinger 1994: 268-271). In these circles, he was a well-known elder figure, and his ideas were also at least partly welcomed by theosophists, as will be shown. Blavatsky herself was rather sceptical about Swedenborg, because, although his visionary approach was not dismissed, he was nevertheless too “Christian” for her, and at least from around 1880 onwards her interest mainly turned to Buddhism (*ibid.*: 270).<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that some theosophists, particularly the South Asian translators and writers, appreciated Swedenborg’s legacy. Within theosophy and later also modern yoga, one quotation attributed to Swedenborg became an almost stereotypical set of phrases concerning the breath and its link to the mind, which was subsequently often quoted verbatim. Theosophy and modern yoga share a tendency to promote a universal truth by bringing together notions drawn from different cultural backgrounds – in this case, the relation between breath and mind. The intertextuality of the pseudo-Swedenborg passage is therefore a good example for a syncretistic brand made in theosophy that had a clear impact on modern yoga.

The history of said pseudo-Swedenborg passage starts with *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Biography* (1849) by James J. G. Wilkinson (1812–1899). Wilkinson was a British homeopathic physician and translator of Swedenborg’s texts who had absorbed Swedenborg’s teachings. In his Swedenborg biography, we find a short section on the connection between thought and breath. While Wilkinson does not quote Swedenborg directly in this passage, his words reflect Swedenborg’s experience regarding the interdependence of breath and cerebration that he had described in the

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<sup>173</sup> Bochinger (1994: 270) notes that some allusions to Swedenborg in Blavatsky’s work may have been introduced to her by Éliphas Lévi’s texts.

*Spiritual Diary* (as discussed above). Wilkinson repeatedly advises the reader to mind this connection:

[T]hought commences and corresponds with respiration. The reader has before attended to the presence of the heaving over the body; now let him *feel his thoughts*, and he will see that they too heave with the mass. When he entertains a long thought, he draws a long breath; when he thinks quickly, his breath vibrates with rapid alternations; when the tempest of anger shakes his mind, his breath is tumultuous; when his soul is deep and tranquil, so is his respiration; when success inflates him, his lungs are as tumid as his conceits.<sup>174</sup> [...] Now this mind dwells in the brain, and it is the brain, therefore, which shares the varying fortunes of the breathing. It is strange that this correspondence between the states of the brain or mind and the lungs has not been admitted in science, for it holds in every case, at every moment. [...] As we breathe, so we are. Inward thoughts have inward breaths, and purer spiritual thoughts have spiritual breaths hardly mixed with material (Wilkinson 1849: 55, 77).

The link between the brain and the lungs, Wilkinson urges, should also be admitted by science, and elsewhere he hints at the necessity “that every man requires to educate his breath for his business” (*ibid.*: 82). He says that “[B]odily strength, mental strength, even wisdom, all lean upon our respirations” (*ibid.*). Wilkinson points to Swedenborg as an exceptional example for his discovery of the subtle states of breath which are “for the most part not conceived” (*ibid.*). However, he also found that the “Hindoo yogi” was aware of this “analogous power of the breath” and so was the hypnotist James Braid (*ibid.*: 80).<sup>175</sup> Alluding to the mind-breath nexus, the plea for science to acknowledge it, and the necessity of an education of the breath makes the lines of Wilkinson those of a prophet for modern yogic breath cultivation. However, Wilkinson was largely forgotten, while the influential passage survived.

It was probably the Bengali theosophist Peary Chand Mitra (a.k.a. Piari Chand Mitra, 1814–1883) who first links Wilkinson’s reflection on the breath and the mind to theosophy-inflected and universalist musings on Indian soil.<sup>176</sup> Mitra’s *On The Soul: Its Nature and Development* (1881) is a text with strong universalist tendencies

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<sup>174</sup> Later editions of this passages read “timid as his concepts”, as in Mitra (1881: 54) and in the subsequent reception history (see below).

<sup>175</sup> On the influence of James Braid on notions of early yogic breath cultivation, see chapter 6.3.

<sup>176</sup> In turn, Mitra was probably aware of Wilkinson’s text through his interest in alternative religious strands which would make his reading of a Swedenborg biography likely. Mitra was associated with several religious societies and doctrines, like Buddhism and the Brahmo Samaj as well as spiritualism, and, after joining the Theosophical Society as early as 1877, became the president of the Bengal Theosophical Society (Godwin 1994: 327). For a detailed discussion of Mitra’s work in context of theosophy in Bengal, see Mukhopadhyay (2021).

that compares various statements of interlocutors of nineteenth-century occultism (among these, Emma Hardinge Britten, Andrew Jackson Davis, and exponents of spiritualism) with Hindu (“Aryan”) and Buddhist doctrine. In the chapter that explains the “Development of the Soul” he emphasises the role of Pātañjalayoga as well as Haṭhayogic practices (Mittra 1881: 34-81). All this amounts to the development of extraordinary powers or *siddhis* as found, for example, in the *Yogasūtra*. The special “power” to be obtained is “called occultism, and was largely developed in India [where] it is still to be found in the ascetics and Yogis” (*ibid.*: 50). This text is one of the earliest to explicitly equate yoga and occultism. At the time it was written, this was well-aligned with the programme of the theosophical leaders Blavatsky and Olcott, who initially sought to enrich theosophy through yoga practice (see below).

From all the practices compared, yoga is presented as the most ancient and convincing one in which all others culminate. It is in this context that Mittra places the passage taken from Wilkinson, when he says that the “Yoga philosophy of the Aryans attracted the notice of foreigners” (Mittra 1881: 54). He, however, mistakes Wilkinson’s words as Swedenborg’s:<sup>177</sup>

Swedenborg saw the intimate connection between thought and vital life. He says—“Thought commences and corresponds with respiration.” [...] [Swedenborg] discovered the correspondence between respiration and thoughts and emotions, and thus he discovered the links between the body and the soul. He says—“Inward thoughts have inward breaths, and purer spiritual thoughts have spiritual breaths hardly mixed with material” (Mittra 1881: 54-55).

The quotation is taken from Wilkinson’s *Biography* (1849: 55, 77), but it is presented as Swedenborg’s words. While Mittra did not establish a clear connection to *prāṇāyāma* in this quotation, it is still evident that he wanted to comment on yoga-related themes that were addressed in India (and in his text) by practices that influenced “thought and vital life” (Mittra 1881: 54). In any case, theosophical interpreters, who evidently read his work, clearly related the passage to *prāṇāyāma*.

The theosophist Tukaram Tatya produced the first full-fledged edition of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* in book format (first edition 1882, second edition 1885).<sup>178</sup> This book contains the translation by the Sanskrit scholar James R. Ballantyne and Govind

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<sup>177</sup> Although Mittra cites Wilkinson at length, only a short version of the quotation with the most important features will be reproduced here.

<sup>178</sup> For a detailed history of the translation of the *Yogasūtra* into English, another eventful episode, see Baier (2009: 359-360). In the following, my investigations are based on the second edition by Tatya (1885 [1882]).

Shastri Deva, an Introduction by Olcott and an Appendix with several compiled texts from different religious traditions. In the Appendix, the publisher quotes Wilkinson's elaboration on the connection between the breath and the mind.<sup>179</sup> The passage is reproduced verbatim with reference to Mittra's *On the Soul* including the explanatory interpolations of Mittra (Tatya 1885 [1882]: 212-213). Tatya edited the text merely by linking the whole sequence to *prāṇāyāma*, when he mentions in a footnote:

The observation of Swedenborg, the great Seer of modern times, explains the philosophy of the प्राणायाम *Prāṇāyām* of the Indian Yogis (Tatya 1885 [1882]: 212, n.\*).

Although Swedenborg does not explain a philosophy of *prāṇāyāma in toto*, it is still true that it is a common theme in Indian (yogic) texts to correlate the mind (*citta*, *manas*) and the breath (*prāṇa*, or in Patañjali's case *śvāsa*) as early as in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.2 and in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 1.31 (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 128, 329, 351; chapter 3.3.6). Due to this notable parallel between ancient Indian thought and the Swedenborgian notion of breath, it is not surprising that the echoes of the quotation attributed to Swedenborg also appear in further translations of yoga texts.

The exact replica of the Wilkinson passage as quoted in Mittra's *On the Soul* is found again in the first English translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* by Vihari Lal Mitra, published in four volumes in Calcutta between 1891 and 1899. Mitra, of whom little is known, interpolated several theosophically influenced passages into his translation.<sup>180</sup> His works were known to Vivekananda (Kraler 2021: 384). Mitra quotes the Wilkinson passage ascribed to Swedenborg as found in Mittra and Tatya at least twice partially (Mitra 1999 [1898]: 1194-1195) and once, by reprinting the whole passage, with reference to Olcott. The full quote is found in the chapter "Union of the Mind with the Breath of Life", hitting the theme that was expounded by Wilkinson (*ibid.*: 385).

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<sup>179</sup> It is worth noting that the Appendix (Tatya 1885 [1882]: 198, 211-212) also mentions Buddhist breathing techniques and Hesychast meditation in correlation with the breath as mentioned in Samuel Beal's *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (1871). See for Hesychasm, a form of Christian spirituality with roots in early Christianity, and its expression through the monks of Athos, also Blavatsky (1880a: 315): "[T]he same method described here [voluntary trance, M.K.] is known as a tradition and practised by the Christian monks at Mount Athos even to this very day. These, to induce 'divine visions' concentrate their thoughts and fix their eyes on the navel for hours together." The correlation of yoga practice and Hesychasm has been discussed before Blavatsky in German mesmerism (Baier 2013: 417). Regarding *prāṇāyāma*, these passages have not become as influential in modern yoga contexts as the words of Wilkinson, and they are therefore not further discussed here.

<sup>180</sup> This assessment can be judged from the theosophical jargon and themes implemented, such as the mentioning of demiurges, the preference of Rājayoga over Haṭhayoga, and the reference to Blavatsky, Olcott, and other theosophical authors.



From that point on, the pseudo-Swedenborg passage appears in various theosophical and modern yoga contexts. The Austrian occultist Carl Kellner cites them in his *Yoga* (Kellner 1896: 15) with reference to Sris Chandra Vasu's Introduction to the *Śivasamhitā*, which had adopted the passage (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlv). In *An Introduction to the Yoga Philosophy* (1914), Vasu cites the passage in a chapter on *prāṇāyāma* (Vasu 1975 [1914]: 39). Sri Yogendra, a prominent modern yoga pioneer, was aware of Vasu's book, and he also quotes the passage in his influential works on yogic breath cultivation (Yogendra 1932: 69-70; 1940: 50-51). Yogendra appropriates it for elucidating the *prāṇa*-mind nexus as laid out in the fifteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.4 (*ibid.*: 51).<sup>181</sup>

Although the passage attributed to Swedenborg only exemplifies one aspect of yogic breath cultivation as part of an entangled history, it is a wonderful example for how an influential discursive pattern was coined through its reception by theosophists, and then reproduced by the early representatives of modern yoga. While it is not Swedenborg's direct words that are reverberated, the basic idea that breath influences thoughts and emotions (and vice versa) becomes one of the *leitmotifs* of yogic breath cultivation. As has been shown, it was particularly relevant for modern yoga, because the reference to Swedenborg reinforced the *prāṇa*-mind nexus that goes back to the Upaniṣadic text corpuses and already had explanatory power before Swedenborg discovered a similar principle. In other words, the Indian traditions provided a "welcoming structure" (Baier 2016b) for the reception of the Swedenborg theme, which was gradually integrated into an understanding of *prāṇāyāma* in light of Patañjali and, under Vasu and Yogendra, the Haṭha yogis. As will be shown in further contexts that adopt the Swedenborg theme (as in Genevieve Stebbins's work, chapter 5.2), this quotation not only explained the link between breath and the mind, but between the breath and *emotions*, which is not foregrounded in premodern yoga and yoga-related texts. It thus sheds light on the psychological connotations of breath that becomes, under the influence of Swedenborg and others, an increasingly important theme within modern yoga.

Another example of yogic concepts that were paralleled to similar ones found in traditions outside of yoga was the amalgamation of *prāṇa* and the mesmeric

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<sup>181</sup> For details on this crucial medieval Haṭha text and its influential translation by Iyengar, see chapter 3.3; chapter 6.4.

fluidum. In the following, I will highlight explicit correlations of *prāṇa*-related techniques (i.e., yoga) with mesmerism.

#### 4.3.2 Correlation of Yoga and Mesmerism

When Blavatsky and Olcott came to India in 1879, they started to propagate mesmerism, to which both had strong ties, as the “science” that was capable to explain yoga and yogic altered states (Baier 2012: 151). In the above-cited Introduction to the theosophical edition of the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali from 1885, Olcott correlated yogic altered states such as *kuṇḍalinī* arousal with astral travel and projection, highly important practices in early theosophy, and he called yoga “self mesmerization” (Olcott 1885 [1882]: v; cf. Baier 2012: 156).<sup>182</sup> In the same edition, J. C. Thomson addresses Patañjali as “the Mesmer, and more than the Mesmer of India” (Thomson 1885 [1882]: xxxvii). In “The Power to Heal”, an article in the April 1883 issue of *The Theosophist*, Blavatsky avers that a “person in health is charged with positive vitality—*pran*, Od, Aura, electro-magnetism, or whatever else you prefer to call it” (Blavatsky 1883b: 159). This passage, though not equating *prāṇa* or yoga in further depth with mesmeric practices,<sup>183</sup> shows that Blavatsky theorised *prāṇa* in the larger context of healing and mesmerism, yet her elaborations on the practical side are for the most part scarce and close to hostile, as will be further expounded below.

A more explicit correlation of a *prāṇa*-related technique with mesmerism is found in a short note by Damodar K. Mavalankar (1857–1885) on “Self-Mesmerisation”, first published in the April 1884 issue of *The Theosophist*, and later in the edited work *Dâmodar: The Writings of a Hindû Chela* (1940). Mavalankar talks about the experience of “a brother Theosophist”, receiving “wonderful cures by the process of self-mesmerisation”, in which a form of concentration was applied to restore “that particular portion of the *Pran*” that caused a severe attack of lumbago (Mavalankar in Eek 1940: 107; cf. Baier 2009: 361-362).<sup>184</sup> Mavalankar explicitly

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<sup>182</sup> The history of the equation of yoga and self-mesmerisation goes back to German Romantic mesmerism postulating that Indian Brahmins were especially prone to self-mesmerisation. The aforementioned Carl Joseph Windischmann extended this theme by describing a form of “Upaniṣadic yoga” that could be compared to a self-induced somnambulism in his *Die Philosophie im Fortgang der Weltgeschichte* (1827–1834) (Baier 2009: 234-238).

<sup>183</sup> She expounds on Olcott’s healing activities in this article, presenting them as “mesmeric science” (Blavatsky 1883b: 159). However, “*pran*” is used only once in this article and she does not establish a form of “Pranic Healing” as later occultists like Theodor Reuß and Atkinson/Ramacharaka did (Zoehrer 2021: 104-107; chapter 8.2.2).

<sup>184</sup> By most likely echoing Blavatsky, the editor of the book, Sven Eek, warns to disturb the “delicate balance of the prāṇic currents in the body” and of the “mental and physical dangers *prāṇāyāma* attempts lead to” (Eek 1940: 108). He then states that it is “practically certain that H. P. Blavatsky would not

equates the experience of cure through *prāṇa* with “self-mesmerisation”. This is an example in which *prāṇa* is identified with the mesmeric fluidum and adopts precisely the function that the fluidum had in mesmeric healing – it was redistributed and thus healing occurred. However, as should be noted, a similar process was already known in yogic contexts – which is balancing *prāṇa* by concentration (chapter 3.3.5; chapter 8.1.1; chapter 8.2.1). By the 1890s, the idea of *prāṇa* as a means of cure had travelled long ways along theosophical roads. They were further developed by the German theosophist and occultist Carl Albert Theodor Reuß (1855–1923) in his article “Pranatherapie”, which appeared in the German theosophical monthly journal *Sphinx* in July 1894. In this article, magnetic passes of the mesmerist tradition are described as a method to direct the healing agent *prāṇa* (Zoehrer 2021: 104-107).

All these examples show that the term *prāṇa* was related to both self-mesmerisation and mesmerising or curing others. This is important, because Haṭhayogic texts harness *prāṇa* in various ways, but, as far as I am aware, they do not mention transferring *prāṇa* to others as a healing technique. As such, these examples constitute a novelty introduced by theosophists. For all their relevance, these examples do not treat *prāṇāyāma* as a central practice, but describes yoga or *prāṇa*-related techniques that were, in the case of the Mavalankar example, more relevant in context of concentration (*pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā*) than of *prāṇāyāma*.

Leaving the terrain of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent, in theosophy the notion of *prāṇa* was further linked to discourses on vitalism, evolution, matter and force, as well as ether theories prevalent at that time. In comparison to theorising the notions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as imponderables and as allusions to anti-materialist science (see below), the practice of *prāṇāyāma* is of minor importance in theosophical literature. However, there are voices pro and contra *prāṇāyāma*. The next section discusses these in light of the controversial reception of Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga and the search for a theosophy based on yoga practice that some people pursued.

#### 4.3.3 Likes and Dislikes of *Prāṇāyāma*: Occultism in Relation to Yoga and Physical Culture

As part of her mesmeric and vitalistic speculations, *prāṇa* theories were never disputed by Blavatsky. However, she did not hold *prāṇāyāma* as a practice in high regard, for it was in her opinion mainly associated with Haṭhayoga and tantrism. In late

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have allowed this [appreciative, M.K.] article to appear, but she was traveling in Europe at this time with Col. Olcott” (*ibid.*).

nineteenth-century India, Haṭhayoga and tantra, the two often mentioned in one breath, were still considered obscure practices, particularly by South Asian Brahmins and European Indologists. Theosophists mostly shared this view, and in negotiating various forms of yoga they tended to side with Rājayoga, associating it with Vedānta and with mental exercises, whereas Haṭhayoga with its focus on bodily practice was not much appreciated.<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, Haṭhayoga heritage started to leak into the margins of the Theosophical Society. Theosophy not being a monolithic movement, the interest in yoga and its practices inspired the translation of yoga-related texts into English, the earliest relevant translation being the aforementioned *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali. While the theosophical translations of Haṭhayogic texts like the *Śivasamhitā*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* will be discussed in chapter 6.4, some relevant references regarding *prāṇāyāma* are also made here (mainly regarding the Yoga Upaniṣads as translated by Narayanaswami Aiyer).

Blavatsky did not comment on *prāṇāyāma* often, but when she did her critique was mostly vigorous. However, there is an early passage in *The Theosophist* in which she surprisingly sides with breathing techniques that are used as an anaesthetic during surgery. It is found in a commentary on N. C. Paul's *A Treatise on Yoga Philosophy* published in *The Theosophist* during the years 1880 and 1881. N. C. Paul had first published the *Treatise* in 1851. Being trained as a surgeon, his work is probably the first attempt to translate yogic concepts into medical terms, and, in combining yoga and aspects of natural science, it matched the agenda of early theosophy. Published in English and dealing with practical and theoretical notions of Rājayoga and Haṭhayoga, it was one of the important reference books on yoga for the early phase of theosophy (Baier 2009: 249-250).<sup>186</sup> In this early phase, Blavatsky and Olcott were keen on collecting available data on yoga which could be linked to their occult endeavour, not only in a speculative, but also in a practical way. Hence, Paul's *Treatise* was serially

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<sup>185</sup> The opposition of Rāja- and Haṭhayoga, promoted by the theosophists, has its roots in medieval notions of Rājayoga claiming to be superior to Haṭhayoga (Birch 2013). This discourse does not end with the theosophists, but is continued by Vivekanand, among others. The theosophists, however, presented Rājayoga as being largely devoid of aspects of bodily practice, whereas they associated Haṭhayoga with the lack of any intellectual or cognitive elements. There are statements that this practice would render the practitioner idiotic or dumb (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 615; Besant 1935: 74). This polemical dichotomy is historically problematic, as some medieval sources incorporate Vedānta, Rājayoga and Haṭhayoga in fruitful relation to each other, incorporating both philosophical and practical aspects, as found, for example in the *Yogacintāmaṇi* by Sivānandasarasvatī (late sixteenth or early seventeenth century) (Birch 2013: 401). Although favouring Rājayoga, Vivekananda did not present it as a purely philosophical approach, as *prāṇāyāma* forms an intrinsic part of his understanding of Rājayoga.

<sup>186</sup> For an extensive discussion of N. C. Paul's *Treatise*, see chapter 6.3.

republished in *The Theosophist*, though not without Madame Blavatsky's – at times corrective – commentaries, and as a monograph again in 1882.

One of the characteristics of Paul's *Treatise* is that it does not distinguish between Rāja- and Haṭhayoga – a fact criticised by Blavatsky.<sup>187</sup> He considers all eight limbs of Pātañjalayoga, calling them limbs of Rājayoga, and in doing so, maybe for the first time parallels Patañjali's yoga with Rājayoga (Paul 1882 [1851]: 28; cf. Birch 2013: 418, n. 2).<sup>188</sup> Human hibernation, which is equated with yoga and *samādhi*, is the pivotal point of the text, and Paul also highlights *prāṇāyāma* as an outstanding technique for hibernation. Another main feature of the text, as part of the hibernation techniques presented, is the debate over humans being buried alive, which they could allegedly survive for days or weeks. This yogic feat was frequently discussed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century yoga texts and was a subject that also fascinated Blavatsky.

In her commentaries on Paul's passages published in *The Theosophist*, she frequently endorses Paul's statements about yogic hibernation techniques. Similar to the occultists, the "ascetics" (or yogis) had discovered what science had just recently become aware of: "[T]hese *illiterate* and *superstitious* ascetics seem to have only anticipated the discoveries of modern science" (Blavatsky 1881: 72, her emphasis). Commenting on the *ujjāyī kumbhaka*,<sup>189</sup> which, according to Paul, is supposed to cure "all diseases dependent upon deficient inhalation of oxygen" (*ibid.*), Blavatsky quotes from the September 1880 issue of the *New York Medical Record* addressing an experiment conducted by the physician Dr. Bonwill in Philadelphia in 1872. In this experiment, so the newspaper reports, patients were asked to hyperventilate, and then, in the following couple of minutes, some simple surgeries like the extraction of teeth were undertaken. The newspaper further explains the patient's reactions following the hyperventilation, and claims that the effect is due to an oxygenation of the blood poisoning the "nerve centres". Blavatsky stimulates further thoughts on the potential of breathing techniques as an anaesthetic:

And if it be well proved that about 100 respirations per minute ending in rapid puffing expirations can successfully deaden pain, then why should not a varied mode of inhaling oxygen be productive

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<sup>187</sup> "Here the author falls into an unmistakable error. He confounds the *Raja* with the *Hatha* Yogins, whereas the former have nothing to do with the physical training of the *Hatha*" (Blavatsky 1880b: 31).

<sup>188</sup> The *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali was subsequently associated by theosophists with Rājayoga, because for them, it represented more of a philosophical stratum. For the history of this correlation see Birch (2013) and De Michelis (2004: 178).

<sup>189</sup> For details of the technique see chapter 3.3.3; chapter 8.3.1; chapter 8.5.2.

of other and still more extraordinary results, yet unknown to science but awaiting her future discoveries? (Blavatsky 1881: 72).

Blavatsky's positive evaluation is thoroughly aligned with Paul's medical understanding of the efficacy of yogic techniques. However, her later change of attitude towards *prāṇāyāma* and breathing techniques may be due to a general shift of her interest to an occultism rooted in more disembodied "ethereal" practices, rather than body-centred practices like Haṭhayoga.

Shortly after the final publication of Paul's *Treatise in The Theosophist*, a decline in statements regarding bodily practice occurs, and a general lack of body-related techniques can be observed (Baier 2009: 373). The founding figures of theosophy, Blavatsky and Olcott, were not capable of covering the practical side of their occult teachings to the satisfaction of their disciples – and at least some of them also demanded instructions in body-centred practices, such as Haṭhayoga. To fill this gap of knowledge in yoga, they initially collaborated with Dayananda Sarasvati (as discussed above). Although Dayananda was knowledgeable about yoga, he did not agree to teach it to theosophists, much to the disappointment of Blavatsky and Olcott (Godwin 1994: 329). The decline of practice was further enforced by a shift from defining authority through direct teachers like Dayananda to the teachings of the so-called Masters (Baier 2009: 335, 337). These authorities were considered to be highly developed human beings with extraordinary occult powers such as materialising in front of an elected discipleship or manifesting letters out of thin air that contained their teachings. However, as stated, Blavatsky's attitude towards Haṭhayoga had already been dismissive in 1882, and additionally, reports about the dangers of *prāṇāyāma* practice may also have aroused her scepticism.

A text likely aligned with Blavatsky's programmatic anti-yoga regimen was written by a close collaborator of Blavatsky, Godolphin Mitford (1844–1884). Mitford laid out the occultist's religious practice in relation to aspects of physical culture – which could be read as an attractive alternative to yoga.<sup>190</sup> In his influential article "The 'Elixir of Life'", first published in *The Theosophist* in March and April 1882, Mitford envisioned the adept's ascent towards spiritualised life, which was in its final stage "eternal". This was attained by leaving the physical body "behind" and gradually adopting an ethereal body – thus describing an inherently theosophical motive. In Mitford's inspired and well-versed occult jargon and content,<sup>191</sup> the text leaves the

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<sup>190</sup> For an interpretation of "The 'Elixir of Life'" along these lines, see Baier (2009: 340-349).

<sup>191</sup> The text is said to be directly inspired by the Masters and by Blavatsky.

reader with a sense of encountering the core of theosophical teaching. Consequently, it is referenced by many subsequent statements on meditation and contemplation. Despite its ethereal programme, some passages in this article allude to the importance of certain aspects of Euro-American hygienic and physical culture (and the suggestions of “modern scientists”), at least in the initial stages of the practice:

Hence the neophyte should endeavour, as far as possible, to fulfil every true canon of sanitary law as laid down by modern scientists. Pure air, pure water, pure food, gentle exercise, regular hours, pleasant occupations and surroundings, are all, if not indispensable, at least serviceable to his progress (Mitford 1882: 169).

What follows is a correlation of key aspects of recent hygienic and physical culture, as in the quote above, and spiritual life, developed throughout “all ages”:

It is to secure these, at least as much as silence and solitude, that the Gods, Sages, Occultists of all ages have retired as much as possible to the quiet of the country, the cool cave, the depths of the forest, the expanse of the desert, or the heights of the mountains (Mitford 1882: 169).

Significantly, Mitford refrains from mentioning “yogis” here, though the description of the “Gods, Sages, Occultists” clearly invokes the image often associated with yogis, and they could easily have been included in this appraisal. Instead, the yogi is explicitly mentioned only once, namely in connotation with exertion and the over-straining of willpower. As such, this text does not reveal an appeal to yoga, but rather reads as an outline for an alternative to the yogic path. It does, however, recommend certain physical as well as mental practices plus the reading of certain occult texts that aimed to induce meditative states and the urge to become immortal. The text reflects, among other aspects, the call for physical practices among theosophists, at least in the initial stages of the occult path.

Notwithstanding the overall reservations of Blavatsky, some Indian theosophists expressed their interest in (Haṭhayogic) *prāṇāyāma* in various pamphlets and treatises, many of them published in *The Theosophist*. Some of them, as in Paul’s case, may have passed Blavatsky’s censorship only by placing themselves closer to a Rājayogic understanding. Some of them, however, entered the society’s journal after Blavatsky had handed over the editorship of *The Theosophist* to Olcott in 1885, who was, considering his experience in healing practices, less sceptical of body-centred practices. In *The Theosophist* 1889 and 1891, two anonymous members of the Theosophical Society of Kumbakonam, a town in Tamil Nadu (district of Thanjavur), presented a translation of the *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* (Aiyer 1889) and the *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī*

*Upaniṣad* (Aiyer 1891b).<sup>192</sup> Both *Upaniṣads* are part of the early eighteenth-century canon of the Yoga *Upaniṣads* and feature aspects of Haṭha and Rājayoga (Birch 2018: 10; Ruff 2002: 93). According to the translations of the Kumbakonam members, the *Upaniṣads* deal with Haṭha and Siddha-yogic (and thereby tantric) ideas of *prāṇa*, *prāṇāyāma* and subtle-body-related techniques and concepts such as *kuṇḍalinī* and the *cakras*. These are rare, uncensored exposures of Haṭha-based forms of *prāṇāyāma* within the theosophical circles after the decline of practice in 1882.

One of the anonymous Kumbakonam members is almost certainly Narayanaswami Aiyer (1854–1918), a theosophist who received schooling in Kumbakonam, later translated the *Laghu Yogavāsiṣṭha* (1896), and published the *Thirty-two Vidyā* (1916), a compilation of early eighteenth-century Yoga *Upaniṣads*. He was an esteemed member, lecturer, and translator in the Theosophical Society. Aiyer gave a lecture on “Occult Physiology” during the annual convention in December 1890 (printed in the March 1891 issue of *The Theosophist*), a few months before Blavatsky’s death. This lecture put into applicable terms what he had translated in the *Śāṇḍilya* and *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upaniṣad*. This meant that Aiyer transferred the Sanskrit notions of *prāṇa*, *prāṇāyāma* and the subtle body into English and interpreted them in mesmeric and medical terms.<sup>193</sup> With regard to *prāṇāyāma* and Haṭha yogis (“persons who go through pranayama”) he states, referencing the *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upaniṣad*:

What persons who go through pranayama do, is that they go through the several plexuses to conquer the forces in those plexuses, and also to control their breath through cessation of breath or Kumbaka. In ordinary moments, breath is passed through the right or left nostril, breath passing from one nostril to the other in some minutes less than two hours. What should be done in order to produce the state of trance is, that breath should be controlled and should be made to go through the Sushumna, the central nadi. [...] Now when the plexuses have been conquered, when the prana has been stopped and made to get into the Kundilini [*sic*], and thence into the Sushumna, one’s desires vanish, and he is able to destroy his subtle body at his will and then to reproduce it if he likes (Aiyer 1891a: 357-358).

<sup>192</sup> Both were published anonymously by “two members of the Kumbakonam society”, but, as explained below, one of these authors is almost certainly Narayanaswami Aiyer.

<sup>193</sup> The mesmeric terminology is most obvious in the following statement: “These wires [*nāḍīs*] act as conductors of *pranas* or vital airs—what we would call magnetic currents—in our body” (Aiyer 1891a: 352). The medical terminology is most obvious in the statement paralleling the *cakras* with glands and parts of the brain: “These three nadis go from the sacral plexus or *muladhara* to the highest top of the head—*Sahasrara* or the pineal gland—and then return from these down to the *medulla oblongata*, going through the spinal cord and joining again in the *muladhara*” (*ibid.* 353).



The passage on “conquering the plexuses” is further interpreted in a theosophical sense in so far as the connection between the physical and the subtle body should be severed, and “the adept is then able to get out of his gross body and pass in[to] the double” (Aiyer 1891a: 358), which probably means to separate the physical body from its ethereal “double”.<sup>194</sup> The *cakras* are crucial, because they are the knots at which the subtle body is tied to the gross body. The lecture “Occult Physiology” can be viewed as an unorthodox theosophical statement to the extent that it openly deals with advanced *prāṇāyāma* techniques in Haṭhayogic contexts. However, it is also obvious that the lecturer tried to reconcile his findings from the Yoga Upaniṣads with theosophical doctrine.

To return to Blavatsky’s own anti-Haṭha and anti-*prāṇāyāma* sentiments, one of the harshest critiques of *prāṇāyāma* by Blavatsky is found in one of her last texts. This is the “Esoteric Section, Instruction Number III”, documenting meetings held in London in 1889 and 1890 for a small group after Blavatsky had left India for good. She repeatedly refers therein to *prāṇāyāma* as the “death of the breath”:

Such, then, is the occult science on which the modern ascetics and Yogis of India base their soul development and powers. They are known as the Haṭha-Yogis. Now, the science of Haṭha-Yoga rests upon the “suppression of breath,” or *Prāṇāyāma*, to which exercise our Masters are unanimously opposed. For what is *Prāṇāyāma*? Literally translated, it means the “death of (vital) breath” (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 613-615).

In this statement, Blavatsky clearly shows her enmity towards Haṭhayoga and *prāṇāyāma*, enforcing it by the Masters’ authority. Her reading of *prāṇāyāma* as the “death of breath” might be due to an etymological misinterpretation of the term, for she seems to divide it into *prāṇa* and *yama*.<sup>195</sup> In Hindu mythology, Yama is the lord of death (as, e.g., referred to in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*), and Blavatsky likely misinterprets the term on this basis (Cantú forthcoming-a). Whatever the exact sources for her interpretation, for Blavatsky the reading of *prāṇāyāma* as the death of breath manifests quite literally: practitioners may develop consumption, mental illness or tendencies to commit suicide, or die for other reasons (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 615). The immorality associated with these practices – probably also due to the frequent link Blavatsky establishes between *prāṇāyāma* and left-hand tantrism (*vāmamārga*) –

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<sup>194</sup> Although the term (ethereal) “double”, a synonym for the “astral body”, was already used by Blavatsky, the better known “etheric double” was coined in second-generation theosophy (Zoehrer 2020: 160).

<sup>195</sup> See, elsewhere in the Esoteric Section: “It is indeed that which called *Prana-yama*, or the ‘death of the breath’” (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 622).

results “in moral death always, and in physical death very frequently” (*ibid.*: 622). Along with her tendency to disapprove of tantra (which is not as univocally promoted in all her texts, Baier 2016b: 335), she also dismisses the scholar-translator, theosophist, and *tāntrika* Rama Prasad (chapter 5.3). She states that he may be a good Sanskrit scholar, but does not qualify as an occultist (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 604).

After Blavatsky’s death one of her closest followers commented favourably on *prāṇāyāma*. Annie Besant (1847–1933), a leading figure of second-generation theosophy, considered *prāṇāyāma* a relevant technique for some of her fellow theosophists. In contrast to Blavatsky’s sharp criticism, there is also evidence that Besant was inspired by Prasad’s interpretation of the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (Besant 1912 [1895]: 57; Kraler 2021: 391). In a lecture titled “Yoga”, held at an annual convention in 1893, she states that *prāṇāyāma*, depending on the conditions of the practitioner, can be either dangerous or useful. She argues that Indians are better prepared for *prāṇāyāma* than Westerners through their hereditary disposition of practising the technique for many generations. She furthermore observes that *prāṇāyāma* is not only a practice of yoga, but that it is part of the Brahmanical religious culture, “known to almost every Brāhman at least” (Besant 1894: 59). She may point here to *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite, maybe drawing the information from Paul’s *Treatise*, in which he mentions *prāṇāyāma* as part of Brahmins’ “daily practice” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 9). Besant acknowledges that *prāṇāyāma* has a definite purpose in Haṭhayoga by shutting off the orientation of the senses toward the exterior world. However, even for Indians, *prāṇāyāma* is only safe when practised in moderation and under supervision. She cautions the Westerner with no “physical heredity” against practising *prāṇāyāma* “with much persistence and with Western energy” (Besant 1894: 59). Warnings again include possible disease and death. She furthermore doubts that the conditions in the West, regarding the physical and the psychical, would support this practice:

Whereas for the European it is unwise to practise it at all, because he has not any suitable physical heredity, nor are the physical and psychical surroundings amongst which he lives fitted for a practice which may be said to work on the physico-psychical life; thus the practice may be exceedingly dangerous, and for a European who is going to begin, the physical training will begin in a different fashion (Besant 1894: 59-60).

Other than Besant, theosophy's Western exponents had barely given credit to *prāṇāyāma*,<sup>196</sup> but Besant acknowledged *prāṇāyāma* in the context of Brahmanical and Haṭhayogic traditions. However, the critical attitude is still obvious, and largely follows Blavatsky's dismissive stance. For Besant, there exists a Western kind of "energy", and an Eastern mode or "heredity" of practice, reflecting a typical cultural dichotomy. In case of the Western exercises, she probably alludes to strands of physical culture carrying out exercise with too much vigour. What is new here is the contextualising of *prāṇāyāma* in a psycho-physical framework, which shows that Besant was somewhat aware of the larger transnational discourse in hygienic and physical culture. Also, Besant alludes to a physical culture in a "different fashion" for the Western student not suited to practise *prāṇāyāma*. This suggestion could be read as a foreshadowing of modern yoga's physical training through *āsana*, and Besant seeing – similarly to Mitford – the need for it. Contrary to Besant's view, the transnational and "universal" significance of modern yoga's physical culture, however, has developed irrespective of the practitioners' nationality or heredity.

#### 4.3.4 *Ākāśa*, *Prāṇa*, and Superconsciousness: A Foreshadowing of Modern Yoga's Key Notions

Theosophists were interpreters of the cosmos. They were not only interested in the petty human condition on its physical plane, but tried to fathom human life on a larger scale, which resulted in an abundance of cosmological speculation. Theosophy was therefore an arena where concepts of psychology, physics, and parapsychology were presented and discussed. *Ākāśa*, *prāṇa*, and the superconscious were some of these notions, as will be exemplified in the following. I will here provide a base for the discussion of the cosmological notions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, mostly translated as "ether",<sup>197</sup> which is then extended in chapter 5. It should be briefly noted that *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* represent one of the "seven principles" or "envelopes" respectively which constitute the human being.<sup>198</sup> In this cosmological hierarchy, *ākāśa* holds a higher

<sup>196</sup> Another exception is the later *Meditation for Beginners* (1918) by James I. Wedgwood which treats breathing techniques as part of his emphasis on physical practice in meditation (Baier 2009: 414-423). Wedgwood, however, recommends "simple deep breathing" over strenuous (Haṭhayogic) breathing techniques that would place too much emphasis on the body, and additionally could strain the heart and lungs (Wedgwood 1918: 41-42; Baier 2009: 421). It should be briefly noted that this is the only text that I am aware of that relates the capacity of "inner breathing" not to Swedenborg, but to the quaker George Fox (Wedgwood 1918: 40).

<sup>197</sup> Others are "space", "sound", or "substratum". For a discussion on *ākāśa* in premodern South Asian philosophy and several usages in theosophy and modern yoga, see also chapter 5.

<sup>198</sup> On these principles that comprise the "septenary man", see Hall (2007). Correspondingly to the importance of "seven", theosophical discourse on *prāṇa* at times recurs on the *Taittirīya Aranyaka*

ontological status than *prāṇa* (which will change in modern yoga), based on a logic that places *ākāśa* on a higher plane (usually the fifth) than *prāṇa* (usually the second) (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 607). Moreover, in Blavatsky's teachings, *ākāśa* would at times explicitly replace functions of a premodern notion of *prāṇa* which in Haṭhayoga contexts is linked to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal and an upward movement through the *susūmnā* (chapter 3.3.1). For example, in the so-called Inner Group Teachings documented by Spierenburg,<sup>199</sup> Blavatsky states: "It is the pure Ākāśa that passes up Susumnā; its two aspects in Ida and Pingala. These are the three vital airs" (Blavatsky as quoted in Spierenburg 1995 [1985]: 4).<sup>200</sup>

In first commenting on *ākāśa*, I will use the meanings attributed to the term by Blavatsky in her *Working Glossary for the Use of Students of Theosophical Literature* (1892).<sup>201</sup> In establishing the meaning *ākāśa*-as-ether, this concept was linked by theosophists to the so-called Aryan hemispheres, consisting of two main cultural circuits, the Indian and the Greek. Ether theories, an important discourse in the nineteenth century that brought together the views of physics and occultism, drew on the ancient Greek notion of *æther/ether* as an all-pervading, imponderable substance (chapter 5.1). Theosophists had their part in this, because their cosmological speculations incorporated ether and ether theories. In Blavatsky's first book, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), which claims to bridge "Science and Theology", she correlates *ākāśa* with ether in the context of mesmerism:

Akasa is the mysterious fluid termed by scholastic science, "the all-pervading ether;" it enters into all the magical operations of nature, and produces mesmeric, magnetic, and spiritual phenomena (Blavatsky 1877: 140).

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*Upaniṣad*, stating that there are seven *prāṇas*, not five. See, for example, Aiyer (1891a: 355, his emphasis): "[W]e find that there are seven *pranas* in reality, because it is stated in *Taittiriya Aranyaka* [...] edited by Rajendralala Mitra, that there are Sapta or seven *pranas* [...] which proves that everything is sevenfold in this world."

<sup>199</sup> These are lectures given to an exclusive circle around Blavatsky in London in 1890 and 1891 until her death. The lectures edited by Spierenburg in *The Inner Group Teachings of H. P. Blavatsky: To Her Personal Pupils (1890–91)* document later meetings than those presented in Zirkoff (1988) as "The Esoteric Section I–V".

<sup>200</sup> This is significant, as *kuṇḍalinī*-related practices involving meditation on the *cakras* lie at the core of the Inner Group Teachings. Blavatsky's *ākāśic* reinterpretation of the ascending substance in the central channel is thus an important part of what Baier (2009: 391) has called a "Neo-Kuṇḍalinī-Yoga" of the Inner Group Teachings.

<sup>201</sup> These are *ākāśa* (1) as *æther/ether*; (2) as the Astral light; (3) as (procreating) space as was also prevalent in premodern Indian cosmologies (Blavatsky 1892: 13, 38). One important notion connected to *ākāśa* is what came to be known as the "Akasha Chronic" in second generation theosophy, a highly influential term in twentieth century esotericism. The Akasha Chronic, a concept that can only be mentioned here, denotes the imprint of all *creation* at any given time into *ākāśa*. By accessing the Akasha Chronic through mediumship, omniscience can be obtained.

Theosophists also often identified *ākāśa* with Éliphas Lévi's (born Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875) notion of the “astral light”. The famous French socialist and occultist who interweaved cabbalistic ideas with mesmeric and magical concepts was an influential figure for theosophy.<sup>202</sup> Thus, this correlation is not surprising. For example, in the above-cited Introduction to the *Yogasūtra*, Olcott states that *ākāśa* is the astral light *and* ether, an all-compassing guide to understanding space for the yogi: “[T]he Yogin can see through the pure Akāsa (astral light, or ether) all that concerns the orbs of space, as well as all that is transpiring upon our globe” (Olcott 1885 [1882]: viii). Olcott further holds that several religious acts on the globe are enacted in “the presence of this radiant, this silvery [*sic*] Light” (*ibid.*). Another theme is the reading of *ākāśa* as paralleled with a life elixir which is often found in contexts of alchemy. In the above discussed “The ‘Elixir of Life’” by Mitford that speaks of a prolongation of life, it is stated that the occultist lives on *ākāśa*, or ether: the neophyte “will become all living and sensitive, and will derive nourishment from the Ether (Akas)” (Mitford 1882: 170).

Being a polyvalent term already in the Indian traditions, it is not surprising that some inconsistency pervaded the theories around *ākāśa*. Part of the confusion was the fact that the Sanskrit term *ākāśa* had (like the multitude of its spellings) several counterparts in English, not *just* ether. Furthermore, theosophical theories also took heed of more traditional meanings of *ākāśa*, like being one of the five elements emanating from *prakṛti*; in this role it was an element attributed to sound and space. Because of its varied readings, the term *ākāśa* was debatable. In reflecting the problem of translating terms and concepts into different contexts and languages in the *Secret Doctrine* (1888), Blavatsky calls the mis-correlations that she observed in theosophy (or the synonymisation of *ākāśa* with several notions that she had established earlier) “a great mistake” (Blavatsky 1893 [1888]: 315).<sup>203</sup>

Responding to the potentially confusing discussion of the all-pervading *ākāśa*, one of the clearest explanations of the relationship between the different meanings of *ākāśa*, the astral light and ether is found in one of her late teachings, the “Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society” (Blavatsky 1988 [1889]: 358-

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<sup>202</sup> See, for example, Blavatsky (1893: 20) referring to Lévi as the “great Mage of the XIXth century”, and quoting him at length.

<sup>203</sup> The full quote being: “The Astral Light of the Kabalists [*sic*] is by some very incorrectly translated “Ether,” the latter is confused with the hypothetical Ether of Science, and both are referred to by some Theosophists as synonymous with Ākāsha. This is a great mistake” (Blavatsky 1893 [1888]: 315).

373). On the question on ether's molecular density, Blavatsky explained *ākāśa* and ether in its various contexts:

In its lowest strata, where it [ether] merges with the astral light, it may be called molecular on its own plane; but not for us. But the ether of which science has a suspicion, is the grossest manifestation of Akasa, though on our plane, for us mortals, it is the seventh principle of the astral light, and three degrees higher than “radiant matter.” [...] We may perhaps call matter “crystallised ether” (Blavatsky 1988 [1889]: 370).

In this passage, the connotation of *ākāśa* and matter occurs in relation to the notion of ether, which in turn implies all-pervading subtle matter. To sum up, in contextualising *ākāśa* in the theosophical debate, it becomes clear that it orbits around *ākāśa*-as-ether, which is followed by the notion of *ākāśa*-as-primordial matter. Vivekananda will follow up on the latter reading by closely associating *ākāśa* with *prakṛti*.<sup>204</sup>

Compared to *ākāśa*, the meaning of *prāṇa* was somewhat less ambivalent in the early theosophical cosmological speculations – at least in its most frequently used form. It is often subordinated to *jīva* (“life”), which is mostly translated as “One Life” responsible for all living beings created in the cosmos.<sup>205</sup> As a subordinate principle, *prāṇa* is mostly associated with physical vitality that is confined in the solar sphere. Thus, *prāṇa* is connoted with all life *under* the sun, but not with cosmic life at large – an interpretation that contrasts with the notion of *prāṇa* in modern yoga, which is mainly influenced by Vivekananda, as will be shown. In theosophy, *prāṇa* as physical vitality is often associated with the second-lowest principle within the abovementioned sevenfold cosmic hierarchy (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 607). The theosophical understanding of *prāṇa* (which is sometimes synonymous with *vāyu*, “air”) as “force” derived from the sun (Anonymous 1892: 31; Prasad 1890: 37)<sup>206</sup> becomes crucial for the history of modern yoga, as it foreshadows the explicit correlation of *prāṇa* as force and *ākāśa* as matter. This correlation is, to my knowledge, first found in Hartmann's

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<sup>204</sup> Prefiguring Vivekananda's tendency, Blavatsky puts *ākāśa* on the same plane with *prakṛti*, calling it “*ākāśa-prakṛti*” thus incorporating the notion of an *Urmaterie* into the principle of *ākāśa*, also interpreted here as space: “[T]his is SPACE, the field for the operation of the eternal Forces and natural Law, the basis (as Mr. Subba Row rightly calls it) upon which take place the eternal intercorrelations of Ākāśa-Prakṛti” (Blavatsky 1910: 38-39). This passage is taken from an Appendix to T. Subba Row's *The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tenets on the Seven-fold Principle in Man* in the same volume.

<sup>205</sup> The following passage elucidates the relationship between *prāṇa* and *jīva* and its somewhat subordinate role: “Jīva becomes Prāṇa only when the child is born and begins to breathe. It is the breath of life, Nephesh. There is no Prāṇa on the Astral Plane” (Blavatsky as quoted in Spierenburg 1995 [1985]: 18).

<sup>206</sup> Prasad probably derives this interpretation from the *Praśna Upaniṣad* which is quoted on several occasions in Prasad (1890). The *Working Glossary* of 1892 that is, though anonymously published, written by William Judge, probably adopts this notion from Prasad (1890).

“Das Wesen der Alchemie” (1893) and then in Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga* (chapter 5.3.3; chapter 5.4.3).

The last concept that should be briefly mentioned here as part of a theosophical imprint on modern yoga is superconsciousness. Uniting theosophical interpretations as well as those found in psychic research, the complex history of the term will be expounded in detail elsewhere (Jacobs & Kraler forthcoming). Suffice it to say that, in theosophy, it often denoted the adept’s *ascent* to higher cosmological spheres, but “supra-conscious life” could also denote the highest (i.e., seventh) cosmic plane *itself* (Coryn 1893: 25). This notion also became widely influential in modern yoga because Vivekananda used it as a translation for *samādhi*. As a product of *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, which is in turn induced by *prāṇāyāma*, superconsciousness is part of the key terminology in his *Rāja Yoga* and of numerous subsequent texts. As for the broader influence of theosophical ideas on modern yoga, a final summary is provided in the following.

#### 4.3.5 Modern Yoga’s Theosophical Heritage

Theosophy, which integrated certain strands of Indian philosophy (among these, yoga, tantra, Vedānta, and Buddhism) into occultism, can be considered as a closely related field to modern yoga. Theosophy prefigured some of modern yoga’s discourses, notions, and practices. For example, by discussing *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in the context of anti-materialist concepts of evolution, theosophists had created a net of relational cosmological terms that were absorbed by modern yoga pioneers. The terms absorbed did not necessarily imply exactly the same semantics, but they *were* used.

As a polyphonic movement, theosophy had both proponents and opponents of *prāṇāyāma*, and theosophical teachings were at least partly yogic. This provided a rich foundation upon which several modern yoga pioneers built (among these Vivekananda, Yogendra, Sivananda, and Yogananda). A major factor in the diffusion of theosophical ideas into modern yoga were the highly influential theosophical translations of Sanskrit texts, which were paid for by the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund (chapter 6.4). As has been exemplified by the influential passage falsely attributed to Swedenborg, such interpolations were often footnoted to translations of Sanskrit texts, from where they gained currency. Subtle body-related concepts such as the equation of *cakras* with glands and parts of the brain (Aiyer) and the translation of *cakras* as “nerve centres” (Blavatsky) will reappear in explicit modern yoga contexts. Likewise, the theme of yoga in relation to mesmeric practices

persists in the work of several modern yoga pioneers, first and foremost, in Vivekananda's. Despite his public refusal of theosophical doctrine, it is evident that the swami was well-acquainted with theosophical literature appropriating yoga, as shown by his scientific interpretation of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* (chapter 5.4), his frequent application of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent (chapter 8.1.1), and his employment of the idea of superconsciousness (Jacobs & Kraler forthcoming). All of these notions are further disseminated into modern yoga by the works of Atkinson/Ramacharaka that started to appear only seven years after Vivekananda's seminal *Rāja Yoga* (chapter 8.2.2).

Turning now to the last section of this chapter, the contributions of the transnational physical culture movement will be addressed. While physical culture was not a central theme in theosophy, some allusions to the need for suitable physical practice for the adept – both Eastern and Western – were made by Mitford, Besant, and Wedgwood. The wider occult scene – in which some protagonists continued the Randolphian magical practices – evidenced a clear interest in physical culture, as some pertinent texts show (i.e., in modern yoga contexts, the works of Stebbins and Atkinson/Ramacharaka). Hygiene and physical culture as relevant movements, however, also stand for themselves, since yoga pioneers from the 1920s actively assimilated (psycho-)physical-culture teachings and hygiene into yogic practice. This often involved a simultaneous appeal to and demarcation from physical culture, and in this negotiation, yoga ultimately remained superior for those individuals.

#### 4.4 Networks of Hygiene, Physical Culture and Psycho-Physical Culture: Their Breath-Related Ideas

##### 4.4.1 Transnational Hygienic and Physical Cultures

Though antiquated as a term, physical culture is a relevant historical category for understanding the emergence of modern yoga (Newcombe 2009: 993). In my study, the term physical culture is closely linked to nineteenth-century hygienic culture, which provided important grounds for the birth of national physical cultures as well as yoga, as will be shown. Various strands of the physical-culture movement became increasingly connected to nation-states as well as national and religious identities. Their transnational expansions also reached South Asia, and, in consequence, India's national expression of physical culture was called "yoga" (Singleton 2010: 81). In Singleton's seminal work *Yoga Body* (2010), a major angle of analysis is Euro-



American physical culture and its forging of transnational anglophone yoga, and vice versa. As Singleton has suggested, the unfolding yoga scene was influenced by certain strands of physical culture like gymnastics by the Swedish Pehr Henrik Ling (1766–1839), Eugen Sandow’s (1867–1925) system of bodybuilding, and Genevieve Stebbins’s American Delsartism (*ibid.*: 84-90, 144-148). On the level of transnational organisations of physical culture, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was responsible for spreading practices of physical culture paired with “core values of the Christian West” in India (*ibid.*: 91). Under the heading of “Muscular Christianity” (Alter 2006), Christian belief was conceived as particularly “masculine”, whereas Hinduism was portrayed as its “feminine” (and “weaker”) counterpart. But South Asia wanted to grow strong, too, as several nationalist rants in yoga- and physical-culture-related contexts show (e.g., quite prominently in Sundaram 1929: 108-109). The reinvention of yoga as an indigenous and thus national physical culture was at least partly triggered by the input of the colonial forces and the push-and-pull between Hindu and Christian negotiations (see also chapter 6.2).

This section investigates the field of hygienic culture as well as physical culture and their productivity for discourses on yogic breath cultivation.<sup>207</sup> Various strands of physical culture have mutually influenced each other. Since this chapter aims to delineate important contexts for the emergence of yogic breath cultivation, I mainly address the question of how modern yoga was influenced by these contexts and largely ignore the reception of yogic breath cultivation *within* hygienic and physical culture.<sup>208</sup> The strands of physical culture mentioned above (as investigated by Singleton) were partly relevant for the origination of yogic breath cultivation, as will be further expounded here. The impact of American Delsartism and Genevieve Stebbins’s notions of dynamic and rhythmic breathing on yogic breath cultivation can hardly be overstated and will therefore, for the most part, be dealt with in detail in two other chapters (chapter 5.2; chapter 8.2.1).

Apart from modern yoga scholarship, I rely on two main secondary sources that offer an in-depth understanding of the germane European (in particular German

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<sup>207</sup> For the relationship between physical culture, occultism, and modern yoga, see also Baier (2009: 454-456).

<sup>208</sup> According to Wedemeyer-Kolwe, post-1900 schools of breath gymnastics that developed out of schools of eurhythmics and rhythmic gymnastics may have been influenced by yoga (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 147, n. 78). Other examples for the reception of breathing techniques informed by yoga are the breathing exercises of the German (and also transnational) Mazdaznan movement that included breath retention in various sitting and standing postures, occasionally combined with arm and trunk movements (*ibid.*: 162).

and French) hygienic and physical culture, partly overlapping with the time frame and themes of the present study: Philipp Sarasin's *Reizbare Maschinen* (2001) and Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe's *Der neue Mensch* (2004).<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, I briefly touch upon the history of an important term often referred to by exponents of physical culture and modern yoga: psycho-physiology and derivatives thereof. As a last step, J. P. Müller, one of the most prominent examples of physical culture influencing modern yogic breath cultivation, is introduced.

#### 4.4.2 Discourses of Hygiene in German and Transnational Physical Culture

In his remarkable study *Reizbare Maschinen* (2001), Philipp Sarasin has covered discourses of hygiene in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by mainly investigating German and French sources (see also chapter 2.5.1). At that time, hygiene meant much more than cleanliness and sterility, as it is mostly conceived today. By offering a huge set of knowledge, practices, and technologies, it addressed most areas of human life and provided practices of self-care for the married white middle-class male like gymnastics, diet, and rules for a balanced sexual life. Its major concerns were the equilibrium of the body by addressing the sexual activity level, hygiene of the nerves, cleanliness, bathing, choice of work, clothing, housing, and environments that engender health (Sarasin 2001: 17).

These themes had already developed as a response to the Enlightenment during the nineteenth century and they predate the emergence of national physical cultures (Sarasin 2001: 19). Although informed by the knowledge production of medicine and material science, these practices were often conducted self-responsibly, by and for the subject. They were recommended in books and within the wider media culture and did not depend on a physician's prescription (*ibid.*: 136-137). Rather, they featured normative elements such as morality and pedagogic advice (*ibid.*: 171). The genre of hygienist fitness manuals therefore adopted the authority of popular science including basic medical knowledge, which crucially informed hygienic ideas and practices (*ibid.*: 136-137). Forged in the post-Enlightenment era, these practices involve a certain this-worldly aesthetic, rely on a common vitalistic outlook, and impart care of but also mastery over the self (*ibid.*: 464-465). As such, these features of nineteenth-century hygiene are clear predecessors of and directly related to physical culture (see below).

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<sup>209</sup> Global transcultural flows enabled the dissemination of influential ideas from German and French contexts.

Nineteenth-century hygienic culture is also echoed in modern yoga.<sup>210</sup> This is particularly evident in various statements by Kuvalayananda, who stresses “nerve culture” as one of the main yogic concerns,<sup>211</sup> and also in Yogendra’s influential *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931). Control and preservation of the semen, for which *prāṇāyāma* was a crucial technique, was already addressed in Haṭhayoga. These efforts are, however, also congruent with the emphasis on a balanced sexuality by the hygienists. Consequently, techniques of (male) masturbation were not only dismissed by Swami Kuvalayananda, but also by hygienists (e.g., Sarasin 2001: 392-394; Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 358). In modern yoga, the trope of semen- and birth control for the married male – significantly accomplished by *prāṇāyāma* – is addressed by the Bengali Madan Mohan Sada in his *Self-Protection* (1935).<sup>212</sup>

In another outstanding study, Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe has mapped German physical culture (*Körperkulturbewegung*, lit. “body-culture movement”) in the *Kaisserreich*, the *Weimarer Republik* and in German National Socialism. In a similar vein as Sarasin, Wedemeyer-Kolwe discusses German physical culture’s interest in prophylactic medicinal knowledge that shaped the conduct of everyday life. Thereby, the elements of hygienist culture persist, and hygiene can be seen as an overarching discursive environment in which various aspects of physical culture can be located (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 374-375). German physical culture with its claims for a “new mankind” can, however, be demarcated from practices of sports that were mainly focused on physical exertion (*ibid.*: 12-14). In contrast, physical culture mostly opted for a somatic approach to self-cultivation that was paired with a call for societal change. It often represented political programmes associated with National Socialism, socialism, or reformism. Indeed, from c. 1900 onwards, physical culture started to increasingly become overshadowed by eugenics and biopolitics and was instrumentalised as part of a nationalist propaganda.

Various strands and practices can be subsumed under the term German physical culture. It incorporated the German *Gymnastik* movement (“gymnastics”), which included fitness, bodybuilding, and schools of *Atemgymnastik* (“breath

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<sup>210</sup> Apart from modern yoga’s general entanglement with the history of “medicine, health, and hygiene” (Singleton 2010: 208), Singleton also mentions Sri Yogendra and Yogacharya Sundaram as engaged in matters of hygiene (*ibid.*: 119, 126, 129).

<sup>211</sup> The care of the “nerves” is a major trope in nineteenth-century hygienic culture (Sarasin 2001: 354-355).

<sup>212</sup> *Self-Protection* utilises *prāṇāyāma*, *mudrā* and *āsana* as a means for “semen-protection” and “semen-purification”. It particularly addresses male marriage partners and promises the results of self-regulated birth control, all in all strengthening “the foundation of love between man and woman” (Sada 1935: 136).

gymnastics”) as well as schools of *Ausdruckstanz* (“expression dance”) and “rhythmic” education with a focus on expression and “natural” ways to move. Various forms of dance and gymnastics in Germany were based on Delsartism, which was imported from America in an already-adapted form (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 65). Delsartism was combined in Germany with eurhythmics by Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, with hygienist-medicinal practices, and with dance (*ibid.*: 66-67). Although there were also male protagonists, German physical culture including gymnastics and *Ausdruckstanz* as well as (American) Delsartism were largely propelled by female exponents. These forms of physical culture are often designed to specifically benefit white middle-class women. In so far as they also address the hygiene and equilibrium of female sexuality, they can be seen as a response to male-dominated nineteenth-century hygienic practices. Not least, this concern is often addressed by gymnastics and breathing exercises, for example in the work of the Delsartist and gymnast Bess Mensendieck (1864–1957) who was born in New York but was mainly active in Germany (Mensendieck 1907).

As has been mentioned, Delsartism, eurhythmics, *Ausdruckstanz*, and *Atemgymnastik* were, for one, part of a larger environment of hygienic and physical culture. But the organisations that promoted these practices also tended to be associated with the German *Lebensreform* (“life-reform”) movement. Physical culture and *Lebensreform* overlapped and influenced each other.<sup>213</sup> The heterogeneous *Lebensreform* movement is characterised by a call for new forms of individual and social ways of life. This was to be realised through an “inner reform” that included vegetarian diet, shared housing and living communities, reformed clothing, nude culture, nature cure, and gymnastics (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2017: 20). In its body culture, *Lebensreform* was particularly inclined towards breath and relaxation techniques and tended to import Asian practices with connoted religious paradigms (*ibid.*: 11). Life reformers often opposed church religiosity and developed their own hybrid alternative religions, such as Mazdaznan (from 1900 onwards) and Neugeist (from 1920 onwards). These strands of alternative religion were inclined towards and partly derived from theosophy, anthroposophy, and American New Thought (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2017: 119-123).<sup>214</sup> Generally, German physical culture was a

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<sup>213</sup> For example, the Schlaffhorst/Andersen school for *Atemgymnastik* also incorporated a rigid system of food regulation including vegetarianism that is typical for *Lebensreform* (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2017: 118).

<sup>214</sup> Mazdaznan combined physical culture with an emphasis on breath cultivation, religious aspirations, and eugenics, claiming origin from the ancient Persian Zoroastrian religion. It developed into a

broad middle-class movement, whereas the *Lebensreform* movement was initially propelled by individuals on the margins of this class. Its main themes only gradually reached the bourgeois centre of the middle class (*ibid.*: 11). Sub-communities of physical culture with various thematic focal points, among these often eugenic and *völkisch* interests, were often organised in small or nation-wide associations. In contrast, *Lebensreform* groups – which may also have had eugenic leanings – often had their own private commercial schools (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2012: 313).

In all these modes of German physical culture, breath was in vogue. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of *prāṇa* was readily received by exponents of German physical culture and *Lebensreform* (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 138-149). After all, breath as a “vital” and “rhythmic” phenomenon – encapsulated in the exotic term *prāṇa* – was programmatic for their own practices (*ibid.*: 147). The milieu of German *Lebensreform*, in turn, had repercussions on transnational physical culture, and, subsequently, yoga. Typical emblems of *Lebensreform* like *Licht und Luft* (“light and air”)<sup>215</sup> and practices like (nude) sunbathing, the emphasis on fresh air and certain dress codes had permeated the discourses that influenced New Thought authors like Atkinson.<sup>216</sup> His Yogi Ramacharaka books mark one entrance point of *Lebensreform*-styled practices into modern yoga (e.g., Ramacharaka 1904). Another prominent protagonist of physical culture with life-reformistic inclinations to influence yogic breath cultivation was J. P. Müller, as will be further expounded below.

Representatives of physical culture were interested in cultivating the “physical”. Nevertheless, they also drew on the emergence of a closely related field, the

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transnational movement during the first half of the twentieth century. For a discussion of Mazdaznan in Germany, see Graul (2011). Neugeist is the German equivalent to the New Thought movement. German Neugeist introduced meditation as the primary practical approach, rather than the practice of mind healing, as in American New Thought. Practices and rituals in which silence was contemplated were often called “yoga” (Baier 2009: 526). Meditation in silence also included breath cultivation, particularly rhythmic breathing and breath retention (*ibid.*: 526-528).

<sup>215</sup> The prevalence of the trope “light and air” is probably owed to the fact that it was described in Galenic medicine (second century CE). More precisely, it is the first aspect (subsumed under the Latin term *aer*, which alludes to both light/atmosphere and air) of six factors (*sex res non naturales*) that were said to promote and sustain health (Sarasin 2001: 36). German physical culture and *Lebensreform* promulgated a neo-classicist revival of Greek and Roman antiquity, and the reception of Galenic medicine was part of nineteenth-century hygienic culture (*ibid.*: 33-36).

<sup>216</sup> The question as to whether the term *Lebensreform* as a specific mindset and set of practices could also be used to define specific strands of life/health reformers in America needs further investigation that cannot be undertaken here. However, in a recent article, Steven Sutcliffe has demonstrated that the term *Lebensreform* or “life reform” can be utilised in certain strands of British alternative (religious) culture that employ “terms with clear translocal family resemblance [as found in German *Lebensreform*, M.K.] such as ‘health’, ‘life’, ‘vitality’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘nature’” (Sutcliffe 2021: 142).

exploration and application of psycho-physical effects. This seminal theme, to be explored in the next section, also impacted modern yoga's reinvention.

#### 4.4.3 “Psycho-Physical Culture” in Relation to Modern Yoga Practices

Pioneers of modern yoga often apply the term physical culture but also use it to distinguish it from what they consider to be authentic yogic practice. For example, Yogacharya Sundaram's first yoga manual is called *Yogic Physical Culture: Or the Secret of Happiness* (1929). Nevertheless, he stresses the superiority of yoga, “a system perfected thousands of years ago” (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 2). In a similar vein, Swami Kuvalayananda draws a demarcating line between “physical culture” and “spiritual culture” that sufficiently describes yoga practice, in his view. The former is, unsurprisingly, mainly associated with Western modes of breathing instruction, while the latter mainly refers to traditionally informed yogic practices, or “*prāṇāyāma* proper” (chapter 8.3.1). Against this backdrop, it is striking that the theme of psycho-physical culture and related terminology<sup>217</sup> is conceived as a theme inherent to yogic culture. For example, Swami Kuvalayananda ascribes a psycho-physiological aspect to the yoga of Patañjali: “According to [Patañjali] although the act is physical, [*prāṇāyāma*] has psychological and psycho-physiological effects” (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 59).

The application of the psycho-physical in the context of breath practices is indeed not new, but I would not trace its origin as far back as Kuvalayananda. Rather, the term initially occurred probably in the first half of the nineteenth century as an antithesis to theories that sought to explain religious phenomena on the base of animal magnetism. It was, by the mid-nineteenth-century, applied in early experimental psychology by Fechner and Wundt, and was subsequently incorporated into physical culture and “psycho-physical culture”, as, for example, promoted by Stebbins (1892: 57-67). It should be noted that the term has a complex prehistory within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, medicine, and natural sciences (at the latest, since René Descartes) that cannot be further expounded here. Musings on the link between soma and psyche also swelled into alternative religion and healing arts, such as eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century mesmerism, and into the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> The terms psycho-physics and psycho-physiology, as well as the adjectives psycho-physical and psycho-physiological, seem to be largely synonymous in the literature discussed.

<sup>218</sup> For allusions to Swedenborg's influence, see below. As for the link between mind-body speculation in the late nineteenth century, mesmerism still informed New Thought theories, as discussed, for

The term psycho-physiology was probably coined by the American Samuel Adams, M.D., professor of chemistry, mineralogy, and geology in Illinois in the United States (Tassinari et al. 1989: 713), denoting a reciprocal relationship between the body and mind. In his article “Psycho-Physiology: Viewed in its Connection with the Mysteries of Animal Magnetism and other Kindred Phenomena” (1839), Adams argued that scientists should only indulge in mind-body speculations if they acknowledged that “the brain is the physiological embodiment of the mind” (*ibid.*: 714). Taking the prominent role of the brain as a starting point, he opposed the quite common attempt to explain religious phenomena by theories of animal magnetism. Animal magnetism or mesmerism was one of the prisms (next to, e.g., Friedrich Schleiermacher’s comparative theory of religion) through which religious experience was read comparatively during the nineteenth century. Within mesmerism (and subsequently theosophy), these discussions frequently referred to Hesychast meditation and yogic altered states (Baier 2016b: 339-341, and as discussed above). Next to expounding on mesmerism, Adams likewise mentions, by referencing Montègre and the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales* (1812), the similarities between Hesychasm and “fakirs, jouguis and dervishes” with regard to their “communication with the deity” (Montègre as quoted in Adams 1839: 372). In contrast to mesmeric theories, Adams explains the mystical states produced by these techniques through a proclivity towards “nervous excitability” (*ibid.*: 374):

And in the cases to which we have alluded, the constrained attitude of body and mind, the intense effort of the will [...] bring the nervous system into a state of *extreme tension*, which could not fail to produce decided *modifications of its functions*; and those who are somewhat acquainted with the mysterious nature of these functions, will be prepared to *witness the phenomena above described* [the mystical states, M.K.] (Adams 1839: 374, my emphasis).

To summarise Adams’s position, he understood these religious phenomena mainly from a perspective of emerging modern psychology. First, he insisted on the function of the brain and the nervous system as physiological mediators between the body and the mind (*ibid.*: 364), because “the brain, the appropriate organ of the mind, has a direct anatomical and physiological connection with every part of the body” (*ibid.*). Based on this physiological observation, he explains how sensation and

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example, by Warren Felt Evans. For the implications of a correspondence between the psyche and the physical body in Evans’s thought, see Baier (2009: 449-451). For a note on Ralph Waldo Trine’s *In Tune with the Infinite* (1899) and psychosomatics, see (*ibid.*: 433, n. 13). In German philosophical schools the problem is still debated as part of mind-body theories (*Leib-Seele-Theorien*).

volition are dependent on the sense organs, the nervous impulse, and the recognition of the same in the brain. He also acknowledges that certain emotions and thoughts (impulses of the “mind”, as he explains) reciprocally inform the body, and thus he describes the brain as the “great centre of psycho-physiological sympathy” (*ibid.*: 367, 371). If we examine again the above quote, the “extreme tension” into which the nervous system is brought (another physiologically inclined concept) brings about certain “modifications of its functions” that help to “witness” these extraordinary phenomena. As Adams concludes, it is a matter of *will* as well as the *willingness to believe* (i.e., psychological categories) that produce magnetised subjects, religious experiences and “kindred phenomena” (*ibid.*: 382). In rejecting the manipulation of the mesmeric fluidum as responsible for producing these, he nevertheless still acknowledges that these phenomena are real, yet dependent on an imaginative faculty of the brain that may likewise lead to “deception” (*ibid.*: 381-382).<sup>219</sup>

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Adams’s concept and its genealogy were illuminated from another angle. Some of Swedenborg’s interpreters considered him a forefather of psycho-physiology. For example, the editor of the English translation of *Oeconomia regni animalis* of 1740, i.e., *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* (1846), observed that “by redeeming psychology from abstractions, and peopling physics with moral life, he [Swedenborg] has, in scattered sentences, done more to reconcile the soul with the body than his most ambitious predecessors” (Clissold 1846: lviii). According to the Swedenborgian author William White, Swedenborg had observed an inextricable link between the body and mind: “There is no Psychology apart from Physiology. [...] When the body is sick, the mind is sick” (Swedenborg as quoted in White 1868: 598). In brief, although the term “psycho-physiology” was probably not yet coined in Swedenborg’s times, his anthropology was, indeed, imbued by the quest for how the soul expressed itself (or was “clad”) in the physical body. His ideas on the intimate link between the brain and the lungs, hence also between cerebration and breath, were only one aspect of a much larger construct of correspondences, and as has been shown, brain physiology was a major part of his physiological studies. But beyond what could be termed “psycho-physical” in

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<sup>219</sup> Along similar lines to Adams, the hypnotist James Braid (see chapter 6.3) also held that explaining somnambulism through the magnetic fluidum was obsolete. Instead, he argued that his theories of hypnotism, or “nervous sleep”, were “all consistent with generally admitted principles in physiological and psychological science” (Braid 1850: vi).



Swedenborg's thought,<sup>220</sup> it was the quest for the influx of the divine into the human being that was his ultimate interest. The affinity towards Swedenborgian thought in modern yoga however is, as discussed above, certainly more tangible in the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and the breath than the seer's musings about the correspondence between the soul and body or God and the soul.

Although animal magnetism remained one of the main lines of interpretation for yogic altered states, e.g., in theosophy, the concept of psycho-physiology gained currency over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>221</sup> In fact, psycho-physiology, nowadays better known as “psychosomatics”, is still a thriving discipline within medical science. Within the nineteenth century, another important exponent of psycho-physics was Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), professor of medicine, physics, and philosophy at the university of Leipzig, who introduced the “psycho-physical law” in his philosophical work *Zend-Avesta: Oder Über die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits* [“Zend-Avesta: Or on the Things of Heaven and the Hereafter”] (1851). Soon after, Fechner turned to experimental psychology, dedicating the following ten years to psychological experiments that resulted into the two-volume book *Elemente der Psychophysik* [“Elements of Psycho-Physics”] (1860). Fechner conceived of the psycho-physical law as a “universal principle (*universales Prinzip*)” (Fechner 1860: 218), representing an “exact science of the relationship between body and soul (*eine exacte Lehre von den Beziehungen zwischen Leib und Seele*)” (*ibid.*: v).<sup>222</sup> An opponent of materialistic scientism, Fechner inspired physical culturists and pioneers of modern yoga who welcomed a psychology tinged with universal laws and a philosophy of nature that penetrated his psycho-physical explications. Fechner's ideas had provided a concept that was applicable to the aesthetics of modern physical cultures which, despite their focus on corporeal practices, often tried to include *more* than purely physiological considerations and practices.<sup>223</sup> It was especially useful for

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<sup>220</sup> Even the Swedenborg scholar Inge Jonsson notes that, in his visionary texts, Swedenborg continued his “psycho-physical theorizing” that he had earlier established in his *Oeconomia regni animalis* of 1740 (Jonsson as quoted in Hanegraaff 1996: 424).

<sup>221</sup> Points of (inexplicit) reception of Adams's concept of psycho-physiology in the nineteenth century are Gustav Fechner's *Elements of Psychophysics* (1860), Guillaume Duchenne's *The Mechanism of Human Physiognomy* (1862), Ivan Sechenov's *Reflexes of the Brain* (1863), Alexander Bain's *Mental Science* (1863), Charles Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), and Wilhelm Wundt's *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (1873) (Tassinari et al.: 713-714). Alexander Herzen's *Psychologische Physiologie* (1889) was quoted by Blavatsky (1890: 92).

<sup>222</sup> The other two universal laws enunciated by Fechner are “the pleasure principle” and “the principle of the tendency to stability” (Ellenberger 1994 [1970]: 218).

<sup>223</sup> Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984) utilised in his method the “Weber-Fechner law”, established by Ernst Heinrich Weber (1795–1878) and Fechner, which denotes the human being's sensitivity to

systems related to breath practices, since breath was often conceived as a link between body and mind.

The theme of the psycho-physical and the psycho-physiological subsequently evolved in the transnational networks of physical culture including yoga and its discourses of yogic breath cultivation. An important entry point of the concept into modern yoga is Genevieve Stebbins's influential *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892), in which she devotes a whole chapter to its description (Stebbins 1892: 57-67). Stebbins is aware of the work of Fechner's most important disciple, Wilhelm Wundt (*ibid.*: 120). She thinks of "psycho-physical culture" as a concept practically applicable to her holistic system designed "for the development of body, brain and soul" (*ibid.*: 57). Moreover, since psycho-physiology was in vogue, she had apparently recognised the cultural capital that came with its practical application. In demarcating her work from others, she regrets that contemporary systems "of aesthetic and physical culture", including the system of the "Swedish poet Ling", have "now become [...] purely physical training" (Stebbins 1892: 57-58). Her own relies on the combination of "sacred dance and prayer practised by various oriental nations for certain religious and metaphysical effects", blended with dynamic breathing and mental techniques (*ibid.*: 59). As such, her system appears to reflect the phenomena and cultures that were investigated by Samuel Adams.

In explicit contexts of modern yoga, the earliest reference to psycho-physiology that I am aware of is by the Viennese occultist Carl Kellner (1851–1905). He published *Yoga: Eine Skizze über den psycho-physiologischen Teil der alten indischen Yogalehre* ["Yoga: A Sketch of the Psycho-Physiological Part of the Ancient Indian Doctrine of Yoga"] (1896), a paper dedicated to and circulated at the Third International Congress for Psychology in Munich held in August 1896. At this congress, a variety of psycho-physical themes were discussed including a pertinent section on "anatomy and physiology of the brain, physiology and psychology of the senses, psychophysics" (*Anatomie und Physiologie des Gehirns, Physiologie und Psychologie der Sinne, Psychophysik*) (Anonymous 1897: 171-217). Kellner certainly made an extraordinary appearance there, since his booklet on yoga exemplified the only non-European theme at the congress, and, moreover, he was accompanied by the South Asian ascetic and yogi Bheema Sena Pratapa (Baier 2018: 410-411). As for his own explication of the psycho-physical, which may have been prompted by the

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*relative* perceptions instead of *absolute* measures of proportional differences in weight, light, and sound (Reese 2015: 192).

prominence of the concept at the conference, his booklet states that Haṭhayoga exceeds other forms of yoga, *because* it is psycho-physical (*ibid.*: 414). Before Kellner, the concept was already discussed in occult milieus such as the Theosophical Society,<sup>224</sup> albeit, due to its allegedly materialistic tendencies, mainly in a dismissive way (Fawcett 1887; Blavatsky 1890). The Indologist Arthur Ewing published an article on “The Hindu Conception of the Functions of Breath: A Study in Early Hindu Psycho-Physics” (1901). Kuvalayananda could have been aware of this text; however, Ewing does not discuss Patañjali at all.

Given the intention of Stebbins’s psycho-physical culture and her praise of oriental religious practices, it is not surprising that pioneers of modern yoga found her system as well as her terminology and related practices attractive. Yogendra explicitly cited Stebbins and quite obviously also employed her concept of psycho-physical culture to explain nothing less than the yoga of Patañjali (chapter 8.3.2). Other influential yoga pioneers like Yogananda, Sundaram, Kuvalayananda, and Sivananda employ psycho-physical jargon in close association or even as synonymous with yoga and – significantly – often in relation to *prāṇāyāma* or the functioning of *prāṇa*.<sup>225</sup>

#### 4.4.4 A Physical-Culturist Breathing Manual: J. P. Müller’s *My Breathing System*

*My Breathing System* (1914), written by the Danish former military lieutenant and athlete Jørgen Peter Müller (1866–1938), was probably one of the most popular physical-culture manuals on the art of breathing. Müller was one among many authors who tried to systematise breath for various purposes. Other examples are the British medical doctor Henry Harper Hulbert, who published *Breathing for Voice Production* (1903), and bodybuilders who used breathing techniques for weightlifting such as Theodor Siebert, Eugen Sandow, and Hans Surén, as well as the German school of *Atemgymnastik* of Clara Schlafhorst and Hedwig Andersen, who pleaded for the overall therapeutic effect of breath cultivation (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 147, 92).

<sup>224</sup> Already Besant (1894: 105) spoke of the “physico-psychical” effects of Haṭhayoga in a lecture in Adyar (as discussed above). The reversed use of the term may indicate that the term was probably not fully established in English at that time.

<sup>225</sup> Yogananda in *Scientific Healing Affirmations*: “There are various methods for concentration and meditation, but Yogoda, based on Vito-Psycho-Physical methods, is the best” (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 24). Sundaram in *The Secret of Happiness*: “Retention in mind and if necessary meditation over the benefits that would accrue through Pranayam, while controlling the breath, are bound to give good psychophysical results” (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 95). Sivananda in *Practical Lessons in Yoga*: “Prana plays a vital part in all psycho-physical processes” (Sivananda 1938: 281). Like Kuvalayananda (1956a: 59), Yogendra calls the yoga of Patañjali “psycho-physical” (Yogendra 1934a: 104).

When Müller published his book on breathing, he was already a well-known physical culturist via his famous *My System: 15 Minutes Exercise a Day for Health's Sake* (1904), a manual that had been translated into twenty-four languages by 1924, and was published in German in its eighteenth edition of 400,000 copies (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 327). Müller's *My System* and the slightly less successful *My Breathing System* – on which the focus in this analysis lies – was known to Kuvalayananda and Yogendra (chapter 8.3).

In *My Breathing System*, Müller presents himself as an authority on bodily fitness and regimens of health-enhancing practices, and he claims that he gained much of his strength and endurance from correct breathing since childhood (Müller 1914: 12). His call for preventive practices culminated in the fight against consumption, or tuberculosis, that was, in his opinion, easily obviated by teaching his breathing techniques to children and their parents (*ibid.*: 76). His pedagogical and preventive approach made him train teachers in his system in various European states, for example, in Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Great Britain, and France (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 217, 320). Despite, or rather because of his international success, he understands his system as particularly “Danish” and, although the two were often “confused” with each other, as superior to “Swedish” gymnastics (Müller 1914: 52). Müller participates in the medical discussion in a chapter about “The Secret of the Diaphragm” (*ibid.*: 34-42), which, he reports, had not yet been “unveiled”, and most textbooks were, in this regard, “full of non-sense” (*ibid.*: 35). After defeating various theories of medical doctors and breathing experts like Hulbert and Quain (*ibid.*), he explains his own theory about the diaphragm (figure 5), discussing questions of whether one has direct control over it and its connection to the mobility of the ribcage (*ibid.*: 38-42). Müller also deals with themes as to why correct breathing is through the nose (*ibid.*: 18-25), the importance of training slow exhalation (*ibid.*: 17-18), and the usefulness and right application of deep breathing exercises (*ibid.*: 12-18). The latter had fallen into discredit, he felt, since they were often wrongly applied without prior physical exertion (*ibid.*: 16-17). Finally, he gives specific recommendations for athletes, speakers, and singers (*ibid.*: 81-101).

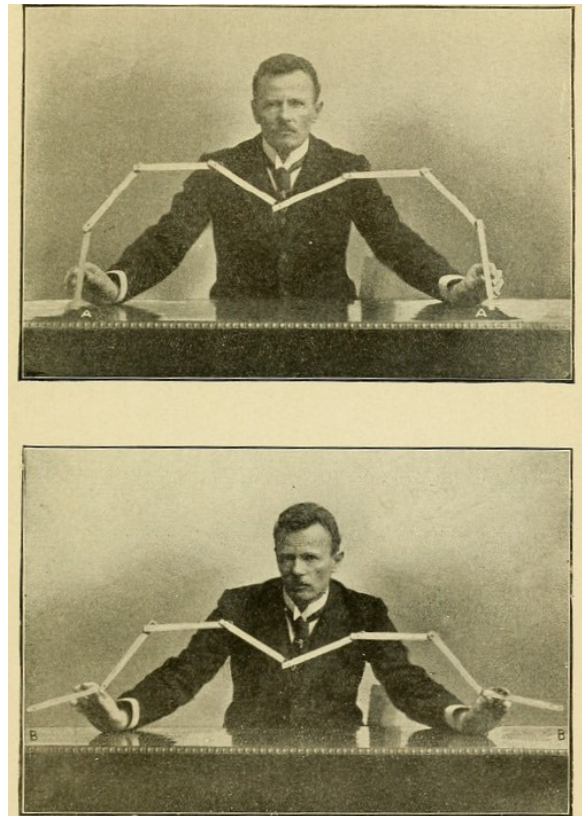


FIGURE 5: MÜLLER DEMONSTRATING HIS “THEORY AS TO THE MOVEMENTS OF THE DIAPHRAGM” (MÜLLER 1914: 39).

Müller had some objections to the techniques of holding the breath. These are of course part of yogic breath practices, but, in his rejection, it is more likely that Müller refers to breath-holding practices that were also common among advocates of hygienic practices and, moreover, singers.<sup>226</sup> He does not recommend the average person (other than specially trained people like singers and speakers) to hold their breath during movement or as an exercise to strengthen the breathing apparatus, because it may cause emphysema or heart disease (Müller 1914: 16). Müller also comments on “Hindu Yogi Breathing” (*ibid.*: 48-49), whereby he inexplicitly yet undoubtedly refers to Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904) (chapter 8.2.2). According to Müller, the “Yogi complete breath” is more difficult to perform than his version of a complete breath, and its characteristics of a

<sup>226</sup> For example, in *Die Athmungskunst des Menschen* [“The Human Art of Breathing”] (1859), A. C. Neumann ascribes healing capacities to breath-holding practices (“*cohibitio spiritus*”) and claims that they were already prescribed by ancient Greek and Roman physicians like Galen (second century CE) and Celsus (first century CE) (Neumann 1859: 1). This claim cannot be further substantiated here, but Foxen (2020) has inquired into these lines of transmission. Neumann indeed has a different approach to breath practices from Müller, since he refrains from combining them with vigorous gymnastic movements (*ibid.*: 2), which is clearly recommended by Müller (1914: 16-17). An example of the promotion of breath-holding practices for singers is Leo Kofler’s *The Art of Breathing* (1890 [1887]: 75-80, 89). Like Neumann’s prescriptions, these are not inspired by yoga but likely originate in German and/or French schools of gymnastic and voice culture.

stiff chest during exhalation and the expulsion of air through the mouth are faulty (*ibid.*). Müller also criticises other breathing techniques by Ramacharaka, like the “Yogi nerve vitalising breath” and the “Yogi vocal breath” (*ibid.*: 49). Mistaking Ramacharaka’s books for authentic yoga literature, he concludes: “The greatest part of the Yogi philosophy consists of words, words, words” (*ibid.*), a position that someone who considered himself an “authentic” yogi like Swami Kuvalayananda took personally, and vigorously opposed (chapter 8.3.1).

Not only the yogis but also the physical culturists followed the discursive patterns of popular science. In Müller’s *The Fresh Air Book* (1908),<sup>227</sup> he claims that his system is scientific in the sense that “we make use of science for the purpose of producing a good result in as many directions as possible”; that is, aesthetics, physiology, hygiene, ethics, and education (Müller 1908: 84). This book promulgates several tropes of *Lebensreform* practices with the main theme of exposing the body to light and air, including undressing for sun, air, and water baths, as well as instructions for a sound and healthy sleep without sleeping garments. Müller again addresses the prevention of various diseases, such as consumption, rheumatism, appendicitis, and the accumulation of toxins in the body. For him, hygiene, “the science of health”, is the “unit idea” of this book, and “fresh air is the dominating factor” (*ibid.*: 14). For Müller, the ancient Greeks were the role models for a perfected physical culture, an “easy bearing of the body” (Müller 1914: 15), and their truly “rational scientific gymnastics” (Müller 1908: 84). Because he is oriented towards ancient Greece rather than ancient India, it is not surprising that Müller does not apply the concept of *prāṇa* at all (nor does he, however, recur on the Greek *pneuma*).

His books were nevertheless a prominent example of physical culture and *Lebensreform* practices that inform the hygienist and scientific views of modern yoga pioneers, as stated above. The tropes of “light and air” as well as various forms of air, sun, and water baths could easily be transposed to modern yogic interpretations of *prāṇa* and self-culture that, next to yogic breath cultivation, also apply bathing and cleansing techniques through water. Müller also contributed to a reformed understanding of posture, participating here in a wider discourse that also influenced Kuvalayananda’s understanding of *āsana* practice (Goldberg 2016: 110-118). The physical culturist refers to posture as ideally responsive to breath, a posture that ought to be divested of its military rigidity. He claims that the over-inflated chest and drawn-

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<sup>227</sup> The original Danish title can be translated as “Hygiene hints” (Müller 1908: 14).

in stomach so common in military settings prevents a person from deep exhalation and engenders a too-rigid chest that does not allow for “natural” breathing (Müller 1914: 14-16). His breathing exercises, described in *My Breathing System*, were followed, to a greater or lesser extent, by modern yogis like Yogendra, Kuvalayananda, and Sivananda (Singleton 2010: 118; Goldberg 2016: 30-40; chapter 8.3; chapter 8.4.2).

#### 4.5 Summary: Multiple Influences Shaping Yogic Breath Cultivation

This chapter has distilled crucial ideas from the religious, occult, and cultural networks that constituted the basis for the modern reinvention of yogic breath cultivation. The significant contributions of the Brahmo Samaj lie in the scientification of religion and yoga; those of Dayananda’s Arya Samaj in describing and popularising *prāṇāyāma* as both related to the *sandhyā* rite and the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. While Haṭhayoga-informed *prāṇāyāma* had its place in Dayananda’s outline of these practices, it was not his focus (rather, Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* became widely influential through the work of second-generation modern yogis like Kuvalayananda, Sivananda and Krishnamacharya). The occult networks contributed to yogic breath cultivation through the legacies of mesmerism and Swedenborgianism, imparted to modern yogis through nineteenth-century occultism. The occultist and sexual mage Paschal Beverly Randolph taught a technique which later, under Genevieve Stebbins, came to be known as rhythmic breathing (chapter 5.2). The New Thought theoretician Warren Felt Evans combined ideas from theosophy with a practical approach to mind cure, in which breath was a relevant concept for him. Through the gateway of the works of Atkinson/Ramacharaka New Thought hugely informed modern yoga at the turn of the century (chapter 8.2.2). A major germinator of ideas for yogic breath cultivation was theosophy, setting the stage for the implementation of notions like *prāṇa*, *ākāśa*, and the superconscious on both microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. Theosophy left an imprint of mesmeric and Swedenborgian ideas on modern yoga through its musings on *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent and the intimate connection between the mind and the breath. Yogic breath cultivation also owes many of its innovations to the transnational networks of hygienic and physical culture. This includes *Lebensreform*-styled practices with their prominent “light and air” tropes. Psycho-physical culture was another influential brand that derived its relevance through its demarcation as distinct from mesmerism, becoming a concept that gained currency in modern yoga. While physical culture was often degraded to a system inferior to yoga, psycho-physical

culture was adopted as an inherently “yogic” framework, especially when it comes to interpretations of the relevance of *prāṇa* and breath cultivation.

This chapter has provided a good grounding for our further discussions of these developments. To dig deeper, the next chapter outlines *prāṇa*, the breath of life, *ākāśa*, and the ether as key notions that build a cosmological framework for yogic breath cultivation. It will explore how these frameworks tapped into South Asian traditions as well as into the creative output of globalising developments in turn-of-the-century occultism and hygienic culture.



## 5 YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION:

### COSMOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPTIONS

#### 5.1 Prologue: Correspondences and Mediating Principles

The principle of correspondence, thoroughly understood, is the key that unlocks many doors, physical and spiritual. It was first formulated in the grand old Valley of the Nile, as the axiom of both science and religion; as it is above, so it is below – as on earth, so in the sky – as within, so without.

Genevieve Stebbins: *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Training* (1898 [1913]: 11).

The microcosm is an exact picture of the macrocosm.

Rama Prasad: *The Science of Breath: Nature's Finer Forces* (1890: 48).

Physically this universe is one: there is no difference between the sun and you.

Swami Vivekananda: *Rāja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* (1896: 35).

Three main protagonists – Genevieve Stebbins, Rama Prasad, and Swami Vivekananda – contributed decidedly to a cosmological framework for modern yogic breath cultivation. Throughout their work they relied on a thinking that intimately links the universe at large, or “macrocosm”, to the individual human being or “microcosm”. Thereby, the jargon of the “microcosm” and “macrocosm” is occasionally used by all protagonists. In most cases that we will encounter here, the link between the two is established through “mediating principles”, which are conceived as subtle energies or substances that permeate the cosmos and regulate human existence: *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*; the breath of life; and the ether. These factors are also applied to explain the efficacy of breathing techniques these individuals presented. Of these three thinkers, Stebbins built on both physical culture and occultism, the latter due to her involvement with the Church of Light. Prasad was an influential Indian theosophist mediating knowledge enshrined in Sanskrit to a broader public. Vivekananda accessed yogic, tantric, and Advaita-related knowledge and he was also influenced by theosophy, but to a lesser degree. What connects all these characters is their entanglement with the occult. I therefore think of Stebbins as the “physical culture occultist”, of Prasad as the “tantric theosophist”, and of Vivekananda as the “yogic occultist”. In a way, this chapter

culminates in the somewhat dramatic performance of Vivekananda during his first American visit, most notably his attendance at the World parliament of religion in 1893, but not less so his famous *Rāja Yoga* lectures of the winter 1895/96, which indeed mark the final historical moment of direct relevance for this chapter. It nevertheless carves out the contributions of the other protagonists that were equally relevant for the anthropology and cosmology that built the backbone of yogic breath cultivation.

As has been mentioned, the protagonists' cosmological musings have, in turn, direct bearings on the practices that they taught. In other words, the larger cosmological framework that is carried along with the practices has several discursive functions. It (a) provides a theory of the efficacy of the practices that explains *why* they work from a metaphysical point of view; (b) it helps to claim superiority over other forms of practices like systems of physical culture or even posture-based yogic practices like *āsana*; and (c) it often results in claims of superiority over other cultures that do not attempt to harness vital principles like *prāṇa* in their practices of self-cultivation. Thus, cosmological frameworks that involve discourses of *prāṇa* have a thoroughly this-worldly and even political aspect to them (chapter 6.2). Notions of *prāṇa*, often translated as the “breath of life” and associated with a vitalistic concept thereof, as well as notions of *ākāśa*, often translated as “ether” and associated with concepts of subtle materiality permeating the cosmos, define the larger cosmological framework for yogic breath cultivation. All of them help to substantiate it as a practice that is subject to the influx of subtle energies and substances beyond the individual human system.

As a heuristic approach, here I will apply Wouter Hanegraaff's model to describe the nexus between the cosmos at large and individual beings in various esoteric “pre-Enlightenment periods” (Hanegraaff 2013b: 124). Although we are dealing with neither purely “esoteric” nor “pre-Enlightenment” thought here, it will be shown that aspects of Hanegraaff's model are still relevant for the protagonists analysed. Hanegraaff distinguishes between three kinds of nexuses (*ibid.*: 124-126). The first one (1) is the nexus of “correspondences”, or an acausal link between the microcosm and the macrocosm that is based on “semiotic likeness”.<sup>228</sup> A typical example is the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus (third century CE) in which the

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<sup>228</sup> In highlighting the significance of “correspondences”, Hanegraaff follows Antoine Faivre's six “thought forms” that allegedly define most currents of “Western esotericism” (Faivre 1994: 10-15). I do not hold that Faivre's “thought forms” are of any particular relevance for the further analysis in this thesis, which is why they are not further expounded here.

cosmos is conceived as a “living creature” which is in “sympathy” with all its parts (*ibid.*: 124). The idea that objects are distant from one another is rather irrelevant because of their inherent similitude (*similitudo*) through which they are connected. No “intermediary link or chain of causality” is needed for an individual or part of the universe to be affected by another (*ibid.*). Another nexus (2) is the idea that Hanegraaff termed “occult causality”, which, by contrast, depends on such an intermediary link. This was often conceived as a subtle substance or fluid pervading the whole universe. For example, the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) posited the influx of a universal *spiritus* on living beings (*ibid.*: 125). Such a subtle substance expressed itself in the functions of body and soul, and was the “ideal medium for explaining causal connections of all kinds [...] that could not be explained by visible or material chains of causality” (*ibid.*, my emphasis).<sup>229</sup> As we shall see, this is probably the most relevant link that we encounter in the works of our authors. The third nexus (3) is the idea of “instrumental causality” that postulates influence “by means of demonstrable and predictable chains of material cause and effect” (*ibid.*). In scientific post-Enlightenment thought this model superseded the other two and is still the dominant one even in post-Newtonian physics. I will come back to Hanegraaff’s model in chapter 5.5 after the detailed exposition of the protagonists’ contributions in the following.

As mentioned, the link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, or the cosmological and the anthropological levels, is often established by means of an all-pervading principle or force-substance: in the case of Genevieve Stebbins the “breath of life” and the “ether”; in the case of Rama Prasad, this force-substance encapsulates *svara* (“breath”), *prāṇa* (“physiological life”), and the *tattvas* (“element” or “principle”);<sup>230</sup> in the case of Vivekananda *prāṇa* (“life force”, “energy”, “motion”) and *ākāśa* (“matter”, “ether”).<sup>231</sup> As chapter 3 has shown, the varied and complex conceptual history of *prāṇa* in premodern Indian thought stretches back to Vedic and Upaniṣadic thought. The Upaniṣads were full of correspondences between the human being’s psycho-cosmic experience, nature, and laws of the macrocosm (Killingley

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<sup>229</sup> Hanegraaff probably utilises the adjective “occult” in this case in a literal sense, i.e., “hidden” or “invisible”, because he otherwise exclusively employs the term “occultism” to denote post-Enlightenment forms of “esotericism” (Hanegraaff 1996: 406).

<sup>230</sup> *Tattva* (lit. “thatness”) is a “true or real state”, “element”, or “principle” in Sāṃkhya (Monier-Williams 1899: 432). All the translations given in parentheses are those used by the respective protagonists.

<sup>231</sup> *Ākāśa*, “space” or “ether”, is one of the twenty-five *tattvas* in Sāṃkhyan philosophy (Larson 1987b: 49).

2018: 69; Ganeri 2018: 151). I do not posit, however, that this is exactly the case with the modern thinkers treated in this chapter, although they may also have derived some examples of correspondence thought from these texts. In order to understand the abovementioned notions, I will apply in the following several lenses to refract various aspects of the nexus between microcosm and macrocosm.

In one way or the other, both *prāṇa*, or life force, and *ākāśa*, or ether, concern all three protagonists and their cosmologies, anthropologies, and epistemic conceptions. My focus on the analysis of *ākāśa* as space/ether lies in its reception and interpretation by theosophists (see also chapter 4.3.4). It also reframes the multilayered understanding of the concept by Vivekananda, which on the one hand was influenced by the medieval *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and on the other by theosophical thought. In the following, I will briefly summarise the concept of *ākāśa* in premodern South Asia, which became entangled with the imponderable “ether” of nineteenth-century scientific and occult discourse, also briefly described below. I mainly build here on two scholarly works. Egil Asprem’s (2011) analysis is concerned with the discursive history of ether theories that implied both cosmological and anthropological considerations, focussing on the interface between nineteenth-century scientific and esoteric thought. Anna Pokazanyeva<sup>232</sup> (2016) has tied on to Asprem’s analysis by discussing discourses on *ākāśa* in modern yoga.

In premodern Indian philosophy, *ākāśa* occupies a great variety of meanings and various ontological positions.<sup>233</sup> *Ākāśa* is generally translated as “space”, “sky”, or “ether” (Monier-Williams 1899: 127). The function that *ākāśa* has in Sāṃkhya as “space” or “ether” is likely the most relevant for the present context, because classical Sāṃkhya was adopted and integrated into later Vedāntic and tantric cosmologies in the medieval age (Larson 1979: 152),<sup>234</sup> on which both Prasad and Vivekananda drew. While in the earlier Upaniṣads, the notion of *ākāśa* was so encompassing that it was occasionally identified with *brahman* (Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 43), in classical Sāṃkhya, i.e., the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa (c. 350–450 CE), *ākāśa* is the first and the subtlest of the five elements (*bhūtas*). In this function, *ākāśa* brings forth the other four elements, thus entailing a creative component (Pokazanyeva 2016: 326). In the explications of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, *ākāśa* is not eternal (*nitya*) and does not resemble – despite its creative component – either *puruṣa* or *prakṛti* in any way

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<sup>232</sup> A.k.a. Anya Foxen.

<sup>233</sup> This section is based on Kraler (2021: 377-378).

<sup>234</sup> For some general remarks on Sāṃkhya and its periodisation, see chapter 3.2; chapter 3.4.

(Duquette & Ramasubramaniam 2010: 520).<sup>235</sup> However, the sixteenth-century Vijñānabhikṣu, who attempted to unify Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Pātañjalayoga, ascribed a causal quality to *ākāśa* that approximates the function of *prakṛti* in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (*ibid.*). In the philosophical school of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, *ākāśa* is equalled to *ātman*, and both are called “the supremely great or all-pervasive,” and are considered eternal (Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 292). In the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā*, *ākāśa* signifies a specific space within the body, such as the space between the eyebrows, in the throat, or in the heart (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 75-76).<sup>236</sup> The wide range of meanings attributed to *ākāśa* in India over centuries and in different philosophical schools is extended further by the encounter of these concepts with scientific and occult ether speculations during the nineteenth century. In this process, the translation of *ākāśa* as “ether” is highly relevant. The two concepts were first brought together by European scholars and translators of Sanskrit works (Pokazanyeva 2016: 320, 327).

Describing larger portions of the complex conceptional history of “ether” is well beyond the scope of this study. Hence, as with the case of *ākāśa*, only the most salient points are mentioned here.<sup>237</sup> In Greek antiquity, the concept of ether was conceived by Aristotle as “a kind of perfect *Urstoff*” (Asprem 2011: 134).<sup>238</sup> Although Newton’s innovations were milestones in modern physics, the ether theory that he employed had significant gaps, and it was not until the nineteenth century when ether theories became more refined. Initially rehabilitated in the field of physical optics, where it was suggested that waves of light are transmitted through space by the subtle substance of the luminiferous ether, it was the findings of James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879) that combined theories of ether with electromagnetism, with ether as the seat of all electric and magnetic phenomena. Thus, since the 1850s, Maxwellian physicists reconsidered the ether with regard to basic physical phenomena like matter, energy, and force, as well as magnetism and electricity. Especially British physicists described ether as the primary subtle substance to which matter and mechanics could ultimately be reduced, and these speculations were at times even purported as parts of idealist cosmologies (*ibid.*: 159). As such, the idea of ether as an “all-pervading, universal, invisible substance, linking all the universe” (*ibid.*: 142) became a powerful resource

<sup>235</sup> On the notions of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, see chapter 5.4.1.

<sup>236</sup> Brahmanānda draws on the medieval *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, when he correlates these spaces in the body with *ākāśa* (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 75-76). For more on the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā*, see chapter 6.4; for more on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, see chapter 5.4.1.

<sup>237</sup> For an overview over the history of ether theories, including the antique context, see Cantor & Hodge’s elaborate Introduction to *Conceptions of Ether* (1981).

<sup>238</sup> The following paragraph is based on Asprem (2011: 134-141).

notably for phenomena like magnetism and electricity, but also for the esoteric speculation on subtle materiality.

Since occultists were prone to bridge science and religion, they were attuned to these speculations and advanced them well into the realm of occult speculations resulting in a complex of esoteric ether metaphysics. Furthermore, at the core of the theory of eighteenth-century mesmerism was an invisible all-pervading fluidum (see also chapter 4.2.1). By the end of the nineteenth century, the theory of the fluidum that equally coupled scientific and esoteric thought was already well established for several decades. On the side of South Asian religion, subtle-body concepts that also relied on theories of subtle substances, energies, or principles, like *prāṇa* as a vital principle and *ākāśa* or ether as one of the *tattvas* in the Indian tradition, fuelled these discussions with ancient textual material.

In search of an ancient wisdom religion, theosophists were especially attuned to locating scientific theories within the superior framework of a perennial philosophy, which was at least partly rooted in South Asian thought. In *Isis Unveiled* (1877), Blavatsky correlated modern ether speculations with various notions of ancient cultures like the Indian “*ākāśa*” and the Greek “chaos” with the “astral light” of the French occultist Éliphas Lévi,<sup>239</sup> as well as with concepts derived from mesmerism like the “fluid”, the “nerve-aura”, and the “od force” of Karl von Reichenbach (1788–1869), using all of these notions as synonyms (Blavatsky 1877: 125).<sup>240</sup> Besides equating *prāṇa* with the “breath of life” (Chajes 2019: 78), Blavatsky also linked it, at times by means of daring etymological tracings, to the biblical “*ruah*”, to *ākāśa*, and the “all-pervading ether” (Blavatsky 1877: 140, n. †). By connecting disparate knowledge systems, Blavatsky conceived of the ether as “the soul of living nature, the mediating principle, the agent of transmutations, [and] the core subject of an alleged perennial philosophy” (Asprem 2011: 144).

Occultism-informed discourses of modern yoga and physical culture continued to promulgate occultistic ether metaphysics. The various notions of *ākāśa*, although also relying on a more traditional understanding of them, were linked to ether theories by Vivekananda, most notably in his dialogue with the physicist Nicholas Tesla (Pokazanyeva 2016: 338), as will be further discussed below. Genevieve Stebbins’s

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<sup>239</sup> The “astral light” was applied by Lévi as a “magical agent” in practices of magic and alchemy (Asprem 2011: 142). Otto (2011: 520-521) has traced Lévi’s engagement of the term back to Paracelsus and Marsilio Ficino. Baier (2009: 267-270) has shown that Lévi, in following Baron Dupotet, reinterpreted the concept in mesmeric terms.

<sup>240</sup> On the rhetoric of synonymisation that was typical for Blavatsky, see also Hammer (2004: 164-165).

breath practices were informed by the occultism of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, itself heavily relying on the sexual magic of the Rosicrucian Paschal Beverly Randolph. In his teachings, the “inspiration” of ether that resulted in the acquisition of magical powers (for instance, astral travelling) was a major theme. Both Stebbins and Vivekananda interpreted the mediating qualities of ether, or *ākāśa*, and the breath of life, or *prāṇa*, on cosmological as well as anthropological levels, highlighting the correspondence between these two. The theosophical scholar-translator Rama Prasad did not directly elaborate on ether theories as Stebbins and Vivekananda did – but rather held that *ākāśa* was indeed distinct from the scientific notion of “ether”. His mainstay was a theosophical interpretation of the *Śivasvarodaya*, a medieval Sanskrit text on prognostication through observing the breath flow. Based on this text, Prasad explains the correspondence between the breath, or *svara*, and the cosmological principles, or *tattvas*, that were simultaneously active on the anthropological and cosmological plane.

Prasad and Vivekananda trace the principle of correspondence, despite being influenced by nineteenth-century occultism, to tantric and Upaniṣadic thought. What Jonardon Ganeri has observed in terms of Upaniṣadic correspondence thought can, in this case, also be applied in the analysis of the micro-macrocosmic speculations of these protagonists: “If self and world are organised along fundamentally analogous lines, then self-control and self-understanding become methods for controlling and understanding the world” (Ganeri 2018: 151). Stebbins, on the other hand, was inspired by the correspondence thought of Delsarte, which was, in its reception history, often linked to Swedenborg. Although the practices of breath cultivation offered by these authors are distinct, they share the common ground of being tapped into larger cosmological epistemologies, be it the concept of evolution and involution,<sup>241</sup> subtle vibrations producing material phenomena, or the inherent vitalism connected to *prāṇa*, *svara*, and the breath of life.

## 5.2 Genevieve Stebbins and the Breath of Life

Genevieve Stebbins (1857–1934) was one of the most prominent exponents of American Delsartism, who significantly contributed to its development and dissemination. Not least through Stebbins, American Delsartism became an important strand of the gymnastic and physical culture movement. It emphasised expression

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<sup>241</sup> In these contexts, “involution” is regarded as a kind of ascent on a ladder that leads from “gross” to “subtle” materiality and experience, reversing the process of evolution.

through gestures, oratory, and movement drills that evolved in America and Europe through a constant interaction of agents on both continents. At the turn of the century, there was a growing interest in improving the social and cultural life through new forms of living. The reform movements that swept over European countries and the United States included physical culture, innovations in the fields of medicine and hygiene, combined with the aesthetics of natural forms and alternative religious thought.<sup>242</sup> Especially women's culture was rapidly changing, and systems of expression and well-being that involved body, voice, and breath were on the rise. In a recent article, Carrie Streeter has shown that these developments not only affected white middle-class women in the United States, but also women of the black communities of Indianapolis (Streeter 2020). By influencing both white women and women of colour through her widely used manuals, Stebbins was in the vanguard of their empowerment through Delsartism (Ruyter 1999: 28-29; Streeter 2020: 24).

Initially being trained as an actor, Stebbins started to teach Delsartean techniques that were mediated to her by the American Delsartist Steele Mackaye (1842–1894). During the 1880s, her New York classes consisted of statue-posing, which Stebbins had developed through being inspired by artefacts of Greek antiquity, movement drills, and oratory exercises. In 1893, she founded the New York School of Expression, a successful studio in which a wide range of mostly female students of all ages was trained. In 1894, the school merged with F. Townsend Southwick's School of Oratory, which was led by Stebbins until her retirement in 1907. Stebbins's Delsartism became increasingly enriched through practices from Swedish medical gymnastics, also known as the Ling System, that she learned from Dr. George H. Taylor (1821–1896). She also began to incorporate a wide range of contemporary medical theory and practices of physical culture. Although little is known about any actual encounter of Stebbins with various forms of oriental dance, she was nevertheless inspired by what she called "oriental dance" and "prayer", just like many of her contemporaries (Ruyter 1999: 95-96; Foxen 2020: 161-163; Streeter 2020: 26). In all these fields, Stebbins complemented the practices that she learnt from teachers and direct observation with theoretical knowledge that she acquired through indefatigable reading. Into this horizon of theories and practices Stebbins placed what became increasingly important in her teachings: breath cultivation.

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<sup>242</sup> On details of the physical culture movement, see chapter 4.4.



Stebbins's influence on modern dance and somatic disciplines is a well-established fact and her public career as a Delsartist is being documented (Ruyter 1988; 1999; Mullan 2016; 2020; Streeter 2020). However, far less is known about the details of Stebbins's engagement with nineteenth-century occultism, which is, for the present context, highly relevant. The wider context of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (henceforth H. B. o. L.) and the Church of Light seems to be an important source for her to develop specific ideas on breath and breath cultivation. In *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) she integrates physical culture, Delsartism, and occult thought, a blend that reflects the simultaneous reception of these teachings. This blend also enabled the wide dissemination of her work within modern yoga contexts.

In this analysis, I mainly draw on Ruyter (1999), Baier (2009; 2016a), and Mark Singleton (2010). Ruyter (1999: 98-100) has located Stebbins in the contexts of modern dance and has first hinted at Stebbins connection to the H. B. o. L. With regard to modern yoga studies and practices of embodied meditation, Baier (2009: 454-467) has elaborated on aspects of the occult influence on Stebbins. Singleton (2010: 144-147) has noted the importance of Stebbins's concepts of breath cultivation for both South Asian and Euro-American modern yogis. This chapter contextualises her theory and practice of breath cultivation within Delsartist and occult legacies, a discussion that includes the notions of Swedenborg's law of correspondences, the ether, and the breath of life, among others. These notions form the conceptual framework for what she calls "dynamic breathing" and "rhythmic breathing". Especially the latter undoubtedly influenced yogic breath cultivation (Singleton 2010: 157-158; Foxen 2020: 162, 228-230). Although her influence on various breath practices and therapies in European physical culture and gymnastics was also prominent,<sup>243</sup> the breathing techniques she developed were more obviously influential on modern yoga. The wider concepts of dynamic and rhythmic breathing, but also specific breathing techniques like the "Packing Breath" were directly incorporated into subsequent yogic breath cultivation via their reception by Vivekananda and Atkinson.<sup>244</sup> Although I discuss details of Stebbins's breathing techniques in chapter 8.2.1, this chapter will also refer

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<sup>243</sup> Famous teachers that further developed breath practices and related therapeutic gymnastics in Germany and America were, for example, Bess Mensendieck, Hade Kallmeyer, Elsa Gindler, and Dora Menzler (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2012; Mullan 2017).

<sup>244</sup> Even Desmond Dunne, a prominent yoga author in the 1950s, has adopted Stebbins's crucial practices like "rhythmic breathing", and the "Packing Breath", among others. For details, see Kraler (forthcoming).

to them as far as they are part of the cosmological and anthropological framework that she developed.

### 5.2.1 Delsarte, the Law of Correspondences, and Swedenborg

Delsartism is a system of expression with theoretical implications created by the French singer and orator François Delsarte (1811–1871). As most accounts report, Delsarte developed his own practices that involved body, gesture, voice, and expression out of dissatisfaction with his education at the Conservatoire in Paris and as a result of losing his voice.<sup>245</sup> He observed that various teachers that he encountered had built their authority on their own personage rather than on an overarching principle that he could follow (Delsarte as quoted in Stebbins 1887 [1885]: xxxiv-xxxv, xlv). In search of a “science”, “principle”, or “law” for the art of expression, Delsarte developed an elaborate theoretical and practical framework consisting of these laws in question. His system, then, included classifications of movements, gestures, and voice production, i.e., bodily expression in general. Two main principles are of major importance in our context, the law of trinity and the law of correspondence. These principles most likely rely on the revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>246</sup> According to Delsarte, these laws are part of a scientific investigation that he undertook over several decades. Nevertheless, they are at least partly rooted in metaphysical and cosmological considerations, insofar that he departs from metaphysical principles like “Love, Wisdom, and Power”, representing the “nature of God” (Shawn 1988 [1954]: 29; Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 35-36). From these, the triune principle of the human body, mind, and soul is derived. Delsarte subsequently classifies areas of the body into threefold categories, as well as the qualities of movement and expression belonging to them in a strictly threefold pattern that represents the universality of the law of trinity (Shawn 1988 [1954]: 24). The law of correspondence mainly signifies the intimate relations between body, mind, and soul. Hence, meaning is attached to every gesture and expression, and, consequently, there is also a correspondence between inner or

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<sup>245</sup> It is difficult to fully disentangle the hagiographic aspects from actual facts about Delsarte’s life. There are several accounts on how he developed his method in the 1880s and 1890s, and contemporary scholarship has not yet reconstructed a convincing narrative (Kelly Mullan in a personal conversation, Apr 1, 2021).

<sup>246</sup> See also chapter 4.2.1. For an interpretation of Swedenborg’s correspondence teachings in light of its reception within Western esotericism, see Hanegraaff (1996: 426-429). As for Delsarte, he had left hardly any written material, therefore there is no definite proof for him being influenced by Swedenborg, though an influence is likely. Franck Waille (2012a) traced the metaphysical influence on Delsarte back to Thomas Aquinas, the medieval Kabbala, and antique esotericism, including the Hermetic dictum “as above, so below” (Waille 2012a: 224-225).

“spiritual” aspects, from which meaning is derived, and outer or “physical” aspects that express those meanings (Ruyter 1999: 76).

Delsarte’s classification was new in the field of expressive art, and, notwithstanding a certain inherent rigidity, it sparked innovative practices involving gestures, movement, breath, and voice, encoding meaning into these forms of expressions. Delsarte was interested in connecting theory and practice, which was also crucial for Stebbins. As a singing teacher, he taught breathing techniques, but they were probably not the main focus in his work.<sup>247</sup> He distinguished between “vital” abdominal breathing, “moral” diaphragmatic breathing, and “mental” clavicular breathing (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 187-188; cf. Shawn 1988 [1954]: 38). Delsarte considered both abdominal and diaphragmatic breathing to be well-suited for singing as a vital human expression (Waille 2012b: 260). While abdominal breathing was the natural state of the breath, diaphragmatic breathing was explicitly cultivated for singing, and the latter constituted the main technique that he taught (*ibid.*). Clavicular breathing was applicable only for hysteric and gasping expression and was to be cautiously applied, since it was said to result in an unbalanced mind (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 188). According to Stebbins’s translation of portions of Delsarte’s work in *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885), Delsarte recommended “deep breathing” in combination with softening the throat muscles for preparing the voice for singing (*ibid.*: 196).<sup>248</sup> The French master also taught the triune process of breathing, consisting of inspiration, exhalation, and suspension (Waille 2012b: 259). The held breath, or suspension after inhalation, was used as a tool for expression, especially for the culmination of an expanding gesture like a throwing movement (Shawn 1988 [1954]: 49).

American Delsartism drew extensively from Delsarte’s teachings, but it was also modified by the contributions of its American interpreters. In its adapted form, it became widely popular in America from the 1870s onwards, peaking in the Delsartist heyday of the 1890s (Ruyter 1999: 60). Steele Mackaye learnt directly from Delsarte in 1869 and he taught Stebbins in the years before 1885. Mackaye’s Delsartism already

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<sup>247</sup> There is, however, some debate in scholarship as to how central breathing was to Delsarte’s original system. For example, Alfred Giraudet (1845–1911), a French singer and student of Delsarte who documented portions of his system, gives Delsarte enormous credit for developing breathing techniques for singers: “No one before him had studied, from the special points of art, the physiology of breathing and diaphragmatic breathing. Since his death many other teachers of singing have adopted and used his discoveries” (Giraudet as quoted in Shawn 1988 [1954]: 104).

<sup>248</sup> “Preparation for tone consists in deep breathing, depression of larynx, canalisation of tongue” (Delsarte as quoted in Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 196). Waille (2012b: 256) identifies the depression of the larynx as part of the Italian *belcanto* technique.

had an increased focus on movement training and physical culture, an aspect that Stebbins advanced in her focus on physical culture, spiral movements, and dance-like transitions between statue-posing. Stebbins also utilised breath-holding exercises (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 244). Delsarte's threefold division of vital, moral, and mental breathing, or abdominal, diaphragmatic, and clavicular, was not only applied by Stebbins, but also by the Delsartist Carrica Le Favre (Le Favre 1891: 37-42). Le Favre further combined all three forms of breathing into one in- and outbreath and termed it the "Full Breath" (*ibid.*: 42), a technique that also came to be known as "Yogi Complete Breath" (Ramacharaka 1904: 37-38).<sup>249</sup> Le Favre also appears to have been influenced by German *Lebensreform* practices, since she suggests fresh-air bathing and dietary rules (Shawn 1988 [1954]: 100). This may have inspired her to merge the three breath spaces into the "Full Breath", which was likely already practised in circles of therapeutic and medical gymnastics which often accompanied *Lebensreform* practices.

Stebbins's first book, *The Delsarte System of Expression* (1885),<sup>250</sup> is a compilation of Delsarte's unpublished manuscripts with annotations and practices by Stebbins. Stebbins's reception of Delsarte was accompanied by reading Swedenborg. She quotes Swedenborg directly with regard to the law of trinity and law of correspondence, next to several authors whose thoughts she correlates with her interpretation of the Delsarte system (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 33-34). She also refers to various Swedenborgian authors like the influential American Delsartist Lewis Baxter Monroe (1825–1879), who terms Delsarte's system "Swedenborg geometrized" (*ibid.*: 38), and to Reverend Edward Madeley, a member of the Swedenborg church in Britain and the author of *Science of Correspondences* (1883). Swedenborg's law of correspondence seems to have been an important basis for Stebbins's concept of "psycho-physical culture" and, in this context, she highlights the relation between the brain and the lungs, or mental action and respiration, which is a typical Swedenborgian theme (chapter 4.2.1; chapter 4.3.1). Despite references to Swedenborg, she never mentions, like many Swedenborgians did, the concept of "internal breathing". Swedenborg's and Delsarte's metaphysical laws were certainly important for Stebbins's intellectual world and practical teaching. The main metaphysical drive in

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<sup>249</sup> For further discussions about the threefold division of breath space, see chapter 8.2.2.

<sup>250</sup> The first edition of this book was published in 1885. The sixth edition of 1902 has many annotations. I quote from the second edition of 1887.

her work, however, is more evidently sustained by an inherent vitalism, expressed in the notion of “the breath of life”.

### 5.2.2 The Breath of Life: Genevieve Stebbins and the Reception of Thomas Lake Harris

In her third book, *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892),<sup>251</sup> Stebbins integrates ideas from the exact sciences, the fields of comparative religion and occultism, physical culture, therapeutic gymnastics, and medicine. As a common theme in nineteenth-century occultism, she closely links “scientific” and occult statements, and a vital principle called the “breath of life” is the common denominator. In doing so, Stebbins places her understanding of breath cultivation into the wider perspective of a metaphysical – and, I would argue, an occult – interpretation of the subject. Her breathing exercises are an elaborate conglomerate of various practises of physical culture and occultism with her own innovations and contributions. Despite the influence of occultism on Stebbins, the elements of Delsartism and physical culture in her work persist.

For Stebbins, the breath of life, together with the powerful “glorious central sun of our solar system” (Stebbins 1892: 7), bring forth and nourish all existence. In the first lines of *Dynamic Breathing*, she alludes to the breath of life as mentioned in the Old Testament (*Genesis* 1.2). The sun and the breath of life are co-dependent and operate on the same ontological plane. She asserts that “everything must come to us from the shining centre of life, our earth’s parent; and that in the air we breathe is contained the All of human existence” (*ibid.*: 12). The solar centre emits visible and invisible rays; the visible produce light, heat, and motor force; the invisible ones equally produce physical forces that are even more powerful (*ibid.*: 10-11). Stebbins relies here on the statements of scientific authorities like John Herschel (1792–1871) as well as John Tyndall (1820–1893) and their theories of solar heat. By translating these “truths”, as she calls them, to a microcosmic level, Stebbins states that not only the human physique but also “the higher and more ethereal powers of mind and soul emanate from the same celestial centre” (*ibid.*: 10). In close analogy to the invisible sun rays, she holds that the “powers of the mind are the invisible rays of the human spectrum” (*ibid.*: 11). Ultimately, the breath of life sustains the human body, the mind, and the soul. In Stebbins’s cosmology and anthropology, the finest essences,

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<sup>251</sup> Henceforth *Dynamic Breathing*.

consisting of subtle materiality, are ethereal, like “magnetism, electricity, and the celestial ether” (*ibid.*: 9). These “finer but imperceptible ethereal forces [...] nourish and expand the spiritual energies of the soul” (*ibid.*: 12).<sup>252</sup>

In discussing the notion of the breath of life, Stebbins also relies on terminology derived from the exact sciences, like the “protoplasm”, or the “bioplasm” to delineate a basic life principle.<sup>253</sup> However, she advances these notions further into the realm of occult speculation by introducing a “psychic principle in humanity” that explains, “in its wonderful powers over mind and matter”, various phenomena like “Hypnotism, Mental Healing and Telepathy” (Stebbins 1892: 11). Additionally, she introduces the notion of the psychoplasm as the “thing which really lives” (*ibid.*: 7). While the bioplasm is linked to the visible, physical side of matter, the psychoplasm represents the invisible, spirited side of every molecule, constituting these “finer forces”; together, the bioplasm and the psychoplasm form the “primordial life” (*ibid.*: 9, 11). The “celestial ether” provides the medium by which the phenomena of life become perceptible to the physical senses by means of subtle vibrations (*ibid.*: 9-10, 25). These vibrations leave their imprint in the atmosphere, charged with ether, and the air we breathe. The vibrations that ripple through the universe are perceived by human beings as sounds, colours, memories, and thoughts (*ibid.*: 25-28). Mental images are “but eternal vibrations of the ether that constitute the real external consciousness of life, of being, all being the result of invisible vibration” (*ibid.*: 28). The soul that perceives the “illusions of matter” is, in the final analysis, only constituted by the “eternal realities [of] ether, motion and intelligence” (*ibid.*).<sup>254</sup> While ether is the subtle and spirited side of matter, although capable of resonating with and nourishing the human soul, the breath of life is that which brings forth life at large on a cosmological scale (*ibid.*: 11-12). Ether can be extracted from the air that one breathes – constituting the core idea of Stebbins’s system of dynamic breathing, as will be further expounded below.

As noted above, Stebbins’s esoteric ether metaphysics are indebted to nineteenth-century ether speculations in both science and occultism. These

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<sup>252</sup> This passage is reminiscent of Rama Prasad’s influential phrase “nature’s finer forces”, but there are no further explicit references to Prasad in Stebbins’s work. The phrase might have circled in the networks of the H. B. o. L., in which Prasad’s *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884) was known to some members (see below).

<sup>253</sup> She may have derived the idea of the protoplasm and the bioplasm from Lionel S. Beal’s *Bioplasm: An Introduction to the Study of Physiology and Medicine* (1872).

<sup>254</sup> As to the wider contexts of ether theories, Aspren (2011: 141) explains: “[P]hysicists were led to theorise that matter might be but an epiphenomenon of etheric motion, the more fanciful even allowing for the possibility that such motion consists of thoughts in the mind of God.”

speculations were often embedded in concepts of vitalism or panpsychism, purporting the idea of an “impersonal, all-pervading life force” (Asprem 2011: 148). While it could be argued that this impersonal life force was the ether itself, Stebbins’s notion of the “breath of life” takes the position of a primary ontological – and vitalistic – principle. Regarding occultists rubbing off on Stebbins, there were at least three possible sources in her (intellectual) proximity that dwelled on the notion of the “breath of life” or the “breath of God”. Of these three, Thomas Lake Harris has evidently exerted significant influence on Stebbins’s notion of the breath of life. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter 4.2.2, Pascal Beverly Randolph, who significantly influenced the practices of the H. B. o. L., posited that during sexual union, the partners were suffused in the “breath of God” (Randolph 1906 [1874]: 126). In the early Theosophical Society, which was a discursive partner of (if often opposed to) the H. B. o. L., the breath of life was a recurring theme, especially in its explication of a vital principle, often expressed as the “One Life” (Coryn 1893: 22; Sinnett 1883: 27; Blavatsky 1889: 176). It would be intriguing to analyse the larger discursive strands of these vitalistic notions, but a discussion outside the main protagonist’s ideas is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I focus on the paramount influence of Harris upon Stebbins in the following.

The notion of the “breath of life” is often (and also by Stebbins) contextualised with the Biblical theme in which “God breathed life into the nostrils of man” in *Genesis* 2.7. Although this principle can be understood to emanate from (the Christian) God, in many cases (as in Blavatsky and, likely, also in Stebbins) it is not dependent on a theistic interpretation. However, nineteenth-century occultism was informed by certain strands of Christian faith via Swedenborgianism and spiritualism, as will become apparent below.

Reverend Thomas Lake Harris (1823–1906) was closely associated with Paschal Beverly Randolph, and both were former spiritualist mediums turning to sexual magic, after being inflicted by spiritualism (Deveney 1997: 13, 214). Harris was also a follower of Swedenborg (Deveney 2006c: 1077). Harris founded various religious communities, the last and maybe most influential one being The Brotherhood of the New Life, residing in Santa Rosa, California. In his *God’s Breath in Man and Humane Society* (1891), which is an enlarged edition of his earlier *The Breath of God with Man* (1867), Harris elucidates theories of the breath of God, some of which were directly absorbed by Stebbins. Harris synonymously utilises the concepts of the “breath of God”, the “breath of life”, the “divine breath”, and the “holy breath”. All

these denote the influx of a divine plan or energy that uplifts humankind from this-worldly pursuits to a heavenly and ever more etherised reality. These forms of breathing and living lie in stark contrast to what humankind cultivated in this darkening age: Harris observes that “natural respiration” had propelled intellectualism, materialism, and decay (Harris 1891: 7, 29, 140). Only the “Breath of Life” is capable of saving humankind from these destructive tendencies, and it is acquired by the “divine-natural breath”, also termed “spiritual respiration” (*ibid.*: 24, 27, 140). Thereby “the lungs of mankind must open” (*ibid.*: 140), and humans will move from a breathless to a “breathful” state (Harris 1891: 24).<sup>255</sup> The author promises a new kind of inhalation of the “God-pervaded air”, or a “*living atmosphere*”, in which “oxygen, hydrogen, and ozone supply divine love, divine wisdom, divine potency” (*ibid.*: 26, his emphasis). Harris does not specifically instruct breathing techniques that would help to accomplish this; rather, he talks abundantly about the results of such a new way to breathe. Essentially, humans so inspired gain spiritual insight without religious authorities, they are affiliated to the “universal brotherhood” rather than to a specific family or religion, and they help to build and preserve this “New Life” that commenced with the divine-natural in-breath of Jesus Christ in his corporeal human form (*ibid.*: 26, 29, 78, 106-120).

Harris outlines various forms of celestial hierarchy. He mentions the waning of the solar cults of India, Iran, and Greece, followed by the age of Christ, marking the transition from natural-divine (or “solar respiration”) to divine-natural breathing (Harris 1891: 106-109). Humankind has arrived at the age of the ether, ever continuing the “rhythmic law” of Pythagoras and the “etheric force” of Jesus (*ibid.*: 270). Only recently, however, had the influx of the ether manifested in common people through “the law of universality” (*ibid.*: 272) amounting to new therapeutic possibilities:

Unconsciously to the dull sense of the masses, the gross atmosphere of the planet is imbibing a nimbler, more volatile, more elastic and irrepressible ether. As atmosphere becomes etherized, and as man becomes etherized, ethereal agencies deploy into new processions of the healing art. Mind cure invades the domain of the apothecary. The old familiar face of miracle peers out, this time through natural law, and the human constitution reacts and revivifies under the influence of the unseen forces (Harris 1891: 270).

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<sup>255</sup> Harris also refers to breathless states, belonging to forms of “natural breathing” such as, for example, experienced by a person in deep thought or prayer, but also in utter despair or shock (Harris 1891: 23). These and other passages suggest the reception of Swedenborg as part of his esoteric biography (Deveney 2006c: 1077).



The “old familiar face of miracle” is attributed to Jesus, but now, in the late nineteenth century, these “unseen forces” ally with the “natural law”. Although Harris at times is sceptical about the agnostic tendencies of the sciences (Harris 1891: 5, 79), they nevertheless support the mission of society becoming increasingly attuned to the ethereal forces, not least by finding names and categories, e.g., for the elements confined in air (*ibid.*: 107).

While the age of the solar reign had passed, the worship of the sun was still a model for the age of the divine-natural breath. Ethereal currents were still, at least partly, dependent on the emanations of the sun: “[T]he solar ray is also a nerve, a wire for living etheric vibrations of intelligent harmony” (Harris 1891: 81). Solar rays are “an organization in many degrees of etheric matter” (*ibid.*: 142). The new life that revives by respiration still acknowledges that civilisations with solar cults worshipped the sun as “alive”, knowing that it “breathed as well as shone” (*ibid.*: 78). Indulging in the breath of life implies something similar, at least as to the fact that it is equally a religious act: “In the recovery of respiration Deity is rediscovered” (*ibid.*: 80). The “old” respiration, which is charged with “natural-divine currents whose medium is in the solar rays” is combined with the “new” breath that God breathes into man, resulting in a third respiration: “God breathing forth through the solar luminary [...] may inbreathe into the human organism through its plexial chords [...] wedding the breaths into a third and complex respiration”, resulting into a “psychophysical transformation” (*ibid.*: 9). In essence, this combined “external” and “internal” respiration is also achieved when Christ becomes embodied in the human being: “The veil that parts the internal from the external breathing system must be rent in twain: God the Son must breathe forth through us” (*ibid.*: 140).

As Julie Chajes has noted, Harris’s model of respiration was an appropriation of Swedenborg’s internal respiration (Chajes 2016: 506). Swedenborg’s notion of internal breathing meant “the process by which humans, moved by love, regain their original ability to breathe as the angels do”, resulting in the ability to commune with angels (Deveney 1997: 470, n. 2). Besides unfolding the theme on various levels in his 1891 book, one of the volumes of *The Brotherhood of the New Life: an Epitome of the Works and Teachings of Thomas Lake Harris* (1897) bears the name “Internal Breathing”, showing that it was also a major theme in the community founded by Harris. This five-volume book was published under the pseudonym Respiro and

reflects the activities and teachings of Harris.<sup>256</sup> With regard to Harris's old acquaintance Randolph, Deveney (1997: 470, n. 2) has found that his understanding of breathing in connection with sexual magic was equally inspired by Swedenborg's notion of internal respiration, enabling Randolph to communicate with realms "beyond". It is important to note that Swedenborg, although he certainly used breath to induce altered states of consciousness, did not introduce the idea of breath as a vitalistic principle pervading the cosmos. As a result, these occultists were influenced by Swedenborg with regard to the *mode* of breathing, but less so in terms of the concept of the breath of God linked to the notion of the ether.

Returning to Harris's *God's Breath in Man and Humane Society* (1891), this text is a conglomerate of what may be called post-spiritualist and Swedenborgian reasoning with a millenarian bent. It is notable that Harris speaks of "plexial chords" or "plexial organs" on several occasions (e.g., Harris 1891: 9, 78-80).<sup>257</sup> There is, moreover, one passage in which Harris weaves analogies of the yogic subtle body and the ascent of *prāṇa* into the description of this new respiration, though not explicitly so:

[A]s the human system begins to regain the activities of the suppressed senses and the rhythm of the plexial chords, and as the divine-natural respiration moving on through nerve-center after nerve-center to organic quickening and harmonization finally grasps to the full control of the semi-lunar ganglion, that breathing form calls forth the response of the objective-subjective complement of respiration: the sun breathes into man (Harris 1891: 80).

The occult biography of Harris and the question as to how he was influenced by yoga needs further investigation that cannot be undertaken here. In this passage, the reference to an ascending breath through "nerve-centers" together with a sun-moon symbolism is too close to yogic subtle-body schemes to be mere coincidence. Following these breadcrumbs, for Harris, the "divine-natural inspiration" would indeed mean the control of *prāṇa*.

While Harris's reception of yoga remains a conundrum yet to be solved, there are several tropes in his work that are relevant for an analysis of Stebbins's work.

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<sup>256</sup> I was not able to acquire a copy of this book or to have a closer look at the volume "Internal Breathing". As for the pseudonym under which the book was published, it was likely inspired by a series of articles under the heading "Respiro" in the *Spiritual Magazine* of 1862 (Vol. III), in which Swedenborg's notion of internal respiration is discussed extensively (Deveney 1997: 470, n. 42).

<sup>257</sup> At least once, Harris seems to refer to the solar plexus here, when he states that "[t]he seat of intellectual sensation in mankind [...] is now becoming active through the plexial organs and in the stomach and bowels" (Harris 1891: 291).

Throughout this complex and multilayered text, Harris variously refers to the doctrine of solar rays and solar respiration. He speaks of ether as endowed with vibrating, healing, and subtle qualities (Harris 1891: 81, 270, 297). Harris's understanding of the divine breath is embedded in a form of esoteric Christendom in which Christ "breathes" in humans, bestowing upon them the benedictions of the ether. Many of these elements are also found in Stebbins's *Dynamic Breathing*, published only one year later, albeit with different interpretations. For Stebbins, the age of sun worship had not passed and was still relevant for today's understanding of and attunement to the breath of life. The respiration of the nourishing ether is a major theme in her work. As opposed to Harris, her notion of the breath of life is a vital principle independent of a theistic source. Despite the differences, there is further clear evidence that the Reverend's treatise was known to the Delsartist. In the very first paragraphs of their books, both Harris and Stebbins introduce the idea of the breath of life with simultaneous reference to the Bible and to modern science (*ibid.*: 5; Stebbins 1892: 1). Furthermore, a chapter, in both works titled the "Phenomena of Respiration" (Harris 1891: 20-31; Stebbins 1892: 13-21), elucidates relations of natural (i.e., not consciously altered) breathing to various states of mind and emotions. Although Stebbins at times quotes nearly verbatim (and without attribution) from Harris and certainly applies the same tropes and examples, they arrive at different conclusions. Harris states that humanity needs to adopt "divine-natural breathing", while Stebbins extracts theoretical and practical implications for her psycho-physical gymnastics and breath cultivation. Harris dwells only on religious aspects while Stebbins is rooted both in occult thought and in physical culture. Both, however, agree on the necessity of "breathfulness" (Harris 1891: 24), or a "full-breathing pair of lungs" (Stebbins 1892: 72).

The idea of the breath of life certainly existed before Harris's and Stebbins's elucidations, but it should also be kept in mind that Harris's book first appeared as early as 1867.<sup>258</sup> As to the legacy of the concept after them, I will leave it at briefly mentioning the existence of magnetisers and healers that thought of breath as a substance that could not only be absorbed by inhalation, but stored and conveyed to

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<sup>258</sup> The intellectual head of the New Thought movement, Warren Felt Evans, also dwelt on the notion of the "breath of life", the "breath of God", the "Universal Life Principle", and the like, often linked to the "ether", e.g., in *Esoteric Christianity* (1886: 91-106). For Evans, the divine principle commonly called "God" is an androgyne principle, which has a clear equivalent in Harris's thought (Chajes 2016). Most likely, there was a cross-pollination between Evans's and Harris's ideas. For a further discussion of Evans's influence on the occult milieu, see also chapter 4.2.3.

others (chapter 8.1; chapter 8.2.2; chapter 9.1). These healers also applied breathing exercises for the purpose of recharging the magnetiser or healer. Some textual evidence is found in Sydney Flower's *A Course in Personal Magnetism* and *A Course in Magnetic Healing* (both 1901), Levi D'Guru's (pseud., E. S. Dowling) *Complete Course in Biopneuma: The True Science of the Great Breath* (1902) addressing the Zoist Brotherhood,<sup>259</sup> as well as the associated journal *The Breath of Life* (1902), which expounds on "Christopathian Philosophy". Ursula N. Gestefeld's *The Breath of Life* (1897) and Grace Brown's *Inner Breath* (1922) seem to adopt Swedenborgian ideas.

### 5.2.3 Psycho-Physical Culture: Breathing, Mental Imagery, and Physical Exercise

Before elaborating on Stebbins's understanding of breath cultivation, some general remarks on her system of psycho-physical culture are due. As has been discussed, the concept of the "psycho-physical" or the "psycho-physiological" has a specific reception history that reaches back to the 1830s and a certain Dr. Adams, who likely coined the term (chapter 4.4.3). Adams used it to explain religious phenomena, and most prominently the effects of animal magnetism, that simultaneously affected the body and the mind, by stating that it was the imagination that produces corresponding physical results. While neither Mackaye nor Delsarte applied this term to their work (and it is also not found in Swedenborg's texts), Delsarte's law of correspondences is close to the reciprocal relationship between body, soul, and mind that is an intrinsic aspect of the concept of psycho-physiology. Stebbins perhaps partly also relied on Harris's principle of "psycho-physical transformation" mentioned above (Harris 1891: 9). She was, moreover, aware of contemporary discourses on psycho-physiology, by the 1880s a well-established field at the interface of psychology, physiology, and medicine, evidenced by her reference to one of its contemporaneous exponents, Wilhelm Wundt (Stebbins 1892: 120; chapter 4.4.3).

Clearly informed by Swedenborg, Stebbins affirms the "affinity between mental action and respiration" (Stebbins 1892: 13). Like other authors in the Swedenborg legacy, she calls into question the lack of awareness of everyday experience on the breath and the correlated mental states that it produces (e.g., Wilkinson 1849: 81-82). Drawing from Harris, she also mines the correlations between

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<sup>259</sup> Dowling (1902: 21) employs the notion of *svara*, most likely an uncredited reference to Rama Prasad.

breath and emotions.<sup>260</sup> As a crucial step for her own system of harmonic gymnastics – and here, she departs from Harris – she notes that, in turn, breath cultivation can in turn influence emotional states in a technical and purposeful way. If deep breathing is, for example, accompanied with a mental image that implies hope, then the breath will be deepened even more by way of the imagination influencing the breath (Stebbins 1892: 13-18; 1913 [1898]: 27). In a sense, her way to cultivate the breath is “psycho-physical culture” par excellence, since its most important medium is linked to the mind, the emotions, and the body. Being deeply reciprocal in nature, breath is both affected by and affects the mental and emotional dispositions of a person.

Her psycho-physical culture is, in general, designed to develop “body, brain and soul” and to bring the “human microcosm into one continuous, interacting unison” (Stebbins 1892: 57). Stebbins therefore incorporates mental imagery, breathing techniques, and energising and relaxing activities.<sup>261</sup> Roughly speaking, harmonic gymnastics (or the energising and relaxing activities) train the physical levels, mental imagery impacts the emotional and moral spheres, and dynamic breathing affects the mental and spiritual levels (*ibid.*: 68-75). But although breathing mainly strengthens “brain-power”, it is nevertheless “as vital as exercise” (*ibid.*: 70), and these aspects are “acting and interacting upon each other in perfect unison” (*ibid.*: 71). The title of her influential work, “Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics”, thus encapsulates Stebbins’s encompassing programme.

#### 5.2.4 Dynamic Breathing and Rhythmic Breathing

Stebbins’s ideas on breath cultivation were set forth in *Dynamic Breathing*. Therein, the concepts of “dynamic breathing” and “rhythmic breathing” comprise the practical significance of all breathing exercises. The main epistemic pattern for a variety of detailed breath instructions loops back to the notions of the breath of life and ether. This is outlined in a whole chapter dedicated to “Dynamic Breathing” (Stebbins 1892: 48-54), “elucidating the deeper principles which underlie respiration and the air we breathe” (*ibid.*: 82). Dynamic breathing means to assimilate ether from the air, and the way to accomplish this is chiefly rhythmic breathing aided by the power of imagination (*ibid.*: 54-55). This is the nexus between the elaborate introduction to the breath of life

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<sup>260</sup> These passages that can be traced to Harris are later adopted in Yogendra’s *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* (1940). For details, see chapter 8.3.2.

<sup>261</sup> In a revealing article, Wouter Hanegraaff has elaborated on the concept of “mental imagery” in the context of Rhodes Buchanan as well as William and Elizabeth Denton (Hanegraaff 2017: 22). An influence on Stebbins is not unlikely, since she was aware of Buchanan’s work (see below).

and the significance of dynamic and rhythmic breathing.<sup>262</sup> Although Stebbins's system is thoroughly psycho-physical, the essential task of nourishing mind, body, and soul could also be supplied by respiration only, leading to "a higher level of mental, moral and vital energies" (Stebbins 1913 [1898]: 28). In the following, I shall focus on rhythmic breathing and some of its precedents as the main concept to inform yogic breath cultivation.

Stebbins explains that by natural involuntary breathing, the organism sustains its life functions, extracting "vif" from the air (Stebbins 1892: 52), an element that is elsewhere simply referred to as oxygen (*ibid.*: 72). But rhythmic breathing aspires to elevate the practitioner to higher functions of living by sifting ether from the air (*ibid.*: 52-53). The technicalities of it are described at the beginning of the chapter "Breathing Exercises" (*ibid.*: 82-90). In its basic form, rhythmic breathing means counting four heartbeats each for the in- and outbreath and suspending the breath for two heartbeats, resulting in the rhythm 4-2-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale-retain). While this rhythm is closest to "strong, normal rhythmic respiration" (*ibid.*: 83), the lengths of each phase could be increased to 7-4-7-4 or up to 10-5-10-5 (*ibid.*: 83-85). This "perfect musical rhythm" is, by means of the measure of the heartbeat, aligned with the "vital vibration of the whole organism" (*ibid.*: 83). Notably it is accompanied by the "consciousness of indrawing nature's vitality" (*ibid.*: 84).

Stebbins gives credit to several medical and scientific authorities who confirmed the significance of ether as a vital principle and rhythmic breathing as a valuable tool for medical purposes. Establishing the authority in question regarding the ether, she, for one, refers to Dr. Rhodes Buchanan, the author of *Therapeutic Sarcognomy* (1891) who also wrote books on psychometry and spiritualism (Hanegraaff 2017). Secondly, she mentions the seventeenth-century physician F. Hoffman, very likely the German Friedrich Hoffmann (1660–1742), a Cartesian theorist of medicine (Stebbins 1892: 49-52; Stengel 2011: 163; Foxen 2020: 110-111). Stebbins's medical authority for breathing is George H. Taylor's *Pelvic and Hernial Therapeutics* (1885), from which she learnt Swedish Ling gymnastics (Ruyter 1999: 94-95). Indeed, Taylor mentions the idea of rhythmic respiration, mostly applying the notion of "rhythmic motion" of muscles and organs, particularly the breathing

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<sup>262</sup> Dynamic breathing denotes a breathing rhythm that coordinates the breath with a sequence of movements (Stebbins 1892: 102; Ruyter 1999: 108-109). For example, while inhaling, on four beats one lifts an arm "as if the breath were lifting it", then one holds the breath and the arm for four beats, and lets the arm descend while exhaling on four beats (Stebbins 1892: 99). The "slow increase of tension upon a held breath" specifically develops the "personal magnetic power" (*ibid.*: 97).

apparatus (e.g., Taylor 1885: 52-60). Although Taylor recommends deep breathing to increase or inhibit the motion of various parts of the trunk (*ibid.*: 66-68), he does not apply the notion of rhythmic respiration as a form of exercise, but rather speaks of the “rhythm of respiration” (*ibid.*: 67) as an intrinsic property of the breathing apparatus and all the muscles involved.

A comparative textual analysis of Stebbins’s chapter on “Relaxation” (Stebbins 1892: 76-81) reveals that she drew from the extended field of physical culture, voice training, and American Delsartism to establish the notion of “rhythmic breathing”. It thereby becomes a concept of *consciously* rendering the breath *rhythmic* (not only *deep* as in Taylor’s case) as well as of developing a specific breathing technique. Stebbins is perhaps indebted here to the Delsartist and writer Annie Payson Call (1853–1940) and her *Power through Repose* (1891).<sup>263</sup> Though Stebbins never explicitly quotes Call, for the former “relaxation means recuperating dynamic *power through repose*” (Stebbins 1892: 78, my emphasis). In her 1891 book, Call recommends “quiet, rhythmic breathing” with “fifty breaths, a little longer than they would naturally be” for starting and quieting down a group of students in class (Call 1891: 139). Furthermore, she holds that “[t]he breaths must be counted, to keep the mind from wandering” (*ibid.*), though not revealing a specific rhythm or recommended length of each (phase of the) breath. Many contemporaneous sources posit similar forms of relaxation through breath cultivation. However, in light of its specific wording, Annie Payson Call’s understanding seems to be closest to Stebbins’s and a direct influence – or a cross-pollination – is likely.<sup>264</sup>

Other voice specialists and Delsartists had recommended applying breathing rhythms as a preparatory exercise for singing. In *Gymnastics of the Voice* (1884),<sup>265</sup> the German acting teacher Oskar Guttman describes a set of exercises in which “inspiration and expiration should be of equal length” (Guttman 1884 [1867]: 144). One of the most influential American Delsartists, the aforementioned Lewis B. Monroe, mentions a similar technique, whereby the duration of the in-breath and the

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<sup>263</sup> On the similarities between Call’s and Stebbins’s system of relaxation, see Baier (2016a: 48-51). On Stebbins’s and Call’s influence on the developments of “harmonial gymnastics” in Britain and, subsequently, modern yoga see Singleton (2010: 150-152). Singleton (2005: 294) also notes, in light of relaxation as a major theme for both therapeutic and modern yoga contexts, that Annie Payson Call’s early instructions for breath-based relaxation are “proto-typical of the majority of later therapeutic approaches which have almost certainly had an influence on the development of modern *prāṇāyāma* methods”.

<sup>264</sup> Also the Delsartist John Bailey describes “slow rhythmic breathing” in her *Physical Culture* (1892) much in the sense of Call, to whom she also directly refers (Bailey 1892: 28, 40; Foxen 2020: 142).

<sup>265</sup> The first German edition was published in 1867.

out-breath are both counted in two beats accompanied by arm movements, yet also without explicitly applying the notion of “rhythmic breathing” (Monroe 1869: 20-21). Stebbins refers to these authors repeatedly but does not mention them in terms of rhythmic breathing.

All these physical culturists, orators or Delsartists suggest the idea of making the breath rhythmic, but the idea of assimilating ether by doing so is not found in any of these sources. Furthermore, none of them make any reference to yoga, which has often been stated to having influenced Stebbins in developing certain forms of drills and breathing techniques (e.g., Ruyter 1999: 96). Bringing light into the question of how Stebbins integrated the technique of rhythmic breathing with the idea of absorbing ether from the atmosphere, I will now turn to Stebbins’s reception of ideas of the H. B. o. L., some of which were already relevant for the discussion of Stebbins’s reception of Thomas Lake Harris. Since the wider conceptional frameworks have already been set, this discussion of her entanglement with occultism focusses more on the reception of its *practices*. Her orientalist inclinations resonate with the tendency of occultism to integrate practices informed by yoga and Indian philosophy.

#### 5.2.5 Turning to the East: India, Sun Adoration, and *The Mysteries of Eros*

Apart from all the references to dynamic and rhythmic breathing that have been mentioned, Stebbins reveals in a later work, *The Genevieve Stebbins System of Physical Culture* (1898), that she was inspired to develop “Dynamic Breathing” by her encounter with a “Hindu pundit” in London (Stebbins 1913 [1898]: 21). Here she explains that dynamic breathing exemplifies the “correspondence of breath and thought” (*ibid.*), a formula that has already been dwelled upon above and that is relevant both in premodern and contemporaneous South Asian yogic as well as Swedenborgian contexts (chapter 4.2.1; chapter 4.3.1). As Stebbins indicates, the pandit probably referred to the correlation of the breath and the mind, so prominent in Indian thought once it comes to *prāṇa*-related discourses. Although hints of a yoga-inspired conception of breath cultivation are generally scarce in Stebbins work, they still exist. Notably, she terms a specific breathing exercise in lying position “yoga breathing” (Stebbins 1892: 86-87; chapter 8.2.1).<sup>266</sup>

For various reasons, her involvement in the Church of Light is of critical importance here. It is relevant both for the reception of practices influenced by yoga

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<sup>266</sup> For an overview of Stebbins’s breathing exercises, see also Ruyter (1999: 106-109); for a discussion of “yoga-breathing” in Delsartean contexts, see Streeter (2020: 26-27).



and Indian ritual practice as well as for Stebbins's reception of ideas and practices that are inherently occult. These strands of reception are sometimes not easily discernible since occultism tended to embrace the "East" (including Egyptian, Persian, and Indian influences), and at least some occult currents had incorporated Indian thought from the outset. In brief, the occult melting pot draws from various sources that will be carefully disentangled in this analysis. As such, Stebbins's fascination and application of science and religion in *Dynamic Breathing* is, as mentioned, thoroughly occult, and so are her orientalist aspirations. Occult societies often tended towards arcane secrecy, which would explain why Stebbins could not reveal their practices directly in her works.

The H. B. o. L. was a short-lived occult society that existed between 1884 and 1886.<sup>267</sup> Despite its early dissolution, it influenced various occult societies well into the twentieth century. Among its offspring was the Church of Light, grouping around one of the H. B. o. L.'s leading members who was also its secretary, Thomas Henry Burgoyne (born Thomas Henry Dalton, c. 1855–c. 1895). As a professional astrologer, Burgoyne chose adepts according to their astrological birth chart and consequently instructed them via correspondence teaching (Bowen 2020: 163). The Church of Light was mainly active in California, and is still in existence today (Ruyter 1999: 98). Stebbins was a member of the Church of Light already before getting married to her second husband Norman Astley (b. 1853) in 1893, and Astley was also involved with the Church of Light (*ibid.*: 52). Since the mid-1880s, Norman Astley had entertained a close relationship with Burgoyne. Both Astley and Burgoyne had direct ties with Indian occultists. Astley himself was a retired captain in the British army who had lived in India, where his interest in occult studies was sparked (*ibid.*). Burgoyne had met a certain Hurrychund Chintamon in London, who is reported to be both a black magician and a Sanskrit scholar, and was an Indian protagonist in the earliest days of the Theosophical Society (Godwin et al. 1995: 35-36). Quite likely, second-hand knowledge of (occult-)Indian practices would have been transferred to Stebbins through these encounters. However, there is a more well-documented influence of Hindu ritual practices incorporating both *prāṇāyāma* and sun worship mediated to members of the H. B. o. L.

In a recent study, Patrick Bowen (2020) has shown that at least some of the early members of the H. B. o. L. were aware of three books dealing with Indian occult practices. These books, informed both by the Arya Samaj and theosophy, were written

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<sup>267</sup> For a detailed discussion of the H. B. o. L., see chapter 4.2.2.

or published by R. C. Bary. Bary was involved in theosophy and the Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj. He is the author of *The Prayer Book of the Aryans* (1883), which instructs Hindu worship at dusk and dawn (*sandhyā*) (chapter 4.1.3). Bary was also the publisher of Rama Prasad's *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884) – a highly influential work discussed in detail below. According to Bowen, early members of the H. B. o. L., most notably Reverend William Alexander Ayton and Thomas M. Johnson, secured these books for their personal practice (*ibid.*: 160, 165). Especially Bary's book on the *sandhyā* rite seemed to be influential. Ayton likely gave instructions that closely followed *sandhyā* (Bowen 2020: 165-166). However, this was not favourably endorsed by all of the members, resulting into a dispute concerning the superiority of the occident over the orient and associated practices (*ibid.*: 168). Core members of the H. B. o. L. like Peter Davidson (1837–1915) and Burgoyne opted for adapting the Hindu ritual practice into an occidental one. To recapitulate, *sandhyā* consisted, among other elements, basically of taking a bath, the sipping of water, a simple form of *prāṇāyāma* for purification of sins, and the worship of the sun by reciting the *Gāyatrī* mantra. The adapted practice, outlined in a pamphlet by Burgoyne titled *General Instructions to Members* (*ibid.*: 173-174), retains all these elements, yet some elements have indeed been occidentalised: taking a bath is combined with a sun bath without wearing clothes; breath cultivation (slow inhalation, retention, and exhalation)<sup>268</sup> is combined with the absorption of the “Vital spirit of the solar ray's [*sic*]”; the water that is sipped is first magnetised by seven passes of the right hand; the “mantram” affirms the unity of the soul with the universe and God (Burgoyne in *ibid.*: 174). Whatever the details of the adapted practice, the main point here is that, at least indirectly, Stebbins would have been aware of the Hindu rite at dusk and dawn in which breath control and sun worship played a major role. As has been shown, in her 1892 text, she indeed places the role of the sun centre stage, and given the centrality of it in her system, it is probably not too far-fetched to call her a “sun worshipper”. If Stebbins was aware of its origin, *sandhyā* in its adapted form would have been one example that she could have borne in mind when she referred to “sacred dance and prayer practiced by various oriental nations for certain religious and metaphysical effects” (Stebbins 1892: 59). This phrase may have even clothed her reception of *sandhyā*. However, at the current state of research, a direct influence from the adapted *sandhyā* rite on her forms of breath cultivation cannot be deduced.

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<sup>268</sup> Burgoyne advised slowly inhaling with the face towards the sun, holding the breath for at least thirty seconds, and exhaling with the back towards the sun (Bowen 2020: 174).

Further influence of texts compiled and rewritten by Burgoyne is clearly evidenced in Stebbins's reception of *The Mysteries of Eros* (Ruyter 1999: 98-100). Burgoyne had compiled and systematised *The Mysteries of Eros* in late 1886 or early 1887, a pamphlet that contains the core teachings of the H. B. o. L. on sexual magic. This pamphlet is thoroughly indebted to the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph and his *The Mysteries of Eulis* (c. 1870) (Deveney 1997: 450, n. 81, 488, n. 33).<sup>269</sup> During the mid-1880s, Astley hosted his teacher Burgoyne in California, while the latter compiled several lessons of his correspondence teachings that resulted in the book *The Light of Egypt* (1889), published under the pseudonym "Zanoni" (Ruyter 1999: 53; Godwin 1994: 360). Together with Peter Davidson, Burgoyne was also the editor of the *Occult Magazine* of Glasgow, which had its first edition in 1885 (Deveney 2006a: 486), in which he wrote under the same pseudonym. The February 1885 issue of the *Occult Magazine* edited by Burgoyne, refers to "Love, Power, and Wisdom" (Burgoyne 1885: 8); it references the scientist John Tyndall and the notion of "protoplasm" (*ibid.*: 2); and it promotes Rhodes Buchanan's *Therapeutic Sarcognomy* (1891) (*ibid.*: 8). All these elements also occur in Stebbins's *Dynamic Breathing*, indicating that she was probably aware of Burgoyne's journal. Due to her personal and occult proximity to him, Stebbins would have come to know about all these texts, and, as will be shown, it is likely that she was significantly inspired by the works of Burgoyne and related sources that were available for members of the H. B. o. L. and the Church of Light.

*The Mysteries of Eros* served as an initiatory text for the neophytes in the H. B. o. L., introducing them in three steps to the first grade. *The Mysteries of Eros* presents several magical principles to the neophyte, culminating in the goal of creating superior children through sexual magic. The text repeatedly warns against setting one's will to other than sublime goals and offers Randolph's suicide as a warning example (e.g., Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 274; Deveney 1997: 504, n. 20). The text nevertheless highlights several terms of Randolph's Eulian magic, like the principles of Volantia (development of will through visualisation), Decretion (projecting the astral light, or the ether onto somebody), and Posism (a "Receptive Principle" including the ability to read a person's body language).<sup>270</sup> In *The Mysteries of Eros*, these principles are

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<sup>269</sup> For a discussion of Randolph's sexual magic and seership that incorporated Swedenborg's notion of "internal breathing", see chapter 4.2.2.

<sup>270</sup> Baier (2009: 462) observed that Stebbins likely built her system on these principles when she incorporated visualisation techniques, the inhalation of ether through rhythmic breathing, and expressive movements.

called Formation, Execution, and Reception (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 219). Three further principles are Formulation, Vitalization, and Realization (*ibid.*: 219-233). Formulation is the first state, and it involves developing the adept's willpower through visualisation techniques.<sup>271</sup> The triune principle of "Vitalization" mainly applies breathing techniques that extract the magnetic fluid Æth from the air. Realization is the culmination of the first grade's magic, resulting in the encounter with "Centres, Spheres, Potencies, Hierarchies and Brotherhoods", or astral journeying (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 229; cf. Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 331). In the following, I will focus on "Vitalization", because it is most relevant in the context of breath cultivation.

Vitalization, which is entirely based on the principle of the vital essence received in breath, is a triune principle and contains Inspiration, Respiration, and Breathing. Inspiration and Respiration (the latter meaning actually "exhalation") are antithetical, whereas "Breathing" contains the two. To inhale means to "inspire the essences and forces of the One life" and as a result to have "replenished the body, soul and spirit" (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 226). Respiration (i.e., exhalation) signifies loss, expenditure of power and coldness (*ibid.*). The two antagonistic principles are related to Vishnu and Siva, "preserver and destroyer in oriental religion" (*ibid.*), and the equipoise of these principles is a lawful necessity paralleled with sowing and reaping. Burgoyne states that "too much inspiration causes levitation, too much respiration, gravitation" (*ibid.*: 227). Here, the theosophically informed reader is reminded of Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, in which she invokes occult powers that help to overcome gravitation and states that, by controlling the latter, one will levitate (Blavatsky 1877: xxiii-xxiv).<sup>272</sup> Breathing, finally, is to inspire on the one hand "common atmosphere", and on the other hand "magnetic, electric, more ethereal particles of the air which support the life of soul and emotion" (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 227). The difference between the two contents is that "[t]he first gives force, the second generates power" (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 228; cf. Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 330). In natural breathing, the breath corresponds with the organs extracting "vif" from the air enhancing physical life, the exhalation being naturally longer than the inhalation. For inhaling the second principle, or Æth,<sup>273</sup> "the heaving of the chest should be regular

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<sup>271</sup> This principle contains the principles derived from Randolphian magic, i.e., Volantia, Decretism, and Posism, which correspond to Formation, Execution, and Reception in Burgoyne's text.

<sup>272</sup> Burgoyne's reference to the "One Life" also indicates the reception of theosophy that frequently invoked this notion as a vital *ur*-principle, as mentioned above. Randolph, in contrast, did not invoke the One Life, and did not refer to forces of levitation or gravitation.

<sup>273</sup> Æth is a term applied by Randolph for the "universal, all-pervading magnetic fluid" (Godwin et al. 1995: 215). In Randolph's words it is the "fine essence which spirits breathe, which is the filling in of

and its inspiration and expirations of equal duration” (*ibid.*: 228; cf. Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 331). Performed for ten to twenty minutes, the impact is even greater when the mind is fixed on a desired object, resulting into a storage of ether within brain and lungs that bestows further magnetic powers.

Although neither *The Mysteries of Eulis* nor *The Mysteries of Eros* apply the terminology of rhythmic breathing, this description of Vitalization is still strikingly close to Stebbins’s understanding of “rhythmic breathing”. All the defining elements of Stebbins’s rhythmic breathing are described here: the difference between “vif” and “Æth”, or “ether”, the importance of the equal length of inspiration and expiration, and the crucial role of imagination. Like Burgoyne, Stebbins also refers to the brain and lungs as a kind of battery that is able to replenish itself with magnetic force, storing it for immediate application, if needed (Stebbins 1892: 53). For Stebbins, the significance of absorbing ether by rhythmic breathing is in aspiring to higher levels of human potential, or to “ascend beyond”, stating that “natural respiration” is not enough to reach this goal (*ibid.*: 52). Likewise, both Randolph and Burgoyne hold that it is impossible to develop higher aspirations of the soul if it was not for inhaling ether through concentrated imagination: “No real divine or celestial energy can be evolved until [...] the Neophyte learns to inhale the Æther while the mind is firmly fixed upon what is in and of it” (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 228; cf. Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 331). This enables the adept to ascend to celestial heights and far-off spaces by astral travelling, called “flight power” or the “Sacred Sleep of Sialam” (Burgoyne 1995 [c. 1877]: 227, cf. Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 330).

Sexual magic as rooted in Randolph’s teachings was a practice in which rhythmic breathing – though he did not yet term it as such – had its place (Deveney 1997: 221-223). The combination of breath cultivation and sexual magic was also relevant for the H. B. o. L., as alluded to by Burgoyne in *The Mysteries of Eros*. After Randolph’s death in 1875, R. Swinburne Clymer (1878–1966) was the main figure to adopt and disseminate Randolph’s teachings and the Rosicrucian societies. His influence cannot be ignored, because Clymer was in charge of an occult society started by William Pike Phelon that had branched off from the H. B. o. L. called the Hermetic Brotherhood of Atlantis, Luxor, and Elephanta (*ibid.*: 243). From 1908 onwards, Clymer distributed several editions of *The Divine Alchemy of Imperial Eulis*, which comprised the gist of Randolph’s sexual magic teachings (*ibid.*: 244). This text

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space; which cushions the worlds, and which penetrates the outer air just as odors do” (Randolph 1997 [c. 1870]: 331). The term “vif” is also applied in the *Mysteries of Eulis* (*ibid.*).

contains instructions for arousing sexual energy through breathing and concentration exercises, called the “single” and “double breast drill” (*ibid.*). The single breast drill serves both males and females as a preparation for the double breast drill, which is connected to a sexual rite. The single form is practised in standing or lying position with the hands resting on the chest; by drawing in the breath one imagines that the chest is filled with “life” and “vivifying fire”, followed by a brief retention (Clymer 1945: 123). Then one expels the air by imagining “that the spirit of love should descend upon all” (*ibid.*). The double breast drill is practised during the “Marriage Rite” and presupposes that the primary concern of sexual union is love and affection;<sup>274</sup> the thoughts are further directed towards the achievement of health, spiritual development, and “Soul Illumination” (*ibid.*: 125). While breathing rhythmically, the couple focuses on a specific goal to be achieved during inhalation, followed by a comfortable retention of the breath; during exhalation one thinks of the partner’s health, happiness and love, thoughts that are supposed to be intensified during the “mutual crisis”, or orgasm (*ibid.*).<sup>275</sup> The cultivation of the life force by raising it is equalled to the transmutation of base metal into gold, hence it is called divine alchemy (*ibid.*: 126).<sup>276</sup>

It is likely, though not documented, that Stebbins (and Ayton) practised similar forms of sexual alchemy that include rhythmic breathing and thoroughly engage concepts of vital energy and the power of imagination. Although the term rhythmic breathing was not used by Randolph himself, the fifth edition of Clymer’s *Divine Alchemy* of 1945 speaks of rhythmic breathing on several pages. Given the entanglement of Stebbins with the wider network of the H. B. o. L., it is more than likely that Clymer adopted the term rhythmic breathing from Stebbins’s influential work. This highlights Stebbins as a crucial disseminator of breath cultivation linked to occult practices, which both influenced – and left behind – the enclosed environments of occult circles.

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<sup>274</sup> Both Clymer’s *Divine Alchemy* and Randolph’s *Mysteries of Eulis* state that it is a prerequisite to be aware of the dominance of the principle of love and affection over mere pleasure in order to perform this rite as exposed in *The Ansairitic Mystery* by Randolph (c. 1874).

<sup>275</sup> For the notion of the “double crisis” signifying a synchronic orgasm see Randolph (1997 [c. 1870]: 338, his emphasis): “The woman [...] must be one who hath known man and who has been and still is capable of intense mental, volitional and affectional energy, combined with perfect sexive and orgasmal ability; for it requires a *double crisis* to succeed: no one can reach the power sought, or gain their special purposes unless they do so in the coitive act.” In contexts of mesmerism, the term “crisis” normally denotes a state of intense feelings that induces a process of healing. Randolph probably adopted the term from mesmerism and reinterpreted it in light of his sexual magic practices.

<sup>276</sup> These discourses of sexual magic probably also influenced William Walker Atkinson and the occult networks towards which he gravitated (see chapter 8.2.2).

### 5.2.6 Summary: The Physical-Culture Occultist and Rhythmic Breathing

This section has highlighted Stebbins's cosmological and anthropological conceptions that provide a framework for the notions of "dynamic" and "rhythmic breathing". From "over one hundred artists, thinkers, and scientists whose work contributed to her own knowledge in one way or another and to the theoretical and practical system she developed" (Ruyter 1988: 385), only a few could be taken directly into account in this discussion. While it has been shown that aspects of Delsartism, the physical culture movement and medical gymnastics co-shaped Stebbins's notion of rhythmic breathing, these contexts can only explain parts of her understanding of this technique. The picture becomes more complete by considering the impact of Stebbins's membership in the Church of Light. *The Mysteries of Eros* and other texts by Burgoyne were directly influential. Much of Stebbins's chapter on "Dynamic Breathing" in her 1892 book is taken almost verbatim from Burgoyne's adaptation of Randolph's teachings. This is not to say that the influence of the physical-culture movement is to be neglected. The significance of Stebbins's work lies in the fact that she combined all these sources, resulting in a coherent and highly influential concept of dynamic and rhythmic breathing. In Stebbins's system, expression through the cultivation of movement, breath and voice, health-oriented physical culture, and religious aspiration come together. Inspirational for Stebbins's notion of the breath of life was the wider occult field in nineteenth-century America including Thomas Lake Harris, distantly related to the Church of Light via the acquaintance of Randolph. The relatively intimate occult circles of the H. B. o. L. enabled the circulation of theosophical sources like Bary's and Prasad's texts, ensuring that the discursive field of theosophy and early modern yoga was on the horizon of these members.

Within her larger radius as a teacher, Stebbins acted like a catalyst of ideas that, enclosed in occult teachings, would not easily be revealed otherwise beyond these secretive circles. It is through Genevieve Stebbins, the Delsartist and occultist, that the knowledge and techniques cultivated by these orders met a public space of recognition in physical culture and gymnastics. Thus, proponents and practitioners of modern yoga already inclined towards mystical states and soul-flights became involved with occult ideas and practices of the breath via the gateway of Stebbins's work.

### 5.3 Rama Prasad and *The Science of Breath* or “Nature’s Finer Forces”<sup>277</sup>

A second spotlight is now cast on Rama Prasad Kasyapa (c. 1860–1914).<sup>278</sup> Prasad was a North Indian pandit, theosophist, and translator. Born into a Brahmin family, he was one of the influential theosophical players that translated yogic and tantric literature from Sanskrit to English, making it available to a broad public.<sup>279</sup> Prasad earned a B.A. from Government College Lahore, where he was a fellow student of the equally influential theosophist and translator Sris Chandra Vasu, and he obtained an M.A. from Punjab University in Lahore.<sup>280</sup> Prasad and Vasu later collaborated on the project of an edition of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* resulting into the work *Patanjali’s Yoga Sūtras: With Commentary of Vyāsa and the Gloss of Vāchaspati Miśra* (1912). Prasad also interacted with the afore-mentioned Lahore-based publisher R. C. Bary, a theosophist and follower of the Arya Samaj.<sup>281</sup> The first edition of Prasad’s influential *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* was printed at Bary’s press in early 1884.<sup>282</sup> After leaving Lahore, Prasad became a high-ranked lawyer and the president of the Theosophical Society in Meerut, then the capital of the North-Western Provinces. Prasad mediated the transmission of tantric texts and occult ideas to modern yoga pioneers like Vivekananda, and also to other subsequent interlocutors that were pondering *prāṇa*, *svara*, and occult forms of divination through breath. I consider his contribution directly relevant for a further discussion of Vivekananda’s conceptions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* (chapter 5.4). Part of this section consists of the reception of Prasad’s works revolving around the notion of the “science of breath” and related ideas in German occultism and theosophy.

Rama Prasad’s *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* of 1884 was the first of an influential series of texts produced by Prasad that were based on a translation and interpretation of the *Śivasvarodaya*. This Sanskrit manuscript is a tantric text that offers instruction on divination by means of the dominance of breath flow, or *svara*, in the left and right nostril respectively. A few years after *Occult Science*, Prasad published a series of essays entitled “Nature’s Finer Forces: The Science of Breath” in *The Theosophist* (November 1887–March 1889). The third influential publication on

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<sup>277</sup> This section is, for the most part, based on Kraler (2021: 386-391).

<sup>278</sup> This paragraph is based on Cantú (forthcoming-b).

<sup>279</sup> On the agency of theosophical translators, see also chapter 6.4.

<sup>280</sup> Lahore was the capital British Punjab in pre-partition India and is now part of Pakistan.

<sup>281</sup> On Vasu, see chapter 6.4; on Bary, see chapter 4.1.3.

<sup>282</sup> Bowen (2020) refers to the text as first published in 1883, but, thanks to Keith Cantú, I have access to a digital version of the first edition of the work, which is dated to 1884.



the basis of *Śivasvarodaya* was the book *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas: Nature's Finer Forces* (1890). It comprised the essays from *The Theosophist*. The first text, *Occult Science*, focusses mainly on the regulation of *svara* as a yogic practice. The emphasis of the later texts lies on an interpretation of the *Śivasvarodaya* in cosmological terms. Of these three publications, only the last text has appended a translation of portions of the *Śivasvarodaya* (Prasad 1890: 185-236). In the following, an overview of Prasad's translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* and his understanding of *svara* is provided.

### 5.3.1 Science of Breath: Prasad's Interpretation of the *Śivasvarodaya*

The *Śivasvarodaya* ("The Arising of the Breath of Śiva") is a tantric text of which some portions probably date back to the twelfth century.<sup>283</sup> The central notion of the text is *svara*, which can be translated as "sound" or "breath" (Monier-Williams 1899: 1285).<sup>284</sup> The *Śivasvarodaya* deals with the rhythms and flow of *prāṇa*, or *svara*, through the three main *nāḍīs*, *iḍā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā* (Bühnemann 1991: 304, n. 59). More specifically, it refers to the flow of the breath in both nostrils, which alternates throughout the day. The tantric practitioner employs the knowledge of *svara* flows for purposes of divination. The right timings and appropriate actions for religious practice and healing – including the prediction and warding off of death – are determined by the rhythm of *svara* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 485, n. 20). Prasad's series of texts on the "science of breath", from 1887 onwards under the heading "Nature's Finer Forces" – despite the appended translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* in his last text – are clearly an occultist interpretation rather than an accurate representation of the original Sanskrit text. The essays explaining the translation cover various subjects of the occult realm, like the principles of evolution and involution from an occult perspective, subtle anatomy, alchemy, astrology, and rebirth. In a typical theosophical mode, he furthermore elaborates on physical forces, in his case mainly electricity. Prasad also attributes to *prāṇa* the property of storing images in the atmosphere to explain phenomena such as clairvoyance (Prasad 1890: 122-138, 169). These subjects are not the focus of this chapter, and can therefore not be treated in

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<sup>283</sup> Prognostications in the form of *svarodaya* teachings are also found in some Śaiva tantras, from which the *Śivasvarodaya* likely draws. The connection of prognostication and *prāṇāyāma* is already found in the twelfth-century *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra (Qvarnström 2012; Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Oct 7, 2020).

<sup>284</sup> Regarding "breath", it means more specifically "air breathed through the nostrils" (*ibid.*).

detail. Instead, I provide an outline of Prasad's theory with a vitalistic bent that highlights *svara*, but also *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*.

In Prasad's series of texts on the science of breath, *svara* is a cosmological agent that he correlates at times with the "Great Breath", the "Breath of God", or the "Breath of Life" (Prasad 1890: 1, 137). For Prasad, *svara* is the ultimate or first cause of the universe: "It is the *Swara*, the Great Controller of All, that Creates, Preserves, and Destroys and Causes whatever is in this world" (Prasad 1884: 6).<sup>285</sup> *Svara* is also said to be an "abstract intelligence," or "*intelligent motion*," and the "*current of the life wave*" (Prasad 1890: 137, 11, his emphasis). As a vital principle, it is connected to the breath of beings (*ibid.*: 12), and it has the capacity to bridge micro- and macrocosm:

The primeval current of the life-wave is, then, the same which in man assumes the form of inspiratory and expiratory motion of the lungs, and this is the all-pervading source of the evolution and involution of the universe (Prasad 1890: 12).

Here, the movement of the lungs (inhalation and exhalation) is likened to the evolution and involution (i.e., returning to a state of mere potentiality) of the universe – indicating that the universe also "breathes". It is only one of the few passages in which Prasad clearly alludes to the intimate connection between human life and the cosmos implying that the "microcosm is an exact picture of the macrocosm" (Prasad 1890: 48). However, the macro- and microcosm are linked through the mediating principle of a "primeval current of the life-wave", which clearly has vitalistic implications. As for the reception of Prasad's *svara*-related musings, the topical thread of a vitalistic principle is also highly relevant for Blavatsky. At times, she correlates the breath of life with *ākāśa*, or ether, and presents it, in her debut *Isis Unveiled*, as a primordial life-sustaining principle (Blavatsky 1877: 133, 140). In "Psychic and Noetic Action" she adopts Prasad's understanding of the breath of life as *svara* (Blavatsky 1890: 93).

Regarding the overlap and distinction between *svara* and *prāṇa*, there are a few crucial aspects in Prasad's work that I will briefly address. Generally, Prasad tends to distinguish between *svara*, the "Great Breath", and *prāṇa*, "physiological life" (Prasad 1890: 89, 137). This connotation of *prāṇa* with the terrestrial spheres including its association with the individual's vital force is a common theme in theosophy, and theosophical doctrines normally do not associate *prāṇa* (but rather *jīva*) with life at

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<sup>285</sup> The transliteration of Sanskrit terms in the cited passages adheres to Prasad's original (most terms are in italics). He applies *Swara* for *svara*, *tattva* for *tattva*, *prana/prāna* for *prāṇa*, and *Akāśa/ākāśa* for *ākāśa*.

large that permeates the cosmos.<sup>286</sup> However, somewhat confusingly, Prasad also distinguishes between *prāṇa* on two planes (although the notion of the terrestrial *prāṇa* seems to be foregrounded): the solar *prāṇa* immanent in this solar system, and the individualised *prāṇa* constituting life in all terrestrial beings. Both the solar *prāṇa* and the individual *prāṇa* receive energy from the sun (Prasad 1890: 250), and the prāṇic forces are therefore normally enacted only in our solar system and on the planet. Prasad also mentions *prāṇa* in relation to *rayi*, which can be translated as “stuff, materials” (Monier-Williams 1899: 868). He attributes *prāṇa* with “solar, positive life-matter” and *rayi* with “negative, lunar life-matter” (Prasad 1890: 80). This echoes the *Praśna Upaniṣad* 1.3–4, in which *prāṇa* and *rayi* are presented as a primordial pair from which all creatures are born (Gharote et al. 2017: 57-58). At times, Prasad also conceives of *prāṇa*, similarly to *svara*, as life at large, or “vital principle, which is indestructible” (Prasad 1884: 7, n. \*).

The first entities to emanate from *svara* in this cosmogony are the *tattvas*.<sup>287</sup> “The *tattvas* are the five modifications of the Great Breath” (Prasad 1890: 1). Of these, *ākāśa* is the first, and most important one: “When the process of evolution began, this Swara, this great power, threw itself into the form of Akāśa” (Prasad 1888: 276). From *ākāśa*, the other elements are formed, which are, in succession, air, fire, water, and earth (*ibid.*). The elements in their “subtle” form, which are said to emanate first, are to be distinguished from the elements in their material form of “gross” (*sthūla*) matter (Prasad 1890: 4).<sup>288</sup> According to Prasad, subtle *ākāśa* is fivefold, and correlates with the respective qualities of the five subtle elements. Although the author generally translates *ākāśa* as ether, he consequently distinguishes between five forms of “ether”. The subtle quality of *ākāśa* is attributed to the element of sound, hence translated as “sonoriferous ether” (*ibid.*: 1). The *tattvas* are “elements of refined matter”, and although *ākāśa* is also attributed with subtle materiality, it is also a “vibration that constitutes sound” (*ibid.*: 2-3).

From 1887 onwards, Prasad encapsulates the cosmically intertwined play of these subtle principles in the highly influential phrase “nature’s finer forces”, which

<sup>286</sup> See, for example, Blavatsky (1888: 593).

<sup>287</sup> In Prasad’s outline the five “*tattvas*” coincide with the five elements (Prasad 1890: 1). The base of this cosmology, like much of tantric thought, is classical Sāṃkhya as outlined in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Sāṃkhya cosmology will be discussed in detail below, since it is more directly relevant for Vivekananda.

<sup>288</sup> Prasad (1890: 4) refers, regarding the “gross” elements, to the Sanskrit term “*sthūla Mahabhūtas*” (i.e., *sthūla mahābhūtas*). According to Rastelli (1999: 217, n. 942) the *mahābhūtas* constitute the cosmos as we perceive it.

probably denotes the principle of *svara* in conjunction with the vibrating subtle *mahābhūtas*. “Finer forces” seems to imply also the interplay of *svara* with *nāḍīs*, *cakras*, and *prāṇa*. Prasad never gives a clear definition of this phrase, but his occupation with the “finer” and “subtle” principles is patent, and they are constantly discerned from the “gross” elements. What is highly relevant here is that “finer forces of nature imprint themselves upon the grosser planes” (Prasad 1890: 181). Prasad correlates fast vibrations with the subtle “instrument”, to which the mind and the soul belong, and slow vibrations with the physical body, which means that mind can influence the body (*ibid.*: 52, 94, 166). Both *prāṇa* and the mind, or *manas*, consist of the modifications of the five *tattvas*, yet *manas* is composed of a still finer grade of the same (*ibid.*: 91). This amounts to a cosmology in which the finer and subtler forces bear a far higher potential than the physical or tangible reality constituted by the *mahābhūtas*. In the ultimate reality, Brahmā or the universal soul lies at the spiritual centre of the universe (*ibid.*: 153). Prasad’s cosmology of the great breath has a vitalistic, but also Neoplatonic bent, assuming that an original image or idea of the soul engenders the physical appearance of any form of earth-life (*ibid.*: 137). His Neoplatonic ideas are probably owed to Blavatsky; however, it should be noted that his cosmology is also deeply rooted in Sāṃkhyan thought – if in an adapted form. This links it to the rendition by Vivekananda, who equally tends to blend traditional cosmological ideas with occult ones, as will be discussed below.

Harnessing subtle forces, the yogi-occultist is concerned with the finer layers of being. Within the universe, they are constituted through a constant change of the *tattvas*. The shape and colour of the respective *tattva* is then imprinted into the individual *prāṇa* and mirrored in the flow of breath. The “science of breath” (*svarajñāna*, *svarodayaśāstra*) tells the yogi which *tattva* governs the present moment and he can thereby cure diseases, conquer death, and make right prognoses for the future (Prasad 1884: 1-6).<sup>289</sup> Although this form of divination was applied in various religious contexts like Śaiva tantra and Jainism, Prasad also extensively comments on notions of Pātañjalayoga in various chapters (Prasad 1890: 88-122, 143-180) and adopts the eightfold path as a means to purify *prāṇa* of “any very strongly personifying colours” (Prasad 1890: 77). For Prasad, this tantric “science of breath” is an

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<sup>289</sup> Prasad seems to have translated the Sanskrit compound *svarajñāna* (lit. “knowledge of breath-sound”), which appears, e.g., in *Śivasvarodaya* 13, 21, 389, as well as the compound *svarodayaśāstra* (lit. “teaching of the rising of the breath-sound”), e.g., in *Śivasvarodaya* 27, 395, as “science of breath”. I have used the manuscript reprinted in Muktibodhananda (2008 [1984]: 125-214) as the reference for these verses.

outstanding tool for overall health, and it mainly consists of the observation of the *svara* flow in the nostrils. It balances the positively and negatively charged currents of *prāṇa* flowing in *piṅgalā* and *iḍā* respectively (*ibid.*: 51, 161). These aspects are considered to be of key importance for staying healthy since imbalance of these currents causes disease and emotional disturbance (*ibid.*: 161)

Prasad also mentions *prāṇāyāma*, which is “deep expiration and inspiration” that leads, like physical exercise, to greater well-being and health (Prasad 1890: 161). In contrast to physical exercise, however, *prāṇāyāma* does not disturb the action of *suṣumnā* (*ibid.*). *Prāṇāyāma* has a grounding quality and it also purifies the mental activity, bestowing to the mind the silvery crest of the water element (*apas tattva*) (*ibid.*: 162). In *Occult Science*, Prasad briefly mentions the three phases of the breath (*pūraka*, or “inhalation”, *kumbhaka*, or “retention”, and *recaka*, or “exhalation”): “The Purak gives a man strength, keeps up or restores the proportion of what are called the seven Dhatus of the body, viz., blood, fat, semen, &c. The *Kumbhak* increases life, and the *Rechak* purifies the mind, and takes away his tendencies to sin” (Prasad 1884: 28, his emphasis).<sup>290</sup> *Prāṇāyāma*, which he defines as “deep expiration and inspiration” (Prasad 1890: 161), however, is rather secondary for Prasad compared to balancing the negative and positive currents of the *prāṇic* flow in the nostrils, including its usefulness for divination. The science of breath as a tool for prognostication and maintaining health therefore is “the most important, useful and comprehensive, the easiest, and the most interesting branch of Yoga” (*ibid.*: 51). It is, moreover, “the key of all that is taught in the Upanishads” (*ibid.*: 176).

### 5.3.2 *Prāṇa* and *Ākāśa* in Prasad’s Work

One of the crucial nexuses in Prasad’s science of breath is the connection between *prāṇa*, or vital breath, and *ākāśa*, or ether. As has been shown, Stebbins correlates the vital principle of the breath of life with the subtle materiality of the imponderable ether. In some passages, she also refers to the breath of life and the ether as interdependent, or even synonymous, in so far as the one evolves out of the other (Stebbins 1892: 50). For Vivekananda, the relationship between *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* is equally crucial to the extent that these principles are outlined as the main constituents of the cosmos as it is mediated to us by our senses. Comparing and synonymising imponderables and vital

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<sup>290</sup> The seven *dhātus* or “bodily constituents”, mainly relevant in ayurvedic contexts, are listed already in the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, as well as in various tantric, Purāṇic, and Buddhist works (Birch 2018: 16). *Prāṇāyāma* influencing the *dhātus* is also mentioned, e.g., in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.51–53 as part of a prescription of *ujjāyī* practice (*ibid.*: 15).

principles was not new in various scientific and occult forms of ether speculation of the nineteenth century (Asprem 2011: 153; Hammer 2004: 164-166). However, a new form of ontological speculation arose in contexts of Indian philosophy and theosophy, while trying to comprehend and explain the functioning of the cosmos at large, by coupling *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*.

Very likely, Prasad's science of breath contains the initial considerations that sparked subsequent metaphysical speculations about *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Some essays on astrology by Prasad published in *The Theosophist* after the "Nature's Finer Forces" series shed additional light on the relationship between *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, as will be elucidated here. As mentioned, all earth-life depends on terrestrial and solar *prāṇa*, which is directly derived from the nourishing quality of the sun. The rays of the sun act like "wires" for the "electric current" of the solar *prāṇa* to reach the earth (Prasad 1889: 710). With regard to the cosmic or solar sphere, *prāṇa* is linked to the principle of motion through conjoining with the second *tattva*, *vāyu*. *Ākāśa* itself has no motion but occupies the all-pervading faculties of sound and space (thus providing the "vehicle" for *prāṇa* and the remaining four *tattvas* to modify). Motion arises when *prāṇa* is modified into the second *tattva*, *vāyu*, or air (*ibid.*: 711-712). The individualised *prāṇa* on the other hand is correlated with "forces" that are attributed to different functions in the body or the ten *vāyus* of Haṭhayoga (Prasad 1890: 37). Prasad seems to subordinate the solar *prāṇa* to the all-pervading *ākāśa tattva* (Prasad 1889: 711), since *ākāśa* is one of the "five constituents of the universe on all the planes of life" (*ibid.*: 710). Summing up, *prāṇa* depends first on *ākāśa* or space as its "vehicle" and then on *vāyu* or air to be modified into motion. Then, on the solar plane, *prāṇa* is motion, and on the individual, it is force. In all these relations, one must keep in mind that, for Prasad, *svara* is the ultimate vital principle.

Returning to *Science of Breath* (1890), *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* are more explicitly brought together. By using the functioning of a telephone as example, Prasad states that its vibrations are those of the "sonoriferous ether, the constituent of the Indian *prāṇa*, which is called *ākāśa*" (Prasad 1890: 3, n. \*, his emphasis). Prasad's reasoning, which involves considerations of sound, electricity, and vibrations, is typical of theosophy. By referring to the fire element (*tejas tattva*) as the "luminiferous ether" (*ibid.*: 1), he employs a terminology that was part of ether speculations (Asprem 2011: 134-136), in which theosophy decidedly took part. However, Prasad's insistence on a fivefold division of the ether, closely related to the five elements, is a feature that, to my knowledge, is not found in other theosophical sources. Although he mentions the

cosmological interdependency between *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* elsewhere, none of the passages known to me go into much further detail. Nevertheless, it seems like the initial spark was there for an influential cosmological theme.

### 5.3.3 Prasad's Science of Breath within German Occultism and Theosophy

Prasad's occult science of breath was influential in German occultism and the reception of yoga in German-speaking countries at the turn of the century (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 145-148). Famous proponents of German occultism like Carl Kellner (1851–1905), Theodor Reuß (1855–1923), Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), and Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) drew from Prasad's texts.<sup>291</sup> His *Occult Science* was translated into German in 1893 by Kama, a pseudonym for the novelist-cum-occultist Gustav Meyrink, entitled *Occulte Wissenschaft: Die Wissenschaft des Atems* (figure 6). This very literal translation was published by the Wilhelm Friedrich publishing company in Leipzig, Germany, which also published the theosophical monthly journal *Lotusblüten* (1893–1900) edited by Franz Hartmann. Hartmann was one of the most influential theosophical writers of his time (Baier 2018: 395). In two of Hartmann's essays, published in German in the *Lotusblüten*, Hartmann elaborates on the unity of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, ultimately forged by a divine will and consciousness. For Hartmann, *prāṇa* is force, and *ākāśa* is matter, and he postulates the functional unity of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, or force and matter (*ibid.*: 407). Matter, furthermore, exists in vibrating forms on different planes (*ibid.*: 406; Hartmann 1893a: 415, 437-438). As has been shown in chapter 4.3.4, various connotations of *prāṇa* as (vital) force and *ākāśa* as matter existed in theosophy before Hartmann explicitly correlated the two.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Kellner's (1896: 9) mentioning of "surya-swara" (lit. "sunbreath"), "Sonnenatem," and "Mondatem" in his *Skizze* on Yoga indicates the reception of Prasad through Kama (1893: 18-19), because the latter applies exactly the same terminology in German. Reuß (Merlin 1913: 4-5) mentions the phrase "Finer Forces of Nature" twice in his "Mystic Anatomy."

<sup>292</sup> E.g., Coryn (1893: 25) equates *prāṇa* with "force" on the "physical plane"; Judge's *Working Glossary* says that *prāṇa* is the "force" derived from the sun (Anonymous 1892: 31); Blavatsky (1888 [1889]: 370) correlates *ākāśa* with (subtle) matter.



FIGURE 6: TITLE PAGE OF PRASAD'S *OCCULT SCIENCE* (1884) AND FRONTISPIECE OF ITS GERMAN TRANSLATION *OCCULTE WISSENSCHAFT* BY KAMA (1893).<sup>293</sup>

On an intertextual level, it is evident that Hartmann directly drew from Prasad in these essays. Hartmann refers to Prasad in at least two of them (Hartmann 1893a; 1893b).<sup>294</sup> From these, “Das Wesen der Alchemie” by unacknowledged reference, draws extensively from Prasad, but also from other established theosophical metaphysics such as the sevenfold constitution of the cosmos (Hartmann 1893a: 417). Besides obvious overlaps in content – with the most salient points being the repeated references to *prāṇa*, *ākāśa*, and the *tattvas* – Hartmann combines the symbols and colours of the five *tattvas* (*ibid.*: 422-425) as they are introduced by Prasad (Prasad 1884: 12-14; Prasad 1890: 7, 22-23). Hartmann also transposes the science of breath into a theory of alchemy, based on the knowledge of the *tattvas*, or the “modifications” of *ākāśa*:

The key to the entering of chemistry into the field of alchemy lies in a correct understanding of the qualities of “ether”, or, to be more

<sup>293</sup> The latter displays the “shape” of each *tattva* at the end of each ray of the pentagram.

<sup>294</sup> The two relevant passages in Hartmann (1893b: 27, 33), as translated in Baier (2018: 406), are: “This principle of life, which the Indians called ‘prana’, could also be called a function of the general primary matter or ‘ether’. It constitutes the life force of each organism.” “Science [may] turn its attention to the ‘finer’ forces of nature, *i.e.*, the various modifications of movement, which occur in the solar ether (which the Indians call Akāsha).”



accurate, of the Akāsha and its modifications, and we have good reason to believe that in this respect we are on the eve of great discoveries (Hartmann 1893a: 438 as translated in Baier 2018: 407).

Akin to Hartmann's alchemy, already Prasad presents an idea of changing the quality of the "terrestrial element" by applying heat, so that the element "approach[es] its solar state", whereby the "terrestrial coatings" of the same are destroyed (Prasad 1890: 22).

In the English-speaking section of theosophy, Prasad's reception was controversial. Blavatsky tended to condemn the tantric way (especially the so-called *vāmamārga*, or "left-hand path") by equating it with black magic and mere mediumship (Blavatsky 1980 [1890]: 622).<sup>295</sup> The theosophist Annie Besant, however, gave a lecture in Adyar in late 1894 which again references the interdependence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Clearly, Besant had read Prasad (1890: 78-79), as she quotes the same passage as Prasad from the *Praśna Upaniṣad* by holding that "[f]rom Atma this prana is born" (Besant 1912 [1895]: 57). She goes on to explain that "wherever prana is there also is akasha, and without akasha prana cannot show itself" (*ibid.*: 58). In this lecture, she compares *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* to electricity and ether, notions that would soon be attributed to *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* by Vivekananda, among others. Vivekananda also postulates a direct interdependence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, and like Hartmann, he also correlates these terms with force and matter (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 436). The complex discursive net that evolved between Prasad, Hartmann, Besant, and Vivekananda will be further treated below (chapter 5.4.3).

#### 5.3.4 Summary: The Tantric Theosophist and Nature's Finer Forces

Apart from sparking an influential cosmological concept that privileges *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, Rama Prasad's *Science of Breath* resurfaces in several occult contexts which were at least partly relevant for yogic breath cultivation. The phrase "science of breath" has its own fascinating and influential reception history and has become an emblem representing several potent techniques of yogic breath cultivation. In some instances, it appears, like in the original, to be related to prognostication through breath, while in most cases it is more generally connoted with any form of *prāṇāyāma*. The reverberation of the phrase "science of breath" as well as the equally influential "nature's finer forces" in contexts of modern yoga is a prominent example of how occult thought was imprinted on modern yoga. Subsequent works utilising the phrase "science of breath" in their title include, for example, Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's *The*

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<sup>295</sup> For a discussion of these controversies, see also Cantú (forthcoming-a).

*Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904) and Swami Sivananda's *Science of Pranayama* (1935) (chapter 8.2.2; chapter 8.4.2). Both authors drew from occult teachings, but present their "science" as explicitly yogic.<sup>296</sup> Numerous *prāṇāyāma* manuals bear the title "science of breath" up until today. "Nature's finer forces" almost has a life on its own, and reappears, apart from the above-noted mentions in German occultism, for example in the works of Atkinson (chapter 8.2.2) and in T. R. Sanjivi's *Advanced Course in Mental Sciences and Finer Forces* (1925) (chapter 9.1). As will be discussed below, Adelia Fletcher's *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath* (1908), a treatise dedicated to Prasad, is also deeply inspired by the idea of a rhythmic flow of subtle breath connecting the micro- and macrocosm.

The work of the tantric theosophist tends to be overshadowed by the towering personage of Swami Vivekananda. Nevertheless, Prasad's contribution in outlining a cosmological framework of a "science of breath", employing *svara* as well as *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, is continued in some ways by the Bengali swami. Though it is difficult to determine a detailed reading history of Vivekananda, at least some traces lead to Prasad.

#### 5.4 Swami Vivekananda and a Cosmology of *Prāṇa* and *Ākāśa*<sup>297</sup>

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) contributed a multilayered cosmological rendition to modern yoga's reasoning, which became highly successful. Born in Calcutta as Narendranath Datta, Vivekananda was a Bengali swami who taught yoga and Vedānta in India and the West. In his short life, his fame as a gifted spiritual teacher extended throughout India, the United States, and Europe, and his popular lectures represented a confident Hinduism that often argued against the grain of colonialism. His address at the World Parliament of Religion in 1893 in Chicago hugely accelerated his international fame. Vivekananda travelled to and stayed in America twice, from 1893 to 1896 and from 1899 to 1900 (returning to India only shortly before his untimely death). During his first long trip, the swami also ventured to Europe where he lectured in London and other cities. These years were crucial for the dissemination of yoga and Vedānta in America and Europe. Vivekananda taught in public lectures, private sessions and through personal instruction (Deslippe 2018: 13). In his early religious biography, he joined the Brahmo Samaj and was a follower of the charismatic

<sup>296</sup> In their publications, "science of breath" refers to yogic breath cultivation (not to *svarodaya* practices) – and in Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's case, also to breathing exercises derived from physical-culture practices and American Delsartism.

<sup>297</sup> This section is based on Kraler (2021).

Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen (chapter 4.1.1). Vivekananda then became the most famous and influential disciple of the Bengali sage Ramakrishna who was a tantric Kali worshipper. It was in these circles that a “vernacular *advaita*” (Madaio 2017: 7) was cultivated, one example being the reception of the *Yogavāsishtha* in Bengali (*ibid.*: 7, n. 21). Living in the cosmopolitan capital that Calcutta was, Vivekananda was also acquainted with contemporaneous Euro-American science and philosophy, and he was a freemason. Vivekananda remained a religious seeker throughout his days, questioning and comparing the authority of both Indian and European philosophic traditions, arriving at a position in which “experience” was the main religious fountainhead.

In his famous *Rāja Yoga* (1896), a book that compiles a series of talks held in the winter of 1895/96 in the United States, Vivekananda outlines a cosmology that employs the concepts of *prāṇa* (“life force”, “energy”, “motion”) and *ākāśa* (“matter”, or “ether”). Vivekananda’s cosmological conception has been interpreted, in the light of nineteenth-century occultism, along two major lines: one mainly following the interpretation of *prāṇa*; the other that of *ākāśa*. One way Vivekananda’s theory of *prāṇa* has been understood is in its function as a “healing agent”, a notion that can be paralleled with the mesmeric fluidum. Elizabeth de Michelis (2004: 159-168), Karl Baier (2009: 479), and Dominic Zoehrer (2021) have pursued such an argumentation.<sup>298</sup> A second line of interpretation has traced the influence of nineteenth-century ether theories on Vivekananda’s notion of *ākāśa*/ether, those being the works of Asprem (2011) and Pokazanyeva (2016). These discussions will not be repeated here other than in brief summaries or references. I rather focus on Vivekananda’s notion of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as part of a Sāṃkhyan cosmology that was also inspired by his reception of the *Yogavāsishtha*. Not less relevantly, I highlight the role of theosophy in Vivekananda’s thought, especially his likely reception of Rama Prasad’s texts, which is another aspect of a novel reading of Vivekananda’s cosmological outline. The question as to how Vivekananda conceives of *prāṇāyāma* against the elaborate backdrop of his cosmology will be addressed here. This is a core issue to which the cosmological discussion amounts, serving as a base for examining yogic breath cultivation as a practice in Part II. Lastly, I will briefly summarise influences on Vivekananda such as contemporaneous science and philosophy, and also

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<sup>298</sup> Theories of animal magnetism pervaded discussions of both *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in the years of early theosophy and they certainly influenced Vivekananda. The interpretation of *prāṇa* as a veiled variant of the mesmeric fluidum, also evident in Vivekananda’s text, is therefore justified.

discourses revolving around spiritualism and mesmerism, which seemed to be particularly relevant when Vivekananda lectured in front of an American audience.

#### 5.4.1 Vivekananda's Cosmology and Anthropology in Relation to Sāṃkhyan Cosmology

Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* (1896) is a collection of lectures on Pātañjalayoga, a tradition that assumes the philosophy of Sāṃkhya.<sup>299</sup> Before engaging with the exegesis of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* within *Rāja Yoga*, Vivekananda establishes a cosmological framework in which he sets forth the ideas of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. In his view, these principles are linked to the broader explications of the Yoga-Sāṃkhya tradition.

In the Introduction to *Rāja Yoga*, Vivekananda states that all existence evolves out of *ākāśa*, a primordial matter, or the element ether (Vivekananda 1896: 30, 36). *Prāṇa*, a vibrating energy and the “sum total of all force”, activates this primordial matter, and together they form all existence (*ibid.*: 31). Moreover, the “subtle” action of *prāṇa* correlates with the “subtle” material quality of *ākāśa* and the “gross” action leads to “gross” manifestations, thereby producing tangible objects (*ibid.*: 36, 14). In its lower vibrations, *ākāśa* gives rise to all objects, from the stars to the human body, and in its “finer state of vibration [it] will represent the mind” (*ibid.*: 36). The vibrations of *prāṇa* are manifested in physical forces including motion, gravitation, and magnetism.<sup>300</sup> *Prāṇa* pulsating in the individual implies the movement of breath and thought, as well as the flow of nerve currents (*ibid.*: 31). In brief, vibration on various planes throws both *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* into various guises on a macrocosmic and microcosmic plane.

Already in *Rāja Yoga*, it becomes apparent that the subtle materiality which constitutes the individual mind (i.e., *ākāśa*) is equated with the “very same material which is used as the macrocosm” (Vivekananda 1896: 212). In other lectures, however, the intimate link between the micro- and macrocosm is even clearer brought to the

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<sup>299</sup> Larson (1987b: 37) explains that “older” Sāṃkhya, i.e., classical Sāṃkhya or the soteriological tradition related to Pātañjalayoga, “had focused largely on epistemology, psychology/physiology, and ethics”. I subsume these philosophical subcategories under the term “philosophy of Sāṃkhya”. Larson also explains that, as a later development, late-medieval Sāṃkhya with exponents like Vijñānabhikṣu “focuses on a metaphysical cosmology centering on the interaction of guṇas as substances” (*ibid.*). Hence, when I talk about “Sāṃkhyan metaphysics” or “Sāṃkhyan cosmology” it denotes late-medieval developments that were adopted by figures like Vivekananda.

<sup>300</sup> A very similar statement that “modern science” has found that “heat, light, electricity, magnetism, &c., are but the modifications of one great force” was already made by the Bengali theosophist Barada Kanta Majumdar, albeit with reference to *kuṇḍalinī* as the underlying principle (Majumdar 1880: 173; cf. Strube 2021a: 138). For theosophy's influence on Vivekananda, see below.

fore.<sup>301</sup> The relation between the two is like that between an “inner” (microcosm) and an “outer” reality (macrocosm) (Vivekananda 1958 [1896c]: 212; 1958 [1895]: 432). In the *Rāja Yoga* lectures, however, the idea of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* vibrating at various frequencies represents Vivekananda’s view of the cosmos at large: The universe is “an ocean of ether, consisting of layer after layer of varying degrees of vibration under the action of Prāṇa” (Vivekananda 1896: 45). Although Vivekananda comments here on the *Yogasūtra*, linked to the philosophy of Sāṃkhya, many of these functions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* (e.g., their vibrating quality) are not found in the classical doctrines of these traditions. The discursive environments that employ similar connotations for these terms will be further discussed below.

Since Vivekananda often speaks of his cosmology as “Sāṃkhyan” in nature, it is helpful to set this discussion in the context of the classical articulation of Sāṃkhya in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Notably, Sāṃkhya “enumerates” a set of twenty-five principles or *tattvas*. The first two principles – “consciousness” (*puruṣa*) and “materiality” (*prakṛti*) – are eternal and form the basic Sāṃkhyan duality. They are ontologically distinct, and it is through their proximity or co-presence that twenty-three further aspects of reality emerge. *Puruṣa* is a “witnessing translucent presence” (Larson 2012: 76) and a unique principle distinct from *prakṛti* and the other principles derived from it (including the mind). Though manifold in its appearance, *prakṛti* can be reduced to an unmanifest singularity (*mūlaprakṛti*). The twenty-three *tattvas* emanate in the following order: intellect (*buddhi*); egoity (*ahaṃkāra*); mind (*manas*); the five organs of perception (*jñānendriyas*); the five organs of action (*karmendriyas*); the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*); and the five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*), of which *ākāśa* is the first. It should be further mentioned that Sāṃkhya distinguishes two phases in the developments of the elements – a development from subtle to gross: in the first phase the elements, as *tanmātra*, have a generic quality, which is not yet specified. In this phase *ākāśa* is sound (*śabda*) and is associated with hearing. Then the *tanmātras* combine to form together the grosser elements, or *mahābhūtas*. However, the way of their interaction has not been made especially explicit in the primary Sāṃkhyan texts, thus a distinction between subtle and gross elements is problematic and fuzzy (Duquette & Ramasubramaniam 2010: 520).

I will address below one of Vivekananda’s lectures called “Cosmology”, also held in the winter of 1895 in New York, which was originally titled “Sankhya

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<sup>301</sup> See, for example, the lectures “Cosmos: The Macrocosm”, and “Cosmos: The Microcosm”, both held in 1896 (Vivekananda 1958 [1896b]; 1958 [1896c]).

Cosmology” (Burke 1994 [1985]: 580). Echoing the classical material, the swami explains here key aspects of Sāṃkhyan thought, such as the ontological dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. He expounds that all phenomenality emerges from *prakṛti* in its unmanifest or undifferentiated (*avyakta*) form (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 433). This creation from “nature” (Vivekananda’s translation of *prakṛti*) occurs in cyclical repetition. From there, *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* emerge:

There is one element which [...] is eternal; every other element is produced out of this one. It is called Ākāśa. It is somewhat similar to the idea of ether of the moderns, though not exactly similar. Along with this element, there is the primal energy called Prāṇa. Prana and Akasha combine and recombine and form the elements out of them. [...] Prana cannot work alone without the help of Akasha (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 435-436).

Vivekananda goes on to explain the emanation of the other elements out of *ākāśa* (i.e., air, fire, water, and earth), which, through the interaction of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, also form the sense organs of the human body (*ibid.* 436-438). Finally, Vivekananda mentions *puruṣa*, or “the pure, the perfect, [...] the Self of man” (*ibid.*: 438) and he reveals the final purpose of the play of forces between nature (*prakṛti*), *prāṇa*, and *ākāśa*: “Nature is undergoing all these changes for the development of the soul; all this creation is for the benefit of the soul, so that it may be free” (*ibid.*: 439).

This lecture lists most of the relevant aspects of Sāṃkhyan thought, recognises *ākāśa* as the first of five elements, and most importantly, refers to *puruṣa*’s and *prakṛti*’s primary ontological status and the soteriological potential for liberation central to classical Sāṃkhya. Nevertheless, the understanding of *ākāśa* and *prāṇa* differs significantly from the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Therein, the “gross” element *ākāśa* does not directly emanate from *prakṛti* but is generated from the “subtle” elements (Larson 1987b: 51). Although Vivekananda acknowledges a generative relation between “subtle” and “gross” materiality, he does not subsume *ākāśa* under that scheme but rather attributes these qualities to *ākāśa* itself. *Prāṇa* is not, Vivekananda holds, considered as a “primal energy” in Sāṃkhya; rather, it is limited to a vital function in the human organism (*ibid.*: 25). Consequently, in classical Sāṃkhya *prāṇa* is not a cosmological agent that, together with *ākāśa*, would “form the elements out of them” (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 435), nor do they interact to create the human sense organs or the mind.

It is important to note that Sāṃkhyan philosophy forms the basis for many cosmological renditions in Indian history, and it also lies at the base of Prasad’s

outline. From the medieval period onward, Sāṃkhyan thought was absorbed into numerous traditions, including Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Vedānta, and, then, the cosmological side of the Sāṃkhya doctrine was often emphasised (Larson 1979: 152). Indeed, by the fourteenth century, within Advaita Vedānta for example, the traditions of Sāṃkhya and Pātañjalayoga were no longer viewed as “rivals but rather as pan-brahmanical traditions/technologies” (Madaio 2018: 8, n. 47). Generally speaking, Vivekananda assumes this backdrop of inherited tradition but, in doing so, he also articulates his own rendition of Sāṃkhya cosmology which privileges *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Thereby, he stretches the framework of classical Sāṃkhya and Pātañjalayoga. When Vivekananda speaks of varying degrees of prāṇic vibrations that produce different planes of reality in *Rāja Yoga*, this is a position alien to these traditions. One trace, however, where similar ideas can be found leads to the medieval *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. The confluence of ideas in medieval India partly explains why Vivekananda’s usage of these notions diverts from the doctrines of the classical Yoga-Sāṃkhya tradition. We know that Vivekananda was acquainted with a theosophically informed translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* by Vihari Lal Mitra that he requested to be sent to him while he taught yoga and Vedānta in New York (Kraler 2021: 384). It is also certain that a Bengali version of the Sanskrit text was read by Vivekananda and his fellow monks at the Ramakrishna Math (Gupta 1974: 987; Madaio 2017: 7, n. 21). Vivekananda adopts some of its doctrines, and in the following, I will treat the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* as a major source that informed Vivekananda.

#### 5.4.2 *Prāṇa* and *Ākāśa* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*

The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (c. tenth century CE),<sup>302</sup> attributed to the mythical saint Vālmīki, evidences a polyvalent Advaita tradition that integrates various philosophical schools and practices across sectarian boundaries. This is also the case in several other medieval texts dealing with yoga (chapter 3.4). The work demonstrates familiarity with various strands of Indian philosophical traditions, such as Upaniṣadic Advaita, Yogācāra Buddhism, non-dual Trika Śaivism, as well as Haṭhayogic and tantric elements (Timalsina 2012: 304).<sup>303</sup> In an extensive “prologue” to the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*,

<sup>302</sup> The *Yogavāsiṣṭha-Mahārāmāyaṇa* consists of almost 30,000 verses and presupposes the tenth century *Mokṣopāya* and the shorter *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*, both of which have origins in Kashmir (see, e.g., Hanneder 2005). Following Madaio (2019: 122, n. 1), I use the title “Yogavāsiṣṭha” in a generic way, implying both the *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha-Mahārāmāyaṇa*.

<sup>303</sup> According to Timalsina (2012: 304), most scholars have neglected yogic elements in the text because its Haṭhayogic and tantric aspects have been overshadowed by its poetic tropes and the work’s repeated emphasis on knowledge-based methods of awakening (*jñāna*).

the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* presents the troubled prince Rāma, who is taught by the sage Vasiṣṭha in the form of a dramatic dialogue.<sup>304</sup> Relating a non-dualistic philosophy, Vasiṣṭha teaches a means to be liberated while living (*jīvanmukti*). The text incorporates various streams of tradition and employs numerous narratives, including the apprenticeship of Vasiṣṭha himself, who learned from the eternally living crow Bhuṣuṇḍa.

Various chapters in the *Nirvāṇa* section of the text deal with the “yoga of *prāṇa*” (Timalsina 2012) taught to Vasiṣṭha by Bhuṣuṇḍa. Here, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* enacts tantric and yogic subtle-body schemes, such as the three main *nāḍīs* and the *cakras*, while *prāṇa* is understood to govern all bodily functions (Timalsina 2012: 311). *Prāṇāyāma* includes the regular *prāṇa* flow within the body and the intentional control of breath with the goal of merging the mind with the flow of breath (*ibid.*: 314, 316).<sup>305</sup> The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* thus highlights the *prāṇa*-mind nexus (Madaio 2017: 5). As discussed, this is a theme central to many strands of Indian thought – and to Vivekananda’s cosmology and anthropology. In the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, this nexus is activated through the principle of vibration, or *spanda*, which is attributed to *prāṇa* (*prāṇaspanḍa*). According to Mainkar, the doctrine of *spanda* shows Śaiva-tantric influence on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and he sees in it an important point of difference between the Vedānta of Śaṅkara and the Advaita of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (Mainkar 1977 [1955]: 243). With regard to *prāṇa*, on the microcosmic level, this means “[w]hen the *prāṇa* vibrates and is on the point of passing through the nerves [i.e., *nāḍīs*, M.K.], then there appears the mind full of its thought processes” (Dasgupta 1952 [1923]: 256). On the macrocosmic level, “[i]t is the vibration of the *prāṇa* (*prāṇaspanḍa*) that manifests itself through the *citta* and causes the world-appearance out of nothing” (*ibid.*). The yogic practice that derives thereof and the ontological relation between the vibration of *prāṇa* and the mind is echoed in Vivekananda’s anthropological and cosmological accounts. It lies at the heart of both his reasoning about *prāṇāyāma* and his metaphysical speculations.

Another element that the swami appropriates from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* is a tripartite understanding of *ākāśa*, which again permeates the macro- and microcosmic levels. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* employs *ākāśa*, or space, in a threefold manner: (*bhūt*)*ākāśa*, or the elemental space; *cittākāśa*, or the mental space; and *cidākāśa*, or the space that

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<sup>304</sup> On the transformative nature of dialogue in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, see Madaio (2019).

<sup>305</sup> For an example of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*’s *prāṇāyāma* teachings see chapter 8.4.2 on Sivananda, who also recurs on Vasiṣṭha and Bhuṣuṇḍa.



is consciousness (Slaje 1994: 279).<sup>306</sup> So does Vivekananda when he speaks of “the ordinary space, called the Mahākāśha, or great space [...], the Cittākāśha, the mental space, [...] and] the Chidākāśha, or knowledge space” (Vivekananda 1896: 51).<sup>307</sup> If we acknowledge that (*bhūt*)*ākāśa* is a synonym for *mahākāśa*,<sup>308</sup> Vivekananda is clearly aligned with the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in applying a tripartite understanding of *ākāśa* and their respective functions. He explains that in *mahākāśa* perceptions, imaginations, and dreams arise (*ibid.*). This is also the primary association of the space-giving quality of (*bhūt*)*ākāśa* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, based on the concept that these impressions of individual consciousness, and space in general, are ultimately emptiness (*śūnyatva*) (Slaje 1994: 274-276). The individual’s attainment of *citākāśa* is both in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and in Vivekananda’s outline characterised by objectless perception (*ibid.*: 280, n. 307; Vivekananda 1896: 51). For Vivekananda *cittākāśa* gives rise to the yogi’s ability of thought-reading and “supersensuous” perception (*ibid.*). Although the notion of magical powers (*siddhis*) in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and in premodern yogic contexts could be relevant for a close analysis of this statement,<sup>309</sup> here he most likely draws on similar accounts of clairvoyance that were prevalent in theosophy at that time (e.g., Prasad 1890: 131).

There is another conceptual link between Vivekananda’s thought and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Like other texts that follow a radical non-dualism, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* often polemically argues against Cārvāka philosophy, a materialist doctrine that identifies the self and consciousness with the physical body (Bronkhorst 2016). By denying the existence of *ākāśa*, Cārvāka philosophy claims that the body consists of four elements only (Dhole 1899: 74, n. \*). In contrast to that, the author of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the medieval Sāṃkhya-commentator Aniruddha, and a modern commentator on Advaita Vedānta highlight the doctrine of *ākāśa*, at times in relation to their argument against Cārvāka philosophy (Slaje 1994: 208, n. 33; Larson 1987a: 349-350; Dhole 1899: 74-77, n. \*). Vivekananda adopts the argumentative line of these traditions. Moreover, the existence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* could ultimately be reduced to a universal mind, or “Infinite Mind” – as Vivekananda explains in a lecture on “The

<sup>306</sup> In the final analysis, however, all of these demarcations of space are ultimately dissolved and merged in “consciousness”: “All of this is *brahman*, the space that is consciousness [*sarvam eva citākāśam brahmeti*]” (*Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* 6.9.224 cited in Madaio 2019: 115). Indeed, according to Madaio (2019: 125, n. 33), there are numerous declarations of this sort in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

<sup>307</sup> Although Vivekananda substitutes (*bhūt*)*ākāśa* by *mahākāśa*, the parallel here is obvious.

<sup>308</sup> According to Jürgen Hanneder (personal conversation, Nov 29, 2019), *mahākāśa* is used as a synonym for (*bhūt*)*ākāśa* at least once in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

<sup>309</sup> Such an analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

Ether” which was published in the *New York Times* in February 1895 (Vivekananda in Burke 1994 [1985]: 56; Kraler 2021: 385). I would argue that this is central to Vivekananda’s Advaita perspective with a strong idealist bent, despite De Michelis’s proposition that Vivekananda’s thought is “quasi-materialistic” (De Michelis 2004: 14). In light of the wider Indian philosophical contexts, Vivekananda’s emphasis on *ākāśa* stressed his religious orientation, which aimed to oppose materialism (including the Cārvāka philosophy). His particularly “Hindu” perspective is, according to Vivekananda, diametrically opposed to a materialist worldview, for him often associated with the West (Vivekananda 1955 [n.d.a.]: 305).

In summary, the concept of a vibrating *prāṇa* is key in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and in Vivekananda’s cosmology and anthropology, and, as is found in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, Vivekananda speaks of a tripartite division of *ākāśic* space. In other words, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* emphasises both *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, but does not, as far as I can tell, link them as a functional pair. Rama Prasad’s texts that translate and interpret the *Śivasvarodaya* add further ingredients to Vivekananda’s metaphysical thought. As has been shown, Prasad occasionally mentions *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as a pair and highlights each of these notions in a specific way. Most likely, Vivekananda at least partly adopted Prasad’s texts, as will be expounded in the following.

#### 5.4.3 Vivekananda’s Reception of Rama Prasad and Further Theosophical Literature

Vivekananda was generally unaffectionate towards the Theosophical Society, especially after the events at the World Parliament of Religion (Pokazanyeva 2016: 335). His reception of theosophical ideas is, however, certain. Several intertextual relations and documented correspondences indicate that he had read theosophical translations of Sanskrit texts. First, as has been mentioned, Vivekananda knew Vihari Lal Mitra’s translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which interpolates several quotations from Olcott’s, Blavatsky’s, and other theosophist’s texts. Second, Philip Deslippe (2018: 34) has noted that the swami requested the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and the *Śivasamhitā* to be sent to him, probably for the purpose of teaching yoga. Vasu’s translation of the *Śivasamhitā*, *The Esoteric Science and Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Sanhita* (1887), was distributed among Vivekananda’s advanced disciples in New York, as the occultist Ida Craddock (1857–1902) reported (Schmidt 2010: 126). Third, Vivekananda was most probably aware of Prasad’s work. The first and second editions of *Occult Science* (1884 and 1892) were published by R. C. Bary & Sons in Lahore,

not necessarily revealing a theosophical background at first sight. Notably, the aforementioned theosophical translator Sris Chandra Vasu, a close collaborator of Prasad, hosted Vivekananda as his guest before his voyage to the United States (Bose 1932: 184). It is unlikely that Vasu and Vivekananda, both immersed in yoga, would not have exchanged ideas about a prominent theosophical translator like Prasad. Additionally, Vivekananda often stressed the importance of indigenous sources, which may have attracted him to Prasad's works.

There are certainly differences in the cosmological outlines of Vivekananda and Prasad. Most importantly, Vivekananda does not apply the science of breath for divination, but instead mainly focuses on the yogic practice of *prāṇāyāma*; also, he does not place strong emphasis on the *tattvas* and their constant modification, nor does he engage the notion of “*svara*”. Vivekananda, however, clearly knew about divination through breath as part of a tantric heritage, since he alludes to it in at least one lecture (Vivekananda 1992 [1900a]: 508).<sup>310</sup> The obvious parallels between their outlines are the constitution of the world's existence on *svara/prāṇa* (*svara* only in Prasad's case) and *ākāśa* as the first *tattva*/element, as well as breath cultivation as a tool for health and healing.

There is additional evidence that Vivekananda was acquainted with Prasad's translation and comments on the *Śivasvarodaya*. Both Prasad and Vivekananda refer to the same passage in the *Rgveda* explaining existence based on a principle that “breathed breathless in itself” (Prasad 1884: i). Vivekananda avers that this was *prāṇa* that “existed without vibration” (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 435). For both, this mode of *prāṇa* was distinct from its later cosmological function – breathless and non-vibrant.<sup>311</sup> Prasad then elaborates on various degrees of vibrations that constitute different layers and realities in the universe. Vibration, or *spanda*, is an important theme in Trika Śaivism and tantra in general, as the discussion on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* has shown. Prasad elucidates it on the base of the tantric *Śivasvarodaya*. Thus, Vivekananda could have taken the idea of vibrations constituting different levels of realities – and the repeated notion of “subtle” and “gross” realities, the former

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<sup>310</sup> “Some [people] have taken up this breathing as the whole [pursuit] of life. They do not do anything without consulting the breath. They are all the time [observing] in which nostril there is more breath. When it is the right, [they] will do certain things, and when [it is] the left, they do other things. When [the breath is] flowing equally through both nostrils, they will worship” (Vivekananda 1992 [1900a]: 508). According to the stenographer Ida Ansell (the square brackets in the above quotation are her emendations), the lecture “Breathing” (1992 [1900a]) has originally been titled the “Science of Breath” and was held in California in March 1900 (Burke 1987a: 68).

<sup>311</sup> Additionally, they both refer to the Sanskrit compound *anidavatam* (Prasad 1884: i) and *ānidavātam* (Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 435).

dominating the latter – from various sources, one of them being Rama Prasad. Furthermore, Prasad states that the science of breath is based on verifiable experiments, and that through this practice the yogi controls the elements and nature: “All these facts are established by experiment, which may, at any time, be repeated by any body [*sic*] who cares for it. This is the course of nature. But a Yogi commands nature. He turns every thing [*sic*] his own way” (Prasad 1884: 9). Both of these arguments – yoga as a verifiable science and the yogi that aims to control nature – are two of Vivekananda’s *leitmotifs* in *Rāja Yoga* (Vivekananda 1896: 11, 6). And both authors mention a direct interdependence between *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*.

At the present state of research, it is difficult to determine the exact theosophical sources from which Vivekananda drew other than the abovementioned translations. But, nevertheless, he certainly adopted several theosophical ideas not found in these translations, which means he knew additional theosophical texts. Although there are indeed overlaps in their cosmological considerations, Vivekananda may not have read the works of the theosophists Franz Hartmann or Annie Besant directly – at least, less likely than those of Prasad – but the texts of these authors exemplify the dissemination of a concept that had been formulated before Vivekananda. Perhaps future investigation will reveal further sources on which both Hartmann and Vivekananda drew when they both highlight *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as “force” and “matter”, respectively. In both cases, the reference to force and matter is reminiscent of Ludwig Büchner’s *Kraft und Stoff* (1855, *Force and Matter*).<sup>312</sup> Hartmann’s and Vivekananda’s engagement with “force and matter” could therefore be further analysed against the backdrop of a vast net of materialist and anti-materialist discourses in the nineteenth century. Due to lack of space, it will only be briefly addressed below when dealing with Vivekananda’s relationship to the scientist Nicolas Tesla. For now, it should suffice that Prasad’s texts evidence a relevant approximation towards what both Vivekananda and Hartmann developed further in their texts along similar lines.

Before turning to a discussion of Vivekananda’s relation to non-Indian doctrines, there is a final relevant text that has ties to both Indian traditions and the Theosophical Society. The work of another theosophical translator can be viewed as a

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<sup>312</sup> In his well-known *Kraft und Stoff*, a book of popular science which was translated into fifteen languages, Büchner postulates the unity of force and matter and propagates, although not fully consistently, a material monism that reduces categories like mind, soul, and thought to a force-bearing imperishable substance (Bergunder 2016: 89-90). For a discussion of Büchner’s influential work and its sharp polemics against mesmerism, see Zoehrer (2020: 153).

predecessor of Vivekananda's cosmological rendition and exposition of Rājayoga: M. N. Dvivedi's *Rāja Yoga: Being a Translation of the Vākyasudha or Dṛgdrśyaviveka of Bhāratitirtha and the Aparokśānubhūti of Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya with Introduction and Notes* (1885). Here I will not go into details as to how Dvivedi conceived of Rājayoga (he basically follows the typical theosophical dichotomy between Rājayoga and Haṭhayoga, see chapter 4.3.3). It is, however, a fact that his understanding of Rājayoga as an Advaita discipline, in a translation and Introduction written only a few years before Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*, points towards an influence on the latter (Singleton 2008: 84). It may well be that Dvivedi's understanding of *ākāśa* – which partly has theosophical implications – also co-shaped Vivekananda's interpretation. One of the most prominent passages in Dvivedi's Introduction, which anticipates Vivekananda's interpretation, is:

Mesmerism and Clairvoyance and Spiritualism are nothing new to us [Hindus, M.K.]. The whole of our system of religion abounds in ceremonies based on the potentialities and capabilities of all-pervading magnetic ether [i.e., *ākāśa*, M. K. ...].<sup>313</sup> But to the Materialists of Europe the thing means a revolution (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 29).

There are several aspects here that foreshadow Vivekananda's conception of *ākāśa* as ether: first, Dvivedi explains various magnetic phenomena through the existence of an all-pervading principle – in the case of Vivekananda he avers that his theory of *prāṇa* can explain phenomena like spiritualism, or even the functioning of a steam engine (Vivekananda 1896: 47; chapter 8.1.1). Second, *ākāśa* is rendered here a principle of utter potentiality; such is the case in Vivekananda's understanding of both *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Third, this principle was known to Hindus for millennia, and thus marks (quite similarly to the abovementioned texts that polemise against Cārvāka philosophy) the superiority of South Asian philosophies over the typically materialistic strands of Western philosophy. Concerning the latter, only figures like Herbert Spencer are exceptional (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 30). Vivekananda's arguments are quite similar, which makes a direct borrowing likely.<sup>314</sup> Vivekananda equally endorses

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<sup>313</sup> Dvivedi (1890 [1885]: 28-29) similarly states that “mesmeric clairvoyance, *Samādhi*, and the so-called spirit-manifestations” are explained “by assuming that the whole universe is one life and through the potentialities of *ākāśa* it is possible for any phenomena to happen at any moment”. In these two quotes it is evident that ether and *ākāśa* are used as synonyms.

<sup>314</sup> A similar foreshadowing may be posited by investigating Dvivedi's *The Yoga-Sutra of Patañjali* (1890) (Singleton 2008: 84-85). Like Dvivedi, also Vivekananda unites Patañjali, *prāṇāyāma* practice and *kuṇḍalinī* arousal in his *Rāja Yoga*. In turn, Dvivedi himself drew on Prasad (1884; 1890), since he refers to *svara* as applied by Prasad (Dvivedi 1890: 51-52, n. \*). In *Rāja Yoga*, he mentions the phrase “science of breath” (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 14), though he correlates it with Haṭhayoga, not with the

Herbert Spencer and other selected non-Indian doctrines, as is discussed in the following section.

#### 5.4.4 Vivekananda as a Cosmopolitan Philosopher: Relations to Non-Indian Doctrines and Science

Besides Vivekananda's reception of theosophical texts, there were certainly additional sources from which the multifaceted and philosophical polyglot drew. Lecturing in the United States and Europe, the swami tied on to mediating principles and concepts (like the ether and the mesmeric fluidum) familiar to the audience and available within their known epistemologies and cosmologies. This is further evidenced by the fact that Vivekananda mingles Haṭhayogic subtle body schemes with Western concepts of subtle materiality. On the one hand, the swami certainly relies on tantric/Haṭhayogic ideas of the subtle body in which *kuṇḍalinī*, the *nāḍīs* and the *cakras* play a major role (Vivekananda 1896: 48-55).<sup>315</sup> He also utilises the distinction between the *līṅga śarīra* ("subtle" body) and the *sthūla śarīra* ("gross" or material body), which is common in various Vedāntic contexts (e.g., Vivekananda 1958 [1895]: 436; Pokazanyeva 2016: 333-334). On the other hand, in his lecture on "Samkhya and Vedanta", he relates these concepts to "Christian philosophy", in which the *līṅga śarīra*, according to Vivekananda, is called "the spiritual body of man" (Vivekananda 1958 [1896a]: 456). Whatever the swami connotes with "Christian philosophy", he likely points at concepts of spiritism and Christian Science, also known as New Thought. The influence of New Thought is also evidenced in some *prāṇāyāma* instructions that Vivekananda gave in the United States and Britain (Vivekananda 1958 [n.d.a.]; chapter 8.1.1).

Although Vivekananda's understanding of *prāṇāyāma* as a practice will be discussed in a separate chapter, it should be briefly noted here that Vivekananda almost certainly draws on Stebbins's notion of "rhythmic breathing" as exposed in *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) which was a widely used text in circles that Vivekananda gravitated towards while residing in the United States. Although his references to Delsartism mainly serve the purpose of delineating it from yoga (Vivekananda 1896: 18; Vivekananda 1958 [1896a]: 455; Singleton 2010: 71), they

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*Śivasvarodaya*, probably for the first time shifting the meaning from prognostication to *prāṇāyāma* more generally. Despite this slight incongruence, Dvivedi evidences an employment of *prāṇa* in relation to the *tattvas* that again points at the reception of Rama Prasad (*ibid.*).

<sup>315</sup> The chapter that deals with subtle physiology in *Rāja Yoga* is called the "Psychic Prāṇa". It also states that the aim of *prāṇāyāma* is to arouse *kuṇḍalinī* (Vivekananda 1896: 51).

nevertheless show that he was aware of it. Regarding Vivekananda's understanding of rhythmic breathing, one could argue that breath is an undulating and tidal phenomenon, as any even superficial observation of the same would suggest, and that the swami's idea is based on such a "natural" phenomenon. Furthermore, the notion of a vibrating *prāṇa-as-spanda* is present in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which extends, under Vivekananda, to the notion of a "rhythmic" *prāṇa* (Vivekananda 1958 [1899]: 31). When Vivekananda talks about "rhythmic breathing", the next available source is still Stebbins, which is further evidenced by the fact that Vivekananda adopts the concept of recharging the body like a "battery", which is explained in Stebbins's *Dynamic Breathing* (Stebbins 1892: 53; Vivekananda 1896: 51).<sup>316</sup>

In terms of his broader outline of rhythmic motion, the swami must have been attracted to the ideas of the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903). Indeed, the young Vivekananda had translated Spencer's *Education* into Bengali and had corresponded with the British philosopher (Baumfield 1999: 204-205). Spencer explains in his *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (1864) that all motion in the universe was rhythmical, including breath (Spencer 1864: 276, 313-334). This principle had already influenced the New Thought theoretician Warren Felt Evans and his ideas on breath (chapter 4.2.3). In turn, both Vivekananda and Stebbins mention Spencer. While Stebbins's references to him are scarce (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 5), Vivekananda quotes him on several occasions.<sup>317</sup> In light of these references, Vivekananda's understanding of rhythmic breathing and the rhythmic motion of *prāṇa* is another example of how he integrates several influences in his philosophical outline that frames *prāṇāyāma*. This blend was accessible to both his South Asian and Euro-American students.

Another aspect that Vivekananda's audience was attuned to is the equation of yoga and science, already suggested by the Brahmo Samaj and one of its charismatic leaders, Keshab Chandra Sen, as well as by theosophy (chapter 4.1.1; chapter 4.3). The American and European audience valued Vivekananda's voice from the East, who was

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<sup>316</sup> Stebbins's understanding of "recharging" the body through a kind of polarisation of its molecules by rhythmic breathing and sifting ether from the air is highly reminiscent of practices described by Burgoyne. As Foxen has shown, this concept is also found in contemporaneous New Thought journals, and traces of it in the works of Andrew Jackson Davis (Foxen 2020: 99-100, 162, 245). Like Vivekananda, his fellow-monk and successor Swami Abhedananda subsequently employs the concept; so does Yogananda (*ibid.*: 229-230, 233, 245).

<sup>317</sup> E.g., "Practical Vedanta. Part IV" (London, Nov 1896) and "Vedanta and Privilege" (London, n.d.a.). In "Conception of the Universe" as well as in other lectures, the swami endorses Spencer: "When Herbert Spencer's voice says that the same life welling up in the plant is the life welling up in the individual, the Indian religion has found a voice in the nineteenth century" (Vivekananda as quoted in Burke 1987a: 194).

at the same time trained in certain concepts of Western thought (Thomas 1930: 74). The rationale of science based on experiential knowledge was, for many, more convincing than the sole borrowing from scriptures and religious authorities. More than once, Vivekananda directly engages with ether speculations and, unsurprisingly, is particularly fascinated by contemporary approaches from the natural sciences that seemed to support an idealistic monism. Besides the abovementioned newspaper article “The Ether”, another example for this is his encounter with the Serbo-American scientist Nicolas Tesla (1856–1943) in New York in 1893 and 1896. Tesla was a “fanciful futurist” who was not only interested in ether theories but also in speculations about “free energy”, which he also termed “teleforce” (Pokazanyeva 2016: 338). Vivekananda is convinced that, in collaboration with Tesla, “Vedantic cosmology will be placed on the surest of foundations”, as pointed out in a letter to the theosophist Edward Toronto Sturdy (d. 1957) in 1900 (Vivekananda 1959 [1896]: 101). He, furthermore, “clearly see[s] their perfect unison with modern science” (*ibid.*) According to Vivekananda, Tesla was interested in his cosmology, including the cyclic repetition of world-ages (*kalpa*)<sup>318</sup> based on the expansion and subsequent shrinking of the cosmos as “the only theories modern science can entertain” (*ibid.*). In the same letter, the swami draws a simple equation that shows a) the importance of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in this cosmology, and b) the synonymity established between an emanationist cosmology articulated in South Asian terms and a scientific monism propagated by some exponents of anti-materialist science:

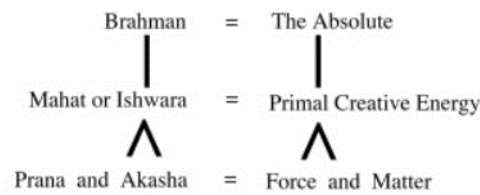


FIGURE 7: VIVEKANANDA’S EQUATION OF COSMIC PRINCIPLES (VIVEKANANDA 1959 [1896]: 101).

Vivekananda does not directly refer to Sāṃkhya here, but relies on a Vedāntic scheme by assuming *brahman* as the highest reality. As has been shown, this is in alignment with the medieval integration of Sāṃkhya into Vedānta.<sup>319</sup> To hold that *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* or “force” and “matter” emerge from a primordial source equated to *brahman* or “the Absolute” is probably more recent – and aligned with the model of the

<sup>318</sup> *Kalpa* means “a day of brahman, or 1,000 yugas”, or the “end of the world, universal destruction” (Apte 1890: 388).

<sup>319</sup> The Sanskrit term *mahat* (lit. “the great one”) utilised here by Vivekananda is a synonym for *buddhi* or “intellect” the latter being an important human faculty in Sāṃkhya (Larson 2012: 76); here it is equated with *Īśvara*, which is the highest being in Sāṃkhya-Yoga (*ibid.*: 90).



theosophist Franz Hartmann (see above). Moreover, this equation again reflects Vivekananda's monism and that *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, though fundamental to the cosmos as perceived by the senses, still depend on *brahman* or "the Absolute".

The encounter of Vivekananda and Tesla was meaningful for both sides. In Tesla's essay "Man's greatest achievements" (1908), he explicitly adopts Vivekananda's conception of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* for a cosmogonic rendition (Pokazanyeva 2016: 338). Tesla's attempt to mathematically show that force and matter were reducible to potential energy supported Vivekananda's monistic worldview (*ibid.*). Moreover, the fact that Tesla, a quite well-known scientist – whose works were still appreciated by the scientific community in the late 1890s – relied on Vivekananda's cosmological understanding raised the latter's cultural capital. The correlation of the authorities of South Asian Vedānta and Western science was highly successful. Those attuned to this correlation, be it occultists or Americans in doubt of Christian doctrines, and all those who valued "science" over "blind faith", would certainly have listened.

#### 5.4.5 Summary: The Yogic Occultist and an Influential Cosmological Rendition

In this section, I have moved from a discussion of Vivekananda's interpretation of a Sāṃkhyan cosmology, through his reception of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* to his reception of Prasad's texts. I have further demonstrated that, as a cosmopolitan philosopher, Vivekananda drew from medieval Sanskrit sources, vernacular forms of Advaita, and theosophically tinged translations of Sanskrit texts, and was additionally inspired by scientific ether speculations. A philosopher-performer and travelling yogi, he combined these sources in talks he gave in front of highly diverse audiences in South Asia, Europe, and the United States. As for his simultaneous employment of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, it has been shown that while the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* highlights both as main themes, this text does not directly mention them as functionally related. This functional correlation probably first appears in theosophical texts. In analysing Vivekananda's understanding of *ākāśa*, I hold that it should be conceived as a notion implying several meanings – (1) *ākāśa* as a concept of tripartite space as in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*; (2) *ākāśa* as a principle that represents an idealist doctrine vis-à-vis materialist philosophies; (3) *ākāśa* as correlated with ether in ether theories, which implies the notion of *ākāśa*-as-matter; (4) and *ākāśa* in relation to *prāṇa*. This highly diverse and multilevel

interpretation of *ākāśa* can only be recognised by taking heed of all these influences on Vivekananda.

The swami also theorises *prāṇāyāma* within his lectures, ascribing to it an almost omnipotent, *siddhi*-oriented, and soteriological potential (chapter 8.1.1). Against the backdrop of an elaborate *prāṇa* theory, *prāṇāyāma* moreover provides an additional framework for explaining such diverse subjects as health and healing, occult phenomena, and phenomena of contemporary physical science. Covering vast realms of both grosser and finer realities, his theory of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* – and the related notion of *prāṇāyāma*, which is the “control” of these realities and phenomena – encompasses quite literally everything. This is no less a theory that spans microcosm and macrocosm than it is, in Vivekananda’s view, an “ancient” yogic – and thereby “scientific” – guideline for mastering multiple microcosmic and macrocosmic relations. *Prāṇāyāma* is one of the most powerful tools of Rājayoga, charged by the agency that the mastery of *prāṇa*, thus *ākāśa*, provides. This potency was further harnessed by subsequent yoga pioneers, and most books on yogic breath control up to the present apply a concept of *prāṇa* (sometimes, but not always, in correlation with *ākāśa*), much in the sense of Vivekananda.

## 5.5 Summary: Synopsis of Rama Prasad, Swami Vivekananda, and Genevieve Stebbins

There are several similarities found in the works of the three protagonists presented here. Before summarising them, I will briefly loop back to the Prologue to this chapter, in which Hanegraaff’s model of three forms of correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm was discussed. I have utilised it as a heuristic model to prepare the analysis of our three main protagonists. It has become evident that none of them engages a form of correspondences that is *exclusively* based on (1) *semiotic likeness* with no mediating principle or substance that would connect the microcosm and macrocosm.<sup>320</sup> Also, allusions to (3) *instrumental causality* are scarce. Nevertheless, (1) and (3) are employed in some rare cases (see below). Most of the examples that we encountered rely on the nexus of (2) *occult causality*, in which a subtle force-substance (at times referred to as “energy”) or principle that permeates the

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<sup>320</sup> An allusion to *semiotic likeness* might be Prasad’s statement that the “microcosm is an exact picture of the macrocosm” (Prasad 1890: 48), but the fact that he clearly treats *svara* as a “current of the life-wave” (*ibid.*: 12), to connect micro- and macrocosm, suggests that his model more clearly falls under (2).

cosmos has a direct influence on human beings. To recapitulate, the force-substances and mediating principles harnessed are the following: for Stebbins, ether, which is extracted from the air through rhythmic breathing, and the breath of life that is fundamental to life at large; for Prasad, *svara*, which is an energetic force-substance, and “terrestrial” *prāṇa*, both of which can be regulated through *prāṇāyāma* and *svarodaya* practices; finally, for Vivekananda, *ākāśa* (materiality/matter, ether) and *prāṇa* (life force, force, energy, motion) together constitute all existence,<sup>321</sup> and because universal *prāṇa* can be harnessed through *prāṇāyāma*, “nature” (*prakṛti*) can be “controlled”.

Our authors describe various mediating principles but establish, in essence, the same kind of nexus between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Thereby, the terminology of the “microcosm” and “macrocosm” is often applied or at least alluded to.<sup>322</sup> Although (2) is the most salient nexus, the authors are also aware of and refer to (1) and (3). Stebbins even explicitly refers to the Hermetic dictum “as above, so below” (Stebbins 1898 [1913]: 11), which falls in the category of (1). However, she extends the latter – by drawing on Delsarte’s “principle of correspondence” (Stebbins 1887 [1885]: 33-34) – into the nexus between “within” and “without”. In Delsarte’s system, this means that to every gesture a certain emotion or meaning is attached, indicating a psycho-physical correlation relevant for his system. Such a correlation that is reduced to the anthropological level is naturally not included in Hanegraaff’s model, and probably owes more to psycho-physical speculations of the nineteenth century than to correspondence thought. From our three protagonists, some of Vivekananda’s arguments perhaps move closest to the nexus of *instrumental causality* (3), since he tried to reconcile his theoretical musings with contemporaneous scientific theories. However, even if he alluded to yoga as an experience-based “science” and argued that the efficacy of the practices is based on verifiable chains of cause and effect, such a verification never took place. The nexuses established in his cosmological rendition are therefore grounded, as in the other protagonists’ case, in that of *occult causality*.

In summary, the force-substances and mediating principles treated above explain and “cause” the efficacy of the techniques that are subsumed under the category of yogic breath cultivation. In providing relevant epistemic frameworks for

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<sup>321</sup> However, these are grounded in an even more fundamental principle that he refers to as *brahman* or *puruṣa*.

<sup>322</sup> Of the three protagonists, Prasad employs the terminology of the micro- and macrocosm most frequently. Vivekananda sometimes utilises it, and Stebbins speaks of the “human microcosm”, but does not employ the term “macrocosm” even when expanding on the impact of the sun rays on human life.

the practices, all three protagonists markedly contributed to the emergence of yogic breath cultivation as we know it. The fact that nexus (2) in Hanegraaff's model mainly addresses pre-enlightenment thought suggests that occult movements – by which all three are decidedly influenced – preserved some older strata of theories about human existence and its embeddedness within the cosmos. As has been shown, there are also highly relevant strands of premodern South Asian thought that influenced the concepts discussed, particularly those applied by Prasad and Vivekananda. In focusing primarily on the modern period in this analysis, it remains an open question, if, say, a Haṭhayogic understanding of *prāṇa* would also fall under the same category – and if Haṭha yogis at all tried to establish a correlation with the “cosmos”. To minutely contrast the older concepts to those of the modern period and discuss these in the light of Hanegraaff's model (or an extended one) would be a fascinating endeavour, which is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

As to further similarities between the protagonists discussed, all of them employ the principle of vibration, at times interpreted as “rhythm”, which can be perceived by the human senses (despite, or because of, they pervade the cosmos). As a result, the perception of finer vibrations raises the human mind to its higher potential and bestows extraordinary powers. All protagonists were aware of nineteenth-century scientific and occult ether speculations. In a way, their *ākāśa*- and ether-related texts can be viewed as advancing occult ether speculations. Besides loose similarities, the protagonists were also connected through direct transmissions, most likely through textual influence and shared cultic milieus towards which the protagonists gravitated. I have already elaborated above on the relationship between Prasad and Vivekananda in terms of privileging the notions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Any direct influence of Prasad on Stebbins is probably minor, but the reception of Prasad's *svara*-related texts by members of the H. B. o. L has been documented. In any case, they share the common theme that the sun rays act like wires by which either *prāṇa* or ether reach and impact the planet as well as human systems. Probably through direct encounter with Delsartean exponents and literature in New York, Vivekananda was aware of Delsartism and echoes Stebbins's concept of “rhythmic breathing” as well as the analogy of the human system as a “battery” that can be recharged through breath cultivation.

## 5.6 Epilogue: Adelia Fletcher's *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath*

This Epilogue aims to show how the concepts established by our three protagonists resurface in subsequent New Thought contexts. *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath: Teaching the Generation, Conservation, and Control of Vital Force* (1908) by Ella Adelia Fletcher (1846-1934) perfectly exemplifies this. Fletcher was not only an exponent of the “cult of deep breathing” (Fletcher 1908: 10) and its physical-culturist implications, but an occultist tapped into ideas on the breath that circulated in the networks of her time.<sup>323</sup> She was part of the New Thought and occult scene that thrived around 1900, her 1908 book being published serially in several issues of the famous New Thought journal *Nautilus*, edited by Elizabeth Towne (1865–1960), from December 1905 onwards (Leland 2016: 160). Before *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath*, she had published on topics like beauty, women's health, herbal cosmetics, fitness, financial success, and self-help techniques (*ibid.*: 159-160).

*The Law of the Rhythmic Breath* substantially draws on Prasad's *Science of Breath* as well as Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*. Both texts are mentioned in the epigraphs on the first pages of the book. Her work is further thoroughly rooted in theosophical thought and frequently endorses and mentions Blavatsky and Besant. Much in the sense of Vivekananda and Stebbins, she quotes from scientists who in her opinion had only recently confirmed ideas that had been inherent to ancient civilisations. In her extensive tract she elaborates on *prāṇa* and the breath of life, as well as on *ākāśa* and the ether. She interprets *prāṇa* both by explaining Prasad's and Vivekananda's texts and also by drawing from Besant's lectures. She variously refers to it as the “breath of life”, the “vital creative force”, “electricity and magnetism”, and the “life-current” that is coloured by one of the five *tattvas* (Fletcher 1908: 13, 147, 149, 275, 366). Although she draws extensively from Prasad, she does not, surprisingly, employ *svara* at all, but instead privileges *prāṇa* as the notion to primarily denote breath and the main vitalistic principle (*ibid.*: 38-39). This may indicate that *prāṇa* generally enjoyed greater popularity than *svara* and Fletcher utilised that. But she criticises Vivekananda (whom she otherwise clearly esteems) for his inconsistent use of *prāṇa*, when he denies a relation of breath and *prāṇa* (Vivekananda 1896: 30). In her work, *ākāśa* appears in its manifold and polysemic interpretations, reflecting Prasad's and Vivekananda's works, as well as theosophical discourse. She adopts the Sanskrit notion of *cittākāśa*

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<sup>323</sup> Among the influences that will be addressed here, she was also decently informed by New Thought, by referring to, for example, the works of Horatio Dresser. For a discussion on her conception of aura sight, *cakra* balancing and the role of the colours involved, see Leland (2016: 159-161).

that Vivekananda in turn had derived from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*; Fletcher translates it as “Knowledge-space” or “spirit-space” (Fletcher 1908: 200, 264).<sup>324</sup> She follows Blavatsky by interpreting *ākāśa* as the “astral light” (*ibid.*: 174), and describes it elsewhere as a “glowing white light” (*ibid.*: 55).<sup>325</sup> With regard to *ākāśa*-as-ether, she clearly depends on Prasad’s interpretation of the ether as fivefold subtle matter with respective qualities adhering to the senses. Her understanding of the breath of life draws on the common trope in theosophical and occult literature.

Adelia Fletcher thus interlaces several topical strands to outline what she calls the “law of rhythmic breath”. In line with Rama Prasad’s translation of the *Śivasvarodaya*, the law of rhythmic breath is the alternate flow of breath that mirrors the cyclical tattvic modification, manifesting itself both in the universe and in the human body. For Fletcher, this is a means to determine health and disease, times of strength and weaknesses, as well as attuning the body-vehicle to its higher soul-purposes (e.g., Fletcher 1908: 17, 170, 349). Like Prasad, she links this “law” to astrology (*ibid.*: 208-217), continuing the correlation of *svara* (in her case the rhythmic breath) and divination (particularly astrology) as already set forth in the *Śivasvarodaya*. She further adopts Vivekananda’s emphasis on training the mind and the will as part of Rājayoga (e.g., *ibid.*: 198-199). Fletcher repeatedly refers to the concept of the human system as a “battery” that can be recharged through breathing, quoting at times almost verbatim from Vivekananda (*ibid.*: 39; cf. Vivekananda 1896: 51). She combines, however, the idea of the rechargeable “human battery” with the restoration of a regular flow of “positive and negative” currents in the nostrils, i.e., by alternate-nostril breathing (e.g., Fletcher 1908: 171, 358-359). This is a consequent integration of the battery metaphor and Prasad’s outline of electric polar currents permeating the terrestrial atmosphere, thus affecting human beings. However, neither Prasad nor Vivekananda declare that the best means for this is alternate-nostril breathing – in fact, Prasad mentions alternate-nostril breathing only once in his *Science of Breath* publications (Prasad 1884: 28) – and it is likely Fletcher’s innovation to combine all these elements.

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<sup>324</sup> She probably conflates here the notion of *cittākāśa* with *cidākāśa*, the semantics of which have been discussed above.

<sup>325</sup> She allegedly quotes from Vivekananda, who describes the yogi as “*en rapport* with the astral light and the universal mind and thus is able to see the whole Kosmos” (Fletcher 1908: 222). It is more likely that this quote is taken from a theosophical source, since Vivekananda never mentioned the astral light in any text, as a search in his *Complete Works* has shown.

Fletcher mentions breathing exercises of three kinds: “*Prāṇāyāma*”, or the “held-breath”, “alternate breathing”, and “deep, rhythmic breathing”. The “held-breath” is alternate-nostril breathing in certain ratios with retention, and differs from the definition of “alternate breathing” only by its sole focus on the held breath. These two techniques are designed to even out and balance deviations of the “natural” rhythmic flow of the breath and help to obviate certain ailments (e.g., Fletcher 1908: 53, 81, 90, 102-103, 177). They can be practised in a sitting or lying position and while standing or walking (e.g., *ibid.*: 102-103), evidencing the influence of physical culture on her system. Once the “natural” state is restored, these so-called corrective exercises and any form of breath manipulation are abandoned (*ibid.*: 348). The aim is “through faithful practice to wont ourselves to deep, rhythmic breathing as the rule” (*ibid.*). It is surprising that nowhere in her work does Fletcher seem to draw directly from Stebbins, although she may have her in mind when she refers to a “New York authority in voice culture” (*ibid.*: 345). She does, however, adopt the notion of “rhythmic breathing” by counting the heartbeat in the ratio 6-3-6-3 (inhale-retain-exhale-retain) (*ibid.*: 347), which, however, probably points at the reception of the work of Atkinson/Ramacharaka, who adopted Stebbins’s basic understanding of rhythmic breathing (chapter 8.2.2). Significantly, Fletcher considers, like Stebbins and Atkinson, the flow and retention of breath in all four phases of the breath – while Prasad and Vivekananda tend to speak of three phases only (inhale-retain-exhale).

Fletcher’s work can indeed be read as an Epilogue to the works of Prasad, Vivekananda, and Stebbins. Not only is it, however, an integration of certain strands of their thought, but it is also a well-structured and enthusiastic plea for the efficacy of alternate-nostril breathing, breath retention, and the overall significance of breath cultivation that stands for itself. In streamlining the complexities of Blavatsky’s, Besant’s, Prasad’s, and Vivekananda’s thoughts, she offers a dense outline of theosophically informed yogic breath cultivation (which is, above all, somewhat more comprehensible than much of the work from which it draws). Moreover, it is likely that she had additional informants regarding yogic breath cultivation, since she advises to practise alternate-nostril breathing in the rhythm of 7 (inhale) and 9 (exhale) that is not described in the written works of Prasad, Vivekananda, or Atkinson/Ramacharaka (Fletcher 1908: 53).<sup>326</sup> Fletcher was furthermore aware of *prāṇāyāma* as part of the

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<sup>326</sup> A possible source for such a rhythm could have been the article entitled “Woman’s Work and World” by the New Thought author Emma Wheeler Wilcox in *The Recorder* of 1903 (Feb 21), in which she describes a “formula” to conquer negative emotions like anger that was taught to her by Vivekananda

daily *sandhyā* rite (*ibid.*: 118). She also has her own opinion about some Sanskrit notions, particularly their spelling and pronunciation. As a source she mentions here “the authority of a Hindu Sanskrit scholar” (*ibid.*: 368) – a person who might also have informed her content-wise. Whatever the exact nature of her additional sources, like the protagonists that entered the stage before her, she created a fine blend of various eclectic ingredients typical of occultistic literature.

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himself in 1893 (Streeter 2020: 27, 44, n. 65). The formula consists of inhaling, retaining, and exhaling for seven counts respectively (*ibid.*: 27).



## PART II

# PIONEERS AND PRACTICES



## 6 THE PRĀṆĀYĀMA GRID:

### CULTURAL SETTINGS OF YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION

Part I of this study has provided a base for conceptualising *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation by discussing the contributions of various contexts. This comprised a discussion of the premodern roots of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*; the notable contributions of the Hindu reformers; and those by representatives of occultism and physical culture. Cosmological and anthropological speculations of Stebbins, Prasad, and Vivekananda were particularly seminal in providing an epistemic framework for yogic breath cultivation. Part II will first be concerned with contextualising the practice of *prāṇāyāma* in given socio-cultural environments (chapter 6) and with the corporeal aspect of the practices and the question as to how they can be classified (chapter 7). As a core aspect of this study, it will then describe how *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation were enacted in the careers and teachings of modern yoga pioneers (chapter 8). By highlighting two case studies, Part II ends with the dissemination of yogic breath cultivation and related concepts within occultism and the arts in the twentieth century (chapter 9).

In this chapter, the socio-cultural contexts of religion and physical culture, and also the appeal to tradition and innovation of modern yoga pioneers provide crucial reference points. To put these cultural factors and trends in perspective, I conceptualise them as arranged in a coordinate system, formed by a horizontal axis between religion and physical culture, and a vertical axis between tradition and innovation. The result is an analytical tool that I term the “*prāṇāyāma* grid”, the details of which will be further expounded below. This chapter also discusses the impact of nationalism, scientism, and media culture/translation which accelerated the dissemination of yogic breath cultivation. I therefore term these aspects “catalysts”. All these categories are derived from previous scholarship (Alter 2004; Hammer 2004; Green 2008; Baier 2009; Newcombe 2009; Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016), but they are tailored here to the topic of yogic breath cultivation. They serve as a kind of compass that suggests how to navigate through the field. Viewed through the grid, these socio-cultural environments constitute the prior context for yogic breath cultivation, but these environments are also *assimilated* into the practices when it comes to determine the motives that lie behind promised outcomes and goals of practices. After all, influential statements in the discourse also affect the bodily practices. In utilising these categories

and thereby extending the theoretical discussion of chapter 2, this chapter aims to add to a multifaceted discussion of *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation. The grid further helps to explain how innovative approaches were integrated into yogic breath cultivation, i.e., modern yoga's entanglement with other disciplines such as hygienic culture and occultism.

## 6.1 *Prāṇāyāma* between Religion, Hygiene, Tradition, and Innovation

The grid suggested here spans between the poles of religion and hygienic culture on the one hand and between tradition and innovation on the other hand. These poles are represented by specific cultural factors and trends and the resulting discursive strategies to which yoga pioneers appealed. Religion and hygienic culture occupy the horizontal axis – that is, a synchronic spectrum – since these poles were often simultaneously enacted by yoga pioneers in the main phase of early modern yoga (figure 8). *Prāṇāyāma* as religious practice is, for example, evidenced in the daily *sandhyā* rite which was, among others, promoted by the Hindu reformer Dayananda Sarasvati (chapter 4.1.2). Often understood as a self-enhancement technique that fosters health and healing as well as mental poise, yogic breath cultivation is, however, also conceived as part of hygienic culture. To denote the spectrum of benefits of yogic breath cultivation, modern yoga pioneers have often explained *prāṇāyāma* in psycho-physical terms. The psycho-physical effect of the practice at times even appears to include religious aspects, when it is, for example, used to describe *prāṇāyāma* as understood by Patañjali (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 8.3). Thus, the axis constituted by religion and hygienic culture represents in fact a continuum, and the simultaneous appeal of modern yoga pioneers to these poles will be further expounded below.



FIGURE 8: *PRĀṆĀYĀMA* GRID, HORIZONTAL AXIS (AUTHOR'S ILLUSTRATION).

It should however be mentioned here that this continuum is also reflected in the multiple ways that individual practitioners approach their practice. Depending on the religious and/or cultural setting the students of *prāṇāyāma* are placed, they will consider breath cultivation as part of religion, hygienic culture, or both. *Prāṇāyāma* may or may not be practised together with *āsana*, relaxation techniques like *śavāsana*, or other movement practices. It may or may not be understood as a practice that leads to higher states of meditation or to soteriological goals. In any case, from this

perspective, breath practice is a personal enterprise, often located in an environment of studying from a teacher, in a group, or part of a daily exercise and/or religious regimen. However, this personal practice is tied into larger socio-cultural environments, as this chapter aims to discuss.

The tradition-innovation axis, then, constitutes a more vertical spectrum, involving a diachronic aspect (figure 9). This spectrum reflects the yoga pioneers' understanding of preserving "tradition" by means of alluding to the historical past of South Asian traditions. Yoga traditions are an actual part of the religious history of South Asia, but they are simultaneously presented in often highly imaginative ways. The tendency within modern yoga to accentuate the continuation of tradition is, in many cases, disjunct with the etic historiography of premodern and (early developments of) modern yoga, thus reaching into the realm of the mythical and the imaginative. As Olav Hammer has noted, the emic appeal to tradition is often a powerful argumentative pattern that enforces the reliability of a given claim or practice, connoting stability and authenticity (Hammer 2004: 23-24, 34).<sup>327</sup> However, in this study I also show how certain "traditional" frameworks of the practices including their hygienic and soteriological goals as well as a particular set of practices (e.g., alternate-nostril breathing and some of the eight *kumbhakas* like *śītalī* and *bhastrīkā*) are maintained.

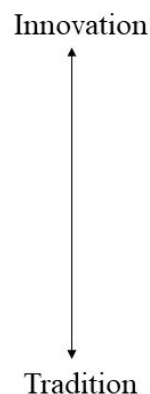


FIGURE 9: *PRĀṆĀYĀMA* GRID, VERTICAL AXIS (AUTHOR'S ILLUSTRATION).

In contrast to invoking the past, innovative trends often aim to be up-to-date through embracing the latest methods of biomedicine and generally have an inkling

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<sup>327</sup> "Thus, 'tradition' does not necessarily denote the existence of an actual chain of historical links back to the premodern past, but also indicates the existence of a discourse which may well serve as a modality of adaptation and change. Both custom and innovation can receive their legitimacy through appeal to tradition" (Hammer 2004: 34).

for what is *en vogue*. Therefore, in many cases, innovative trends reflect the yoga pioneers' understanding of what their students were looking for in changing times. The tension between tradition and innovation concerned all yoga pioneers, and it can be safely said that all of them were innovative in some ways, and none completely ignored what yoga meant as part of the Indian traditions. For example, the Bombay-based gurus had a traditionalistic understanding of *prāṇāyāma*, but tried to explain it in biomedical and scientific terms. What is more, the appeal to tradition and innovation is frequently combined in the work of one and the same author (e.g., invoking Patañjali as an authority while applying scientific empirical methods, as in the case of Kuvalayananda). This results in some of the fractions in the understanding and description of yogic breath cultivation, which could be nevertheless presented as continuity or authenticity within a tradition. However, the appeal to innovation via scientific progress also follows some imaginative trajectories; for example, when Kuvalayananda opted for investigating the workings of *prāṇa*, but in trying to do so, had to rely on the measurability of oxygen and carbon dioxide, because *prāṇa* itself proved to be immaterial and immeasurable (Alter 2004: 91). Although Kuvalayananda was, in this case, in the paradoxical position of “proving nothing” (*ibid.*: 101), his experiments were nevertheless highly influential for the yoga community and informed several subsequent yoga pioneers.

The spectrum between tradition and innovation moreover covers the notion of guru-disciple relationship versus the anonymisation of teachings through easily available print media (Green 2008: 287) as well as the integration of physical culture and hygienic practices (Alter 2004; Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016). But hygienic culture itself had an appeal to religion, and it was partly merged with certain strands of nineteenth-century occultism (Baier 2009: 451-497; Ruyter 1999: 89-101; Singleton 2010: 143-162). The occult understanding of breath as a vitalistic principle, for example, is found in certain religious/occult practices within Euro-American Delsartism and gymnastics. As mentioned above, the poles are therefore understood to represent a spectrum that could easily be traversed by modern yoga pioneers and practitioners. In other words, the grid allows for various combinations within two distinct sets of features, and helps to analyse these combinations.

In this chapter, I argue that through the intersection of the two axes analysed above four quadrants are formed that sufficiently describe yogic breath cultivation (figure 10). By combining “religion” and “tradition”, quadrant A encompasses *prāṇāyāma* as described in Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga and in Advaita-related

movements (the latter implies the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*). Quadrant A also includes *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite as promoted by Dayananda Sarasvati and others (chapter 4.1.2). As for quadrant B, it can be described as comprising “hygienic culture” in South Asian traditions. As far as *prāṇāyāma* in traditional hygienic contexts is concerned, these practices are mainly found within Haṭhayoga and within ritual settings that incorporate *prāṇāyāma* next to certain cleansing actions and diet regulations. The Haṭhayogic practices that are directly breath-related include, for example, alternate-nostril breathing for purifying the *nāḍīs*, *kapālabhāti* as one of the six cleansing actions (*ṣaṭkarma*), and some of the eight *kumbhakas* that are prescribed to cure certain ailments. Such hygienic concerns in Haṭhayoga also encompass the regulation of semen, prescriptions of right diet, clothing, and the ideal place of practice, and they are often viewed as preliminaries for achieving higher states of yoga. All the practices of these religious and hygienic frameworks that lie in quadrant A and B are incorporated in texts that describe yogic breath cultivation (chapter 8).

Moving to the upper half of the grid, in quadrant C, we find concepts and practices of Euro-American hygienic culture that have informed yogic breath cultivation. These are, for example, practices like deep breathing (often to involve the idea of a threefold division of breath-space), rhythmic breathing, and breath cultivation in standing positions or while walking (e.g., chapter 8.2; chapter 8.3.2). These forms of breath cultivation are often combined with movements of limbs and/or transitioning between poses. The innovation factor here also lies in integrating Euro-American biomedicine, which was utilised by both physical culturists as well as yoga pioneers to improve training systems (e.g., chapter 8.3). Finally, quadrant D represents the influence of nineteenth-century occultism on yoga. Here we find practices like rhythmic breathing and the idea of drawing up and storing reproductive energy in the solar plexus as well as the concept of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent (chapter 8.1.1; chapter 8.2.2). These are contexts that most vigorously introduced the idea of reconciling science and religion, and these practices and ideas have been crucially shaped by the influence that occult organisations like the Theosophical Society and the H. B. o. L. had (chapter 4.2.2.; chapter 4.3; chapter 5.3; chapter 6.3).

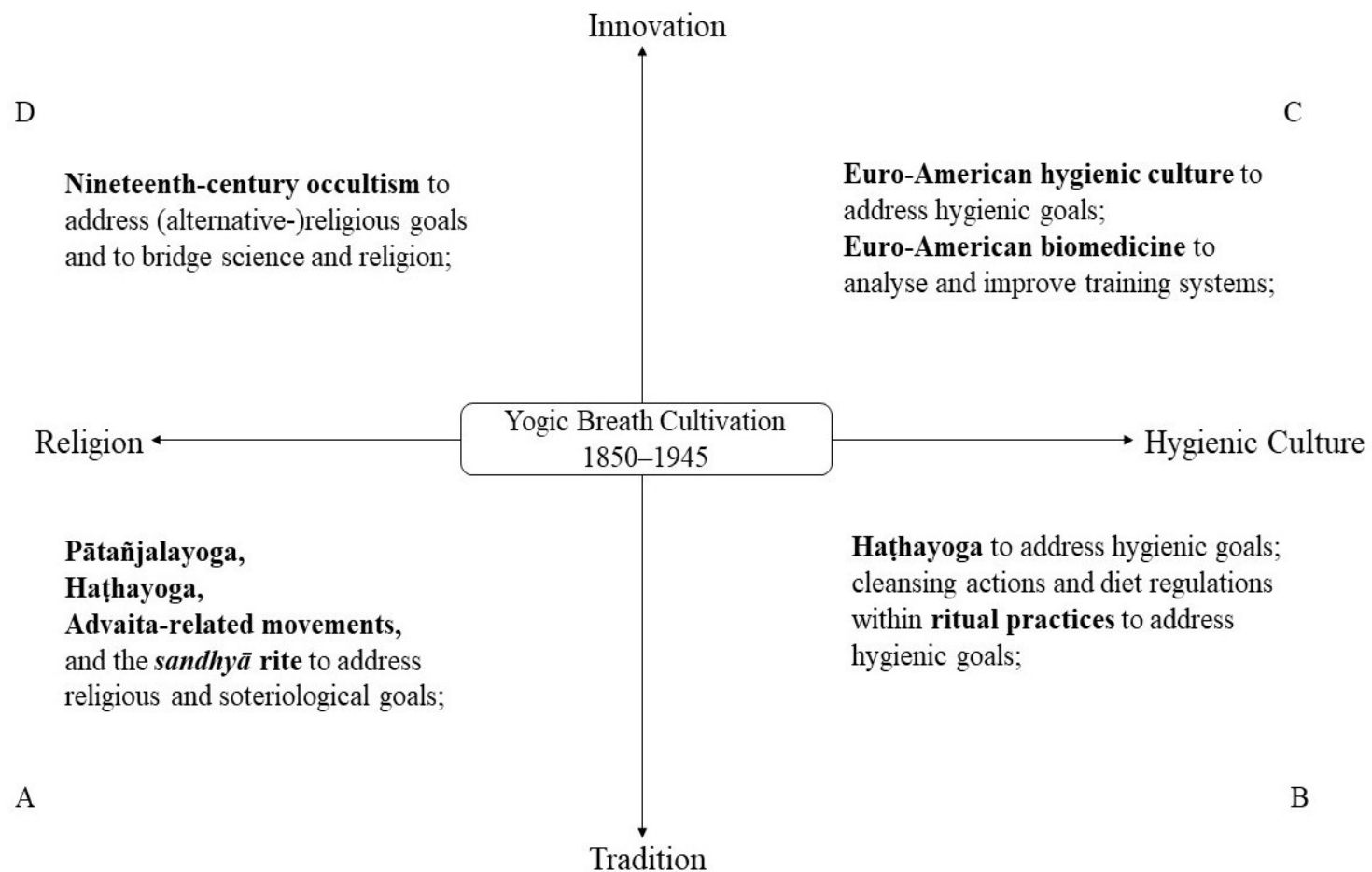


FIGURE 10: *PRĀṆĀYĀMA* GRID: FOUR QUADRANTS TO DEFINE YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION (AUTHOR'S ILLUSTRATION).



If we were to locate the work of yoga pioneers within the grid, it is reasonable to investigate which concepts and practices they adopted in their texts and talks. In other words, what should be assessed is not a certain degree of a generalised appeal to, for example, tradition or innovation in their work, but to show where various statements in their work can be located. For example, Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga* mostly engages quadrants A and D, because he interprets *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* against the backdrop of Pātañjalayoga and Advaita-related movements (A), but also weaves occult thought into it (D); Vivekananda only slightly touches on quadrant C, because he was acquainted with Delsartism-styled practices (chapter 5.4.4; chapter 8.1.1). The most salient areas that are addressed by Kuvalayananda are Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga as “spiritual culture” (A), Haṭhayoga and some aspects of Euro-American hygienic culture as “physical culture” (B, C), and his investigation of *prāṇāyāma* in the labs (C). Yogendra follows similar trajectories (for both, see chapter 8.3). Sivananda utilises all four quadrants to explain *prāṇāyāma*. He draws on translations of several premodern texts (A, B), Euro-American hygienic literature (C), occult texts (D), and theosophical translations (A, D). While I will not plot the work of every yoga pioneer here, this scheme is worth keeping in mind when we discuss the contributions of various yoga pioneers in chapter 8.

Related to the idea of the grid, I will also introduce a category of “catalysts” that have tended to accelerate certain developments. These are nationalism, the impact of biomedicine and science discourses, and media culture/translation (Alter 2004; Green 2008; Partridge 2020). In many cases, these catalysts amplify the factor of innovation, but sometimes also reinforce the appeal to tradition. Translations, for example, accelerated the distribution of arcane knowledge and functioned as a bridge between premodern and modern practices. Several yoga pioneers relied on translations of Sanskrit texts, thereby giving their teachings a traditional feel. In addition, it should be noted that some related notions, particularly “science”, are subject to a rather broad interpretive framework, and that modern yoga discourses and adjacent ones tend to stretch these notions.<sup>328</sup> Moreover, these catalysts are not isolated categories, but are mutually dependent. For example, the discourse of yoga-as-science emerged as part of a discursive battle between British colonialists and South Asian nationalists, in which yoga was portrayed as the older and better version of science than Western approaches.

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<sup>328</sup> Due to the semantic flexibility of the term science in these discourses, it could be relevant to always use quotation marks for the term; instead, the reader is asked to keep in mind that the notion of science is a stretchy term in these discourses. Alternatively, I also speak of “science discourse” that includes scholarly, popular, and occult readings of science.

The factor of translation also reinforced and reflected the appeal to science: as Alter has noted, a variety of Sanskrit terms like *vidyā*, *viññāna*, and, I would add, also *śāstra*,<sup>329</sup> have been translated as “science” (*ibid.*: 42-43). These examples are notable, considering the production of knowledge-power relations in these discourses. As Foucault has pointed out, one of the main “external” forces to direct and control a discourse is the appeal to science (chapter 2.6.1), which is also apparent here.

To recapitulate, yoga pioneers taught and wrote about yogic breath cultivation in light of their appeal to religion, hygienic culture, tradition, innovation, nationalism, and science. These categories are associated with powerful discursive strategies that were utilised by modern yoga pioneers, as will be further outlined below. Additionally, they both drew on and disseminated their teachings via a contemporaneously expanding media culture, amplifying the impact of their teachings on a transnational level. This was possibly only through their reliance on the English language as their main medium of communication. The remainder of this chapter will delve into the discursive relations between the cultural factors and trends presented within the grid and the catalysts that have been instrumental in the reinvention of yogic breath cultivation.

## 6.2 Catalyst I: Nationalism – The Politics of Theorising *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma*

In discussing the cultural and religious capital of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* it is useful to employ a wide lens to capture the broader connotations of breath practice. We have already briefly touched on the implications of turn-of-the-century physical culture as a movement often interlaced with the idea of nationhood and nationalism in chapter 4.4. Though a global movement, physical culture was extensively intertwined with the building of national pride, militaristic discipline, and eugenics. One could argue that from 1880 onwards, at the latest, “muscle building” was “nation building”. In terms of discourses on breath, on the physical plane this was linked to an expansion of the chest, representing ideal posture in military settings (Goldberg 2016: 111). Considering breath as a vitalistic or “energetic” phenomenon, notions of breath cultivation were moreover built, as in Vivekananda’s case, upon discourses of omnipotent power and

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<sup>329</sup> See, for example, the translation of *śāstra* as “science” in the introduction by Tukaram Tatya to the theosophical translation of the *Hathapradīpikā* (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: viii). The earliest reference to “yoga *vidyā*” as science I have found in the translation of the autobiography of Dayananda Sarasvati (on this figure, see below) in the October 1879 issue (which is the very first one) of *The Theosophist*.

multilateral enhancement of “gross” and “subtle” force that comprised both the physical and the mental.

Additionally, reforming Hinduism in the nineteenth century became an enterprise of anticolonial, and hence political, ambitions. Chapter 4.1 has discussed the Hindu reform movements Arya and Brahmo Samaj, and hinted at their new formulations of nationhood. As has been shown, especially the Brahmos were at the forefront of the development of Hinduism as a superior and “scientific” religion. Such superiority is, of course, only achieved in comparison with other religions or cultures, or in this case, even nations. Along these lines, nationalism decidedly informed the reinterpretation of Hinduism. For example, the renaming of the “national fair”, which became the first “Hindu Melā” in 1867, led to an interchangeability of attributes like “Hindu” and “national” (Heehs 1997: 118). Remembering Hinduism as a Vedic uniform religion, as in Dayananda’s *Satyarth Prakash*, with its superior incantations, and as in several examples found in the Brahmo Samaj, was one of the most powerful weapons against the perceived grinding force of British colonialism.

In this milieu, the Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–1894) also fabricated a strong tie between “religion” (*dharma*) and Hindu nationalism. He was one of the most prominent figures of Bengali religious nationalism to also influence the later Vivekananda (Hees 1997: 118). In his *Dharmatattva* (“Principles of Religion”, 1888), Chatterjee links the spiritual to the national and affirms patriotism to be “the highest *dharma* other than absolute devotion (*bhakti*) to God” (*ibid.*). Nationalism implied the call for freedom from the British, which necessitated home rule (*svarāj*). Among the participants of religious-nationalist discourses, nationalism acquired even “supermundane significance” (*ibid.*: 121), due to the spiritual superiority of India and the inherent spiritual nature of its people. What may lie at the root here was the common assumption that the Indian or “Aryan race” was inherently spiritual in nature (*ibid.*: 119).<sup>330</sup> In any case, India’s prescribed mission was to teach the world, and it could teach the world best when it was free (*ibid.*: 121).

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<sup>330</sup> As part of this complex political and socio-cultural situation, nationalism surfaced adjacent discourses on race and patriotism, resulting in a (at best) questionable construct of Arya-hood (*ārya*, in Sanskrit literally meaning “noble”, deriving the meaning of “the noble ones” as the “Indian people”). Furthermore, it could be directly linked to the remembrance of the Vedic teachings mediated by the same Aryans, and their alleged world rule in a former Golden Age (Sharma 2015: 31-32). Arya-hood was propagated by nationalists in their quest for freedom and home rule, by Brahmins in their socio-religious pride, and by theosophists in their call for a universal brotherhood in the period under study. For a detailed discussion of the history of Indian Arya-hood, see Bryant (2001: 267-298).

In the context of nationalism, even the notions of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* became forces powering upheavals in Indian politics. Thus, in modern yoga, *prāṇa* became a term heavily charged with various forms of occult, esoteric, and religious significance, and it is often linked to the superiority of a “Hindu” heritage over that of the West. One of the factors supporting the notion of Hindu superiority was a European orientalist perception of the East in general and India in particular. India was the bright star of a centuries-long fascination with “the spiritual East” (exemplified in the phrase “*ex oriente lux*”), which was additionally magnified by a romantic orientalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (King 1999: 124-135; Partridge 2020). Notions of *prāṇa*- and *prāṇāyāma*-induced power were thus intimately related with concepts of a “reversed orientalism” of the oriental other (e.g., Baumann 2004). In the case of modern yoga discourses, the pioneers’ reversed orientalism utilised the fascination with and perception of a “spiritually highly developed East” (orientalism), thereby creating a now “spiritually superior India” (reversed orientalism).

As has been noted, the “nation” that was India in colonial times was a complex conglomerate of various ethnical and religious influences. The most relevant of these included the Indian Hindu and the Indian Muslim, as well as the British Hindus and Muslims. The following analysis, which considers negotiations within this “polemic triangle” (Green 2008: 295) is indebted to Nile Green’s remarkable study *Breathing in India, c. 1890*. His work has set the foundations for a discussion of the “indigenisation of physical culture” (*ibid.*: 285) in opposition to imperial hegemony. In one of the few scholarly works mapping breathing and meditation techniques, Green highlights aspects of Hindu reform as “new ways of being” (*ibid.*), as opposed to a mere intellectual doctrinal dispute along the lines of reformulating Hinduism. In doing so, he points at demarcations and polemic relations between the above mentioned ethnic and religious parties and their respective receptions of yogic practices.

On the one hand, political lines of identity demarcation ran along the divisions between oriental discourses and practices versus those of the hegemonic West. The British not only imported technologies, philosophies, and sets of socio-cultural behaviour, but also forms of physical culture like cricket, bodybuilding, and gymnastics (*ibid.*: 285). On the other hand, demarcations among the non-British resulted into the now frequent distinctions between the yogi and the fakir, or between Hindu and Islamic notions of bodily conditioning and soteriological becoming.<sup>331</sup> By

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<sup>331</sup> However, as briefly treated below, there were also texts in the late-colonial period that accentuated similarities between Islamic and yogic traditions, e.g., Basu (2004 [1887]: xlvii-xlix).

analysing vernacular meditation manuals, Green has shown that so-called Islamic and Hindu practices were rather intermingled before the rise of such identity demarcations.<sup>332</sup> As a result of this emerging “Hindu” agenda, yogic practices were increasingly connoted with Sanskrit language, and the practice of the yogi and the fakir were often understood to be substantially distinct. By creating an exclusive Hindu yogic tradition, Vivekananda and subsequent interpreters eliminate the Islamic contributions, thereby falling short of reference and recognition. Additionally, the living tradition of cross-culturally grown practices of meditation and breath control and their mutual ecumenical contribution to India’s premodern pluralistic society is marginalised in favour of a neo-classical and Sanskritic tradition.

Vivekananda is indeed a case in point for analysing yogic breath cultivation in its political implications. His almost ubiquitous correlation of *prāṇa* and power in *Rāja Yoga* has been subsequently played out in several vernacular yoga and Sufi meditation manuals (Green 2008: 303-306). This formed an alliance of *prāṇa*-generated Hindu national self-confidence. It is significant that modern yoga pioneers like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Kuvalayananda influenced each other, by direct or text-based acquaintance, in perceiving nationalism as their shared political habitat.<sup>333</sup> In their nationalist agenda, yoga represents the “indigenous” homegrown potential for India to attain to its original and legendary heights, and, as could be argued with Vivekananda, *prāṇa* is its accelerating “turbo” agent. Although other Indian pioneers discussed in this thesis, such as Yogananda and Yogendra, were not directly engaged in political spheres, they also acquired the inflationary, often *prāṇa*-induced, notion of an Indian-yogic superpower-to-attain-superiority, as already promoted by the early Hindu reformers. All these pioneers shaped modern yoga transnationally either by travelling outside South Asia to spread the yoga gospel (as encouraged already by Swami Dayananda) or by propelling transnational anglophone discourse and exchange through journals and letters.

As evidenced here, and as noted by Peter van de Veer, yoga increasingly became a “national symbol of true Indianness” (van de Veer 2007: 321). Indeed, in most cases,

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<sup>332</sup> In considering vernacular discourse, Green also examines Urdu and Hindi equivalents of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* (an endeavour which is beyond the scope of this study). These are *dam*, *habs-e-dam*, meaning “breathing” and “breath control” in Urdu; and *sans*, or *shwans*, meaning “breathing” or “breath” in Hindi (Green 2008: 303-304). For a further discussion of the cross-pollination between yogic and Islamic ideas, see also Ernst (2005; 2012).

<sup>333</sup> For further discussions on Aurobindo’s nationalism see Green (2008) and Hechs (1997). For a transition from Kuvalayananda’s nationalism to transnationalism as well as nationalism in modern yoga in general, see Alter (2004: 73-108). A detailed discussion of Vivekananda’s political agenda and influence is given by Sharma (2015: 84-146, 2013).

nationalism was the additional force that pushed the yogis onto the transnational stage to proclaim the superiority of the new national hero – the yogi who had mastered *prāṇa*. An early example of this Hindu hero is, again, Dayananda, who was said to have had a specific radiance gained from his celibacy and penance (Dobe 2011: 97). Given that Vivekananda featured *prāṇāyāma* in the context of Rājayoga as a unique means of attaining power, modern yoga's kick-off was theorising *prāṇa* as an omnipotent power, and *prāṇāyāma* practice as part of the royal path to gain and utilise it. Thus, “*prāṇa*-building” was “nation-building”. The mastering of *prāṇa* was on some discursive levels linked to ideas of nationhood, and was an emblem for the yogi's superiority over the West.

### 6.3 Catalyst II: Science Discourse – *Prāṇāyāma* in Biomedical Terms and Occult Interpretations of Science

When a religious method recommends itself as “scientific”, it can be certain of its public in the West. Yoga fulfils this expectation.

C. G. Jung: “Yoga and the West” (1958 [1936]: 532).

In light of modern yoga's reversed orientalism, India's mission was to reach out to the world, imparting supreme knowledge to the “spiritually inferior West”. Meera Nanda pointedly termed this theme India's “*jagat-guru* (world-guru) complex” (Nanda 2010: 286). To fulfil this mission, modern yogis had to keep up with science and its hegemonial status as a system of superior knowledge. The appeal to science, however, had a significant prehistory in nineteenth-century occult thought, because, for its exponents, the mingling of science and religion was patent. Occultism was developed in frameworks that spanned science and religion, partly as a countermovement to Christian worldviews that were on the wane since they began to be out-competed by theories of evolution and doctrines of materialistic science (Hammer 2004: 501; Bergunder 2016). Moreover, as noted above, leaders of the Brahmo Samaj also propagated Hindu religion as a universal or even superior form of religion because it was “scientific” (De Michelis 2004: 56-73). The Brahmos, the theosophists, and subsequently the modern yogis utilised the semantic flexibility of the term “science”. This included the progress and techniques of physics, biomedicine, and psychology, as promoted mainly by Western scientists, and was aligned with reviving the age-old yoga tradition as a form of superior science, understood, for example, as “psychology”.

As Olav Hammer has noted, most of the science discourses used in the context of alternative religion – and this also holds true for modern yoga – are appropriated as a discursive strategy that he has termed scientism (Hammer 2004). To enforce religious claims and their verifiability, scientism employs a language that includes scientific terms, references, and stylistic features to the point of integrating mathematical equations and formulae (Hammer 2004: 206). Additionally, as Joseph Alter has observed, the meaning of “science” in the nineteenth century differed significantly from today’s understanding of science and applied different forms of knowledge production (Alter 2004: 29-30). For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) had established the notion of an “objective truth of the world” (Stuckrad 2014: 4), but already at the beginning of the twentieth century it had been acknowledged that (even) natural sciences do not produce objective meaning but are dependent on “thought styles” and “thought collectives” of a given era (Fleck 1979 [1935]). Moreover, during the twentieth century hegemonial claims of science have, on the one hand, been deconstructed by the social sciences (Stuckrad 2014: 7), while on the other the quantifiability of data through technological advancements and digitalisation is a powerful motor to further propel hegemonies of science. While this discussion cannot be extended here, it is generally helpful to distinguish between scholarly and popular approaches to science, and most of the science discourse within modern yoga appropriates the latter. Alter concludes that science discourses within yoga in the nineteenth century adopted “a scaled-down, fragmented image of science that is much more realistic and true to the world of human experience” (Alter 2004: 30). He probably points here at the “empiricism” that yoga provides on an experiential level (as highlighted by Vivekananda and the likes) as the lowest common denominator for what could be subsumed under the umbrella “science”. This was an attempt to partake in a discursive struggle for dominance. In brief, although the discourses in focus appealed to science, their appeal mostly acted as a discursive strategy to include “science” as part of a modernist reinterpretation of yoga.

Zooming in on modern yoga, the earliest attempt to explain yoga in contemporaneous Western biomedical and scientific terms in South Asian contexts was probably made by N. C. Paul in 1851.<sup>334</sup> In his *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* (first published as early as 1851, the second edition appeared in 1882), the Bengali physician claims that the reduction of “carbon acid” produced during exhalation is the

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<sup>334</sup> N. C. Paul is also known as Nobin Chander Paul in Anglicised Bengali, or Navīn Candra Pāl in Hindi. For a discussion of his work in theosophical contexts, see also chapter 4.3.3.

central aim of the yogi, to which all aspects of his life-style contribute: the habitat, the diet, the exercises including various forms of *prāṇāyāma* pursue the achievement of higher yogic states like *samādhi*. In doing so, he relies on a concept and a jargon that could not have been developed without an understanding of modern chemistry and physiology. This is remarkable, since, in Haṭhayoga, *prāṇāyāma* was earlier read against the backdrop of yogic subtle physiology, emphasising the role of the *nāḍīs* for the efficacy of *prāṇāyāma* (Alter 2005: 123). Paul understands *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* (for him, all advancements of *prāṇāyāma*) as “self-trance” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 14).<sup>335</sup> He further equates *samādhi* and yoga in general with “human hybernation” (*ibid.*: iv). For Paul, hibernation is a prerequisite for yogis to survive being buried alive for days. While buried, yogis inserted the tongue into the cavity above the palate (*khecarīmudrā*) and suppressed the breath and vital functions to a great extent. Paul defines yoga, and thereby its essential tool *prāṇāyāma*, as “suspending the circulation and respiration” (*ibid.*: 28).<sup>336</sup> Although Paul does not seem to connote a metaphysical principle with *prāṇa* itself, but defines *prāṇa* as the out-breath, he nevertheless holds that *prāṇāyāma* induces *siddhis* including the overcoming of death (*ibid.*: 9). Paul further reports that *prāṇāyāma* is the “daily practice of the Brahman mendicants who aspire to human hybernation or Yoga” (*ibid.*), thereby likely pointing at *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite.<sup>337</sup>

The Bengali physician grounds parts of his theory of hibernation and the application of biomedical terminology, though inexplicitly, on *Observations on Trance: Or Human Hybernation* (1850) by the Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795–1860) (Baier 2009: 249). This work lists various case studies of yogis or “fakirs” buried alive in India. Already Braid called this process “human hybernation” induced by certain states of “trance”. Both physicians attempt to explain yogic techniques in

<sup>335</sup> In inexplicitly following premodern texts like the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 94–95 and others (cf. Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 287), for Paul all higher states of yoga are defined by the exact *duration* of breath retention. For example, breath retention in *pratyāhāra* is said to be twice as long as in *prāṇāyāma* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 14).

<sup>336</sup> Strictly speaking, Paul refers only indirectly to *prāṇāyāma* as a technique to suspend circulation and respiration. Offering a broader definition, he avers that “by yoga I understand the art of suspending the circulation and respiration” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 28) and that *samādhi* is “the total suspension of the functions of respiration and circulation, but not the extinction of those functions” (*ibid.*: 49). However, since in Paul’s system, the “suppression of respiratory movements” points at *prāṇāyāma* as well as all further stages of Pātañjalayoga, I argue that this “medical” definition of yoga and *samādhi* as *pars pro toto* also defines *prāṇāyāma*.

<sup>337</sup> Dayananda Sarasvati described the *sandhyā* rite in association with the householder’s daily fire ritual (*agnihotra*) (Baier 2009: 312). However, Kane (1941: 313–314) explains that *sandhyā* was also prescribed by several texts (e.g., *Baudhāyana-Gr̥hyasūtra* 2.4.1) for the non-householder. Additionally, the sixth chapter of the c. seventh-century *Bṛhadhyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti* integrates the *sandhyā* rite into yoga practice, which probably also addressed ascetics.



biomedical terms and to study yogic phenomena with positivistic accuracy. However, Paul correlated the phenomenon of “suspending circulation and respiration” more directly with yoga practice and *prāṇāyāma* than Braid. Braid relied on second-hand accounts about these yogis observed and documented by physicians in India and only speaks about the “fakirs” and their “hybernation” in general terms. In contrast, Paul claims to have been an eyewitness of the case documented in Calcutta (*ibid.*: iv). As for the scientific aspects, Paul’s documentation includes data on the nutritional values of milk, rice, and wheat, and on the carbon acid of exhaled air during normal respiration and *prāṇāyāma* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 9-11, 22). Without giving the exact source, he quotes, regarding the latter, from “Vierordt” (*ibid.*: 9). Most likely, his source is Karl von Vierordt’s *Physiologie des Athmens: Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ausscheidung der Kohlensäure* [“Physiology of Respiration: With Special Remarks on the Expulsion of Carbon Acid”] (1845), which talks about the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> in self-experiments and in phenomena of hibernation. Braid is also aware of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction during hibernation, but does not cite Vierordt.

To shed some further light on James Braid it should be noted that he was the founder of a technique that became known as “hypnosis”, which was developed out of his practice of mesmerism. Originally interested in mesmerism, Braid rejected the existence of the magnetic fluidum, and he tried to explain magnetic phenomena in terms of physiology and psychology (Braid 1850: vi; Goodrick-Clarke 2008: 184). In the detailed description of yogis buried alive, Braid attempts to underscore the efficacy of his own method of hypnosis. In his technique, the patient was to stare on a small bright object held above their eyes inducing “a fixed stare, absolute repose of the body, fixed attention, and suppressed respiration, concomitant with that fixity of attention” (Braid 1843: 19). According to Braid, the phenomena that appeared during yogic hibernation were similar to the symptoms that occurred during “trance” induced by his technique, namely a scarcely perceptible pulse and breathing rate (Braid 1850: 7-8, 49-50). The state of “trance” into which yogis and Braid’s patients were reported to fall was also confirmed by Paul. He explains that “the Yogis are recommended to fix their sight on the tip of the nose or upon the space between the eye-brows. These peculiar turns of the axes of vision suspend the respiratory movements and generally produce hypnotism” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 4).<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> For an interpretation of Paul’s involvement in mesmerism and proto-medical science, see also De Michelis (2004: 136-137).

Although Paul copied most of Braid's reasoning about yogic techniques, he does not refer to Braid's theories as his direct model. Nor did he explicitly acknowledge others influencing his study (the only exception being Vierordt). But Paul certainly encountered yoga through various sources. First, the Bengali surgeon is said to have learnt about yoga practice through a British informant, a certain Captain Seymour in search of yoga (Neff 1937: 94-95; Singleton 2010: 52-53), but he also had extensive textual knowledge of yogic practice and had studied it for over thirty years (Neff 1937: 94). Furthermore, it can be assumed that, as a Bengali native interested in yoga, he was at least basically familiar with ritualistic *prāṇāyāma* practice, which was thoroughly disseminated and well-documented in Bengal at that time (Belnos 2002 [1851]). Indeed, the Bengali physician was able to describe a variety of yogic techniques in much greater detail than Braid. Paul remains loyal to the yoga traditions, correlating his theories with Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga, and the concept of Rājayoga. With some precaution, it may be held that Paul's detailed description of various forms of *prāṇāyāma* practice, for example, the eight *kumbhakas* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 32-41), constitute the first of its kind in English. However, the *Treatise* is not written in the style of later turn-of-the-century yoga manuals since its overall appearance is that of a scientific study – and the advanced practices described would have been next to impossible to perform by merely following these descriptions. Put simply, whereas Braid contributed to the medical view on yogic hibernation, his descriptions of the same are not as detailed and specific as Paul's and not directly influential for the subsequent development of yogic breath cultivation – in contrast to Paul's work.

Paul can be seen as one of the earliest exponents of a science-religion debate within modern yoga. For all his allusions to scientific discourse, it is notable that, in his *Treatise*, he nowhere utilised the term “science”. Explicit mentions of science in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, however, gain momentum after Paul. Subsequently, various occultists and exponents of early modern yoga explicitly coupled discourses of *prāṇāyāma* with “science”, or even with the “occult sciences”,<sup>339</sup> most often

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<sup>339</sup> The term “occult sciences” has its roots in the sixteenth century and was mentioned next to concepts of an *occulta philosophia* (Stuckrad 2014: 56; Hanegraaff 2013a: 80-81). By the nineteenth century, the occult sciences are often described as a triad formed by astrology, alchemy, and magic which tended to be opposed to positivistic science (*ibid.*: 84). This juxtaposition does, however, not mean that the “occult sciences” had not contributed to the emergence of what we call “science” today, as the history of science and esoteric currents shows (*ibid.*: 91). Hanegraaff states (flanked by the opinion of other scholars like William Newman and Lawrence Principe) that each of the disciplines (i.e., astrology, alchemy, and magic) “has been deeply and centrally concerned with rational models of causality and empirical study of the natural world” (*ibid.*). At the same time, it should be also noted that the unifying tendency of the term “occult science” to subsume these three disciplines under one term also implied a deeply *religious* reading of these disciplines (*ibid.*: 92-93). To return to the debate in the nineteenth-century, it is

encapsulated in the phrase “the science of breath”. This phrase was likely coined by the theosophist Rama Prasad in his influential *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884) (chapter 5.3). This intricate study of the breath flowing alternately in the nostrils (*svara*) which was used for prognostication was a “science of breath”, according to Prasad. Another theosophist who contributed to the discourse of yoga-as-science was Sris Chandra Vasu who applied Paul’s proto-biomedical definition of *prāṇāyāma* (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlv).<sup>340</sup> But coupling yogic tradition with a scientific or at least scientific approach gained currency, and not only due to the text’s reception by the theosophists. The analysis provided above about the interdependence of occultism and science discourses can be applied to Vivekananda’s seminal outline of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in *Rāja Yoga* (chapter 5.4; chapter 8.1.1). In his indebtedness to occult thought, Vivekananda retained the programme of the theosophists and the Brahmos of a “scientific” yoga, superior to any other science, because it had its foundation in two invincible pillars merged in *one* — the age-old yoga tradition, which ultimately *was* science. Traces of Paul’s work can also be found in the scientific pamphlets of second-generation yogis like Swami Kuvalayananda and Sri Yogendra. The “cold-blooded and hybernating philosophers of the East” (Paul 1882 [1851]: iv) and their techniques remained the object of scientific study throughout the twentieth century.<sup>341</sup>

#### 6.4 Catalyst III: Media Culture and the Agency of Translation – Seminal Yoga Texts To Mediate *Prāṇāyāma*

As chapter 4.3 has shown, part of theosophy’s programme was to compare – and therefore translate – various philosophical and metaphysical ideas derived from different languages and cultures.<sup>342</sup> This becomes especially evident when it comes to translating yogic and tantric texts from Sanskrit to English. In engaging with this task, editors and translators were the neurotransmitters of the field – not only did they

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noteworthy that, in 1880, the Bengali theosophist Barada Kanta Majumdar praised the yogis’ ancient wisdom, i.e., their “occult sciences”, which allegedly “are based upon natural laws and forces and are the result of investigation and experiment” (Majumdar as quoted in Strube 2021a: 140). This is reverberated by Blavatsky, stating that the occult sciences were “*based on the true knowledge of nature*”, which was juxtaposed with “*superstitious beliefs based on blind faith and authority*” (Blavatsky 1889: 48, her emphasis), the latter being, in her opinion, typical for Christianity (Bergunder 2016: 119).

<sup>340</sup> For more on Vasu, see below.

<sup>341</sup> For further details on the reception history of Paul’s text, including its controversies, see Singleton (2010: 52-53).

<sup>342</sup> On the notion of translation within theosophy, see the scholarship of Malin Fitger (2020) and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay (forthcoming).

translate Sanskrit texts, but in doing so they seeded various cultural networks with theosophical convictions. Most of these translations were paid for by the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund. The flip side of funding translations was, as Christopher Partridge has observed, that the Theosophical Society – more specifically, its Western leading members – attempted to “own the core metaphysical ideas of the Orient” (Partridge 2020: 16). The deal also implied that these translations often directly cited Blavatsky’s texts or other publications in *The Theosophist*, thereby explicitly disseminating theosophical teachings. However, these interpolations of theosophical thought prompted some readers to turn to sources or translations that were conceived as “purer” than the theosophical ones. Nevertheless, the theosophical translations raised the discursive power of South Asian translators, because with regard to yoga texts, these were indeed the only translations available at that time. In following Bourdieu, it can be argued that the agency of translation was a form of cultural capital that produced social distinction for the translators within a field.

Indeed, in a field where knowledge was enshrined in Sanskrit, these South Asian translators gained tremendous agency through their language skills. As is not uncommon in the process of translation, English words found for Sanskrit terms at times reflected the translator’s interpretation – but here, they were often charged with occult connotations. One example is the translation of yoga as “concentration” in the first English rendering of the *Yogasūtra* by James R. Ballantyne and Govind Shastri Deva from 1852/53, which was reproduced and edited by the theosophist Tukaram Tatya in 1882 (chapter 4.3.1).<sup>343</sup> The term “concentration” was applied by the aforementioned James Braid to denote a state of “fixed attention” during hypnosis (Baier 2009: 247). Baier has observed that the term entered the history of meditation and modern yoga with the translation of Ballantyne and Deva, and was so influential that “concentration” and “yoga” became almost synonymous thereafter (*ibid.*). Another example is the translation of *ākāśa* in a widely acknowledged Sanskrit dictionary by the Pune-based Vaman Shivaram Apte (1858–1892). In line with a theosophical interpretation of the concept, he translated *ākāśa* as “ether”, but more specifically as the “subtle and ethereal fluid pervading the whole universe” (Apte 1890: 221). This translation by Apte shows the dissemination of an occult-scientific concept linked to ether speculations of that time (chapter 5.1). It could be argued that the authoritative

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<sup>343</sup> Considering various “classical” texts on yoga in this section, early translations of the *Yogasūtra* like the one edited by Tatya (1885 [1882]) could be included, which is however beyond the scope of this study. For discussions on commentaries on and translations of the *Yogasūtra* in the modern period see, De Michelis (2004: 236-247), Baier (2009: 359-360), Singleton (2008), and White (2014).

translation that a dictionary usually offers accelerated the dissemination of an occult-scientific reading of *ākāśa*.

Whoever gained cultural capital from the theosophical translation project, the theosophical translations also shaped the conceptual landscape of modern yoga. When theosophy was in its early phase and at the peak of its innovative power and influence, three main texts were established as a “classical triad” of Haṭhayoga: the fifteenth-century *Śivasamhitā*, the fifteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and the eighteenth-century *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, all translated by South Asian theosophists on behalf of the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund before 1900. One of the major players here was Sris Candra Vasu, who translated the *Śivasamhitā* as early as 1884 and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* in 1895. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* of Svātmārāma was translated by the South Indian T. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and edited by Tukaram Tatya in 1893. This chapter will not go into the details of specific wording in these translations. Instead, it elaborates on some aspects regarding *prāṇāyāma* that have been purported alongside the translations in introductions and commentaries thereon. The influential Sris Chandra Vasu is treated here as the main example of “agents of translation”, followed by Tukaram Tatya and Srinivasa Iyengar and their collaborative project of translating the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

The scholar-translator Sris Chandra Vasu (Bengali: Śrīś Candra Basu, 1861–1918) was a Bengali expatriate growing up in Lahore.<sup>344</sup> There, he came in contact with theosophy and with some of its defining figures of the early phase, Blavatsky, Olcott, Dayananda, the publisher R. C. Bary, and a South Indian yogi associated with the Theosophical Society, Sabhapati Swami (c. 1828–1923/4).<sup>345</sup> In his childhood he indulged in tantrism, which was also practised by his father, and he also learnt from several other traditions like Christianity and Islam. After graduating from the Government College of Lahore in 1881, he moved to Meerut, where he occupied a position as a lawyer and started to collaborate with the theosophist Rama Prasad. As one of his last translation projects, Sris Chandra Vasu and his brother Baman Das Basu (1867–1932) worked with Prasad on a translation of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* that resulted in Prasad’s *Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras: With Commentary of Vyāsa and the Gloss of Vāchaspati Miśra* (1912).

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<sup>344</sup> This paragraph is based on Cantú (forthcoming-b), which gives a detailed account of Vasu’s life and work including its influence on occult networks.

<sup>345</sup> For details on these figures (except Sabhapati Swami), see chapter 4.1; chapter 4.3; chapter 5.3. For an in-depth analysis of Sabhapati Swami, see Cantú (2022).

Vasu's earliest work is the translation of the *Śivasamhitā*, published serially from 1884 onwards in the journal *Arya* by R. C. Bary (Vasu 1975 [1914]: i), and subsequently in book form in 1887. The *Śivasamhitā* is a tantric work by an author with leanings toward Śrī Vidyā, a Śaiva and Goddess tradition today more prevalent in South India (Mallinson 2007b: ix-xiv), and was compiled in its current form in the fifteenth century (Birch 2018: 6, n. 18).<sup>346</sup> It consists of five chapters, of which the third deals with *prāṇāyāma* and *āsana*. For the occult milieu it is, together with its Introduction, the most influential translation by Vasu. Although Vasu conceives of the *Śivasamhitā* as a tantric text, the Introduction is almost entirely, as far the yoga traditions are concerned, discussed on the terminological basis of *Pātañjalayoga*. Vasu tends to caution his readers against Haṭhayoga as well as some of the advanced *prāṇāyāma* practices (Basu 2004 [1887]: iii, xlix), warnings that are entirely absent from his Introduction to the later published *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*.<sup>347</sup> The practices described in the *Śivasamhitā* are, according to Vasu, designed for the householder yogi, and "chastity" rather than "celibacy" is recommended, while a strong tendency toward asceticism is altogether dismissed (*ibid.*: xx, xvii).<sup>348</sup>

In his Introduction, Vasu dedicates a whole chapter to the subject of *prāṇāyāma* (Basu 2004 [1887]: xliii-xlxiii). This chapter can be partly read in continuation with N. C. Paul's *Treatise*, which is explicitly quoted once (*ibid.*: xv). Vasu also draws on Braid's theories of hypnotism and trance,<sup>349</sup> but the influence of Paul is more obvious. Like Paul, Vasu also defines *prāṇāyāma* essentially as "reducing the beating of the heart through restraining the breath" (*ibid.*: xlvi). What becomes evident here is that translating Sanskrit texts also meant the dissemination of specific concepts. In Vasu's case, *prāṇāyāma* as linked to the concepts of circulation and respiration is explained by physiological data such as the functions of the heart, the lungs, and the brain (*ibid.*: xlv-xlv). As Vasu urges, "[t]o understand fully the action

<sup>346</sup> As for the roots of the *Śivasamhitā*, Mallinson (2020: 412) explains that it is "much the biggest borrower from the [c. eleventh-century, M.K.] *Amṛtasiddhi*, sharing 34 verses with it".

<sup>347</sup> The Introduction to this translation otherwise mostly echoes the themes of the Introduction to the *Śivasamhitā*.

<sup>348</sup> This is, on the other hand, aligned with the *Śivasamhitā*'s negotiation between mundane and soteriological ends. The text concludes with a recommendation that the yogi "may amuse himself" after having accomplished the teachings prescribed in the text (Birch 2020b: 223). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that *Lebensreform*-oriented and New Thought-inflected forms of sexual hygiene had a similar objective of fostering "chastity" rather than complete abstinence (Karl Baier in a personal correspondence, May 3, 2021).

<sup>349</sup> Vasu also speaks of a "hypnotic trance" induced by "fixing the attention on a luminous object", tacitly drawing on Braid (Basu 2004 [1887]: xxii). Another influence of Braid is the repeated translation of *samādhi* as "concentration".

of respiration on life, some knowledge of physiology is absolutely necessary” (*ibid.*: xlv).

Unsurprisingly, Vasu’s Introduction is overall clearly aligned with *prāṇāyāma* discourses tinged by theosophy. It is one of the many examples that echoes the pseudo-Swedenborg quote to exemplify the intimate connection between the breath and the mind (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlv-xlvi; chapter 4.3.1). As is typical of theosophical thought, Vasu further correlates *prāṇāyāma* and *prāṇa*-related themes with occult ones, particularly, mesmerism. In mentioning one of the effects of *prāṇāyāma*, he states that it removes the covering of the light as described in the *Yogasūtra* 2.52 (*ibid.*: xli). According to Vasu, this light is perceived by the Yogi “in his heart when in deep contemplation. It is the same light which the mesmerised subjects of Baron Reichenbach saw issuing from the poles of magnet, &c.” (*ibid.*).<sup>350</sup> What may seem to be a big leap – from Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* to a specific phenomenon of subtle perception in mesmerism – is indeed the blueprint of theosophical reasoning about yoga and *prāṇa*-related themes. The section that deals with *prāṇāyāma* also includes a comparative discussion of various forms of breath cultivation, as is similarly found in the “Appendix” to the *Yogasūtra* edition of Tukaram Tatya (chapter 4.3.1). However, other than Tatya, Vasu mentions the “Persian” *habs-i-dam*<sup>351</sup> of which some techniques, according to him, closely resemble alternate-nostril breathing (*ibid.*: xlv-xlix). Next to all these elements, Vasu mentions the significance of *svara* for prognostication as well as the functions of the *cakras* and the five *vāyus*. Not only does Vasu read *prāṇāyāma* against a yogic-occult background, but he holds that the “hygienic effect of pranayama is beyond doubt” (*ibid.*: xlii). As such, his Introduction evidences the complex discursive strata that permeate *prāṇāyāma* discourses in the occult milieu at that time. It also represents the eclecticism of theosophy that compared and merged all these discursive, a tendency often found also in modern yoga.

Indeed, Vasu’s translation of the *Śivasamhitā* and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* remain influential throughout the subsequent emergence of yogic breath cultivation. The Austrian occultist Carl Kellner elucidates on “*habs-i dam*” in his *Yoga* (1896: 16) and mentions Vasu on the previous page. The *Śivasamhitā* may have caught Kellner’s interest, beyond his overall reception of yoga, due to tantric sexual practices that were

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<sup>350</sup> The German chemist and mesmerist Karl von Reichenbach coined the term “Od”, which, like the fluidum, was said to be a vital force that permeated the cosmos and animated organic life. His “sensitives” allegedly observed emanations of Od in form of a luminous glow from magnets, crystals, and human beings (Coddington 1990 [1978]: 67).

<sup>351</sup> *Habs-i-dam* or *habs-e-dam* means “breath control” in Urdu (Green 2008: 304).

described in verses of the 1887 edition, but omitted in later editions of the text. Vasu's translation of the *Śivasamhitā* was also distributed among Vivekananda's advanced disciples when he taught yoga and Vedānta in America (Deslippe 2018: 34). Very likely, Vasu was one of the reception points of theosophical literature for Vivekananda since they knew each other in person. The two Bengalis had met before Vivekananda's entourage to America, when Vasu hosted Vivekananda in Lahore for several days (Bose 1932: 184). Such encounters on the edge between the local and the global could be read as a symbolic representation of the text's fate in the modern era in which South Indian Śrī Vidyā goes global. Vasu had no small part in this.

Another widely influential publication is the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*<sup>352</sup> of Svātmārāma with the commentary *Jyotsnā* by Brahmānanda (d. 1842), which was translated by the South Indian T. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and edited by Tukaram Tatya (1836–1898) in 1893.<sup>353</sup> This edition of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* has four chapters, of which the second is concerned with *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>354</sup> Of interest here is the Introduction to this translation by Tukaram Tatya as well as the portions of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and *Jyotsnā* commentary translated by Iyengar, both of whom were theosophists. Iyengar only translated parts of Brahmānanda's *Jyotsnā*, omitting numerous verses of it. While the *Haṭhapradīpikā* dates to the fifteenth century (Birch 2018: 7), the *Jyotsnā* itself was written as late as c. 1830.<sup>355</sup> As a general remark, Brahmānanda interwove numerous quotations from the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, the Yoga Upaniṣads, and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. As such, this commentary evidences once more that the tenth-century *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was a quite influential text for yoga in the late medieval to early modern period (chapter 5.4.2).<sup>356</sup> Regarding *prāṇāyāma*, the *Jyotsnā* 2.48 cites the

<sup>352</sup> The text published by the theosophists is titled *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, but in scholarship the text is otherwise termed *Haṭhapradīpikā*. For a discussion of this, see the "Introduction" to the *Haṭhapradīpikā* as published in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* (1970), XIII (1-2), 1-14. I will use the title *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* when referring to this particular translation by Iyengar that also includes the *Jyotsnā* commentary by Brahmānanda. When I refer to the text as the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (as in most parts of this thesis), it denotes the more generic textual tradition of the text.

<sup>353</sup> For more on the features of this seminal text that was authoritative for most subsequent Haṭhayogic texts, see chapter 3.3. Strictly speaking, this is not the first translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Already M. N. Dvivedi in his *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (1890) had appended a partial translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Being another translation funded by the theosophists, Dvivedi had also clearly adopted theosophical thought (chapter 5.4). This Appendix also informed Tatya's Introduction to the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (1893) (see below).

<sup>354</sup> Scholarship has unearthed various manuscripts of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* containing four, five, or even ten chapters (Birch 2018: 56; Gharote & Devnath 2017 [2001]: xvi).

<sup>355</sup> The untranslated *Haṭhapradīpikā* together with the *Jyotsnā* commentary is henceforth referred to as the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā*. According to an article on the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* by M. L. Gharote in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, the terminus ad quem of the commentary is 1830 (Gharote 1991). I thank James Mallinson for making me aware of this reference (personal correspondence, Dec 6, 2019).

<sup>356</sup> Several scholarly works composed between the sixteenth and eighteenth century adopt passages from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the most prominent examples being Śivānanda's *Yogacintāmaṇi* (late sixteenth



*Kūrmapurāṇa* (dated between the seventh and tenth century CE) and prescribes the *sandhyā* rite as part of the yogi's daily regimen.<sup>357</sup> This is also reflected in the translation (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 31). In brief, the readers of the theosophical translation of the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* were introduced to a wide range of Indian traditions that originated outside of Haṭhayoga, but had, by then, been integrated into it.

Tatya's Introduction to Iyengar's translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* also quotes from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Surprisingly, in drawing from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, his translation employs the phrase the "science of breath", which was coined by Prasad in his translation of the *Śivasvarodaya*. The cited portion of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* explains the relationship between the breath and the mind, and the following behaviour is recommended to Rama (its main protagonist):

Therefore the wise should study the regulation of *prāṇa* if they desire to suspend the activity of the mind or concentrate will upon the achievement of Yoga. The regulation of *prāṇa* brings all happiness, worldly and spiritual, from the acquisition of kingdoms to *mokṣa* or supreme bliss. Wherefore, O Rāma! study the science of breath or *prāṇa* (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: xi-xii).

Tatya is one of the first authors to utilise the phrase "science of breath" outside the context of the *Śivasvarodaya*.<sup>358</sup> As in this quote, the relationship between the breath and the mind is the main theme in his Introduction. On this basis, Tatya also distinguishes Haṭha- and Rājayoga. He holds that the two disciplines should be viewed

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century) and Bhavadēva's *Yuktabhavadēva* (seventeenth century). Moreover, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was a source text for the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and Śivānanda's *Yogacintāmaṇi* informed Brahmānanda's *Jyotsnā*, which explains several references to the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* (Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Oct 7, 2020).

<sup>357</sup> Birch & Hargreaves (2020). Generally, the connections between yogic practice and the *sandhyā* rite are probably as old as the original *Yogayājñavalkya* (composed in the seventh century CE). The original *Yogayājñavalkya* (as opposed to the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya*, a Vaiṣṇava yoga work) was first translated by the Kaivalyadhama in 1982 and then termed the *Brhadhyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti* (Wujastyk 2017). Chapter six of this text deals with the *sandhyā* rite while *prāṇāyāma* is elaborated in chapter eight (Gharote & Bedekar 2010 [1982]: 32-35, 55-60). I wish to thank Jason Birch for these references (personal correspondence, Jan 2, 2021).

<sup>358</sup> However, Tatya refers to the *Śaivāgama* (which Prasad mentions as the source for his *Science of Breath: Nature's Finer Forces*) but does not, like Prasad, relate it to divination through *svara*, but rather to Haṭhayogic practices like *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma* and *kumbhaka*. The term "*Śaivāgama*" includes texts of the Śaiva tantric traditions in a wider sense, but more specifically, the Saiddhāntika tantras like the *Kiraṇatantra* or the *Parākhyatantra*. It is likely that the *Śivasvarodaya* was composed as a compilation of *svarodaya* from earlier Śaiva works that contained portions on prognostication through *svarodaya* and related techniques. The relationship between yoga and *svarodaya* goes back to (at least) the twelfth-century *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra. In chapter five on *prāṇāyāma*, the text contains several references to prognostication (Qvarnström 2002: 101-143). I wish to thank Jason Birch (personal conversations Oct 7, 2020) for providing me with this information. As for the usage of the phrase "science of breath" in modern contexts, it already appears in Vasu's translation of the *Śivasamhitā* 3.29 (Basu 2004 [1887]: 18-19). Also, M. N. Dvivedi in his *Rāja Yoga* of 1890 (first edition 1885) mentions the "science of breath" not in relation to the *Śivasvarodaya*, and equates it with Haṭhayoga (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 14).

as complementary to each other, far from being antagonistic. In echoing M. N. Dvivedi's *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (1890),<sup>359</sup> Tatya states that the Haṭha yogi controls the mind through the breath, while the Rāja yogi controls the mind directly, leading to a spontaneous cessation of the breath (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: xii-xiii; Dvivedi 1890: vii).

Moving on to an analysis of the translation, it is not always clear where the (original) Sanskrit commentary of Brahmānanda ends and Iyengar's own remarks on the material begin. Though it goes beyond this study to fully disentangle Brahmānanda's commentary from Iyengar's, it can be safely said that Brahmānanda cites the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in 2.3, 4.41, and 4.58. However, Iyengar at times fully omits Brahmānanda's commentary,<sup>360</sup> but in 1.16 interpolates a long story from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that is not found in the Sanskrit version of the *Jyotsnā*. Although the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* itself draws on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, both Tatya and Iyengar amplify the influence of the text through additional quotations. It is not surprising that Iyengar's translation evidences a number of theosophical influences, even quoting one of Blavatsky's articles that appeared in *The Theosophist* (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 13). Additionally, his comments explain that *prāṇa* should not be understood as breath, but as the "magnetic current as it would be otherwise absurd to say that the breath must be made to go to every part of the body like the right toe, etc" (*ibid.*: 23). As treated elsewhere (chapter 4.3.2), the "magnetic current" referred to here is highly reminiscent of that presented by exponents of animal magnetism, which is one of the lenses through which to read yogic practice within theosophy.

The *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* is a gold mine of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* related themes – a full treatment of these is, however, beyond the scope of this study. Together with the *Śivasamhitā* and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, it certainly became an important text that provided modern yoga pioneers with pertinent techniques and practical information. Though Iyengar omits numerous verses from the *Jyotsnā* – to decide what to translate and what not is another aspect of agency in translation – this work is still an important compendium covering a vast range of practical and philosophical discourse.

As to the role of the "classical triad", authors like Kuvalayananda and Sivananda explicitly draw on them as *the* authoritative texts of Haṭhayoga. However,

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<sup>359</sup> More specifically, Tatya draws here on the "Appendix" of Dvivedi (1890) which gives a summary of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

<sup>360</sup> E.g., in *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1.4–9, 1.19–27, 2.13–24, 2.30–43.

several other important Haṭha texts were utilised by modern yoga pioneers, but in many cases, the sources on which yoga pioneers drew were completely veiled. As chapter 8 will show, most of the yoga pioneers relied on English (or vernacular) translations of these texts, though at least some of them also knew Sanskrit.<sup>361</sup> For example, Vivekananda was aware of Mitra’s translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (chapter 5.4), Yogendra utilised Vijñānabhikṣu’s *Yogasārasaṃgraha* in a translation by Jha of 1894 to describe the four phases of the breath (chapter 8.3.2), and Sivananda also drew on several theosophical translations (chapter 8.4.2). Tacitly borrowing from them, several yogis made it appear as if they cited the Sanskrit texts directly, which was meant to raise their cultural and religious capital. Some yoga pioneers like Yogendra and Krishnamacharya also utilised their (marginal or extensive) Sanskrit knowledge to cloak innovative practices in Sanskrit terms (chapter 8.3.2; chapter 8.5.2). Modern yoga was malleable in theory, terminology, and practice. In all these cases, knowledge of the “sacred language” that was Sanskrit was helpful for the mission of teaching and promoting yogic breath cultivation.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has introduced a theoretical outline to denote several cultural factors and trends that shaped concepts of yogic breath cultivation. The “*prāṇāyāma* grid” has served as a heuristic tool to highlight the most relevant cultural factors and trends, which are religion, hygienic culture, and the appeal to tradition and innovation. It constitutes several areas outlined in four quadrants on which yoga pioneers drew to recruit both conceptual and practical ideas. The “catalysts” of nationalism and science discourses were crucial discursive strategies for yoga pioneers to present *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* as powerful tools mastered by the accomplished yogi. Both catalysts were a product of cultural negotiations of late-colonial India, and, as such, *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* were fundamentally reinvented through their impact, as several examples in this chapters have shown. Media culture and the agency of translation certainly accelerated yoga’s adaptation to modernity. First, one could increasingly rely on breath-cultivation manuals in English and vernacular languages that were already available through cheap print media at the turn of the century, which made *prāṇāyāma* teachings far more accessible than those imparted from guru to disciple. Second, translations can be viewed as located at the threshold between the premodern and the

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<sup>361</sup> An exception to the reliance on translations is certainly Kuvalayananda, whose exegesis of Sanskrit texts is well-documented. Also Krishnamacharya had academic training in Sanskrit.

modern. The choice of words and concepts – as evidenced in the example of *ākāśa* as “ethereal fluid” and *prāṇa* as “magnetic current” – infuses the understanding of *prāṇāyāma* and related themes. In the subsequent analysis it will become particularly important to delineate their influence, since “citing” premodern works is often a tacit reference to modernist translations of Sanskrit texts. Since these translations are also situated between the global and the local, they subsequently informed South Asian yogis, the Indian English-speaking middle class interested in yoga, and occultists and aspiring yogis abroad.

## 7 YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION AS A PRACTICE: FINDING CLASSIFICATIONS

### 7.1 Breath as an Intermediary

Within yoga and physical culture, breath has often been conceived as a link between the microcosm and the macrocosm, a subtle but tangible intermediary or “connective tissue” between the body and mind. Vedic and Upaniṣadic texts highlight the relation between human breath and a cosmic life principle – the term *prāṇa* implies both. In Haṭhayoga, the breath is linked to various functions within the human system, most notably to the mind and the semen. In Western esoteric traditions, Swedenborg pointed at the intimate connection between the breath and the mind. For animal magnetism, the existence of a fluidum that permeated the cosmos provided the epistemological framework for various religious phenomena and therapeutic interventions. As early as in Anquetil-Duperron’s translation of the Upaniṣads into Latin in 1801/02, this fluidum was paralleled with *prāṇa*. To some extent, the mesmeric epistemological framework was substituted by the concept of psycho-physiology from the 1830s onwards. Psycho-physiology became another framework in which the link between the body and the mind was central, and which was thus easily adopted for theories on the efficacy of yogic breathing techniques. Protagonists of modern yoga apply all these conceptual frameworks to yogic breath cultivation.

Having touched on all these aspects in previous chapters, this one is more concerned with the internal structure and physiological side of the practices. To introduce this subject, I briefly refer here to deep breathing, a form of breath cultivation mainly associated with medical and physical-culture discourses. Deep breathing was in vogue from roughly the 1860s onwards, and through the impact of Euro-American hygienic culture it shaped the way breath cultivation was conceived on a transnational scale. Various participants in yoga discourses both appealed to and dismissed these forms of breathing. This yielded further definitions of what *prāṇāyāma* is and what it is not. As such the discourse on deep breathing shows how discussions about the nature of *prāṇāyāma* and its various techniques were negotiated. To treat the “internal” and physiological side of the practices, I then will present a typology that accentuates the practice in its significance as a physical exercise that assumes a certain logic based on the functions of the body.

## 7.2 Deep Breathing in Relation to Yogic Breath Cultivation

In contexts of yogic breath cultivation, deep breathing was either conceived as “authentically” yogic or as not being part of an inherent yogic heritage. The following discussion exemplifies the varied reception of a concept that hailed from modern medicine and medical gymnastics, which understood “deep breathing” as a prerequisite for health and as a remedy in the fight against pulmonary tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was the prime cause of death throughout the nineteenth century, and awareness of its disastrous effects sparked a myriad of breathing techniques for preventive and curative purposes (Streeter 2020: 24; Rothman 1995). Furthermore, the success of the concept of deep breathing in Euro-American contexts is also owed to a new dress code for females, who displayed a growing aversion to wearing a corset. Moreover, the necessity of learning and cultivating deep breathing also implied a gender aspect. Females were said to be “chest” or “clavicular” breathers (e.g., Guttmann 1884 [1867]: 138; cf. Summers 2001: 75-77, 107) and exponents of physical culture developed specific attention to training females to become better breathers.<sup>362</sup>

An oft-discussed feature of deep breathing within medical and physical culture was to engage the full capacity of the lungs, as opposed to only parts of it. This understanding of “full breathing” combined the techniques of abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing, side/rib breathing, and shoulder/clavicular/upper-chest breathing, based on a threefold division of breath space. This concept widely influenced yogic breath cultivation and its anatomical understanding and description. It is also reflected in Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “Yogi Complete Breath” in which one aims to sequentially fill the lungs from bottom to top (chapter 8.2.2). Some, however, conceive of deep breathing as a spontaneous involuntary breath, like the kind of breathing that happens during sleep, as for example found in Warren Felt Evans’s *Esoteric Christianity* (Evans 1886: 97). Similarly, the Indian theosophist Sris Chandra

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<sup>362</sup> Regarding primary sources of the medical discourses around deep breathing that often, but not exclusively, address females, see William H. Flower’s “Fashion in Deformity” (1881), Alice B. Stockham’s *Tokology: A Book for Every Woman* (1892 [1885]: 68-69), George H. Taylor’s *Pelvic and Hernial Therapeutics* (1885), and W. Lee Howard’s *Breathe and Be Well* (1916: 1916:136); regarding a discussion within American Delsartism, with reference to the deformative effect of the corset, see Le Favre (1891: 59-64) and the “Appendix” in Stebbins (1892: 137-150); for the physical culturists’ contributions, see Bess Mensendieck’s *Körperkultur des Weibes* (1907) and Müller’s *My Breathing System* (1914); for the necessity of deep breathing for voice and physical training, see Lewis B. Monroe’s *Manual of Vocal and Physical Training* (1869: 24-27), Leo Kofler’s *Art of Breathing* (1890 [1887]), and Guttmann’s *Gymnastics of the Voice* (1884 [1867]: 21), the latter with reference to tuberculosis and wearing a corset; for the connection between deep breathing and relaxation, see Annie P. Call’s *Power Through Repose* (1891: 104-108); for an account of physical culture rejecting the corset from the 1850s onwards, see Summers (2001: 143-172).

Vasu held that the “proper duration [...] of breath for a Yogi” could be learnt by observing the respiration of somebody in deep sleep (Basu 2004 [1887]: li). Mostly, however, “deep breathing” means *deepened* respiration, which is augmented, prolonged and fuller than spontaneous breathing, often achieved by a conscious interaction with the act of breathing. This usual form of “deep breathing” is, strictly speaking, also distinct from the “Yogi Complete Breath” because it does not specify a particular engagement of breath spaces.<sup>363</sup>

Within the broader discourses of modern yoga, however, a discrepancy between deep breathing and techniques that restrain the breath arose. Some authors hold that deep breathing is part of yogic breath cultivation, while others, like Kuvalayananda, aver that mere deep breathing cannot be called *prāṇāyāma*. Let us first consider the proponents of deep breathing. The influential theosophist Rama Prasad suggests that *prāṇāyāma* is “deep expiration and inspiration” and “the drawing of deep breaths” (Prasad 1890: 161). Examples of prescribing deep breathing are also found among first- and second-generation modern yogis. Vivekananda advised his American disciples to “[t]ake a deep breath and fill the lungs”, because “[s]ome of us do not breathe deeply enough” (Vivekananda 1992 [1900b]: 519). Similarly, Sivananda prescribes “deep breathing exercises” in a standing position as derived from J. P. Müller’s *My Breathing System* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 64-66). Despite these recommendations, both yogis add that deep breathing is only a preparation for advanced techniques. Sivananda states that it is “only a variety of pranayama” (*ibid.*: 66), and Vivekananda argues that advanced yogic techniques are more dangerous, but also bestow greater benefits to the yogi (Vivekananda 1992 [1900b]: 519-520).

In his *Breathing Methods* (1932), also Yogendra seems to have few reservations about deep breathing, when he claims that yogis “have always emphasized the value of deep breathing not only as a great spiritual aid to self-culture but also as an important accessory to health and longevity” (Yogendra 1932: 24). Just like

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<sup>363</sup> The notion of “deep breathing” is at times rendered in Indian contexts “*deergha svasana*” (Hindi for “deep/long breathing”), e.g., in Bhole (1982: 73), who demarcates it from *prāṇāyāma*. Most likely, the term results from the conflation of *Yogasūtra* 2.50 stating that the breath becomes long and subtle (*dīrgha-sūkṣma*) due to *prāṇāyāma* and of Euro-American deep breathing discourses. “*Deergha svasana*” has, however, also been equated with the “three-part-breath” which appears to be nothing else than Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “Yogi Complete Breath”, e.g., in Goldberg (2016: 51, n. \*) or on <https://himalayanyoganepal.com/science-of-one-nostril-breathing-and-pranayama/> which states that “*Deergha Swasa Kriya*, also called Three-Part Breath, is a practice of slowing and deepening the breath. *Deergha* is an essential yogic breathing technique that is taught in most yoga classes along with postures” (accessed Jan 23, 2021). I have not found any specific school or lineage that used the terminology as such, but it appears to be somewhat widespread in contemporary yoga as taught in South Asia.

Vivekananda, he does hold that mere breathing methods do not have the same benefits as the “Yoga breathing methods [that] offer more favourable conditions for deeper inspirations and expirations” (*ibid.*: 72). Even if “Yoga breathing methods” are superior to Western breathing techniques, the defining category for Yogendra is still “deep breathing”. A different view is held by Kuvalayananda, who does not correlate *prāṇāyāma* with “deep breathing”, which he specifies to be a “Western” practice. He argues that due to the factor of retention, *prāṇāyāma* involves internal pressure changes (of the intrapulmonary and intrathoracic pressure), whereas the pressure changes in deep breathing do not differ from those in ordinary breathing (Kuvalayananda 1930b: 49; 1930d).

Summing up, in the discourse structure that revolves around the notion of deep breathing lies the distinction of the “authenticity” of yogic breath cultivation. Since this influential concept could not be ignored, all modern yogis considered here position themselves in some way in relation to it. But, as a basic argument, there is no doubt on the part of the yogis that yogic breath cultivation is superior to Euro-American deep breathing techniques. Based on this assumption, there are however three different modes to react to deep breathing. For some, (1) deep breathing is inherent to yogic breath cultivation (Prasad, Atkinson/Ramacharaka); (2) *prāṇāyāma* is essentially deep breathing, but a *better* variety of it (Yogendra, Sivananda, and Vivekananda); (3) deep breathing decidedly differs from *prāṇāyāma*, and the latter is the superior form of breath cultivation (Kuvalayananda). In (2), deep breathing can be used to prepare for *prāṇāyāma*, and in (3) it is not practised at all, because it is fully substituted by *prāṇāyāma*. The concepts that trickled in from Euro-American contexts were not always as ambiguously received, as has been shown with the concept of psychophysiology. Likewise, in case of “rhythmic breathing”, it was easily integrated into yogic breath cultivation, although Stebbins, who popularised the term, drew on occult and Delsartean breath practices (chapter 5.2.5; chapter 8.2.1). As will be discussed below, her concept merged to some extent with the premodern technique of *mātrā* in which one counts the phases of the breath, and it was therefore conceived of as an inherent part of yogic breath cultivation. In other words, the idea of *mātrā* provided a “welcoming structure” (Baier 2016b) for Stebbins’s concept of rhythmic breathing, which enabled the latter’s easy reception among yoga pioneers. To delve deeper, I will now provide a typology of yogic breath cultivation that is based on various physiological aspects of the practices.



### 7.3 Typology of Yogic Breath Cultivation

The typology which is presented here is derived from an analysis of the practices as outlined in various anglophone *prāṇāyāma* manuals in early modern yoga up to the 1940s. As such, this scheme is part of my meta-analysis and the terminology used here is neither a traditional approach to classifying *prāṇāyāma*, nor is it developed by modern yoga pioneers, but it is designed to analyse their practices. Although I give some examples of certain types of breath cultivation of the premodern era, I will only do so if these examples are still relevant in the modern period. Generally, this typology aims to analyse the practices between c. 1850 and 1945. It acknowledges the corporeality of the practices and is thus based on basic physiological considerations.<sup>364</sup> It classifies practices in sitting or lying postures, while it is not intended to analyse practices that combine breathing techniques in postural yoga or movement practice. The terminological phrase “modern yogic breath cultivation” includes techniques that combine *āsana* and yogic breath cultivation, because modern yoga pioneers integrated the two into their training (Goldberg 2016: 36-39; Foxen 2020). But these practices are, as stated, for the most part not considered in this study and therefore not part of this typology.

Breathing is a highly complex physiological action that involves various systems of the human body. In brief, breathing mechanics (e.g., the movement of the diaphragm and related movements of various body parts),<sup>365</sup> pressure changes within the lungs, and the resulting gaseous exchange between the body and the environment are the main underlying physiological principles of “external inspiration”, whereas “internal respiration” involves nutrient oxidation of the body cells (Despopoulos & Silbernagl 2003: 106). Breathing is both a voluntary and involuntary process: it is either directed by the autonomic system and its automatic functioning or by the thinking and planning portions of the brain located in the cerebral cortex (Wasser

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<sup>364</sup> For obvious reasons, I cannot go into much detail regarding the physiological functions of breathing and *prāṇāyāma* here. A clear outline of the physiology of *prāṇāyāma* and its therapeutic applications is, e.g., found in Lakhehev et al. (1986). Also, the conceptual frameworks established by Bhole (1965; 1966; 1982) in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* are convincing. Apart from the research presented in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, medical study on *prāṇāyāma*, e.g., in the context of evidence-based yoga therapy, is a hugely growing field which can only be mentioned here. For information, see, for example, the publications of the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, and De Michelis (2007: 10-16).

<sup>365</sup> The diaphragm is the muscle primarily responsible for breathing. When the diaphragm is contracted during inhalation, it expands downwards and pushes the abdomen out, and it relaxes during exhalation. The diaphragm also moves the lower ribs, and depending on the volume of the breath, parts of the ribcage or the whole trunk. The lungs move indirectly or passively together with the ribcage because they are mechanically coupled to the chest walls by a liquid that fills the so-called pleural space (Wasser 2017: 3-4).

2017: 7).<sup>366</sup> The automatic action of breathing is initiated the moment the blood, passing through the medulla oblongata (a part of the brain stem), reports a certain amount of carbon dioxide, which builds up when the breath is stopped (Todd 2008 [1937]: 232). It is, in other words, the load of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the blood that makes us breathe (Wasser 2017: 5). It should further be noted that breathing is also influenced and regulated by emotional states and bodily movements, both voluntary and involuntary (Todd 2008 [1937]: 232; Despopoulos & Silbernagl 2003: 132).

Based on these two modes of voluntary and involuntary breathing, I assume that forms of breath cultivation can be classified into practices that do not attempt to alter the flow of the breath and practices that deliberately interfere with or manipulate the breath. Any form of interaction with the breath, non-interfering or interfering, is, however, considered here as “cultivation”. Two basic aspects of interfering are noteworthy, which are making the breath rhythmic, and moulding various bodily tissues to change the flow of the breath. This results in four types of breath cultivation that build in complexity (figure 11): (1) “cultivation through witnessing”, which is merely witnessing the breath without conscious interference; (2) “cultivation through rhythm”, in which the practitioner deliberately interferes with the breath to make it rhythmic either through a specific *mātrā* or by following the concept of “rhythmic breathing” as popularised by Stebbins; (3) “cultivation through moulding”, in which bodily tissues are “moulded” according to the respective breath practice, which is the case, for example, in alternate-nostril breathing and in the eight *kumbhakas*; and (4) “cultivation through rhythm and moulding”, which combines (2) and (3), for example in alternate-nostril breathing that follows a specific *mātrā*. In brief, all forms except (1) consciously manipulate the breath. Since the central meaning of *prāṇāyāma*, in both premodern and modern yoga, is “breath control” (i.e., the active manipulation of the breath), (2), (3), and (4) are of great importance and are arguably the direct heritage of Haṭhayoga.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> On the control of respiratory muscles in voluntary breathing, see also Sears & Davis (1968).

<sup>367</sup> Birch & Hargreaves (2015: 18-19) have observed that forms of witnessing the breath without deliberately changing it, as found in modern yoga, do not have clear precedents in premodern yoga.

Yogic Breath Cultivation	Without Conscious Interference	Conscious Interference	Typical Variations
1)	Cultivation through Witnessing		* Various breath-related sensations can be observed;
2)		Cultivation through Rhythm	* applying a <i>mātrā</i> ; * rhythmic breathing;
3)		Cultivation through Moulding	* eight <i>kumbhakas</i> ; * moulding of any body part involved in breathing (e.g., nostrils, throat, diaphragm); * expanding the chest/and or abdomen (as, e.g., in the “complete breath”);
4)		Cultivation through Rhythm & Moulding	* alternate-nostril breathing with <i>mātrā</i> ; * eight <i>kumbhakas</i> with <i>mātrā</i> ;

FIGURE 11: FOUR TYPES OF YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION THAT BUILD IN COMPLEXITY (AUTHOR’S ILLUSTRATION).

In the following, some background considerations and further examples of these four types of breath cultivation are presented. As mentioned, the most basic form of breath cultivation is (1) “cultivation through witnessing”. Although practitioners may find that “witnessing” already alters the breath to some extent, it is closest to involuntary breathing as a conscious interaction with breath can be. The quality and depth, the tidal volume,<sup>368</sup> the respiratory frequency, rhythm, and length as well as various proprioceptive sensations accompanying the breath, including the feeling of the air at the nostrils (*prāṇasparśa*), are possible objects of observation.<sup>369</sup> One can also observe the breathing spaces, in which one follows the expanding and shrinking motion of the chest, ribs, and abdomen during breathing. Cultivation through

<sup>368</sup> In humans, breathing is “tidal”, which means it consists of both air flowing in and out through the same set of tubes which are the trachea, the primary bronchi leading to each lung, and the subsequent progressively smaller bronchioles (Wasser 2017: 3). This tidal in- and outflow of air is induced by a pressure change within the lungs that results in gaseous exchange with the external atmosphere (*ibid.*: 3-4).

<sup>369</sup> For a discussion on *prāṇasparśa* see Bhole (1982) in *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* and Kuvalayananda (1931: 76).

witnessing is applied in modern yoga, for example, in instructions for *śavāsana*, or in practices that prepare for meditation (Kūvalayananda 1933a: 114; Yogendra 1935a: 85). Vivekananda also advises “to join your mind to the breath and gradually attain the power of concentrating your attention on its movements” (Vivekananda 1958 [n.d.a.]: 130). The yogi and occultist T. R. Sanjivi holds that “[c]oncentration of the mind on the pause between inspiration and expiration without trying to interfere with their natural course is the ideal method of concentration of the mind via Respiration” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 34). Cultivation through witnessing is, however, not as ubiquitous as (2), (3), and (4).

The second category, (2) “cultivation through rhythm”, includes all forms of counted breathing, or “*mātrā*”, as practised in Haṭhayoga and widely applied in instructions on modern yogic breath cultivation. The most common *mātrā* that is often recommended is the ratio 1-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale).<sup>370</sup> It means that the exhalation is twice the length of the inhalation, and the retention is four times as long. Another *mātrā* that is described in the *Gorakṣaśataka* is the ratio 6-8-5, which Yogendra holds is suitable for beginners (Yogendra 1940: 40). Krishnamacharya developed a terminology for *prāṇāyāma* with even *mātrā* (*samavṛtti*), i.e., the phases of the breath being of the same length, and uneven *mātrā* (*viśamavṛtti*) (chapter 8.5.2). As has been mentioned, (2) also includes rhythmic breathing as understood by Stebbins, which is counting both the in- and out-breath for four heartbeats each and suspending the breath for two heartbeats, resulting in the rhythm 4-2-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale-retain) (chapter 5.2.4). A main difference between the premodern *mātrā* system and Stebbins’s rhythmic breathing is that the former includes three phases of the breath (inhalation-retention-exhalation) while Stebbins’s technique involves all four phases of the breath. However, modern yoga pioneers also engage the fourth phase of the breath (which includes retention after exhalation) (e.g., Vivekananda, Yogendra, Krishnamacharya). Rhythmic breathing and the concept of *mātrā* are often intermingled in modern yoga, and at times rhythmic breathing becomes synonymous with *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>371</sup>

<sup>370</sup> For an overview of the history of *mātrā*, see chapter 3.3.4.

<sup>371</sup> While “rhythmic breathing” is often practised without any additional form of manipulation, it should be noted that many cases of utilising a *mātrā* also involve “cultivation through moulding” (the combination of moulding and rhythm is further described below). But if *prāṇāyāma* is understood as the cultivation of inhalation, exhalation, and retention (*pūraka*, *recaka*, *kumbhaka*) (as, for example, found in Hemacandra’s *Yogaśāstra* 5.4; Qvarnström 2012: 165), and this is coupled with a specific *mātrā*, it would still fall under this category. A modern example is Krishnamacharya’s idea of *samavṛtti* (“even movement”) *prāṇāyāma*, e.g., in the ratio 4-4-4-4 (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 87).

Cultivation through rhythm is said to have a specific effect on body and mind. This is often contrasted by the argument that normal breathing is irregular and produces ill health (e.g., Vivekananda 1896: 57, 128; Kuvalayananda 1933a: 113; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 53). Because of its pacifying capacities, Kuvalayananda recommends rhythmic breathing with in- and out-breaths of equal length for an advanced stage of *śavāsana* (Kuvalayananda 1933a: 113-114). Vivekananda, for his part, explains that rhythmic breathing brings the body into a harmonious condition and recharges it like a battery (Vivekananda 1958 [1900]: 39; 1896: 50-51).<sup>372</sup> Yogendra explains the correlation of “deep, prolonged and rhythmic breathing” and “mental equipoise” by referring to *Yogasūtra* 1.34 (Yogendra 1940: 52). Elsewhere, however, he explains the same breath-mind interdependence by citing Stebbins (Yogendra 1932: 69). Similarly, Sundaram holds that the rhythm and fullness of breath during *prāṇāyāma* benefits the brain and brings about a calmness of the mind (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 95-96).

In (3) “cultivation through moulding”, “moulding” is manipulating various bodily tissues and the breathing apparatus, for example the contraction and relaxation of the throat, the diaphragm, the abdominal muscles as well as the muscles of the trunk and the pelvis. Nostrils can be moulded, thus altering the breath flow, by pressing them with the fingers as is common in alternate-nostril breathing. A technique like *bhastrikā* involves the rigorous action of the abdominal and pelvic muscles. The throat and the pelvic floor are contracted in *mudrās*, or locks, that often accompany Hāṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* techniques. This category also involves the volume of the breath, emphasising the active expansion of the belly and the chest, as in any form of engaged deep breathing and as in Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “Yogi Complete Breath”. In premodern Hāṭhayoga, the eight *kumbhakas*, and breath retention in general, were often practised “according to capacity” (*yathāśakti*) as opposed to following a specific *mātrā*.<sup>373</sup> This meant that the timing of the practice was individually adapted and not strictly made “rhythmic”, and this concept is at times also utilised by modern yoga pioneers.

The fourth category (4) “cultivation through rhythm and moulding” is often found in modern yoga, and many forms of advanced *prāṇāyāma* involve both rhythm and moulding. A prominent example is alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio 1-4-2,

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<sup>372</sup> For the concept of recharging the “body-battery” through breathing techniques, see chapter 5.2.5, and Foxen (2020: 99-100, 162, 245-246).

<sup>373</sup> See, for example, *Hāṭhapradīpikā* 3.20 and *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.58 (Gharote 2008 [1998]: 47, 68).

which is already mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.10–16 and is frequently taught in the modern era.<sup>374</sup> Since modern yoga appears to have a stronger focus on *mātrā* than on the concept of *yathāśakti*, this category is even more ubiquitous than (3). All South Asian yoga pioneers treated here engage (3) and (4) in the form of either alternate-nostril breathing or other Haṭhayogic forms of breath cultivation that are practised with or without *mātrā* (Vivekananda 1896; Abhedananda 1902; Yogananda 1925; Sundaram 2000 [1929]; Kuvalayananda 1931; Yogendra 1935b, 1935c; Sivananda 1962 [1935]; Krishnamacharya n.d.a.).

I should finally note that *kevalakumbhaka*, which is the spontaneous disappearance of breath achieved either through *prāṇāyāma* practice or through other meditation techniques, cannot be classified in the same way as the other practices. It is, strictly speaking, not *practised* at all, but it *happens* as a result of other more preliminary practices. If at all, it could be understood as a complementary – but infinitely more advanced – practice of “cultivation through witnessing”, which likewise is a non-interfering practice. Since, however, *kevalakumbhaka* results from other practices, and also in premodern yoga it is never described as a *technique*, I refrain from putting it into a classifying box. It should, however, be mentioned that it is, in premodern Haṭhayoga, the pivotal point of *prāṇāyāma* and a prerequisite for *samādhi* (Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 18). Although *kevalakumbhaka* can be viewed as key to the higher achievements within premodern Haṭhayoga, modern yogis do not foreground its significance. As a general remark, it seems that modern forms of *prāṇāyāma* highlight the concept of breath *control* as well as the *techniques* to master the breath. But despite brazen statements regarding the efficacy of the techniques on a therapeutic and soteriological level, the “non-practice” of *kevalakumbhaka* – that which cannot actively be achieved – is not a ubiquitous theme.

## 7.4 Summary

A detailed analysis of all the breath practices in modern yoga would fill volumes and is therefore not intended in this study. Instead, this chapter has presented some demarcations that yoga pioneers set against Euro-American practices like deep breathing. The analysis shows that there is no codified canon of yogic breath cultivation, and the discursive negotiations as to what to include and exclude are continued to the present day. The typology presented here, then, serves as a map to

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<sup>374</sup> For details on the premodern aspects of alternate-nostril breathing, see chapter 3.3.2.

understand certain ways to approach and practise *prāṇāyāma* by considering some basic physiological aspects of breathing. It has been shown that certain modern practices were not prevalent in premodern yoga, and vice versa. But there are also overlaps in the premodern and modern understandings of *prāṇāyāma*, as exemplified by the famous and ubiquitously described practice of alternate-nostril breathing in the *mātrā* 1-4-2.

All modern yoga pioneers engaged in the corporeality of the practice, and this will, at least in part, concern us throughout the analysis in the next chapters. *Prāṇāyāma*, however, is never just a physical practice. “Breath as a conductor” and its “energetic” quality are as relevant as the details of instruction and physical aspects of *prāṇāyāma*. *Prāṇāyāma* as a practice to link body and mind is as notable as its health benefits. The metaphysical and soteriological speculations associated with *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* are a powerful discursive aspect within modern yoga, and, moreover, linked to *prāṇāyāma* in light of political negotiations. As such, the corporeal practice is the inner core of *prāṇāyāma* discourses, which is mainly relevant within self-cultivation. However, its radius of influence is much larger. As has been argued in previous chapters, the wider analysis must also consider the practices in relation to the “social body”, i.e., how they are tied into the larger socio-cultural and religious environments. Keeping these various layers in mind, we move on to an analysis of several systems of yogic breath cultivation as developed by ten thinkers and pioneers who have hugely influenced modern yoga’s landscape.





## 8 PIONEERS OF MODERN YOGA AND YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION

This chapter will provide a close reading of the works of ten pioneers that crucially informed yogic breath cultivation within the main phase of early modern yoga. Because of her outstanding contributions, the practical work of Genevieve Stebbins will also briefly be revisited here. In what follows, I will unearth new insights into yogic breath cultivation that have not been analysed in detail in any other scholarly work. The main analytical lenses in each chapter section dedicated to one pioneer are as follows: I will first analyse the main theoretical and practical frameworks into which their practices are embedded, which will also reveal the guiding concepts of self-cultivation in their work (e.g., Rājayoga in Vivekananda's case or Kriyāyoga in Yogananda's). I will treat their respective interpretations of *prāṇa* and sketch out one or several influential breath practices that they taught.<sup>375</sup> Of further interest is the extent to which these pioneers tangibly influenced (in the form of tacit or explicit borrowings) or actively demarcated their work from each other. This addresses the question of the discursive relations between them, and it also includes uncovering the frequent borrowing from premodern texts and their modern translations. I will also loop the analysis back to chapter 6 by highlighting the pioneers' appeal to one or several factors constituting the *prāṇāyāma* grid (i.e., the tradition-innovation axis and the religion-hygienic culture axis) and by showing the extent to which their work utilises one or several of the catalysts discussed (nationalism, science discourse, media culture/translation). The analysis of the ten pioneers is grouped into pairs, and a summary of their work is provided in each of the chapter sections.<sup>376</sup> Now for the first pair that has contributed seminal ideas to yogic breath cultivation.

### 8.1 The Vedānta Yogis of the Ramakrishna Mission: Vivekananda and Abhedananda

Two disciples of the nineteenth-century Bengali sage Ramakrishna were among the vanguard of teaching yoga and Vedānta in the West: Swami Vivekananda and his

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<sup>375</sup> In the case of Vivekananda's theory of *prāṇa* and Stebbins's theory of the "breath of life", this was already done in chapter 5.

<sup>376</sup> If the analysis is quite short (as in the case of Abhedananda), the summary is integrated into the last paragraph of the respective chapter section. Sometimes, the influence of two pioneers is so intertwined that their work is summarised in one section (as in the case of Stebbins and Atkinson/Ramacharaka).

fellow monk Swami Abhedananda (born Kaliprasad Chandra, 1866–1939). The efforts and goals of their work were intertwined from the outset. Vivekananda founded the Vedanta Society in New York in 1894, a Vedanta centre in London in 1896, and the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta in 1897. Abhedananda oversaw the London centre after Vivekananda left Europe in 1896, took over the New York centre in 1898, and founded several others in the United States after Vivekananda's death in 1902. In his second year in the United States in 1895, Vivekananda had already initiated some followers into yoga at Thousand Island Park, Upstate New York (Killingley 2013: 23, 26). Abhedananda continued to initiate disciples, following Vivekananda both institutionally and doctrinally, but also adapted some teachings to the new environments that he encountered in New York and other cities in the United States.

Vivekananda's cosmological musings that highlight *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* were treated in chapter 5.4, which has also laid the foundation for interpreting his approach to *prāṇāyāma*. This chapter proceeds to examine Vivekananda's and Abhedananda's understanding of *prāṇāyāma* and how it was taught in various cultural environments. Physical culture and occultism, particularly American Delsartism and New Thought, certainly left a mark on the *prāṇāyāma* teachings of the Vedanta Society. At the same time, the swamis were clearly indebted to their understanding of a yogic tradition as represented by authorities like Patañjali and the heralding figure of Advaita Vedānta, Śaṅkara. Read against these multifaceted cultural backdrops, this chapter expounds on the rise of yogic breath cultivation on a global scale co-shaped by the swamis.

### 8.1.1 Swami Vivekananda's Practical *Prāṇāyāma* Teachings

Knowledge is power. We have to get this power. So we must begin at the beginning, with

Prāṇāyāma, restraining the Prāṇa.

Swami Vivekananda: *Rāja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* (1896: 26).

Vivekananda's role in reinventing yogic breath cultivation cannot be overstated. His success is grounded in the conviction that Hinduism was a superior religion, of which he was a most gifted ambassador. When Vivekananda came to the United States, he encountered an audience that was enthralled by the allure to the orient, but knowledge of yoga and Vedānta was at the same time limited. To reach the audience, Vivekananda relied on various modalities of teaching. The most successful model was to first teach in public lectures, which recruited students for small groups or private sessions (Deslippe 2018: 13). Although recent scholarship has found that Vivekananda also

taught Haṭhayogic postures to these students (*ibid.*: 34), the same cannot be said for Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*. As far as textual evidence goes, Vivekananda's practical teachings of yogic breath cultivation were by and large limited to the techniques of alternate-nostril breathing and rhythmic breathing. *Prāṇāyāma* and rhythmic breathing were sometimes used synonymously, and sometimes, it appears, rhythmic breathing would be preliminary to alternate-nostril breathing. Adopting the terminology of rhythmic breathing from the American Delsartist Genevieve Stebbins, he correlated it with the *mātrā* ("unit") system of counting three phases of the breath (inhalation, retention, exhalation).<sup>377</sup> Thus, *prāṇāyāma* taught by Vivekananda also contained breath retention (*kumbhaka*), which was, in his case, mostly practised in combination with alternate-nostril breathing.

In the following, my analysis is based on *Rāja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* (1896) and on additional lectures that were either documented in the Advaita Ashrama edition of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* or in Burke (1994 [1985]; 1986; 1987b).<sup>378</sup> Most of these lectures, including the *Rāja Yoga* lectures, were delivered in the West. It seemed to be more appropriate for Vivekananda to spread *prāṇāyāma* and the notion of *prāṇa* among an American and European audience than in India.<sup>379</sup> Generally, most of the lectures held in the West deal with things Indian, whereas lectures held in India (Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, etc.) often address political themes. Towards the end of the swami's life, there seems to have been an urgency to convey practical teachings, indicated by an increase of lectures focusing on "concentration", "breathing", and "practical religion" in California in 1900 (Burke 1987b: 407-412).<sup>380</sup>

This chapter first delves into the notion of Rājayoga, which constitutes the main theoretical and practical framework for the swami's understanding of *prāṇāyāma*. It then analyses some of the superlatives of Vivekananda's understanding of *prāṇāyāma* like *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, the attainment of superconsciousness, and the

<sup>377</sup> For more on *mātrā*, see chapter 3.3.4; chapter 7.3.

<sup>378</sup> Especially relevant to this study are four chapters of *Rāja Yoga*: "Prana", "The Psychic Prana", "The Control of Psychic Prana", and "Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms", the latter including the translation and commentary on the *Yogasūtra*. The other lectures consulted are 23 lectures on *prāṇa*, *prāṇāyāma*, breathing, and concentration given at various occasions (though not all of them are explicitly cited here). For an overview of Vivekananda's lectures, see Burke (1994 [1985]: 573-583; 1986: 574-579; 1987b: 407-412).

<sup>379</sup> According to Vivekananda, Indians already know *prāṇāyāma*, and it is part of their habitus: "The way the Hindus practise this would be very difficult for this country [United States, M.K.], because they do it from their childhood, and their lungs are prepared for it" (Vivekananda 1896: 58).

<sup>380</sup> E.g., the lectures on "Practical Religion: Breathing and Concentration" and "Breathing", both treated below.

developments of *siddhis*. The accomplished state of a yogi could be applied to heal oneself and others. Lastly, it provides an overview of several cultural settings that frame the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, particularly alternate-nostril breathing, in various lectures by the swami.

#### 8.1.1.1 Rājayoga as a Framework for *Prāṇāyāma*

The wider context in which Vivekananda places his *prāṇāyāma* teachings is the theory and practice of Rājayoga. For the swami, Rājayoga is a synonym for Patañjali's eightfold path. However, the term Rājayoga was first mentioned centuries after Patañjali in the *Amanaska*, a Śaiva text from the twelfth century (Birch 2013: 399, 404). The term Rājayoga was later incorporated into the fifteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikā*, where it was used synonymously with the practice of *samādhi* (*ibid.*: 407). Pātañjalayoga and Rājayoga were probably first explicitly identified in N. C. Paul's *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* of 1851 (De Michelis 2004: 178; Birch 2013: 400). This identification was then adopted by the Theosophical Society, who republished Paul's *Treatise* in 1882 (*ibid.*; chapter 4.3.3; chapter 6.3). In his *Rāja Yoga* lectures, Vivekananda takes his cue from the theosophists, where he presents the *Yogasūtra* as the "highest authority" of Rājayoga (Vivekananda 1896: ix). Additionally, Vivekananda places Rājayoga atop a yoga tetrad, the other yogas being *bhaktiyoga* ("yoga of devotion"), *karmayoga* ("yoga of action"), and *jñānayoga* ("yoga of gnosis"). In this, Vivekananda likely follows Keshab Chandra Sen (De Michelis 2004: 123).<sup>381</sup>

Although there are precedents of Rājayoga as the most potent of several yogas (Birch 2013: 404), Vivekananda's interpretation of the term is nevertheless decidedly modern. In presenting Rājayoga as a set of techniques to train and control the mind, Vivekananda fully relies on a "scientific" empiricism with the tool of "experience" as its main fountainhead. For the swami, Rājayoga is a religious practice based on experience and underpinned by "experiential science". Everybody can study it, because "all our knowledge is based upon experience" as the overture to *Rāja Yoga* suggests (Vivekananda 1896: 1). Replacing religious terms with a language of scientific investigation, Vivekananda puts experience above belief and dogmatism.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Another model could have been a much earlier yoga tetrad already found in *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* 9–11 of the thirteenth century consisting of *mantrayoga*, *layayoga*, *haṭhayoga*, and *rājayoga*, which became seminal for subsequent Haṭha texts like the *Amaraughaprabodha*, the *Yogabīja*, and the *Śivasamhitā* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 6-7; Birch 2013: 407).

<sup>382</sup> Also Anantanand Rambachan (1994) has found that Vivekananda's key understanding of religion is based on the concept of experience (*anubhāva*). Much in the sense of a "scientific" empiricism, although

In its core, Rājayoga is scientific, being derived from ancient times and taught by Patañjali, whom he addresses as a “philosopher” and “psychologist” (Vivekananda 1958 [1899]: 27). Furthermore, Rājayoga being the epitome of religion, science, and psychology (Vivekananda 1896: 55), it has a strong practice-oriented tendency: it is “practical spirituality” and “practical religion”.<sup>383</sup>

*Rāja Yoga* dedicates several chapters to *prāṇa* and its control through *prāṇāyāma*, covering nearly one third of the total text.<sup>384</sup> Such importance is not given to any other of the eight auxiliaries, except *samādhi*.<sup>385</sup> Within the framework of Rājayoga, *prāṇāyāma*’s most important function is to control the mind, its contents, fluctuations, willpower, perceptions, and its thoughtless state. Vivekananda builds here on the *prāṇa*-mind nexus that goes back to the Upaniṣadic text corpuses (chapter 3.3.6). Thus, *prāṇāyāma* is also a technique to control the mind. To this end, Vivekananda suggests to start with the body, with the tangibility of breath. Breath functions as a double-edged blade here that is affected by the mind, but also affects the mind, and once “brought under control”, it is a tool to access and alter states of the mind. Thus, *prāṇāyāma* stands at the beginning of the practice and, as a highly potent technique, it also signifies the mastery of yoga, leading to *samādhi*, which he translates as “superconsciousness” (Vivekananda 1896: 75).<sup>386</sup>

In Vivekananda’s oeuvre, we find some surprising references and explanations as to what *prāṇāyāma* is, and what it is not, and who is capable of practising or teaching it. One of Vivekananda’s general remarks is that, if anything, *prāṇāyāma* is only

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applied to the field of religion, this concept allows religious adepts to verify claims made by religious specialists (*ṛṣis* or masters) as true through their own experience (Rambachan 1994: 95). De Michelis terms this approach “spiritual empiricism” (De Michelis 2004: 168). It is probably triggered by the larger socio-cultural circumstances in Bengal where science as a “key to human progress was enjoying considerable prestige among the Bengali intelligentsia in the nineteenth century” (Rambachan 1994: 128). On science as a catalyst to drive *prāṇāyāma*’s reinvention, see also chapter 6.3.

<sup>383</sup> See, e.g., the lectures “Practical Vedānta” held in London in November 1896, “Hints on Practical Spirituality” (originally titled “Spiritual Breathing”) held in Los Angeles in December 1899, and “Practical Religion: Breathing and Concentration” delivered in San Francisco in 1900.

<sup>384</sup> Vivekananda’s exegesis of the *Yogasūtra* in the second part is not included in this equation.

<sup>385</sup> Regarding the notion of *samādhi*, Mallinson & Singleton (2017: 323-330) point out that *samādhi* can adopt prismatic meanings. Different schools associate various meanings with the term. In the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, *samādhi* is the highest state of mental refinement and additionally includes a state beyond cognition. In its twofold expression, it is hence either practised with cognition (*samprajñāta samādhi*) or without cognition (*asamprajñāta samādhi*). Vedāntins usually relate *samādhi* to the state of identification of the individual self with the supreme self (*jīvātman* and *paramātman*). In some cases, *samādhi* is linked to the state of being liberated while living (*jīvanmukti*). Vivekananda associates *samādhi* with both the Vedāntic merging of *jīvātman* and *paramātman*, and Patañjali’s *samādhi* without cognition, in the sense of acquiring a meditative state beyond thought or “reason” (Vivekananda 1896: 79).

<sup>386</sup> For an account of Vivekananda’s understanding of superconsciousness and the various sources from which he drew (directly or indirectly), which are chiefly Eduard von Hartmann, Frederick Myers, and the networks of psychical research as well as theosophy, see Jacobs & Kraler (forthcoming).

loosely connected to normal breathing, because *prāṇa* is the force moving the lungs, not vice versa (Vivekananda 1896: 38, 184). Vivekananda furthermore sets some demarcations of *prāṇāyāma* practices against other techniques like Haṭhayoga and American Delsartism. According to Vivekananda these are merely concerned with the physical, while they provide little soteriological potential. Regarding Delsartean practices and *prāṇāyāma* he states: “Pranayama is practised to get mastery over this breathing motion; the end is not merely to control the breath or to make the lungs strong. That is Delsarte, not Pranayama” (Vivekananda 1958 [1896a]: 455). He goes on to equate Haṭhayoga with Delsartism, again insisting on a demarcation of both from Rājayoga. This comparison culminates in scorning the “queer breathing exercise of the Hatha-Yoga” as “nothing but a kind of gymnastic” (Vivekananda 1958 [1890]: 233). Nevertheless, he highlights Haṭhayogic subtle physiology, purifying the *nāḍīs*, *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, and the role of the *cakras*. His employment of elements of both Haṭhayoga and American Delsartism despite his objections to these disciplines will be further discussed below.

#### 8.1.1.2 Yogic Superlatives: *Kuṇḍalinī*, Superconsciousness, and *Siddhis*

*Prāṇāyāma* is a crucial practice of Rājayoga, and, once mastered, the yogi becomes omniscient and almost omnipotent. The superlatives resulting from *prāṇāyāma* are *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, *samādhi* or superconsciousness, and the acquisition of *siddhis*. These goals can only be obtained by regular practice (Vivekananda 1896: 59). Further mundane benefits are a beautiful appearance and voice, the hearing of subtle sounds, uncensored health, and full control over body and mind (*ibid.*: 59, 69, 226). Body and mind become an instrument of the will through which thoughts may be directed according to one’s wishes.<sup>387</sup> While some of these *siddhis* are mentioned, for example, in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, the *Yogayājñavalkya*, and the *Haṭhapradīpikā*,<sup>388</sup> others may also reflect Vivekananda’s attempt to underscore the superiority of Rājayoga over other systems of yoga.

<sup>387</sup> This highly developed state can be used for healing oneself and others (see below).

<sup>388</sup> The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* which is quoted by Vivekananda (1896: 224-225) describes the benefits of yogic practice as follows: “Lightness, health, the absence of greed, a bright complexion, a pleasant voice, a sweet smell, and very little feces and urine – that, they say, is the first working of yogic practice” (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 2.13 as quoted in Olivelle 1998: 419). *Yogayājñavalkya* 5.21–22 (Mohan 2000: 73-74), also quoted by Vivekananda (1896: 225-226), describes similar benefits, which are lightness, enhanced digestive fire, as well as an improvement of voice. *Haṭhapradīpikā* 4.65–76 states that various signs of success of *prāṇāyāma* are a radiant, lustrous body, and the hearing of various subtle sounds (*nāda*) (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 74-76). The statements that *prāṇāyāma* defeats old age and death are ubiquitous, but they are often probably also rhetorical to motivate the yogi to keep up the practice (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

For Vivekananda, the most fundamental means to attain superconsciousness is *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, in which the yogi gains control over the subtle body. This process starts with gradually bringing the mind under control through *prāṇāyāma* (Vivekananda 1896: 58). The ultimate conquest of the subtle body happens through the *kuṇḍalinī* traveling “from centre to centre [*cakra*, M.K.]” (*ibid.*: 54). Only then will the “perception of the Self”, “super-conscious perception”, “Divine Wisdom”, and “the realisation of the spirit” be attained (*ibid.*). The latter points at the ultimate reality (*brahman* or *puruṣa*) which he refers to as the “essence of knowledge, the immortal, the all-pervading” (*ibid.*: 85). Thus, the path to liberation is described as *prāṇāyāma*-induced *kuṇḍalinī* arousal that leads to the superconscious state and realisation of the ultimate reality.

The cosmological framework discussed in chapter 5.4 becomes relevant again when Vivekananda invokes omnipotence through *prāṇāyāma*. As has been shown, in Vivekananda’s thought the term *prāṇa* is highly polyvalent, which is nothing new per se, since *prāṇa* found various interpretations throughout the history of Indian thought (chapter 3; chapter 5.3; chapter 5.4). Through the lens of the potency of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*, Vivekananda attempts to explain various phenomena in the physical and immaterial worlds, which according to Vivekananda can be accessed by external and internal means. The functioning of a steam engine is “physical science”, but also “science of Prāṇāyāma, by external means” (Vivekananda 1896: 47).<sup>389</sup> Here, *prāṇa* is conceived of as an omnipresent power that manifests in any kind of physical or external force, which is why it can be controlled through *prāṇāyāma*. A yet more advanced version of this is the internal application of *prāṇāyāma* which masters *prāṇa*-as-breath in the yogi’s own body. This is the “science” of Rājayoga, which is rendered here ultimately more powerful than the physical sciences, the latter normally being associated with its Western origin.<sup>390</sup> Vivekananda’s broad understanding of *prāṇa* thereby also stretches the semantics of *prāṇāyāma*.

The swami continues his associative correlations and advances them into high claims of the potency of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* as signifiers of an internal science:

This opens to us the door to almost unlimited power. Suppose, for instance, a man understood the Prāṇa perfectly, and could control it, what power on earth would not be his? He would be able to move

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<sup>389</sup> In echoing Rama Prasad, the phrase “science of *prāṇāyāma*” again marks the potentiality of the technique.

<sup>390</sup> Yoga as a spiritual science that is even superior to physical science is also mentioned in Vasu’s commentary on the translation of the *Śivasamhitā* (Basu 2004 [1887]: ii, xxxiii).

the sun and stars out of their places, to control everything in the universe, from the atoms to the biggest suns, because he would control the Prāṇa. This is the end and aim of Prāṇāyāma (Vivekananda 1896: 32).

In its radicality, this position reflects a long tradition of employing *siddhis* in tantric and yogic texts to overcome the laws of nature through the yogi's powers.<sup>391</sup> Vivekananda's *siddhi*-oriented understanding of *prāṇāyāma* is rooted in the notion of *prāṇa* as a vibrating, rhythmical, omnipresent force connecting the micro- and macrocosm.<sup>392</sup> Through the control of the microcosm, the macrocosm is also in the yogi's hands. As Nile Green has argued, the correlation of *prāṇa* and power, and also *prāṇa* and *powers*, is highly prominent in Vivekananda's thought (Green 2008: 303-304). The subtext here is to argue against a colonialism that regarded Western science as superior to Indian traditions. Vivekananda's heralding flag in these discursive battles is Rājayoga, coupled with *prāṇāyāma*, and many of his lectures given in the West promise infinite power attainable through yoga. Nationalistic implications of such propositions were discussed in detail in chapter 6.2.

#### 8.1.1.3 *Prāṇa* and Healing in Vivekananda's Thought

The manipulation of *prāṇa* is utilised for various ends in Vivekananda's oeuvre, as has been shown. One application that exemplifies the powers of the advanced yogi and the practical utility of *prāṇāyāma* is healing oneself and others. The latter includes mental healing and healing at a distance, an ability that, in Vivekananda's thought, results from superconsciousness. Ultimately, a high vibration in the yogi, induced by rhythmic breathing,<sup>393</sup> is used for healing purposes, by bringing others to a corresponding "state of vibration" (Vivekananda 1896: 40-41). It is here that the contexts of mesmeric healing practices again become relevant. The magnetic healer curing at a distance, by the power of thought, or through hands-on techniques was a

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<sup>391</sup> Alter has interpreted the description of *siddhis* in premodern texts as "mnemonic aids" (Alter 2004: 22). In my opinion, it is difficult to determine whether Vivekananda indeed thinks of these *siddhis* in more literal terms, as De Michelis (2004: 166) has posited.

<sup>392</sup> In this function *prāṇa* can even explain phenomena like spiritualism, which is "also a manifestation of Prāṇāyāma" (1896: 44). Vivekananda probably interprets spiritualism, i.e., the contact with ghosts and disembodied beings, also as a form of *siddhi*. It is here that one is also reminded on the agency of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent lurking in the semantic shadows of *prāṇāyāma*: the mesmeric fluidum in Romantic mesmerism and nineteenth-century occultism was also utilised to explain various religious phenomena that included the trance states witnessed in séances and spiritualist practices, among others (Baier 2009: 480). For more on *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent in Vivekananda's thought, see below.

<sup>393</sup> Alternatively, Vivekananda (1958 [1899]: 31) also speaks of a certain yogic state "when the Prana is working rhythmically" as a prerequisite of healing. The notion of a "rhythmic *prāṇa*" is probably idiosyncratic to Vivekananda; it is not found in Stebbins, who does not employ *prāṇa* at all; nor would she hold that the breath of life is "rhythmic".



well-known theme in nineteenth-century American occultism by the time Vivekananda travels to the United States. Some passages in *Rāja Yoga* and other lectures mark an important entry point of mesmeric healing practices into yoga (see also chapter 4.2.1; chapter 8.2.2).<sup>394</sup> This is also the main lens through which Vivekananda's *prāṇa*-related healing practices have been analysed so far (De Michelis 2004: 164; Baier 2009: 480; Zoehrer 2021: 101).<sup>395</sup> In considering some relatively unknown passages in Vivekananda's oeuvre, I treat the theme here as part of the yogi's *prāṇa*-related capabilities that ultimately depend on the control of *prāṇa* through yogic breath cultivation.

Despite mesmeric influence on Vivekananda, there is evidence that certain forms of *prāṇa*-related techniques for (re-)gaining health were already practised in medieval India. Some of these *prāṇa*-related techniques focused on balancing *prāṇa* in the body which had become disturbed through irregular or incorrect practice – a faulty behaviour against which Vivekananda also cautions (Vivekananda 1896: 59). First, that *prāṇāyāma* can have mundane benefits like curing diseases is quite ubiquitous in various premodern Haṭha texts.<sup>396</sup> Second, two later editions of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, probably dating to the early eighteenth century, have appended a fifth chapter dealing with yogic therapy (*yogacikitsā*) to cure diseases resulting from irregular practice or negligence (Birch 2018: 56-57).<sup>397</sup> According to this text, the yogi suffering from pain and disease in a particular body part through an imbalance of *vāyu* (here a synonym for *prāṇa*) can alleviate the pain as follows:

In whatever place pain arises because of disease, one should meditate with the mind on the breath in that place. Having meditated on it with a one-pointed mind, [the yogin] should breathe in and out completely, carefully [and] according to his capacity. Having performed many exhalations and inhalations again and again, he should draw out the breath that has accumulated [there], as one [would draw out accumulated] fluid from the ear with water (*Haṭhapradīpikā* 5.9–11, as quoted in Birch 2018: 57).

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<sup>394</sup> The history and context of these practices, particularly their Euro-American implications, are extensively treated in Zoehrer (2020; 2021).

<sup>395</sup> A passage in *Rāja Yoga* that is typically mentioned to prove mesmeric influence on Vivekananda is the following: “Sometimes in your own body the supply of Prāṇa gravitates more or less to one part; the balance is disturbed, and when the balance of Prāṇa is disturbed, what we call disease is produced. To take away the superfluous Prāṇa, or to supply the Prāṇa that is wanting, will be curing the disease” (Vivekananda 1896: 42).

<sup>396</sup> A good example is *Yogayājñavalkya* 8.32–40ab: “For this purpose, the two Aśvins [who were] the best of physicians taught people how to cure disorders of the three humours simply by *prāṇāyāma*” (as quoted in Birch 2018: 23).

<sup>397</sup> The practices of *cikitsā*, however, go back to the c. eleventh-century *Dharmaputrikā* (Birch 2018: 56; Barois 2020: 32).

In the lecture “Practical Religion: Breathing and Meditation”, delivered in California in 1900, Vivekananda seems to apply a similar concept by explaining:

All the different parts are inundated with breath. It is through breath that we gain control of them all. Disharmony in parts of the body is controlled by more flow of the nerve currents towards them. The Yogi ought to be able to tell when in any part pain is caused by less vitality or more. He has to equalise that (Vivekananda 1992 [1900b]: 520).

In both passages, there is the idea that breath may accumulate in certain body areas, amounting to an imbalanced distribution of *vāyu/prāṇa*, which leads to “pain” or “disharmony”. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* passage and Vivekananda find that (diseased) body parts can be “controlled” or cured through a better distribution of breath (by “drawing out the breath”/by “equalising” “nerve currents”).<sup>398</sup> This may have involved *prāṇāyāma*, or simply concentration on *prāṇa*-flow in the body, as it is sometimes described as part of *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā* practices (see below). Alleviating “disharmony” of the body through re-balancing *prāṇa*, “nerve currents”, or the fluidum would be typical of mesmeric healing. However, it should be noted that the above-quoted passage on the even distribution of breath is mentioned by Vivekananda in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, which is also evident in *Rāja Yoga*: “That again is Prāṇâyâma, to learn when there is more or less Prāṇa in one part of the body than there should be” (Vivekananda 1896: 42). However, I find it noteworthy that breath cultivation as part of mesmeric healing was, in American contexts, introduced five years later than Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga* (e.g., [Flower] 1901a; 1901b; 1901c; Ramacharaka 1904). This suggests that Vivekananda influenced fin-de-siècle

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<sup>398</sup> The concept of “nerve currents” hails from nineteenth-century neuroscience. This neurophysiological concept postulated a connectionism between the brain and muscular activity through a “nervous fluid” or a “nervous force” (Clarke & Jacyna 1987: 194). It was the German physiologist Emil Du Bois-Reymond (1818-1896) who first spoke of *Nervenströme* (i.e., “nerve currents”) in 1843 (*ibid.*: 204-211). Vivekananda may well have adopted the concept from *Mind and Body* (1872), a popular work by the British psychologist Alexander Bain (1818–1903). The connectionism through the concept of “nerve currents” that is evident in Bain’s work is also reflected in Vivekananda’s text: *Prāṇāyāma* “will enable us to find out about the subtle forces, how the nerve currents are moving all over the body [...]. The mind is also set in motion by these different nerve currents” (Vivekananda 1896: 19). The aim, for Vivekananda, is “perfect control” over body and mind through checking these nerve currents (*ibid.*). It could further be argued that, for Vivekananda, “nerve currents” is a translation of *prāṇa*. As many other writers on yoga at the turn of the century, Vivekananda translates the concept of *nāḍī* as “nerve”: “First the nerves are to be purified, then comes the power to practise Prāṇâyâma” (*ibid.*). Vivekananda alludes here to *nāḍīśodhana*, or purification of the *nāḍīs*, which is often described as preliminary to *prāṇāyāma* as *kumbhaka* (e.g., *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.4–5; Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 22). In the subtle physiology of premodern Hāṭhayoga, however, the current that flows in the *nāḍīs* is *prāṇa*, which justifies the interpretation of nerve current as *prāṇa*. The identification of *nāḍī* with “nerve” is already made by Basu (2004 [1887]: 11).

American contributors like Sydney Flower and Atkinson to combine breath cultivation with mesmeric healing techniques, and not the other way around (chapter 8.2.2).

Whether Vivekananda was acquainted with yoga *cikitsā* or if he was simply influenced by mesmerism remains an open question. There is, however, additional evidence that the swami was informed by premodern *prāṇa*-related concentration techniques, which shaped his idea of *prāṇāyāma*. These ideas are also concerned with directing *prāṇa* in the body. For example, as part of a *dhāraṇā* technique, *prāṇa* is “held”, or concentrated on, in various *cakras* while one of the five elements is visualised (e.g., Vasu 1895: 26-29; chapter 3.3.5). Furthermore, concentrating on *prāṇa* in eighteen vital points (*marmasthāna*) to attain final liberation is part of a medieval *pratyāhāra* technique that is mentioned in *Yogayājñavalkya* 7.8cd–11ab (Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 16-18).<sup>399</sup> Some texts indicate that these practices require the mastery of *prāṇa* (*prāṇajaya*), because only the breath so conquered can be moved in the body wherever the yogi wants (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 133). Vivekananda probably suggests something like *prāṇajaya* when he avers that “a man [who] has concentrated his energies [...] masters the Prāṇa that is in his body” (Vivekananda 1896: 42). And, as he explains in another lecture, “[b]y means of the breath you can make the [nerve] current of the body move through any part of the body, just at will” (Vivekananda 1992 [1900a]: 508). If the premodern examples do not describe exactly what Vivekananda taught or use a different vocabulary, they still show that the concentration and directing of *prāṇa* was a relevant technique among yogis, both for soteriological and hygienic ends.

I argue that, in analysing Vivekananda’s approach to *prāṇāyāma*, one should keep in mind that premodern yoga traditions offer *prāṇa*-related techniques that complement *prāṇāyāma*. Simultaneously, mesmeric interpretations must be considered. Quite likely, Vivekananda is placed at the confluence of mesmeric healing techniques and various yogic forms of manipulating *prāṇa* in the body. Although never fully distinguishable, the idea of healing others by transmitting *prāṇa* is probably inspired by mesmeric practices, whereas manipulating *prāṇa* in one’s own body was already inherent to premodern yogic practice. Since mesmerism was a relevant prism through which to reinterpret yoga in the nineteenth-century (chapter 4.3.2), however, Vivekananda also tended to express the idea of the manipulation of *prāṇa* in one’s own body in mesmeric terms.

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<sup>399</sup> This technique is more extensively discussed in chapter 8.2.1.

#### 8.1.1.4 *Prāṇāyāma* Against Various Cultural Backdrops

When Vivekananda speaks of *prāṇāyāma* as a specific practice, he normally thinks of alternate-nostril breathing, which includes *kumbhaka*. As has been shown, he sometimes uses the term rhythmic breathing synonymously for the employment of the *mātrā* 1-4-2 (inhale-retain-exhale) in alternate-nostril breathing. Alternate-nostril breathing is one of the most common and best-known techniques of yogic breath cultivation, and, as has been shown, it is intimately connected to the idea of purifying the *nāḍīs* (*iḍā* and *piṅgalā*) which end in each of the nostrils.<sup>400</sup>

Although Vivekananda's practical teachings of *prāṇāyāma* are not highly diverse, they are interpreted, explicitly or inexplicitly, in the light of various religious and cultural influences like Pātañjalayoga, the *sandhyā* rite, Advaita Vedānta, elements of Haṭhayoga, American Delsartism, and New Thought, among others. Since the lectures on *Rāja Yoga* amount to an interpretation of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, one way that Vivekananda interprets *prāṇāyāma* is against the backdrop of Pātañjalayoga. By elaborating on the *sūtras* 2.49–53 that describe *prāṇāyāma* as fourfold, Vivekananda again explains *prāṇāyāma* as controlling the “sum-total of cosmic energy” by beginning with checking the breath (Vivekananda 1896: 184-185). He does not, however, mention a specific form of *prāṇāyāma* practice here, but adds that it results in *udghāta* (eruption), as described in the *Yogabhāṣya* 2.49–50 (*ibid.*: 185; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 140-142; chapter 3.3.7). Vivekananda thus circumvents a more detailed interpretation of the fourfold *prāṇāyāma* of Patañjali. Vivekananda's sole focus on alternate-nostril breathing – a technique which is not mentioned by Patañjali – is likely a fragment of the *sandhyā* rite as outlined in nineteenth-century prayer books and as already practised much earlier (chapter 4.1). Vivekananda also suggests to practise *prāṇāyāma* in the morning and in the evening – at the time when *sandhyā* takes place.<sup>401</sup> Additionally, Vivekananda refers to the Advaitin Śaṅkara and the *Yogayājñavalkya* as authorities on *prāṇāyāma* (Vivekananda 1896: 19-20, 225-226). The swami quotes from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣadbhāṣya* 2.9, a text inaccurately attributed to Śaṅkara, which in turn cites the fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya*. In reference to this text – and in contrast to allusions to the *sandhyā* rite – it is stated here

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<sup>400</sup> In modern yoga, this practice is therefore also known as *nāḍīsuddhi/nāḍīsodhana*. Another term that is frequently applied is *anulomaviloma*. For more on these terms, see chapter 3.3.2.

<sup>401</sup> The most obvious passage that points at an alignment with the timing of *sandhyā* is the following: “What is the best time for practice in Yoga? The junction time of dawn and twilight, when all nature becomes calm” (Vivekananda 1958 [n.d.a.]: 130). This passage is followed by a description of *prāṇāyāma*.

that one should repeat *prāṇāyāma* four times daily (*ibid.*: 20). The main discursive pattern to delineate here is that, by referring to the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣadbhāṣya*, Vivekananda constructs Advaita Vedānta as a framework for alternate-nostril breathing. He thereby highlights the discursive power of the philosophical school, while dismissing other important contexts like Haṭhayoga.

Nevertheless, in *Rāja Yoga* Vivekananda combines alternate-nostril breathing with an imaginative element to forcefully awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*, thereby alluding to a Haṭhayogic parlance.<sup>402</sup> In describing alternate-nostril breathing which affects the subtle body, this passage is worth quoting in full:

Slowly fill the lungs with breath through the Idā, the left nostril, and at the same time concentrate the mind on the nerve current. You are, as it were, sending the nerve current down the spinal column, and striking violently on the last plexus, the basic lotus which is triangular in form, the seat of the Kundalini. Then hold the current there for some time. Imagine that you are slowly drawing that nerve current with the breath through the other side, the Pingalā, then slowly throw it out through the right nostril (Vivekananda 1896: 58).

The expression of “striking violently on [...] the Kundalini” likely echoes a passage of Svātmārāma’s *Haṭhapradīpikā* which refers to the technique of *mahāmudrā* (“great seal”) that acts upon *kuṇḍalinī*. When the yogi bends over one straightened leg and performs the *jālandharabandha* (i.e., pressing the chin to the chest), the “Kuṇḍalinī force becomes at once straight just as a coiled snake when struck by a rod straightens itself out like a stick” (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 39).<sup>403</sup> Although Vivekananda does not recommend practising any specific *āsana* or *bandha* technique in *Rāja Yoga*, the parallelism in the two passages of forcefully awakening *kuṇḍalinī* may hint at Vivekananda’s involvement in Haṭhayoga.

Another influence that certainly employs Brahmanical as well as Haṭhayogic contexts is the recitation of *om* during alternate-nostril breathing. *Om* recitation was

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<sup>402</sup> In this passage, Vivekananda describes *kuṇḍalinī* and imagination as sharing a common ground of residual sense perception: sense perception is stored up in the sacral plexus, and from there imagination and dreams arise (Vivekananda 1896: 54). Once awakened, this *kuṇḍalinī* gives rise to the full perception of the universe (*ibid.*). A similar idea of *kuṇḍalinī* in two forms (gross and subtle, unawakened and awakened) is found in the c. eighteenth-century *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 4.14–27: “Kuṇḍalinī is of two kinds: awakened and unawakened. The unawakened kind is in all bodies in the form of consciousness, naturally taking the form of various thoughts, actions, efforts and phenomena. [...]”; in its awakened form, thanks to her, “yogis realize their true forms” (*Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* 4.14–15 as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 216).

<sup>403</sup> I use the translation of Iyengar in Tatya (1893) here, because it is likely that Vivekananda was familiar with this text (Deslippe 2018: 34). For more on the *Haṭhapradīpikā*’s theosophical translation, see chapter 6.4.

already combined with *prāṇāyāma* in the third-century *Manusmṛti* 6.70.<sup>404</sup> Medieval Haṭhayoga, which mostly refrains from utilising complex Vedic or tantric mantras (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 134), also links *om* recitation to *prāṇāyāma* practice. For example, as the thirteenth-century *Gorakṣaśataka* suggests, one mentally repeats *om* ten times during inhalation, sixteen times during retention, and ten times during exhalation (as described in the *Yuktabhavadēva* 7.22). The *Yogayājñavalkya* 6.2cd–8 of which another passage is quoted by Vivekananda (1896: 225–226) also recommends mentally reciting *om* during alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio 1–4–2, additionally meditating on the letters a–u–m in each phase of the breath. Vivekananda advises to “join the mental repetition of the ‘Om’, or some other sacred word to the Pranayama” (*ibid.*: 57). The ancient combination of *prāṇāyāma* and *om* recitation is thus another aspect introduced into modern yoga by Vivekananda. It also became one of the favourite techniques of Sivananda (chapter 8.4.2).

Leaving the terrain of South Asian contexts, his approach to *prāṇāyāma* can also be read against the backdrop of Euro-American contexts. As has been briefly mentioned, the influence of American Delsartism is prominent here, even though the swami scathingly dismisses it. Harmonising and recharging the body through rhythmic breathing are key concepts found in Genevieve Stebbins’s *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* of 1892. Thus, the abovementioned *om* recitation in which one lets “the word flow in and out with the breath, rhythmically, harmoniously”, making the “whole body [...] rhythmical” (Vivekananda 1896: 57) may also have been inspired by American Delsartism, within which voice culture was an important theme. Stebbins’s 1892 book was already widely disseminated in New York before *Rāja Yoga* was published. Correlating the term rhythmic breathing with the idea of *mātrā* is a notable adaptation of Stebbins’s work by Vivekananda. As the prominent *mātrā* 1–4–2 (inhale–retain–exhale) shows, the key aspect of many *prāṇāyāma* practices is internal breath retention (*kumbhaka*) which here is the longest phase of the breath. But Vivekananda also recommends practising external breath retention, suggesting that it is easier than the former (*ibid.*: 59). This likely also points at an influence of American Delsartism, in which external breath retention was given the same importance as internal (chapter 5.2.4) whereas, in premodern South Asian contexts, *kumbhaka* denoted exclusively internal retention.<sup>405</sup> Lastly, further evidence of Vivekananda

<sup>404</sup> All references to Sanskrit texts in this paragraph are derived from Birch & Hargreaves (2020).

<sup>405</sup> *Kumbhaka* literally means holding a “full pot”, which only makes sense when correlated with internal breath retention. As has been shown in chapter 3.2, there is some lack of clarity as to whether Patañjali described external breath retention. However, this passage in Vivekananda does not refer to Patañjali in

drawing on Stebbins is that he described rhythmic breathing as giving an intensifying twist to the mind, thereby changing it into a “gigantic battery of will” (*ibid.*: 51). This is reminiscent of Stebbins’s battery analogy referring to recharging the body and mind through rhythmic breathing (Stebbins 1892: 53; Foxen 2017a: 229-230; chapter 5.2.5; chapter 5.4.4).

Vivekananda’s reception of New Thought is also evident in several accounts. In his “Lessons on Raja Yoga”, held in Britain (probably in 1896), he instructs students to “mentally hold the body as perfect, part by part. Then send a current of love to all the world” (Vivekananda 1958 [n.d.a.]: 130). Vivekananda then advises “to join your mind to the breath and gradually attain the power of concentrating your attention on its movements” (*ibid.*), a practice that I have described as cultivation through witnessing (chapter 7.3). He then instructs alternate-nostril breathing *without* the use of the ring finger and the thumb of one hand for the manipulation of the breath flow,<sup>406</sup> but to direct the mind as such that the “breathing will obey your mind” (*ibid.*: 132). This is a form of alternate-nostril breathing which, to my knowledge, is not documented before Vivekananda. In highlighting the concept of the “will”, a key notion in turn-of-the-century American New Thought, the alternate breath flow in the nostrils is controlled here merely by the mind. Very likely, this practice is directly related to the tropes of affirmation and thought-power which the swami encountered during his extensive travels in the United States (De Michelis 2004: 168-169).

When Vivekananda integrates references to Śaṅkara, Sāṃkhyan thought, Pātañjalayoga, and (inexplicitly) Haṭhayoga, he assumes a backdrop of medieval developments in which the confluence of these ideas was endorsed (Madaio 2018: 8, n. 47); chapter 3.4). But Vivekananda’s innovative approach certainly stretches this kind of inclusivism further by interlacing Indian thought with American Delsartism and New Thought affirmation techniques. Vivekananda probably learnt as much from his audience as his audience learnt from him. As traditionally rooted as *prāṇāyāma* was, innovations of *prāṇāyāma* that started with N. C. Paul were disseminated further by the much more popular swami. However, Vivekananda’s innovative approach does

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any way. Elsewhere he explicitly states that Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma* meant internal retention: “With Patanjali it [*prāṇāyāma*, M.K.] is one of the many ways, but he does not lay much stress on it. He means that you simply throw the air out, and draw it in, and hold it for some time, that is all, and by that, the mind will become a little calmer” (Vivekananda 1896: 131).

<sup>406</sup> This specific use of the hand, sometimes called *mṛgamudrā* (“*mudrā* of the deer”), is the most common hand position during alternate-nostril breathing. In modern yoga, students are often instructed to use the right hand, but in premodern contexts the left hand could also be manipulating the nostrils (Belnos 2002 [1851]: table 6).

not yet embrace physical or hygienic culture, although the swami holds that a healthy body has its place in religious pursuits. But generally, Vivekananda's outline of Rājayoga, providing the larger practical and philosophical framework for his understanding of *prāṇāyāma*, is far closer to religious and contemplative practice than to physical or hygienic culture.

#### 8.1.1.5 Summary: Vivekananda's Legacy Spreads

Vivekananda's claims that *prāṇāyāma* was an almost omnipotent means of an advanced yogic science called Rājayoga were echoed widely in modern yoga. Nearly every post-Vivekananda manual on yogic breath cultivation reiterates Vivekananda's outline of *prāṇa*. Alternate-nostril breathing is, up to the present, one of the best-known and almost emblematic techniques of *prāṇāyāma* practice – and the swami had a crucial role to play in its dissemination and popularisation. The prominence of *om* recitation and the use of *om* as a *mātrā* during *prāṇāyāma* as prescribed in the *Gorakṣaśataka*, the *Yogayājñavalkya*, and other premodern texts is another feature that Vivekananda imparted to modern yoga. Furthermore, he introduced the notion of transmitting *prāṇa* into modern yoga with which his American audience was already somewhat familiar. *Prāṇa*-related techniques of concentration were employed in premodern Hāṭhayoga both for therapeutic and soteriological ends in the context of the yogi's self-cultivation, whereas *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent for healing others was popularised in modern yoga by Vivekananda. Soon after Vivekananda's mesmeric interpretation of *prāṇa*, Atkinson/Ramacharaka provides instructions for the transferring of *prāṇa* to others in *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904). While Vivekananda adopted rhythmic breathing and related concepts from Stebbins, the idea that *prāṇa* itself could be “rhythmic” and therefore be applied for healing purposes was likely introduced by Vivekananda.

The overall thrust of *Rāja Yoga* suggests that *prāṇāyāma* is a potent yogic technique. It is an entry point into higher meditational states which are the goal of Rājayoga. As could be argued, Vivekananda highlighting *prāṇāyāma*'s corporeality foreshadows the later emphasis on *āsana* in modern postural yoga. But it is also potent as cultural and religious capital, genuinely associated with the “spiritual East”, that migrates with Vivekananda. Vivekananda as an ambassador of yoga and India was keen to spread the knowledge and power related to it in the West, and to show its superiority. With its strong practice-based tendency, *Rāja Yoga* responds to the needs of Vivekananda's Euro-American followers. At the same time, his lofty discourse and



high claims were also disputed by some for whom these practices proved to be too difficult (Thomas 1930: 123-127). Another swami came who made them more accessible.

### 8.1.2 Swami Abhedananda Following Swami Vivekananda's Lead

In many ways, Swami Abhedananda set forth from where Swami Vivekananda had left off. This holds true for much of what he taught, and also in terms of the institutional developments in which Abhedananda continued the work of Vivekananda both in the United States and in India. As has been mentioned, after a rather brief stay in London in 1896 together with Vivekananda, Abhedananda subsequently oversaw the London centre and the Vedanta Society of New York from 1898 onwards. Abhedananda established another one in Pittsburgh and St. Louis (Thomas 1930: 103-104), and one offshoot of the Ramakrishna Mission in Madras, India, while Vivekananda was still alive (*ibid.*: 103-104, 86). Although Abhedananda retired to an ashram in West Cornwall, Connecticut, in 1912, the Vedanta Society in California continued to exist, and some temples were even founded there. Abhedananda left the United States for good in the 1920s and returned to Bengal, where he founded a Ramakrishna Math in Darjeeling. As one of Vivekananda's most important collaborators,<sup>407</sup> Abhedananda extended his innovative approach, and received additional influence from breath practices of fin-de-siècle North America.

Perhaps Abhedananda's most important achievement was to fruitfully reconcile Haṭhayoga with the teachings of the Vedanta Society. In *How to be a Yogi* (1902), Abhedananda's first and best-known book, Haṭhayoga is presented as a form of yoga that is suitable for the beginner and for the less-talented student (Abhedananda 1902: 38-42). As mentioned above, some members of the Vedanta Society called for a greater variety of less-advanced practices, which was at least partly answered by Abhedananda.<sup>408</sup> He echoes here the theme of the four kinds of students suitable for yoga as expounded in the fourteenth-century *Śivasamhitā* 5.13–28, which are “weak, middling, excellent and outstanding” (*Śivasamhitā* 5.13 as quoted in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 70-71). He also relies on premodern texts such as the *Haṭhapradīpikā* in which Rājayoga is attained by mastering Haṭhayoga (Birch 2013: 408;

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<sup>407</sup> Wendell Thomas, who was well-acquainted with the developments of the Vedanta Society in America between 1894 and 1930, mentions Vivekananda, Abhedananda, and Paramananda as the three most influential swamis of the movement (Thomas 1930: 110; 43-134).

<sup>408</sup> For example, reaching the crown *cakra* through *kuṇḍalinī* arousal proved to be difficult (Thomas 1930: 123-127).

Abhedananda 1902: 42). While Abhedananda introduced variations of nine Haṭhayogic postures (*ibid.*: 54-56), he did not, surprisingly, teach a variety of Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*. In fact, he rarely uses the term *prāṇāyāma*, but rather speaks of “breathing exercises”, or the “science of breathing” (e.g., *ibid.*: 125, 140). After taking a measured inhalation and exhalation, with both being of equal length, one could begin to gently hold the breath. Then alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio 1-4-2 is taught (*ibid.*: 57-58). While alternate-nostril breathing without *kumbhaka* is said to purify the nerves and to prepare for higher breathing exercises, practised with *kumbhaka* it develops the “healing power which is latent in the system” (*ibid.*). As a therapeutic intervention he advises performing postures together with breathing techniques, and to direct the energy at the base of the spine (i.e., *kuṇḍalinī*) to the diseased part (*ibid.*: 58).<sup>409</sup> Like Vivekananda, Abhedananda insists on learning directly from a guru. Implicitly, the swamis probably considered themselves to be these very teachers.

Regarding Abhedananda’s interpretation of *prāṇa*, he follows Vivekananda in almost all aspects, which is most evident in the chapter “The Science of Breathing” (Abhedananda 1902: 125-160). For Abhedananda, *prāṇa* is the “mysterious and invisible vital energy [...], the mother of all forces” (*ibid.*: 131-132). On behalf of the Vedāntic tradition, Abhedananda states that Vedānta had emphasised *prāṇa* as a fundamental vital principle since Upaniṣadic times (*ibid.*: 133). As ubiquitously found in the Brahmo Samaj, theosophy, and Vivekananda, Abhedananda also invokes the superiority of the Indian position over Western science. This is, once more, explained by highlighting *prāṇa* as a prominent example: “Why does an atom move and vibrate? A scientist does not know, but a Yogi says because of Prāna” (*ibid.*: 134). Although his explication of *prāṇa* is thoroughly aligned with contemporaneous discursive patterns, he at times follows a more traditional script of *prāṇa* interpretation in close alignment with the Upaniṣads.<sup>410</sup>

Abhedananda also emphasises the correlation between *prāṇa* and the mind, which for him has both soteriological and therapeutic potential. The therapeutic potential lies in recognising that an abnormal state of mind leads to an unfavourable

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<sup>409</sup> “The Yogi who wishes to cure organic trouble or disease of any kind, should combine the higher breathing exercises with the different postures of the body which bear direct relation to the disturbed organ. He should arouse the healing power stored up at the base of the spine and direct it to the diseased part” (Abhedananda 1902: 58).

<sup>410</sup> See, for example, his elaborate chapter “Prana and the Self” in his *Self-Knowledge (Atma-Jnana)* (Abhedananda 1905: 63-90) in which he elaborates on the concepts *prāṇa* and *prajñā* (“wisdom”) as found in the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (c. sixth century BCE).

vibration of *prāṇa* and thus to an imbalance at the cellular level (*ibid.*: 136). In agreement with Vivekananda, the yogi can affect the cellular level and his health by generating “a strong current of vibratory Prāna” (*ibid.*: 140). In this way, Abhedananda clearly illustrates the connection between breath, physical health, and emotional and mental state. Furthermore, the state of the nervous system can be analysed through observing a person’s breath; the vital energy and the mind, together constituting *prāṇa*, regulate a person’s health or illness (*ibid.*: 138-139).<sup>411</sup> *Prāṇāyāma* is said to be an excellent tool to improve and maintain health through increased oxygen intake (*ibid.*: 143-144), which is used to “develop our lung power to its utmost capacity” and to “drive out all physical weakness” (*ibid.*: 145). All these statements recall physical-culture discourses. But *prāṇāyāma* also induces various spiritual powers, bringing upon self-mastery and making the yogi the “supreme ruler of the mind and of the entire system” (*ibid.*: 148). This is accomplished by conquering the “nerve centres”, or *cakras*, and storing *prāṇa* through controlled respiratory movements (*ibid.*: 149). For Abhedananda the most important of the nerve centres is “Anāhata”, or “the royal center”, and, surprisingly, he also terms it the “respiratory center” (*ibid.*: 151; Foxen 2020: 234). This may reflect the Upaniṣadic idea of *prāṇa* having its seat in the heart (Zysk 1993: 205).

Though mainly drawing on Vivekananda, Abhedananda also echoes wider occult-scientistic discourses of (yogic) breath cultivation that were virulent in turn-of-the-century-America. For example, the swami mentions the phrase “finer forces of nature” (Abhedananda 1902: 31), an allusion to Prasad’s text. Abhedananda also draws almost verbatim from Stebbins when he exemplifies the intimate connection between the breath, the mind, and emotions (*ibid.*: 138-139; Stebbins 1892: 13-21). Like her, he elaborates on the theory of the protoplasm as expounded by Lionel S. Beale (1828–1906) (Abhedananda 1902: 129; Stebbins 1892: 7). This theory proposes that life, although manifested by mechanical, physico-chemical processes, and material particles, ultimately is sustained by an immaterial vital force. The swami was probably the first yogi to point at the crucial discoveries of the chemist Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier (1743–1794) who decidedly contributed to developing a physiology of respiration (Abhedananda 1902: 142; Underwood 1943). Although Abhedananda increased the involvement in the biomechanical and biochemical language of modern

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<sup>411</sup> “A Yogi says that all abnormal and diseased conditions of the body are caused directly by imperfect or weak expression of the vital energy, and indirectly by improper mental activity” (Abhedananda 1902: 139). It is notable that unlike Vivekananda, Abhedananda does not recur on an equal distribution of *prāṇa* here, but on the relationship between *prāṇa* and the mind as indicative for the state of health.

physiology, this parlance, however, does not essentially push Vivekananda's teachings further.

Like Vivekananda, Abhedananda also contributes to the development of magnetic healing within yoga. But six years after Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*, he encountered a slightly different ambience. A set of correspondence courses that was likely published by Atkinson's close collaborator Sydney Flower appeared in book form as "Series B" in 1901 (chapter 8.2.2). Both Atkinson and Flower were part of the Chicago School of Psychology that was dedicated to suggestive therapeutics and New Thought approaches to mental healing (Andrick 2020). Abhedananda would probably have been aware of these courses in "personal magnetism" that had started to combine magnetic healing with breath cultivation, when he states:

If mental-healers and faith-healers knew the secret of controlling the Prāna, they would have been undoubtedly more successful in their attempts. Some among them are now beginning to take up breathing exercises, and perhaps in time they will learn the truths contained in the wonderful science of breathing (Abhedananda 1902: 146).

Already Vivekananda had explained the efficacy of mental healing through the subtle mechanics of *prāṇa* (Vivekananda 1896: 34), but Abhedananda suggests that their healing power could be *increased* by applying the "science of breathing". It also should be noted that Abhedananda foreshadows a statement by Atkinson/Ramacharaka that weds rhythmic breathing (for him, a form of "yogi breathing") even more intimately to magnetic healing: "They are using prana ignorantly and calling it 'magnetism'. If they would combine rhythmic breathing with their 'magnetic' treatment they would double their efficiency" (Ramacharaka 1904: 59).

This overlap between Abhedananda and Ramacharaka is indeed no coincidence: Abhedananda attended a convention of New Thought members held in New York in 1900 (Thomas 1930: 234). However, not only did the New Thought advocates learn from Abhedananda, but in turn the swami's later lectures show a decent amount of influence from Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904). In these lectures, which were held in the United States not later than 1915,<sup>412</sup> Abhedananda promotes nostril breathing over mouth breathing (Abhedananda 2009 [1967]: 60-61), employs the threefold division of breath space (*ibid.*: 59-60),

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<sup>412</sup> These are the lectures "The Value of Correct Breathing" (Abhedananda 2009 [1967]: 57-65), "The Healing power of the prana" (*ibid.*: 66-72), and "Vedanta Philosophy and the Science of Breath" (*ibid.*: 73-78). The terminus ad quem of these lectures is 1915, and, because they are clearly post-Ramacharaka's *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath*, their terminus ad quo is 1904.

suggests the possibility of extracting *prāṇa* from air, water, and food (*ibid.*: 64), and refers to distant healing using the healing agent *prāṇa* as “magnetic healing” (*ibid.*: 70). All these tropes had already been made part of yogic breath cultivation by Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2).

As to the developments of the Vedanta Society in the United States, Thomas (1930: 115) reports a significant decline of members after 1906. Thomas traces this development to the swamis’ underlying distaste towards the body in favour of soteriological goals (*ibid.*). This lies in stark contrast to the New Thought movement, which answered the call of many middle-class Americans for a holistic religious culture that integrated the physical body (*ibid.*). Although Abhedananda was willing to incorporate New Thought teachings and decidedly included Haṭhayoga into his expression of Vedānta, there was no significant development within the Vedanta Society after his 1902 book that would have substantially added to yogic breath cultivation. Instead, we should turn our attention to the developments of American Delsartism, the physical-culture movement, occultism and New Thought – the blending of which indeed produced the next seminal ideas relating to yogic breath cultivation.

## 8.2 “American Sisters and Brothers”: Genevieve Stebbins and Yogi Ramacharaka

“Sisters and Brothers of America” – such were the first words of Vivekananda’s opening address at the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago 1893. The inspiration that Vivekananda received from these sisters and brothers was soon afterwards reflected in his *Rāja Yoga* of 1896. As shown above, it borrows ideas from the North American alternative religious milieu, whereas, despite his egalitarian speech to the World Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda simultaneously presented India as a kind of *jagadguru* or “world teacher” (Nanda 2010: 286). The following chapter outlines the influence of the American “sisters and brothers”, first and foremost Genevieve Stebbins and William Walker Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka, on yogic breath cultivation. It also shows how these two protagonists in turn were inspired by Indian – or Indian-styled – practices, such as “yoga breathing” (Stebbins) and “yogi breathing” (Atkinson), at least to some extent. Not least, Atkinson in his yogi-persona Ramacharaka was also significantly influenced by Vivekananda. Although chapter 5.2 has already expounded on Stebbins’s notable contributions, the Delsartist is briefly

revisited here in terms of her practical teachings. Atkinson is presented as a major player in a thriving occult scene at the turn of the century.

### 8.2.1 Stebbins's Breathing Exercises Informing Yogic Breath Cultivation

Genevieve Stebbins' influence on breath-cultivation practices was twofold: she provided a conceptual framework for the "breath of life" as well as "rhythmic breathing", and she developed specific breathing exercises. Chapter 5.2 has mainly focused on her worldview, which also informed her understanding of rhythmic and dynamic breathing as outlined in *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892).<sup>413</sup> To recapitulate, in rhythmic breathing one counts each phase of breathing (in its basic form, e.g., 4-2-4-2, inhale-retain-exhale-retain). In dynamic breathing, the counted phases of breathing (e.g., 4-4-4, inhale-retain-exhale) are accompanied by various movements of the limbs, while the muscular tension is increased during the breath-holding phase (Stebbins 1892: 97-102). In both forms of breath cultivation, ether is assimilated, thus raising the practitioner's vitality and overall religious and occult potential. Additionally, one will develop "personal magnetic power" (*ibid.*: 97). Stebbins's rhythmic breathing appears in almost all subsequent manuals of yogic breath cultivation from Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga* onwards, and in breath-related texts of the wider field of alternative religion. I will further briefly describe here some lesser-known techniques as outlined in *Dynamic Breathing* that nevertheless influenced yogic breath cultivation.

Generally, all breath techniques described by Stebbins are combined with what she calls "mental imagery" or "mental ideas". She used imagination to increase – or even produce – the intended results, and it constitutes an important part of her psycho-physical culture (Stebbins 1892: 70).<sup>414</sup> Some exercises are accompanied with imagery that addresses physiological aspects, such as "complete dispersion of the blood and energy from the brain downward to the feet", while lying supine on the floor and establishing the rhythm 5-1-5-1 (inhale-retain-exhale-retain) during "dispersive breathing" (*ibid.*: 85). The focus lies on diaphragmatic breathing and a short retention, which alleviates the dispersed energy of "brain-workers" (*ibid.*: 85-86).<sup>415</sup> In the "Packing Breath", one draws in the breath in several small inhalations and imagines

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<sup>413</sup> Henceforth *Dynamic Breathing*.

<sup>414</sup> For a discussion of (Stebbins's) psycho-physical culture see chapter 4.4.3; chapter 5.2.3.

<sup>415</sup> It is possible that such a practice would have been taught to Stebbins by the pandit she met in London, because she reported that he had offered specific exercises for "brain workers" and "Oxford professors" (Stebbins 1913 [1898]: 21).

smelling “delightfully aromatic, health-giving perfume” (*ibid.*: 87).<sup>416</sup> During “inspirational” and “aspirational breathing”, rhythmic breathing is combined with arm movements, the movements ending at the body’s mid line with hands put together in “prayer position” (*ibid.*: 88-89). The idea is to draw in “Divine Providence” and “Divine illumination” to “exalt the whole being” (*ibid.*). But Stebbins also describes more down-to-earth practices, such as “therapeutic breathing for women”, in which one pushes the abdomen out during the held in-breath to invigorate the ovaries, the index fingers pressing slightly on the region of the same (*ibid.*: 90). The “anti-dyspeptic respiration” renders the belly “hard like a drum” by concentrating the breath at the navel region and holding it there to relieve indigestion or dyspepsia (*ibid.*). While these techniques influenced several exponents of yoga,<sup>417</sup> I will now investigate in detail another breathing exercise by Stebbins termed “yoga breathing”. The name not only evokes a proximity to yoga, but the technique also resembles certain premodern yogic techniques.

#### 8.2.1.1 Stebbins’s “Yoga Breathing” in Relation to *Prāṇa*-Related Practices of Concentration

For “yoga breathing”, also called “concentrated will-breathing”, one assumes a supine position and imagines that the breath flows in and out through various body parts. Thus, one “breathes” through the limbs, through the abdominal, pelvic, and solar plexial region, and the upper chest, until finally “breathing through the head and the whole organism in one grand surging influx of dynamic life” (Stebbins 1892: 86).<sup>418</sup> Stebbins does not further specify from where she derived this practice other than explaining that it is “so called because its use by the Brahmins and Yogis of India” (*ibid.*). She further mentions that the celebrated Italian maestro and voice teacher Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839–1910) advised his students “to breathe in their bones” and that this practice has a strong “magnetic” effect (*ibid.*: 87). Also, the Delsartist Carrica Le Favre had described a similar practice shortly before Stebbins, in which one imagines drawing in air through the arms and exhaling it through the legs and feet (Le Favre 1891: 30). It is therefore not unjustified to interpret this exercise as part of Stebbins’s repertoire of physical culture and voice culture, or as part of the

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<sup>416</sup> Stebbins may well have taken the idea of the Packing Breath from Shaftesbury (1888: 42-43), who describes a similar exercise as “natural packing exercise”. His exercise, however, lacks the idea of inhaling the scent of a health-enhancing perfume. For more on Shaftesbury, see below.

<sup>417</sup> For example, Yogendra (1932: 58-60) adopted Stebbins’s anti-dyspeptic respiration, among other notions.

<sup>418</sup> For a discussion of Stebbins’s “yoga breathing”, see also Streeter (2020: 26-27).

influence that mesmeric practices had on these fields (Baier 2009: 463). Given that Stebbins reports that she had met a “Hindu pundit” (a person who is still unidentified) in London who inspired her to develop dynamic breathing (Stebbins 1913 [1898]: 21), it is, however, possible that Stebbins encountered a yogic practice of withdrawing the senses (*pratyāhāra*), which is indeed similar to what she teaches.<sup>419</sup>

According to the instruction in the seventh chapter of the fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya*, the breath (*prāṇa*) needs to be moved sequentially through eighteen vital points (*marmasthāna*) (Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 16).<sup>420</sup> These are

[t]he two big toes, the ankle, the middle of shanks, the root of the shanks, the middle of the knees and the thighs and the anus. After that, the middle of the body, the penis, the navel, the heart, the pit of the throat, the root of the palate, the root of the nose, the eyeballs, the middle of the eyebrows, the forehead and [top of the] head (*Yogayājñavalkya* 7.8cd–11ab as quoted in Birch & Hargreaves 2015: 16–17).

This differs from Stebbins’s description in so far that the *Yogayājñavalkya* mentions the anus and the reproductive organ (while Stebbins only draws attention to the pelvic region in general), and goes into greater detail as to the *marmasthāna* found in the head. Also, the medieval Indian text does not suggest surging the breath “in and out” through these points, but rather simply moving the “breath” from one point to another. “Breath” is probably understood here not literally, but as (the sensation of) vital air, which, once conquered, can be deliberately moved to any body part (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 133; chapter 3.3.5; chapter 8.1.1). Nevertheless, there are similarities. While they could be mere coincidence, the reception history of Stebbins’s yoga breathing is worth noting on its own account.

Stebbins’s yoga breathing exerted wide influence on the emerging Euro-American relaxation culture. This field consisted of several strands, among these a yoga-related and a therapeutic one (Singleton 2005; Baier 2016a: 50–51). In terms of its direct reception in modern yoga a few years later, Atkinson teaches this practice with some adaptations, terming it the “Grand Yogi Psychic Breath” (Ramacharaka

<sup>419</sup> This possible connection was first observed by Baier (2016a: 55). It must be noted, however, that Stebbins did not go into details as to what she learnt from the pandit in practical terms, nor is it, at the present state of research, possible to reconstruct it.

<sup>420</sup> *Yogayājñavalkya* appropriates these verses from the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* which in turn derived from ascetic contexts in which the liberation potential of this practice was emphasised (Birch 2018: 24–26). A similar practice of stabilizing the *prāṇa* in eighteen vital points is also described in the later *Trisikhibrahmaṇa Upaniṣad* and *Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad* (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 16; Ruff 2002: 163–164, 171). Furthermore, in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, the *Skandapurāṇa* recommends “concentrating the *prāṇa* at a particular location in the body as advised by the guru” which is termed *prāṇadhāraṇā* or the “holding of *prāṇa*” (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 16).



1904: 67-68). Besides Atkinson, one of the main disseminators of Stebbins’s teachings in India was Yogendra (Foxen 2020: 238-244; chapter 8.3.2). He combines Stebbins’s elaboration of relaxation techniques and the practice of contemplating the breath in the eighteen *marmasthāna*. Quoting Stebbins almost verbatim in two pages on relaxation (Yogendra 1940: 122-124; Stebbins 1892: 76-81), he then describes *śavāsana*, or the supine position, for relaxation. According to Yogendra, *śavāsana* could be practised either in partial or full relaxation (Yogendra 1940: 126; 1931: 220; figure 12). In partial relaxation, *śavāsana* is combined with the practice of contemplating “the sixteen vital zones of the body, by paying attention to each part separately. For the purposes of relaxation, movements of bionergy [i.e., *prāṇa*, M.K.], and concentration, these parts are termed *marmasthānāni*, or the sensitive zones” (Yogendra 1940: 126).<sup>421</sup> The points that Yogendra lists are largely aligned with the *pratyāhāra* practice described in the *Yogayājñavalkya* (omitting the two points at the shanks, but adding the lips). The purpose of this practice is on the one hand said to be relaxation – a thoroughly modern theme more concerned with the therapeutic than the soteriological (Singleton 2005: 294). On the other hand, it aims to direct “bionergy” (for Yogendra a synonym for *prāṇa*) throughout the body and to induce “concentration”, which can be translated as *pratyāhāra*.



FIGURE 12: YOGENDRA IN *ŚAVĀSANA* AS DEPICTED IN *YOGA PERSONAL HYGIENE* (YOGENDRA: 1931: 220).

Similar practices, described as either “*pratyāhāra*” or “(*prāṇa*)-*dhāraṇā*” in various texts (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 16),<sup>422</sup> show that *prāṇa* was also harnessed in premodern yogic practices that were not explicitly termed *prāṇāyāma*. This explains partly why in modern yoga contexts *prāṇa* is applied in highly diverse ways. The idea of drawing “breath” from point to point in the physical body thus becomes a theme in the larger context of yogic breath cultivation. It could be argued that Stebbins’s correlation of relaxation and breathing is as intimately linked to concentration as the

<sup>421</sup> *Marmasthānāni* is the plural form of *marmasthāna*. In fact, Yogendra diverts from the *Yogayājñavalkya* by listing sixteen, not eighteen vital points.

<sup>422</sup> For further discussion of *pratyāhāra* and (*prāṇa*)-*dhāraṇā* practices, see chapter 3.3.5; chapter 8.1.1.

*pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā* practices described in premodern Haṭha texts. Perhaps therefore Yogendra places Stebbins's introductory words on relaxation alongside *marmasthāna* practice, indicating that there is a connection between these themes.

Moving from the terrain of Stebbins's practical teachings, the following section engages the wider nineteenth-century physical culture, which is, as exemplified by our next protagonist, again mingled with occultism. Against this multifaceted background, William Walker Atkinson, a highly influential figure for yogic breath cultivation, is now introduced.

### 8.2.2 *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath: Yoga, Hygiene and Occultism* by William Walker Atkinson

William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932) was a highly prolific author who published under several pseudonyms and on a broad range of subjects.<sup>423</sup> Before starting a writing career, a nervous breakdown in the late 1880s led the former attorney to the study of New Thought (Andrick 2020: 14).<sup>424</sup> Atkinson then became a major player within turn-of-the-century New Thought and the larger occult scene. His engagement with yoga was also deep-rooted in his occult interests. It was a lifelong exploration into self-help techniques as well as an interest in alternative healing techniques that wedded Atkinson to topics like yoga, mesmerism, personal magnetism, Rosicrucianism, and magic, to name a few. He wrote various books on (what he called) yoga under the pseudonym of Yogi Ramacharaka from 1903 onwards. His yoga teachings that combined elements of physical and hygienic culture, occultism, and New Thought were widely influential on subsequent modern yoga pioneers. Though clearly occult in nature, Atkinson's yoga was also “bolstered by science and psychology” (Deslippe 2011: 24). He mainly published his Ramacharaka works under the auspices of the Yogi Publication Society in Chicago between 1903 and 1909. Being involved in both publishing and writing, he co-edited the *Journal of Magnetism* (renamed *New Thought* in 1902) with Sydney B. Flower (b. 1867), who soon became a competitor of Atkinson. During his highly prolific years, which spanned roughly between 1903 and the late 1920s, Atkinson moved to various cities in the United

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<sup>423</sup> This paragraph is based on Deslippe (2019). For further details on Atkinson's entanglement in the occult field see Deslippe (2019). A quite detailed analysis of Atkinson's understanding of yoga in relation to physical culture is found in Albanese (2007: 359-362). Albanese however does not mention Atkinson's usage of breathing techniques at all.

<sup>424</sup> For an extensive discussion of the New Thought movement, see chapter 4.2.3.

States, among these the occult hubs Chicago and Los Angeles, collaborating and exchanging ideas with various protagonists of the occult scene.

As a key figure in occult circles interested in yoga, Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's<sup>425</sup> influence on the wider reception of *prāṇa* and *prāṇa*-related practices (including yogic breath cultivation and Pranic Healing) can hardly be overstated. As with Genevieve Stebbins – but aided by his persona as a Yogi in disguise – his texts were also immensely influential on South Asian modern yoga pioneers. The seminal publication on the subject is Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath: A Complete Manual of the Oriental Breathing Philosophy of Physical, Mental, Psychic and Spiritual Development* (1904).<sup>426</sup> The book is a product of a correspondence course by Atkinson/Ramacharaka that reached the mailboxes of his students in 1903 and 1904.<sup>427</sup> Further important works based on his mail-order lessons are *Hatha Yoga: Or the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* (1904), *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy* (1905),<sup>428</sup> *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy* (1905), *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (1906), *The Science of Psychic Healing* (1906), and *The Spirit of the Upanishads* (1907).

Recent scholarship has started to pay attention to this influential figure. This chapter can therefore build on the works of Baier (2009), Deslippe (2011; 2018; 2019), Foxen (2020), and Zoehrer (2020). Baier has analysed Atkinson's influence on modern yogic contemplative practices, shedding light on the regulation of *prāṇa* in breathing exercises and conveying *prāṇa* to others (Baier 2009: 485-498). Deslippe has provided highly relevant insights regarding biographical data and Atkinson's entanglement with the occult (Deslippe 2011; 2019). Foxen investigated the relationship between American Delsartism and Atkinson's work (Foxen 2020: 211, 215). Finally, Zoehrer

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<sup>425</sup> In what follows, I will use the name "Atkinson/Ramacharaka" when referring to Atkinson's yoga-related statements and publications that were published under the pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka. I will refer to the author as "Atkinson" in more generic contexts that address his activity as a prolific writer with several pseudonyms absorbing and reproducing ideas from multiple cultural contexts and occult strands.

<sup>426</sup> I henceforth use the abbreviated title *Science of Breath* in the remainder of this chapter section. Its first edition is sometimes dated to 1903. It is therefore likely that the mail-order lessons forming the basis for their publication as a book had been circulated from 1903 onwards. However, the Classic Reprint Series of Forgotten Books that I use mentions 1904 as the publication date. In any case, the mail-order lessons were subsequently also published in the shorter *The Hindu-Yogi Breathing Exercises: A System of Physical, Mental and Soul Development by the Oriental Occult Science of Rhythmic and Vibrational Breathing* (1905b), with insignificant differences between these two publications. I therefore rely on the better-known and more elaborate *Science of Breath*.

<sup>427</sup> For an overview and an assessment of the relevance of correspondence courses or mail-order lessons in modern yoga's dissemination, see also Kraler (forthcoming).

<sup>428</sup> The first two lessons of this course were published in 1903, the rest in 1904. According to the source from which I cite, the lessons came out in book form in 1905.

(2020) has engaged Atkinson's notion of Pranic Healing by contextualising it with mesmeric healing practices.

The watershed publication for Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's influence on yogic breath cultivation is *Science of Breath*. After discussing the main features of this text, I briefly treat its appeal to "nature" as a lens through which to read yogic breath cultivation, as well as its indebtedness to the physical-culture movement and the wider New Thought mindscape. Much of what the author called "Yogi Philosophy" and the "Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath" can be understood through investigating these contexts. However, I also aim to show that Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's contribution to yogic breath cultivation was significantly entangled with the works of his yogic predecessors.

#### 8.2.2.1 *Prāṇa* and "Yogi Breathing" in *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath*

In *Science of Breath*, Atkinson/Ramacharaka presents an elaborate system to describe the potency of breath cultivation for absorbing *prāṇa* and regulating *prāṇa*-flows. The work comprises "a mixture of physical culture, contemporary science, New Thought philosophy, and self-help techniques" (Deslippe 2019: 65). Although *prāṇa* and its various synonyms are the pivotal point in the book, breath cultivation is never referred to as "*prāṇāyāma*" therein, but is termed "yogi breathing".<sup>429</sup> *Prāṇa* is by and large the only Sanskrit term used in this tract (except the already anglicised "yogi"), which indicates the wide dissemination of the term within occult networks around 1900. It seems that the term was both accessible and exotic enough to attract our yogi's audience.

Atkinson/Ramacharaka explains the significance of *prāṇa* by expounding the difference between an "exoteric theory of breath" and an "esoteric theory of breath". While Western science provides an understanding of the "exoteric theory of breath" by addressing, for instance, the relevance of the oxygenation of the blood, the yogic "esoteric theory of breath", placing *prāṇa* centre stage, is the superior Eastern counterpart (Ramacharaka 1904: 11-15, 16-19). However, the exposition of this "Eastern" theory is, upon close inspection, an Easternised version of an interpretation of the cosmos in terms of mesmerism (Baier 2009: 490). In this Easternised version, Atkinson/Ramacharaka considers the relevance of *prāṇa*, or life-breath as immanent in all living beings, and he idiosyncratically translates *prāṇa* as "Absolute Energy"

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<sup>429</sup> Atkinson/Ramacharaka employs several umbrella terms for his "yogi breathing" exercises, among these "pranic breathing" (Ramacharaka 1906b: 71-72), "rhythmic breathing" (Ramacharaka 1904), and "vibrational breathing" (Ramacharaka 1905b).

(Ramacharaka 1904: 16). In following “occultists in all ages and lands”, he sees an immanent connection between *prāṇa* and the “spirit of life” which is a “universal principle” (*ibid.*: 16-17). Highlighting the difference between atmospheric air and *prāṇa*, he states that “[p]rāṇa is in the atmospheric air, but it is also elsewhere, and it penetrates where the air cannot reach” (*ibid.*: 17). His conception of *prāṇa*, like in his predecessors’ case, follows the principle of “occult causality” as a nexus between the macrocosm and microcosm (chapter 5.1). In other words, Atkinson/Ramacharaka accentuates the absorption of *prāṇa* and its crucial function for keeping the human system healthy.<sup>430</sup> This perspective is grounded in the assumption that *prāṇa* is responsible for all physiological functions and is synonymous with “Vital Force”, “nerve force”, or “nervous force” (Ramacharaka 1905a: 120).<sup>431</sup> Assimilated through breath cultivation, *prāṇa* can be applied for self-healing as well as for healing others, which again indicates his reception of mesmeric practices (see below).

*Science of Breath* presents “Yogi Breathing” as a crucial tool to harness *prāṇa* for holistic self-development. As the subtitle of *Science of Breath* suggests and as the text explains, Atkinson/Ramacharaka presents a “system for physical, mental, psychic, and spiritual development”. All the breathing exercises described in the first part of the book, including the “Yogi Complete Breath” (henceforth “complete breath”), the “Seven Yogi Developing Exercises”, and the “Seven Minor Yogi Exercises” fall under the category of being physically beneficent (Ramacharaka 1904: 27-50). The complete breath, which is a combination of abdominal breathing, costal breathing, and clavicular breathing, lays the foundation for all the physically oriented practices (*ibid.*: 33). The physical practices in turn form the base for the advanced practices, which are “Yogi Rhythmic Breathing”, “Yogi Psychic Breathing”, and “Yogi Spiritual Breathing”,<sup>432</sup> designed to train the mental, the psychic and the spiritual abilities of the aspirant (*ibid.*: 51-79).

For the New Thought yogi, rhythmic breathing becomes the line dividing the physical goals from the mental, psychic, and spiritual goals on the yogi’s path. It is clearly adopted from Stebbins, with the difference that the prescribed ratio is 6-3-6-3,

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<sup>430</sup> At times, he speaks of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in more cosmological terms, e.g., in Ramacharaka (1906a: 54-59, 74-75). In the *Advanced Course of Yogi Philosophy*, Atkinson/Ramacharaka clearly adopts Vivekananda’s cosmological rendition that privileges *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in a chapter/mail-order lesson titled “Matter and Force” (Ramacharaka 1931 [1905]: 283-309).

<sup>431</sup> The equation of *prāṇa* with “nervous force”, an influential concept of nineteenth-century physiology, is already found in Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga*, in which the author at times translates *prāṇa* as “nerve current” (Vivekananda 1896: 19; chapter 8.1.1).

<sup>432</sup> Henceforth “rhythmic breathing”, “psychic breathing”, and “spiritual breathing”.

and not, as in Stebbins's case 4-2-4-2 (*ibid.*: 53-54; Stebbins 1892: 83). As with Stebbins and the members of the H. B. o. L., here too rhythmic breathing is a prerequisite for all higher attainments. It is also a preliminary practice to transform lower, unwanted emotions into higher aspirations, which includes transmuting sexual energy by raising and storing it in the solar plexus (Ramacharaka 1904: 63-66; Baier 2009: 495). As in Stebbins's case, the potency of rhythmic breathing techniques lies in the phenomenon of vibration. Atkinson/Ramacharaka holds that there is "no mystic property in the [rhythmic, M.K.] breath itself [...] but the rhythm produced by the Yogi breath is such as to bring the whole system, including the brain, under perfect control, and in perfect harmony" (Ramacharaka 1904: 69). Here, rhythm and vibration seem to hold a similarly potent position as the category of *prāṇa*.<sup>433</sup> In climbing the ladder of occult powers, rhythmic breathing combined with consciously directing the "psychic force" is called "psychic breathing". It yields paranormal results like projecting a strong aura around oneself, or the ability to heal others. "Spiritual breathing", then, bestows perception of the soul and universal consciousness expressed in the notion "at-one-ment" (*ibid.*: 70-72). The author's system indeed leads from physical practices to those that reach into the spheres of occult powers and religious experiences.<sup>434</sup>

The concise outline of *Science of Breath* contained, in a nutshell, what later publications by Atkinson/Ramacharaka would develop further. For example, here *prāṇa* is mainly understood as "vital force", whereas *prāṇa* is, probably through Vivekananda's influence, conceived as a principle intimately linked to the individual will and the universal mind in *A Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga* (Ramacharaka 1906a: 90-96). Nevertheless, *Science of Breath* is distinct in its scope, insofar as it combines several practices of physical culture and occultism, additionally highlighting the yogi's appeal to nature.

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<sup>433</sup> Vibration and rhythm are two of the seven hermetic principles in Atkinson's *The Kybalion* which was written under the pseudonym Three Initiates (Three Initiates 1908: 137-170).

<sup>434</sup> Besides rhythmic breathing, Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "psychic breathing" became influential, especially in occult contexts. "Psychic" was, in these contexts, a term to hint at occult capabilities a person had. The term "psychic breathing" gained attention in subsequent publications, appearing, for example, in Adelia Fletcher's *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath* (1908: 297-298, 325) as "psychic breath". The German occultist Peryt Shou (pseud., Albert Georg Christian Schultz, 1873–1953) adopted Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's notions of psychic breathing and mantra, writing books on both subjects. These are *Der Psychische Atem* (1910), *Praktische Mantramistik: Das Mantram und die Vokal-Atmung* (n.d.a.), and *Praktischer Mantram-Kursus* (n.d.a.) (Hauser 2018: 527). The term "psychic breathing" may be influenced by Vivekananda's notion of the psychic *prāṇa*, which he only uses once in *Rāja Yoga*. The notion of the psychic *prāṇa* was not highly successful, and to my knowledge was only echoed by Sivananda (1962 [1935]) (see chapter 8.4.2).

### 8.2.2.2 Breathing Through the Nostrils: Appeal to Nature

*Science of Breath* portrays the yogi as a figure who is closely attuned to nature in several ways. Echoing a romantic exaltation of nature, a common discourse in physical culture (Albanese 2007: 361), breathing should also be “natural”. This mainly means two things: calling into question the negative effects of civilisation, and applying the beneficial outcome of yogi breathing exercises, particularly nostril-breathing. The curative effect of nostril breathing contrasted with the negative one of mouth breathing are described at length (Ramacharaka 1904: 23-26). Nostril breathing cleanses and warms the air before it reaches the lungs, thus preventing germs, dust, and cold air from harming them (*ibid.*: 25). Ultimately, natural breathing is the only means to restore the innate health of the people, or the “race” in general, which is said to be degenerating: “Man’s only physical salvation is to ‘get back to Nature’” (*ibid.*: 15). Whether Atkinson/Ramacharaka invokes the infant, the savage, or the yogi who never encountered the negative effects of civilisation (*ibid.*: 8-10) – all of these agents of otherness are nostril breathers rather than mouth breathers.

These passages on natural breathing reveal a bundle of influences on Atkinson. On the one hand, they are reminiscent of the eugenic tendencies of the physical-culture movement, understanding itself as the main corrective against the degeneration of the “civilised race”. On the other, Atkinson drew on a medical discourse that stresses the usefulness of nostril breathing for the prevention of various diseases and heavily opposed mouth breathing. The most germane, and perhaps earliest, source for this is George Catlin’s *The Breath of Life: Or Mal-respiration and its Effects upon the Enjoyments & Life of Man* (1862),<sup>435</sup> from which Atkinson most likely borrows. The unambiguous core message in Catlin’s book is “shut your mouth”, signifying the need for nostril breathing for health both during wakefulness and sleep. As Nile Green has noted, Catlin’s theory was a “blend of ethnology and quackery”, basing his claims on observations of tribal Native Americans of Brazil, Peru, and the United States (Green 2008: 300). Among other features, Catlin highlights the nursing habits of these tribes in which stress was laid on breastfeeding and the necessity of teaching infants to sleep with closed mouths, a description that contrasts “savage” mothers with “civilised” (British) ones (Catlin 1872 [1862]: 43).

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<sup>435</sup> It was also published as *Shut Your Mouth and Save Your Life* (1870). This book was not only influential for Atkinson, but also for several physical culturists, e.g., J. P. Müller and Bess Mensendieck. Abhedananda (2009 [1967]: 59-60) implicitly adopts Catlin’s ideas via the influence of Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.1.2)

Catlin's ethnography had sparked a whole discourse of correct natural breathing as it could be observed in Native Americans. Edmund Shaftesbury, a representative of physical culture (see below), quotes from the August 20, 1887 issue of the *Scientific American* in full: it says that "full-blooded Indians" and tribes with little interaction with civilisation were abdominal breathers as opposed to upper-chest breathers (which was the kind of breathing ascribed to white women) (Shaftesbury 1888: 9). Furthermore, the influential but under-studied *Therapeutic Sarcognomy* (1891) by Rhodes Buchanan, known to Stebbins and perhaps also to Atkinson, states, by referencing one Dr. E. Cutter, that the gypsies had a natural way to breathe that consisted of deep inhalation by fully inflating the chest, a brief retention, and a thorough exhalation (Buchanan 1891: 395). All these authors appeal to the "savage", the "infant", and the "gypsy" as the "natural" (yet "uncivilised") other, but the yogi as an outstanding example for this is likely Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's invention.

#### 8.2.2.3 Breath Cultivation in Light of American Delsartism and Physical Culture

In terms of various forms of breath cultivation described in *Science of Breath*, it heavily relies on breathing techniques established within contexts of American Delsartism and nineteenth-century physical culture. As in Stebbins's case, these breathing exercises were additionally interlaced with occult practices. In fact, most of the practices in *Science of Breath* can be analysed through the lens of nineteenth-century physical culture, the only exception being the brief description of alternate-nostril breathing (Ramacharaka 1904: 26, 67). The author describes alternate-nostril breathing as a potent "brain stimulating" exercise, and simultaneously cautions the reader to not mistake this form of breathing – due to its popularity – as the whole mystery of yogic breathing techniques (*ibid.*: 67). This not only points at the fact that alternate-nostril breathing was quite well-known around 1900, but also at Atkinson's choice to describe various other breathing techniques that were *not* part of the yogic canon before he entered the scene. These may have been the preferred exercises for him, but it is even more likely that no other forms of yogic breath cultivation were known at this time to which Atkinson could relate. Even Abhedananda, whose texts he was aware of, did not describe Haṭhayogic forms of breath cultivation in detail, and Vivekananda only described alternate-nostril breathing. As for the contexts of Atkinson's breathing techniques, they are briefly examined here – which indeed suggests that his rather dismissive attitude towards American Delsartism, which probably imitates Vivekananda, is wholly unjustified (Singleton 2010: 246).



As has been mentioned, Atkinson adopts Stebbins's rhythmic breathing, including its metaphysical relevance. He further employs her "Packing Breath" (Ramacharaka 1904: 50; Stebbins 1892: 87). Moreover, the vocal breath that includes the engagement of the voice is most likely taken from American Delsartism and Euro-American voice culture (Ramacharaka 1904: 42). One of the advanced breath practices in *Science of Breath* is what Atkinson/Ramacharaka calls the "Grand Yogi Psychic Breath" which is highly reminiscent of Stebbins's "yoga breathing" (as discussed above). While adopting Stebbins's prescription to imagine surging the breath (in his case *prāṇa*) through the bones and through the solar plexus, Atkinson/Ramacharaka instructs the reader to distribute *prāṇa* to the "Seven Vital Centers" located between the skull and the reproductive region (*ibid.*: 68). Although these centres are not fully congruent with the location of *cakras* as outlined for example in Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*, this nevertheless points at a reception of the notion of the *cakras*, and, due to highlighting the solar plexus as a highly receptive zone, also of mesmerism (Baier 2009: 495-496; Zoehrer 2020: 169).

As to Atkinson's further influence from American Delsartism-related practices, I briefly turn to the aforementioned Webster Edgerly (1852–1926) who published under the pseudonym Edmund Shaftesbury.<sup>436</sup> Shaftesbury belonged to the wider field of elocutionists and voice trainers who often joined forces with the deep-breathing discourse. Furthermore, he was a representative of a kind of self-enhancing practice termed "personal magnetism" (Shaftesbury 1888: 37). Like Atkinson, Shaftesbury was a former attorney, and, like Stebbins, he was already active in the field of voice culture in the late 1880s. In an advertisement appended to his *Lessons in Artistic Deep Breathing for Strengthening the Voice* (1888), he positions his system as superior over other systems of deep breathing, including those of the Delsartists. Though not necessarily providing a better-organised system, as he claims, it was certainly comprehensive. It comprises 52 breathing exercises which he teaches in several so-called drills, among these drills for students of average health, for children, for weak people, and for invalids. While Shaftesbury's impact on Stebbins was minor, he directly informed Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's "Seven Yogi Developing Exercises" as well as his "Yogi Nerve Vitalizing Breath" – which according to our yogi-author had been "borrowed" by the physical culturists from the yogis (Ramacharaka 1904: 40-47).

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<sup>436</sup> I am grateful to Dominic Zoehrer for bringing the works of Edgerly/Shaftesbury (henceforth Shaftesbury) and their impact on Atkinson to my attention.

The “Yogi Nerve Vitalizing Breath” has a direct precedent in the “Nervo-Muscular Gymnastic applied to Breathing” which was also taught in Shaftesbury’s “nerve calisthenics” of the “School of Personal Magnetism” (Shaftesbury 1888: 36-37). In both Shaftesbury and Atkinson/Ramacharaka, it helps to strengthen and stimulate the nervous system (*ibid.*: 37; Ramacharaka 1904: 41). Here, in a standing position, one combines rhythmic breathing with a gradually increasing tension that builds up in the arms as they are pulled from the side towards the midline; the breath and the muscular tension then being released simultaneously (*ibid.*). Also, Shaftesbury’s “Chest Tapping Exercise” (Shaftesbury 1888: 37), in which one gently taps the chest while the breath is retained after inhalation, appears again in Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “Lung Cell Stimulation” (Ramacharaka 1904: 44). Further similarities are found between the latter’s “Rib Stretching”, and “Chest Expansion” (*ibid.*: 44-45), and Shaftesbury’s “Kneading the Chest” (Shaftesbury 1888: 37, 103). Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “Walking Exercise”, in which one counts the steps along with a measured inhalation, retention, and exhalation (Ramacharaka 1904: 45-46) is equally inspired by Shaftesbury’s homonymous exercise (Shaftesbury 1888: 34-35).

Although Shaftesbury does not reveal any yogic influence on his system, his 1888 text is one of the first Euro-American breathing manuals that mentions alternate-nostril breathing, terming it “Single Nostril Breathing” (Shaftesbury 1888: 20). He also suggests a breathing exercise in the ratio 8-24-12 (inhale-retain-exhale) (*ibid.*: 86) which resembles the typical yogic *mātrā* 1-4-2. Regarding the others, at least some of these exercises can probably be found in other deep-breathing manuals (certainly he did not invent all of them), but the density of congruence between Shaftesbury and Atkinson/Ramacharaka is too evident to be mere coincidence.<sup>437</sup>

One of the most influential practices described by Atkinson/Ramacharaka is, as briefly addressed above, the “Yogi Complete Breath”, or more briefly, the

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<sup>437</sup> Another case in point is Leo Kofler’s *The Art of Breathing*, the manuscript of which was already written in 1883, and first published in 1887. The Austrian-born singer, singing teacher, and organist Kofler (d. 1908) applied a breathing exercise called the “healthful lung-sweeper” in which one exhales through a small opening of the lips to cleanse the lungs (Kofler 1890 [1887]: 88). Shaftesbury taught a similar exercise in which one is advised to exhale through a pipe stem, termed “pipe stem exhalation” (Shaftesbury 1888: 29). In Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s text, this exercise is called the “Yogi Cleansing Breath”, but practised without a pipe stem (Ramacharaka 1904: 40-41). It is quite likely that Shaftesbury drew on Kofler, since Kofler had already described breathing through one nostril, and an exercise termed “padding the upper chest” for “opening the lung-cells” (Kofler 1890 [1887]: 90). Atkinson may have been acquainted with Leo Kofler’s book as well, but the fact that he additionally employed the concept of “personal magnetism”, which was also promoted by Shaftesbury, hints again at the reception of the latter. Kofler’s contribution needs further investigation that cannot be undertaken here. In any case, the singing teacher was also influential on German schools of breath gymnastics like that of Carola Spitz (Ribbat 2020: 15, 22).

“complete breath”. Despite its non-yogic origin, it gained currency in subsequent yogic breath cultivation discourses and was, in fact, so influential that it became part of many yogic breath cultivation curriculums across the globe. The question as to how to approach correct breathing in the wider deep-breathing discourse of hygienic culture was highly controversial (chapter 7.2). In physical-culture and medical discourses, a threefold division of breath space was common. The terminology usually applied was abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing, side-/rib-/costal breathing, and clavicular/upper-chest breathing. Various schools emphasised one or the other way to breathe. While some would propose that “correct” deep breathing is abdominal or diaphragmatic, others would highlight side- or rib-breathing. Most of the interlocutors though held that mere clavicular breathing was not desirable. It was, moreover, commonplace that females were prone to the latter due to wearing a corset anyway, and they were advised to proactively cultivate a fuller and deeper breath.

American Delsartists presented the three-fold division of breath space as part of the Delsarte heritage (e.g., Le Favre 1891: 37-42). It is, however, uncertain if François Delsarte indeed taught such an anatomically informed division. The origins may lie elsewhere, since authors that were not (yet) influenced by Delsarte taught a similar concept (e.g., Monroe 1869: 25-26). The voice specialist Oskar Guttmann had distinguished “abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing, shoulder or collar-bone breathing, and side or rib-breathing” (Guttmann 1884 [1867]: 137) as early as 1867.<sup>438</sup> Holding that “diaphragmatic” breathing is the best method, he also clarifies that diaphragmatic/abdominal breathing and side/rib-breathing are not mutually exclusive, but these terms only signify that one or the other usually predominates (*ibid.*: 138). In the 1890s, the Delsartean Carrica Le Favre synthesised all three forms of breathing in what she termed the “Full Breath” (Le Favre 1891: 42; chapter 5.2.1). Le Favre’s full breath (which was likely also promoted by others) was adopted as “Yogi Complete Breath” by Atkinson/Ramacharaka (Foxen 2020: 215).<sup>439</sup> After describing low-, mid- and high-breathing as separate techniques, he states that the combination of all three is the superior technique, resulting in the complete breath as the “fundamental breath of the entire Yogi Science of Breath” (Ramacharaka 1904: 33). One should practise it in an erect sitting or standing position, filling the lungs gradually from bottom to top,

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<sup>438</sup> Guttmann’s *Gymnastic of the Voice* was first published in German in 1867.

<sup>439</sup> Stebbins also taught “complete inhalation”, but in a different way: “The ribs expand and the abdomen is lifted as a final result, although at the beginning of the movement there is a slight outward swell. Distention of the back is the proof of complete inhalation [...] in standing-position” (Stebbins 1892: 84).

thereby avoiding a “jerky series of inhalations” (*ibid.*: 34).<sup>440</sup> After a brief retention, one exhales through the mouth by first drawing in the abdomen, and relaxes both abdomen and chest fully after the exhalation (*ibid.*). As a most “natural” form of breathing, the complete breath is said to be a remedy for the fight against common colds and tuberculosis, and to benefit the nervous system, the reproductive organs, and health in general (*ibid.*: 33, 36-39).<sup>441</sup>

Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s complete breath was a highly influential practice for modern yoga. It was successful enough to be presented in contemporaneous newspapers like in the *Chicago Examiner* of 1910 (figure 13). Atkinson was not the originator of this technique, nor was it originally yogic, but it was nevertheless easily absorbed into modern yoga through the authoritative outlook that Yogi Ramacharaka’s books had. Only few realised that they were not actually written by a South Asian yogi.

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<sup>440</sup> Already Shaftesbury repeatedly recommends inhaling and exhaling during a certain exercise without any “jerks or stops” (e.g., Shaftesbury 1888: 26, 28-29).

<sup>441</sup> The wider discourses of breath cultivation and fresh-air baths for the fight against tuberculosis also reached Atkinson. He recommends a typical bundle of nature-cure practices – sleeping in the open covered with several blankets combined with deep breathing exercises – in Ramacharaka (1906a: 222-223; cf. Singleton 2010: 131). Famous exponents of physical culture, e.g., Bernarr MacFadden in *Building of Vital Power* (1904) and J. P. Müller in *The Fresh Air Book* (1908) extensively treat the subject of fresh air around the same time as Atkinson, evidencing the wide dissemination of these themes. For a brief discussion of breath cultivation to aid in the fight against tuberculosis, see chapter 7.2.



#### 8.2.2.4 New Thought, Pranic Healing, and Sexual Magic

As has been mentioned, New Thought constitutes a highly important background for Atkinson's texts. However, New Thought was known not so much for an emphasis on breathing techniques, but for the view that a certain mindset was crucial to health and healing. Given the central role that thoughts apparently had for the process of cure, so-called affirmations as invented by the intellectual head of the movement, Warren Felt Evans, were applied (Hanegraaff 2006: 861; Baier 2009: 507). Developed out of mesmeric healing practices, among other influences, New Thought techniques also incorporated healing techniques by applying passes over a patient's body (chapter 4.2.1). These contexts highlighted the role of the solar plexus for (re)storing vital energy. It should be noted that it was not before the turn of the century that exponents of New Thought had started to incorporate breathing techniques as part of (self-)healing practices which were termed, following their mesmeric genealogy, "magnetic healing".

However, the solar plexus as the storage place of vital energy could be activated both through magnetic healing and breath cultivation, as turn-of-the-century New Thought authors suggested (figure 14; figure 15). Since the discourse of magnetic healing starts to become thoroughly intertwined with breath cultivation through the notion of *prāṇa*, this section briefly discusses Atkinson's contribution.<sup>443</sup> Following Vivekananda's lead, he correlated the vitalistic principle *prāṇa* with mesmeric practices like hands-on healing and distant healing. Although Vivekananda had already contributed significantly to this, this kind of treatment was first termed Pranic Healing by Atkinson/Ramacharaka in his *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy*, published as mail-order lessons between 1903 and 1904, and systematised in *The Science of Psychic Healing* (1906) (Zoehrer 2020: 164-170). In *Science of Breath*, the yogi is first advised to establish rhythmic breathing and is then entitled to practise (a) the willed absorption of *prāṇa* from the universe, which is stored in the solar plexus; (b) self-healing by laying-on of one's own hands on a painful or diseased body part, thereby revitalising it with *prāṇa*; (c) healing others by laying-on of hands on their bare skin or by projecting *prāṇa* to a person at a distance (Ramacharaka 1904: 55-60).

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<sup>442</sup> *Chicago Examiner* 10 (36), 58. I wish to thank Philip Deslippe for providing me with this reference.

<sup>443</sup> I will give a brief overview of Atkinson's understanding of healing through *prāṇa* as a form of magnetic healing because it is of key importance in *Science of Breath* itself as well as for its reception history. For an in-depth discussion see the forthcoming dissertation of Dominic Zoehrer, which reconstructs parts of the genealogy of energy-healing practices including Pranic Healing, as well as Zoehrer (2020).

All these practices are an outcome of psychic breathing, for which rhythmic breathing is both a prerequisite, as well as an amplifier of the results (*ibid.*: 59).



FIG 3.—TREATMENT FOR HEADACHE.

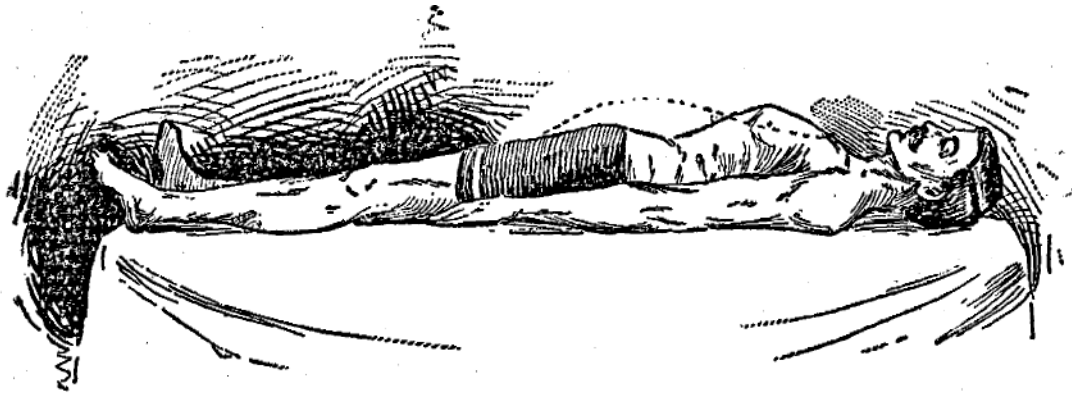
FIGURE 14: MAGNETIC HEALING WITH ONE HAND RESTING AT THE SOLAR PLEXUS, IN *A COURSE OF INSTRUCTION IN MAGNETIC HEALING* ([FLOWER] 1901b: 35).

Under the name of Ramacharaka, Atkinson accelerated the connection of breath cultivation, yoga, healing, and sexuality, thus associating yoga discourses even more closely with inherently Western forms of physical culture and occult practices. But, in doing so, he is probably indebted to a set of correspondence courses published in 1901 in Chicago as *A Course in Personal Magnetism: Self-Control and the Development of Character*, *A Course of Instruction in Magnetic Healing*, and *Zoism* ([Flower] 1901a; 1901b; 1901c). One of the likely candidates for the authorship of these correspondence courses is Atkinson's collaborator Sydney B. Flower.<sup>444</sup> Although breathing techniques (as well as the exact healing procedure) described in these courses differ from Yogi Ramacharaka's, both authors emphasise healing practices accompanied by breath cultivation. In *A Course in Personal Magnetism*, the healing agent is simply termed "the Force", whereas in *Zoism* it is "Zone",<sup>445</sup> but both suggest the idea of transferring a force-substance to the patient. *A Course in Personal*

<sup>444</sup> John Patrick Deveney in a personal correspondence (Aug 14, 2020).

<sup>445</sup> Zoism (from Greek *zōē*, "life") is one variety of the many vitalistic strands at the turn of the century that highlight the concept of the breath of life in their teachings. Besides Flower, another exponent of Zoism was E. S. Dowling, who published under the pseudonym Levi D'Guru and edited the journal *Breath of Life*. While this section can only mention the movement's most salient points as outlined in *Zoism* (1901), it deserves further analysis that cannot be undertaken here.

*Magnetism* marks out a breathing technique that stimulates the solar plexus or the “nerve battery” (figure 15).<sup>446</sup> This helps to gain a “magnetic” appearance that could be perceived by another receptive person, as well as “poise” and “calmness” ([Flower] 1901a: 39). *A Course of Instruction in Magnetic Healing* refers to the solar plexus as a “great nerve center”, or the “abdominal brain”; one of the healer’s hands should be always placed on the patient’s solar plexus to “radiate” the force so received through the entire nervous system ([Flower] 1901b: 30).<sup>447</sup>



**STIMULATING THE SOLAR PLEXUS FOR THE RADIATING VIBRATION THEORY.**

FIGURE 15: STIMULATING THE SOLAR PLEXUS IN *A COURSE IN PERSONAL MAGNETISM* ([FLOWER] 1901A: 35).

The author of these courses, who we assume is Flower, does not apply the term *prāṇa* at all. However, his work already shows how intertwined magnetic healing, New Thought practices, breathing techniques and yoga-related discourses were two years before Yogi Ramacharaka entered the stage. Flower was faintly acquainted with yoga practices, as indicated by his reference to a sensation that the “Hindoos call the ‘spirit movement’, when the Life Energy actually can be sensed in its distribution throughout the body by nerves and blood” ([Flower] 1901a: 23). Yet stronger evidence for the reception of modern yoga texts is found in the *Zoism* course, which describes alternate-

<sup>446</sup> “In supine position, alternately pushing the abdomen and the chest out, while the respective other part of the trunk collapses, and the breath is all the time held in; then resting for half a minute and repeat” ([Flower] 1901a: 39). A precedent of this may be found in Stebbins’s double respiration (Stebbins 1892: 89-90). This technique was later adopted into the teachings of Moshé Feldenkrais (own field data).

<sup>447</sup> Already the German anatomist and gynaecologist Heinrich August Wrisberg (1739–1808), likened the solar plexus to the *cerebrum abdominale*, or abdominal brain, in 1780. Following Wrisberg, the mesmerist John Campbell Colquhoun then also referred to the solar plexus as the abdominal brain in 1836 (Foxen 2020: 97-98). In his *The Solarplexus or Abdominal Brain*, written under the pseudonym Theron Q. Dumont, Atkinson hints at the works of the gynaecologist Byron Robinson, e.g., *The Abdominal Brain and Automatic Visceral Ganglia* (1899), as the originator of this term, indicating that Byron was an important disseminator thereof at that time (Baier 2009: 493, n. 256).



nostril breathing and silent *om* recitation ([Flower] 1901c: 21-27).<sup>448</sup> Moreover, the description of Zone in this work is quite congruent with the notion of *prāṇa* ([Flower] 1901c: 20). Most likely, the author was familiar with Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga*, referring to a tripartite scheme of consciousness (*ibid.*: 9-10). The "Zoist" – a kind of accomplished superman who only lives of the air he breathes – can transfer Zone to any part of his body or to others (*ibid.*: 43-44), an ability which is also ascribed to the yogi by Vivekananda (and Atkinson). Despite its obvious adoption of modern yoga ideas and practices, *Zoism* stresses that they nowhere conflict with Christ's word (*ibid.*: 14). In a way, Atkinson comes full circle with the *Zoism* course, but approaches its themes from the other direction: Atkinson presents New Thought practices as innately yogic, which most of them were not – at least before he rendered them so. His usage of *prāṇa*, moreover, is quite interchangeable with the vitalism-inflected terms applied in these correspondence courses.

The circles in which both Atkinson and Flower were involved were elsewhere described as the Chicago School of Psychology (Andrick 2020). Apart from their common interest in mind cure related to healing practices, at least some representatives of this milieu were also engaged in sexual magic, and so were Flower, Atkinson, and E. S. Dowling, who was one of the main disseminators of *Zoism* (chapter 5.2.2). John Patrick Deveney has suggested that the terms *Zoism*, magnetation, magnetic exchange, drawing up vital energy/force, cultivation of personal magnetism, Elixir of Life, or Divine Fire represent these authors' engagement in sexual magic.<sup>449</sup> Many of these terms are found in Flower's and Atkinson's correspondence courses, and most of them also include some breathing techniques. Especially the practice of drawing up vital energy is closely related to the sublimation of sex, and, like contemporaneous forms of breath cultivation and healing, it emphasises the role of the solar plexus. Thus, the solar plexus became a powerful locus in the human body, and its potential was accessed and increased through sexual magic, magnetic healing, and breath cultivation.

Zooming out to the wider field of New Thought practices, Atkinson also utilised affirmations in which certain thoughts and phrases are said to have a positive effect on health and well-being. In his works these affirmations are termed

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<sup>448</sup> In *Zoism*, Lesson VI, alternate-nostril breathing gradually builds up to the ratio 20-20-20 (inhale-retain-exhale), which is called the "full breath" ([Flower] 1901c: 26-27).

<sup>449</sup> These "codewords" and related practices were discussed in John Patrick Deveney's talk "The Twilight Mages and the Open Secret of Sex", delivered on Dec 10, 2017 at the Workshop "Asia, Buddhism, and Theosophy", Ryukoku University Kyoto.

“mantrams”.<sup>450</sup> Atkinson/Ramacharaka is likely one of the first authors in which mantrams as *English* (not Sanskrit) formulae are designed to enhance both well-being and spiritual growth. Among other themes, he combined mantrams with breath cultivation and a conscious becoming-aware of the solar plexus. The correspondence lessons *Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism* comprised in the homonymous 1905 book have appended a set of mantrams for each monthly lesson. For lesson seven on “Human Magnetism” (Ramacharaka 1905a: 115-138) the following mantram is recommended: “I absorb from the Universal Supply of Energy, a Sufficient Supply of Prana to Invigorate my Body – to Endow it with Health, Strength, Activity, Energy and Vitality” (*ibid.*: 281). While inhaling deep breaths one is “carrying the mental picture of the inflowing Prana, and the casting out of diseased matter through the breath” (*ibid.*). Thereby the influx of *prāṇa* can be sent to any fatigued, painful, or diseased body part, the effect being increased by one’s own hands passing over the body from top to bottom and occasionally resting on the solar plexus (*ibid.*). One should end the practice by mentally carrying “Health, Strength, Activity, Energy and Vitality into the Silence” (*ibid.*: 282). Besides the affirmation, contemplating silence is both the source and end of meditative practice in New Thought (Baier 2009: 504).

So far, Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s *Science of Breath* has been analysed against the backdrop of New Thought and mesmeric practices, as well as physical and hygienic culture. Among the crucial influence on Atkinson are the networks of American Delsartism, the Chicago School of Psychology, and the occult networks that engaged in sexual magic. However, it is highly relevant to see how Atkinson also adopted ideas from an even wider network and multiple sources including theosophy and modern yoga. This adoption is never “pure” but combined with several other influences, as holds true for most of the pioneers of modern yoga discussed in this study.

#### 8.2.2.5 Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s Yogic Predecessors

*Science of Breath* is preceded by the works of Prasad, Vivekananda, and Stebbins, all published in the previous century and informing our New Thought author. His text holds the position of being the most important publication for yogic breath cultivation

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<sup>450</sup> “*Mantram*” is a South Indian way to spell the Sanskrit term *mantra*, which was also used by theosophists, e.g., in the “Arya Prakash: The Autobiography of Dayānund Saraswati Swami”, published in the very first issue of *The Theosophist*, translated from the Hindi. Atkinson/Ramacharaka explains: “A mantram is a word, phrase, or verse used by the Eastern people in order to concentrate upon an idea and to let it sink deep into the mind. It is similar to the ‘statements’, or ‘affirmations’, used by the Mental Scientists and others of the Western world” (Ramacharaka 1905a: 278).

between 1900 and 1910, and even up to the late 1920s, when the seminal yoga manuals by Sundaram, Kuvalayananda, and Yogendra start to appear. This monopolistic position of Yogi Ramacharaka is only slightly challenged by the publications of the American Vedanta Society, most importantly by Swami Abhedananda's *How to be a Yogi* (1902) (chapter 8.1.2). Abhedananda, however, did not publish a pertinent manual on yogic breath cultivation, nor did he introduce new techniques.

Atkinson's yogic-occult studies engaged several South Asian authors. One was Rama Prasad's *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas: Nature's Finer Forces* (1890). As has been mentioned, this text was widely disseminated in the transnational occult milieu, and the title of *Science of Breath* is obviously based on Rama Prasad's text.<sup>451</sup> Another idea that borrows from Prasad is the concept that "prana colored by the thought of the sender" serves as a healing agent and can be "projected to persons at a distance" (Ramacharaka 1904: 59). Prasad had established the idea that *prāṇa* is personified by a certain colour relating to its owner, defined by both the ruling *tattva* and the mental-emotional state of a person (Prasad 1890: 96-97, 117).<sup>452</sup> The ultimate soteriological goal is defined by the fact that one's *prāṇa* no longer has a tattvic colour, which enables the yogi to return to the sun after death (*ibid.*: 77). This is also a path towards "comfort, pleasure, and enjoyment", or psychological and physical health, and additionally, it bestows one with magical powers like clairvoyance (*ibid.*: 162, 164-165). However, the idea that coloured *prāṇa* could be transmitted to another person is not found in Prasad's text itself, but in the works of Atkinson's predecessors, most importantly in those of Vivekananda.

Another influence can be posited from a less-known yogi who already appeared on the American stage before the turn of the century. The Bengali Krishna devotee Baba Bharati was, like Vivekananda, participating in the World Parliament of Religion in 1893 (Thomas 1930: 177), and he probably co-authored some of Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's books. Atkinson maintained ties with Bharati at least during his prolific years spent in Los Angeles between 1903 and 1907 (Deslippe 2019: 66-67). Bharati was also the publisher of the journal *Light of India*, to which Atkinson contributed a few articles. His influence on Atkinson is perhaps most prominent in

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<sup>451</sup> Although this is not an established fact, there is evidence that Atkinson had ties to the Order of the Golden Dawn, in which he may well have encountered Prasad's treatise (Baier 2009: 491, n. 250). Further allusions to Prasad in other texts are found in his *Kybalion* (1908), which mentions the key phrase "nature's finer forces" (Three Initiates 1908: 121).

<sup>452</sup> Prasad expressively terms *prāṇa* the "occult colour": "It is this occult colour which constitutes the real soul of things, although the reader must by this time know that the Sanskrit word Prana is more appropriate" (Prasad 1890: 130).

Yogi Ramacharaka's *The Bhagavadgita* and *The Spirit of the Upanishads* (both 1907) (*ibid.*). The latter compiles aphorisms from several Upaniṣads as well as yoga- and Advaita-related texts. The most frequently cited ones are the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (composed 700–500 CE), the tenth-century *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and the c. fourteenth-century Vedāntic *Aparokṣānubhūti* (which is inaccurately attributed to Śaṅkara). The Advaita thought found in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and in Śaṅkara's Vedānta is the most prominent theme in Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's compilation, and the selection possibly reflects Bharati's philosophical preferences.<sup>453</sup> In drawing on over fifty sources, several lesser-known texts of the Advaita Vedānta school are also quoted in *The Spirit of the Upanishads*, and it would be unlikely that Atkinson would have had access to their translations without the help of somebody like Baba Bharati.

Next to Bharati and Prasad, there is much evidence that Vivekananda's successful *Rāja Yoga* as well as his yogi persona were seminal for Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka. In his *Science of Breath* and other works, the key element *prāṇa* repackages the mesmeric fluidum, and Atkinson/Ramacharaka even explicitly identifies *prāṇa* with “the mesmeric fluid” (Ramacharaka 1905a: 184; 1906b: 48-49). In his works, *prāṇa* can easily be read against the backdrop from several forms of magnetic healing that were virulent in nineteenth-century occultism. However, both in Vivekananda and Atkinson/Ramacharaka, *prāṇa* retains some of its Upaniṣadic semantics, which are the notion of *prāṇa*-as-vitality and *prāṇa*-as-breath, i.e., the subtle forces to be harnessed by the yogi.

The main points of difference between the South Asian and the American yogi are that the latter held that *prāṇa* could be taken in through water and food, an idea which is never expressed by Vivekananda (Ramacharaka 1905a: 117, 131-132). Additionally, water can be mentally charged with *prāṇa* while passing the right hand over a glass of water (Ramacharaka 1904: 62), notably a typical mesmeric practice.<sup>454</sup> Furthermore, while *Rāja Yoga*'s pivotal point is the *control* of *prāṇa*, Atkinson/Ramacharaka emphasises the *absorption* of *prāṇa*, and ultimately his techniques are understood to be a most “natural” way to breathe. The techniques of controlling or absorbing *prāṇa* also differ (other than the fact that both yogis employ rhythmic breathing). Atkinson/Ramacharaka highlights several techniques and promotes breath accompanied by the movements of the limbs, while playing down the

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<sup>453</sup> The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was a prominent text within vernacular Advaita-related movements, particularly so in Bengal (chapter 5.4).

<sup>454</sup> Karl Baier in a personal conversation (Aug 3, 2021).

significance of alternate-nostril breathing. For Vivekananda, however, alternate-nostril breathing is precisely the door to omnipotence, which he flexibly frames as a practice derived from Śaṅkara or as one that could be combined with New Thought practices such as affirmations (chapter 8.1.1). Due to the success of his wide interpretation, alternate-nostril breathing indeed became a relevant technique in New Thought contexts ([Flower] 1901c; Ramacharaka 1904; Fletcher 1908). Further differences mainly lie in the yogis' understanding of the relation between physical culture and yoga. Although Vivekananda acknowledges the importance of physical exercise for health, there are also several statements in his work that are almost hostile towards the (cultivation of the) body. Atkinson/Ramacharaka, in contrast, emphasises the role of physical culture for health, or what today would be referred to as holistic well-being.

Since neither Prasad nor Vivekananda taught a huge variety of practices, it is self-explanatory that Atkinson would mainly adopt their work on a conceptual level. Apart from the notion of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent, he charged *prāṇa* with further occult connotations. In brief, we could distinguish between Vivekananda's control of *prāṇa* which is directly linked to yogic practice, and Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's absorption and (re)storing of *prāṇa* in the solar plexus, which is derived from mesmeric practices and German *Lebensreform*-inspired techniques of transmutation of sexual energy. Further evidencing his transnational engagement, Atkinson's work was also promoted and distributed by the Latent Light Culture in Tinnevely, Tamil Nadu. It is notable that the Latent Light Culture and the Yogi Publication Society printed and promoted each other's books from the 1910s onwards, and several discursive elements indicate a thorough and fascinating exchange between these organisations (chapter 9.1).

#### 8.2.2.6 Summary

William Walker Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka drew from a wide range of sources to outline his influential theory and practice of "yogi breathing". Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* refrains from characterising *prāṇāyāma* as an opaque practice of some outcast yogis. Instead, it aimed for a clear outline of these practices in plain language (Baier 2009: 490). Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's contributions were significant for various reasons. First, he ensured that "yogi breathing" could be practised by anybody who studied the lessons carefully. Introducing distance learning via correspondence into modern yoga, the

requirement for a teacher and direct instruction slipped into the background. Second, he provided a well-structured overview of holistic development that employed practices to grow both physically and spiritually. He thereby pushed the systematic development of breath cultivation further both in the context of New Thought and modern yoga (*ibid.*). Third, Atkinson created a system that had roots in physical culture, occult practices, New Thought, and yoga. This confluence of ideas and practices met the needs of his audience, who were already partly familiar with some of them.

Thus, it was mainly through the New Thought yogi's pivotal *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* that physical culture was explicitly wedded to yoga – two realms which were, up until then, rather distinct from one another. His influence is particularly evident regarding physical-culture-related breathing techniques. Drawing from various sources, Atkinson was responsible for disseminating the concept of the complete breath – as well as associated terms like clavicular, costal, and abdominal breathing – into modern yoga. He clearly influenced Yogendra, and also Sivananda and a host of his disciples, to further disseminate the complete breath as well as the threefold division of breath space.<sup>455</sup> After Yogi Ramacharaka, New Thought became part and parcel of the yogic cultic milieu.<sup>456</sup> He also helped to further popularise Stebbins's occultism-informed rhythmic breathing. At the current state of research, it is safe to say that he was the first person who termed breath-movement practices (i.e., the combination of the movement of the limbs with breath cultivation) “yogi breathing”. This combination is highly relevant for the development of modern postural yoga in the twentieth century and can at least partly be traced to American Delsartism (e.g., Goldberg 2016: 36-38; Foxen 2020: 223-256).

To sum up, the salient practices coined by our “American sisters and brothers” are rhythmic breathing, yoga/yogi breathing, the grand psychic breath, and the complete breath. In Stebbins's case, I have posited some possible influence of *prāṇa-*

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<sup>455</sup> The influential concept of the complete breath was probably first adopted in Sri Yogendra in his *Breathing Methods* (1932) (chapter 8.3.1). Sivananda's *Science of Pranayama* (1935) reproduces Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's breathing exercises as well as healing practices (chapter 8.4.2). The Sivananda disciple Vishnudevananda as well as the Indian-Swiss yoga couple Selvarajan Yesudian and Elisabeth Haich in *Sport und Yoga* (1953) equally describe the complete breath as the best of four methods of breathing (Baier 2009: 498). André van Lysebeth in *Yoga Self-Taught* (1968) also applied the complete breath, and so did the Sivananda disciple Swami Satyananda Saraswati in *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha* (1969). Further examples of the widely ramified reception history of Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's teachings are more thoroughly treated in chapter 9, which discusses Sanjivi's Latent Light Culture and Stanislavsky's theory of acting.

<sup>456</sup> In terms of New Thought affirmation practices, Paramahansa Yogananda published a small booklet entitled *Scientific Healing Affirmations* (1924) (chapter 8.4.1), and his overall system seems to build on New Thought “auto-suggestive body cultivation” (Singleton 2010: 135).

related practices on what she calls “yoga breathing”, although it is evident that most of what she taught was Delsartism, physical culture, and occult practice combined with her own innovative contributions. Similarly, Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s complete breath clearly has roots in nineteenth-century physical culture and voice culture, both inherently tied to deep-breathing discourses and an evolving medical field. Through the seminal works of innovators like Stebbins and Atkinson, physiological and anatomical parlance to describe breath cultivation entered the field of modern yoga. While Stebbins helped yoga to become “psycho-physical”, Atkinson made it holistic, and additionally convinced his audience through his yogi persona. Initiating religious practice via the entry point of the body is clearly suggested by Stebbins and Atkinson, which is typical of New Thought and also became crucial for modern yoga practices (Albanese 2007: 360; Baier 2009: 489). It is likely through their contribution that authors like Sivananda regard the “body as the moving temple of the spirit” (Sivananda 1938: vi) (chapter 8.4.2), Yogendra presents yoga as a holistic endeavour (chapter 8.3.2), and Kuvalayananda terms it “psycho-physical” (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 8.3.1). Bearing this crucial impact firmly in mind, we will now bridge a gap of roughly fifteen years that lies between first-generation protagonists and second-generation yogis, starting with the investigation of Kuvalayananda and Yogendra.

### 8.3 Bombay-Based Gurus: Kuvalayananda and Yogendra

Two modern yoga pioneers shaped the landscape of yoga in the larger Bombay area: Swami Kuvalayananda and Sri Yogendra. As with other outstanding gurus, their influence spread far beyond the epicentre of their work. Both were interested in making yoga scientifically valid and at the same time therapeutic. Their mutual interest was no coincidence; Kuvalayananda and Yogendra had learnt yoga and yoga therapy from the same guru: Sri Madhavadasaji Maharaj of Malsar (d. 1921).<sup>457</sup> Celebrated in the contemporary yoga community of Maharashtra, Madhavadasa originally came from Bengal. He spent much of his alleged 123-year-long life at Narmada river, Gujarat. Madhavadasa was said to be a yogi who reconciled the *bhakti* tradition of the Bengali saint Chaitanya Mahāprabhu with Haṭhayoga (Alter 2013: 63). The yogi probably mainly taught his students *prāṇāyāmas*, *mudrās* and purificatory techniques like *kriyās*

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<sup>457</sup> I will henceforth refer to this yogi as Madhavadasa. Sources vary regarding his year of birth. For example, Alter (2013: 63) dates it to the 1830s whereas others to c. 1800 (Gharote & Gharote 1999: 23).

(*ibid.*: 64).<sup>458</sup> His ashram at the Narmada river was a hermitage for students as well as for ailing laymen seeking a cure.

As a result of their all too intertwined paths, Kuvalayananda and Yogendra were competitors throughout their yogic career. Kuvalayananda was mainly active in Maharashtra, establishing centres both in Bombay and Lonavla, although his reputation spread across India and abroad. Likewise, Yogendra had his base in Bombay (the capital of Maharashtra), yet he also successfully established a Yoga Institute in New York, which he ran for about two years. Both published a yoga journal that included scientific research data, and discussed several yogic techniques like *prāṇāyāma* in their journals and publications. In doing so, they continued the early scientific investigations of figures like N. C. Paul (chapter 6.3) and Major B. D. Basu (Singleton 2010: 50-51).<sup>459</sup> Despite similarities in Kuvalayananda's and Yogendra's approach, there are also major differences in their respective interpretations of yogic breath cultivation. Kuvalayananda's innovation mostly lies in the detailed description of *prāṇāyāma* within a framework that tends to highlight orthopraxy (i.e., what counts as correct practice). In his case, *prāṇāyāma* as found, say, in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* remained relatively unchanged, if complemented by some physical-culture-inflected recommendations. In any case, the intricacies of the technique are explained through scientific analysis that highlights anatomy and physiology. Yogendra's main goal, on the other hand, was to simplify (and thereby alter) yogic breath cultivation, which led him to various innovative approaches. Although first treated in his *Breathing Methods* (1932), these techniques were later subsumed under the term "Yogendra Prāṇāyāma" (Yogendra 1940: 9; Rodrigues 2015 [1982]: 204).

Both pioneers appeal to hygiene as an important lens through which to read yoga practice. The historian of German physical culture and *Lebensreform* practices Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe described the typical "hygienic career" that included health problems in childhood through alienation from "nature", which is then overcome by "natural" hygiene practices (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2017: 27-29). This also applies to our yogis. Kuvalayananda was reported to be a sickly boy with "weak lungs" who gained strength through practising physical culture in his youth, and later yoga (Gharote & Gharote 1999: 12). Yogendra too had experienced severe health issues in his childhood ("a serious bout of typhoid"), and he soon after became enthused with physical culture

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<sup>458</sup> This is also reported in an unpublished letter from Madhavadasa to Yogendra that I have read in an exhibition at the Yoga Institute, Santa Cruz, Mumbai (own field data, Feb 9, 2019).

<sup>459</sup> B. D. Basu was S. C. Vasu's brother and editor.



(Alter 2013: 64). Both became accomplished yogis – and integrated hygiene into their programmes. Yogendra, for example, explicitly equates yoga and hygiene in his texts. For Kuvalayananda, one of the main concepts to explain yoga was “nerve-culture” which is also an important concern of nineteenth-century hygienic practices (Sarasin 2001: 354-355). Not least, his call for the control of sexual desires (most evidently, masturbation) was a typical hygienic programme which was not only followed by Kuvalayananda, but also by other Indian yoga pioneers (e.g., Sivananda and Sundaram).<sup>460</sup>

What was new in Kuvalayananda’s and Yogendra’s approach is that they began to publish illustrated manuals of yogic breath cultivation. These were likely influenced by Sundaram’s photographic yoga manual, which was written in 1928 and first published in 1929 (Goldberg 2016: 157-167; chapter 8.5.1). Yet, while there was a format for manuals of modern postural yoga established by Sundaram, the same cannot be said for *prāṇāyāma* manuals. Until the late 1920s the prototype for such a manual was Yogi Ramacharaka’s unillustrated *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904). Although Kuvalayananda’s and Yogendra’s *prāṇāyāma* manuals were influenced by Sundaram, both certainly also drew on Euro-American physical-culture manuals, most evidently J. P. Müller’s *My Breathing System* (1914).

In the 1920s, the second-generation modern yogis Kuvalayananda and Yogendra were rising stars in the young firmament of modern yoga. It was a “decade of profound creative ingenuity in the pan-Indian Yoga renaissance” (Alter 2004: 63), and I will now turn to Kuvalayananda’s innovative contributions.

### 8.3.1 Swami Kuvalayananda: *Prāṇāyāma* Experiments Seeded with Spirituality

In 1924, Swami Kuvalayananda (1883–1966), born Jagannatha Ganesha Gune in Gujarat, established a laboratory and clinic for investigating the efficacy of yogic techniques. Called the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram, it is still based between Mumbai and Pune in Lonavla, Maharashtra.<sup>461</sup> Before that, Kuvalayananda had learnt Indian

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<sup>460</sup> Kuvalayananda held that “no system of treatment can boast of being even equal to the Yogic in making up for the ravages of masturbation”. This is stated in an advertisement for yoga’s psycho-physiological “application to therapeutics” of the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*’s first issue of Oct 1924. On the link between the care of nerves, disease, and masturbation in hygienic discourses, see Sarasin (2001: 392-394, 404-406, 417).

<sup>461</sup> “Kaivalyadhama” means “the abode of isolation/freedom”. In 1944, the ashram was registered as an official society under the name Sriman Madhava Yoga Mandira Samiti (SMYMS) (Alter 2004: 85). This paragraph is based on Gharote & Gharote (1999) and Goldberg (2016).

wrestling, both with and without weapons, from Rajratna Manikrao (1878–1954) in Bombay. These were of exercise which were understood as traditional Indian physical culture (Alter 2007: 28). Kuvalayananda also received his first *āsana* instructions from Manikrao as well as basic therapeutic skills in bone-setting (Gharote & Gharote 1999: 20). While learning from Manikrao, the young student also earned a degree in Sanskrit from Bombay University in 1910. In 1918, he started to become immersed in learning yoga from Madhavadasa of Malsar, which resulted in the foundation of Kaivalyadhama. Still in existence today, the ashram thrives as a centre of yoga education and the medical study of yoga, and it has had many students, patients, and a pan-Indian appeal. Its various institutions and research departments (the Scientific Research Department, the Philosophico-Literary Research Department, and the Therapeutic Research Department) sought to catch the significance of yogic practice on several levels. In search of a wide range of knowledge production, its main purpose was to verify the contents of premodern yoga texts through scientific experiments. The Kaivalyadhama's main publishing organ was the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, which was also known outside India.<sup>462</sup>

The *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, a (not quite) quarterly journal<sup>463</sup> published by Kaivalyadhama since 1924 reported of findings in the research departments and discussed several aspects concerning yogic physical culture that were explored at the ashram. The journal featured a “Scientific Section”, a “Semi-Scientific Section”, a “Popular Section”, and a “Miscellaneous Section”. These were targeted at a broad audience, from scientifically and medically oriented readers to readers mainly interested in yogic advice regarding health and spiritual growth. Kuvalayananda's earliest publications in book form were practical yoga manuals: *Prāṇāyāma: Part One* (1931) and *Āsanas: Part One* (1933).<sup>464</sup> These manuals are based on articles published in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*.

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<sup>462</sup> Several yoga authors in the United States made unattributed use of the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* (Deslippe 2018: 7, n. 1). Moreover, the German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Johannes H. Schultz (1884–1970), who invented the relaxation therapy *Autogenes Training*, already mentioned the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* in 1927, and quotes several passages from the journal in his seminal study *Das autogene Training* of 1932 (Baier 2009: 654). The German journal *Yoga: Internationale Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Yogaforschung* edited by H. Palmié (first and last edition 1931) advertises the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* and provides information on how to subscribe (Karl Baier in a personal correspondence, Aug 8, 2021).

<sup>463</sup> Kuvalayananda intended to publish the journal four times a year, but this schedule could not always be upheld. For example, there was no publication in 1927, nor in 1931 and 1932; in 1930 and 1933 only two issues were produced respectively, and in 1934 only one. The next volume was published in 1956.

<sup>464</sup> Singleton (2010: 116) dates *Āsanas* to 1931, but the publications that I have access to state that the manual was first published in 1933 (i.e., after *Prāṇāyāma*). The original document of *Āsanas* can be downloaded from <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.69581> (accessed March 9, 2021).

Kuvalayananda's innovative contributions to (the research of) yogic breath cultivation aimed to bridge the most ancient and the most recent. In analysing his approach, I not only investigate *Prāṇāyāma* of 1931, but also consider some articles from the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*. *Prāṇāyāma* and related techniques like *nauli*, *uḍḍiyāna*, and *kapālabhāti* were on the one hand subject to a staunch experimental empiricism. On the other hand, the history of *prāṇāyāma* was also traced to the Vedic period, for example, in the “Evolution of Prāṇāyāma” (1956). Kuvalayananda knew Sanskrit and he built much of what he taught on his knowledge of yogic texts such as the *Yogasūtra*, the *Śivasamhitā*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (with *Jyotsnā*), and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*. The swami's interest was to bring yogic culture, yogic therapeutics, and scientific evidence together to make yoga available to a broader Indian and international audience.

### 8.3.1.1 Yoga as Psycho-Physiology and Nerve Culture

Like other yoga pioneers, Kuvalayananda heavily relies on the concept of psycho-physiology. As has been shown, psycho-physiology has served as an epistemological framework for understanding systems of corporeal education (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 5.2.3). Although found in contexts of physical culture, there is always a psychological or mental component to this concept, which, in Kuvalayananda's case, tended to merge with the spiritual side of yoga. Generally, one can consider psycho-physiology as a meta-discourse with respect to the twofold understanding of yoga as “physical” and “spiritual culture” established by Kuvalayananda (see below). The yogi used psycho-physiology as a lens for the scientific analysis in the labs, following the principle that the mind acts on the body (Kuvalayananda 1933a: 38). Studying this relationship was a core interest of Kuvalayananda, and physiological changes – which were the focus of most experiments – were also interpreted as affecting the psyche and the mind. Ultimately, Kuvalayananda aimed to show “how a physical process can lead to spiritual development” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 126-127).

The term “nerve culture” is similarly important for Kuvalayananda's understanding of *prāṇāyāma*. In its most basic sense, nerve culture is the care of a “healthy nervous system”, and it should be considered the most important part of physical culture (Kuvalayananda 1926: 258). In his view, yoga aims to strengthen the roots of the nerves through practices that involve the head and spine, where nerve roots are located (*ibid.*: 264-265). The swami aims to cultivate the nerves or “nerve centres” through *prāṇāyāma* and other yogic techniques, which can induce higher states of yoga. Although he is aware that there is no scientific proof that could justify this

(Kavalayananda 1931: 57-58), he basically equates these “nerve centres” with the *cakras*, which have “spiritual significance” (*ibid.*: 143). The study of nerve culture was a discursive node for Kavalayananda that was related to psycho-physiology, medicine, hygiene, and the “spiritual” side of yoga. *Prāṇāyāma* practices were particularly prone to evidence the potential of psycho-physical relations and to further “the finer studies of physiology in general and the physiology of nerves in particular” (Kavalayananda 1934: 2-3).

Interpreting yoga as “nerve culture” is quite likely Kavalayananda’s innovation, but he nevertheless clearly drew on precedents of such a concept. An expert on this was the self-proclaimed “nerve-culturist” and psychologist Paul von Boeckmann, who ran a studio which offered courses in deep breathing, “lung culture” and “muscle building” in the 1920s and 1930s in New York City.<sup>465</sup> Boeckmann was a typical personality in the hygienic mould, presenting himself as a “Lecturer and Author of numerous books and treatises on Mental and Physical Energy, Respiration, Psychology, Sexual Science and Nerve Culture” (Boeckmann 1921: 57). Whether he coined the concept of “nerve culture” and Kavalayananda drew on him or not cannot be determined here, but soothing the nerves through deep breathing and other techniques was certainly not new. The work of another author evidently had clearer influence on Kavalayananda’s understanding of nerve culture.

Kavalayananda does not abundantly cite medical sources, but he directly quotes from the “Articles on Physiology” by Alfred T. Schofield (1846–1929) (Kavalayananda 1931: 20). Schofield was a medical doctor based in London who had a keen interest in stretching the borders of science, psychology, and occultism. While his early publications in the 1890s are mainly in the field of hygiene and physiology, his post-1900 publications are inspired by spiritism and New Thought. Kavalayananda was probably aware of Schofield’s remarks on physiology in his *Elementary Physiology for Schools* (1892).<sup>466</sup> Therein, Schofield refers to the spinal cord and the brain as “nerve centres” and relates them to the vital force stored in the cells:

The brain and spinal cord, together with the ganglia of the sympathetic system, constitute the nerve centres of the body. [...]

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<sup>465</sup> Advertisements for Boeckmann’s work are found in various journals, e.g., in the March edition of Bernarr Macfadden’s *Physical Culture* (1921), in *Strength* (1928), and in the May edition of *The Elk Magazine* (1931). Boeckmann wrote several pertinent books on these themes, like *Lung and Muscle Culture* (1905), *Deep Breathing: Physiculture* (1913), and *Nerve Force* (1919).

<sup>466</sup> Much of the medical terminology used by Kavalayananda concerning the respiratory and the nervous system is discussed in this book by Schofield. While I was not able to trace Schofield’s “Articles on Physiology” which are directly mentioned by Kavalayananda, phrases in Schofield’s *Elementary Physiology for Schools* (1892) resemble Kavalayananda’s quotations that he attributes to Schofield.

Nerve cells form the battery of the vital force: and nerves, which are originally prolongations of their processes, are the wires or conductors of this force (Schofield 1892: 254).

It is indeed likely that he was inspired by the doctor's physiology of "nerve centres". The physiologically informed explanation of a vital force or "motor-power" (*ibid.*) is close to the notion of *prāṇa*-as-breath acting on the cells and suffusing the body with oxygen foregrounded by Kuvalayananda (see below). Besides drawing on his remarks on physiology, Kuvalayananda may have been acquainted with Schofield's *Nerves in Order* (1907), in which the author highlights the primary importance of the care of the nervous system from a medical point of view (Schofield 1907: 4). Whether Kuvalayananda had read Schofield's New Thought-inspired and occult publications remains unanswered at this point, but, as will be shown below, Kuvalayananda's understanding of yoga was also not completely devoid of occultist influences.

#### 8.3.1.2 *Prāṇâyâma*: The First Illustrated *Prāṇâyâma* Manual

*Prāṇâyâma: Part One* (1931), which is a compilation of several articles from the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, provides the reader with a thorough introduction to *prāṇâyâma*. The book starts off by describing the process of respiration and offers several anatomical drawings to elucidate the theme. It then delves into describing "Āsanas appropriate to *Prāṇâyâma*", a chapter that explains the nasal gaze, the three *bandhas*, and four cross-legged "meditative poses" (Kuvalayananda 1931: 30-44). After giving a historical overview of *prāṇâyâma* as understood by Patañjali and the Haṭha yogis, it provides general remarks on preliminaries of the practice and the subtle body (*ibid.*: 45-66). The core of the work is the description of three *prāṇâyâma* techniques in minute detail and with several intricacies. These are *ujjāyī*, *kapālabhāti*, and *bhastrikā* (*ibid.*: 67-115).<sup>467</sup> Kuvalayananda finally discusses the "physiological" and "spiritual" benefits of the practices (*ibid.*: 116-128) and suggests three different "courses" in *āsana* and *prāṇâyâma* in the Appendices (*ibid.*: 129-140).

According to Kuvalayananda, *prāṇâyâma* plays a crucial role within yogic culture (Kuvalayananda 1931: 126). He defines *prāṇâyâma* generally as breath

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<sup>467</sup> The way these are practised will be expounded below. *Prāṇâyâma: Part Two* (1958) also includes further *prāṇâyâma* techniques as described by Svātmārāma in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. In total, Kuvalayananda explains the eight *kumbhakas* of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* plus *kapālabhāti* in Part One and Part Two. The latest editions of *Prāṇâyâma*, e.g., the 2010 edition, combine both publications, but omit most of the original photographic material.

retention.<sup>468</sup> As briefly touched on in chapter 7.2, he holds that *prāṇāyāma* and deep breathing cannot be understood as synonyms, and he equates the latter with Western breathing techniques (*ibid*: 71). Nevertheless, he still elaborates on the cultivation of simple inhalation and exhalation, as well as breathing exercises that traditionally do not fall under the category of *prāṇāyāma*, such as *kapālabhāti*.<sup>469</sup> In providing some general rules for *prāṇāyāma*, Kuvalayananda holds that, in most cases, exhalation should be twice the length of inhalation (*ibid*: 53), which follows the natural inclination of the breath. The only time when this rule does not apply is when in *śavāsana*, in which the inhalation and exhalation should be of equal length, or “rhythmic” (Kuvalayananda 1933a: 114). Furthermore, the practitioner should have controlled abdominal muscles throughout *prāṇāyāma* practice – the abdomen should not protract during inhalation (e.g., Kuvalayananda 1931: 71-73). Regarding this rule, I believe that Kuvalayananda – like Yogendra – was influenced by Euro-American breathing practices, as will be further discussed below. As in several other *prāṇāyāma* manuals before him, the instructions often either start or end with a warning. Kuvalayananda states that one who practises *prāṇāyāma* incautiously “plays with his nerves, heart and lungs” (*ibid*: 66). One should further be aware that *prāṇāyāma* is about pressure changes within the internal cavities, and it should therefore not be practised before the age of nine, *uḍḍiyānabandha* and *ujjāyī* not before adolescence (Kuvalayananda 1930c: 11). If practised with care, however, *prāṇāyāma* is “one of the finest exercises for a weak heart and weak lungs” (*ibid*: 12). For all the intricacies of the practice, it is best to closely follow the instruction of an experienced teacher.

Unsurprisingly, Kuvalayananda emphasised both physical and spiritual benefits of the practices. Devoting a full chapter to the “physiological and spiritual values of Prāṇāyāma” with strong emphasis on the physiological side (Kuvalayananda 1931: 116-128), his premises became widely influential. I therefore treat them here at some length. Kuvalayananda has two main arguments for the health benefits derived from *prāṇāyāma*. The first one is its functioning on the inner organs, especially the bowels and kidneys. During *prāṇāyāma*, the diaphragm stimulates them through a kind of internal massage, including the vibrations that ripple through the body through more

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<sup>468</sup> He translates *prāṇa* as “breath” and *āyāma* as “pause” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 45). See also the argument that the four types of *prāṇāyāma* for Patañjali all were breath retentions (*ibid*: 48), as well as the definition of *prāṇāyāma* in Kuvalayananda & Vinekar (2017 [1963]: 56).

<sup>469</sup> Haṭha texts usually do not regard *kapālabhāti* as part of *prāṇāyāma*, but it is more commonly grouped under the category of the “six cleansing actions” (*ṣaṭkarma*) (Birch 2018: 48). Nevertheless, Kuvalayananda regards it as an important preliminary technique that should be considered in *prāṇāyāma* contexts.

vigorous breath practices (*ibid.*: 121, 125). All eliminating organs are said to work better throughout the day due to the stimulating effect of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 122). The second one is the oxygen level in the body, which not only increases during *prāṇāyāma*, but remains elevated throughout the day because of the heightened capacity of the lungs (*ibid.*: 123). A more rapid supply with oxygen-enriched blood is said to be established, for example, during *bhastrikā*,<sup>470</sup> which favourably affects the endocrine glands (*ibid.*: 125). Although the endocrine and the nervous system benefit most from *prāṇāyāma*, the respiratory, the circulatory and the digestive system are also affected thoroughly. In brief, *prāṇāyāma* is said to be beneficial for all the principal systems working in the body. This is also grounded in the view that *prāṇāyāma* is “not only the control of different physiological functions but it is the control of the very life processes that vitalize the human organism” (*ibid.*: 126). However, the benefits on the spiritual level were not as well-documented in Kuvalayananda’s positivistic research as the physiological ones.<sup>471</sup> The lack of evidence regarding these findings is therefore often glossed over with highly generalised claims like “[t]he spiritual value of Prāṇāyāma is equally great” (*ibid.*).

Kuvalayananda furthermore established an influential categorisation of yogic practice, which he divided into yogic physical culture and yogic spiritual culture.<sup>472</sup> This twofold approach – which bears some implicit hierarchical features – included practices for the “physical culturist” and the “spiritual culturist” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 61-66). It is applied both to *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* practices (*ibid.*; 1933a: 36-37). He derives the idea of yogic physical and spiritual culture from premodern *prāṇāyāma* practice that aimed to purify, strengthen, and heal the body, but also to help the practitioner to reach the higher states of yoga. Regarding the former, Kuvalayananda finds that

the Yogic seers of ancient India looked upon Prāṇāyāma as the one exercise that could make every life process supremely healthy. Some of them were so enthusiastic in their optimism about the physiological efficacy of Prāṇāyāma that they ruled out all other

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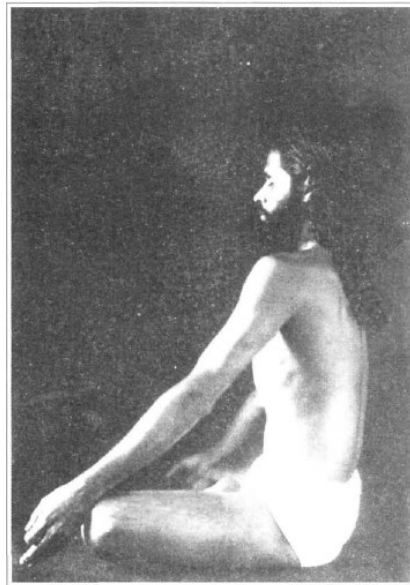
<sup>470</sup> For a brief discussion of *bhastrikā*, see below.

<sup>471</sup> Kuvalayananda stated that “nothing that has not been thoroughly tested by the Western laboratory methods should be given out to the public, is the motto that governs the conduct of this institute” (Kuvalayananda 1928b: 314).

<sup>472</sup> On these categories in Kuvalayananda’s work, see also Baier (2016a: 57-58). Regarding the swami’s understanding of physical culture, Alter (2007) provides an in-depth discussion of his thorough entanglement with the wider Indian physical-culture scene, the idea of “National Fitness”, and the place that yoga occupied therein.

exercises for securing health of the human body (Kavalayananda 1931: 126).<sup>473</sup>

Not only is health acquired through *prāṇāyāma*, making it “the most useful exercise for a physical culturist”, but “to the spiritual culturist its importance is supreme” (Kavalayananda 1931: 66). This meant that the physical culturist mainly pursues health, but the spiritual culturist’s objective is to access higher yogic states, such as *dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, *samādhi*, and *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (Kavalayananda 1933a: 37). As a preparative mode, the latter further aims to strengthen the nervous system, because any form of *prāṇāyāma* can lead to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (Kavalayananda 2010 [1931]: 122).<sup>474</sup> In terms of *prāṇāyāma* practice, the physical culturist’s benefit is mainly considered to be increased oxygen intake (Kavalayananda 1931: 61) – an important theme of Euro-American breathing exercises at the turn of the century. This is accomplished by a partially closed glottis during inhalation and exhalation, and controlled abdominal muscles for “nerve culture”, as applied, for example, in *ujjāyī* (figure 16; *ibid.*: 71-73).



Deep Inhalation with Controlled Abdomen.  
(Side View)

FIGURE 16: A RESEARCH SUBJECT PERFORMING DEEP INHALATION WITH CONTROLLED ABDOMEN IN *UJJĀYĪ* (Kavalayananda 1930c: 68; 1931: 70).

<sup>473</sup> Kavalayananda probably alludes here to *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.37: “Since [it is said,] ‘All impurities are destroyed by breath retentions (*prāṇāyāmair*) alone,’ some teachers do not teach other practices” (*prāṇāyāmair eva sarve praśuṣyanti malā iti | ācāryāṇām tu keṣāṃ cid anyat karma na saṃmatam*). Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves (2020).

<sup>474</sup> Despite his reference to the higher states of *prāṇāyāma*, Kavalayananda only briefly refers to *kevalakumbhaka*, a state that could be considered as the essence of *prāṇāyāma* (chapter 3.3.3). He merely explains that it is a kind of “physiological apnea” or non-breathing state (Kavalayananda 1931: 48, n. 3).



In *Prāṇāyāma*, Kuvalayananda gives careful instructions for his readers depending on the final goal of their practice. Specific rules for each goal aside, one should always practise with “utmost concentration” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 56). As to the physical culturist, they may assume any erect posture for *prāṇāyāma* and sit on either a chair or a rug. They may practise *prāṇāyāma* also while standing, walking, or outside in the open air (*ibid.*: 61-63). In contrast, the spiritual culturist should sit on a *kuśa* grass mat or on a deer hide (as recommended in Haṭha texts) in one of the cross-legged “meditative poses”; one should practise in a well-ventilated room which provides the necessary space for concentration (*ibid.*: 63-64). The meals of the spiritual culturist should always be moderate; if possible, only once a day. The intense daily routine of the spiritual culturist includes increased duration and frequency of the practices. They will gradually develop the art of *kumbhaka*, including the application of *jālandhara bandha* (*ibid.*: 55-56, 64, 97).

In light of this twofold approach, the swami continues to explain three techniques in detail. These are, as mentioned, *ujjāyī*, *kapālabhāti*, and *bhastrikā*. In *ujjāyī*, one inhales through a partially closed glottis, producing a uniform low-pitched frictional sound; then, one exhales through the left nostril for double length of the inhalation (and in this practice, one never exhales with the right nostril) (Kuvalayananda 1931: 69-74). *Ujjāyī* is not only practised while sitting but, for the physical culturist, also while walking and it was taught to anybody who came to Kaivalyadhama (*ibid.*: 63).<sup>475</sup> One of the main differences between the practices for the physical and the spiritual culturist lies in the point of concentration. While the physical culturist concentrates “upon the air he breathes”, the spiritual culturist focusses “upon that point in the nasal part of his pharynx where the first touch of the inhaled air is felt” (*ibid.*: 71-73).<sup>476</sup> In *kapālabhāti*, one throws out the air through rapid and rhythmic pushes from the lower belly while the air rushes in without any conscious muscular effort (*ibid.*: 79-100). The physical culturist’s physiological benefits lie in purifying the *nāḍīs* (*ibid.*: 97, n. 1).<sup>477</sup> The spiritual culturist focuses on a “serene light”

<sup>475</sup> Kuvalayananda implicitly refers to *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.51–53, which states that *ujjāyī* can be practised while walking (Birch 2018: 15, n. 61). However, the spiritual culturist was not allowed to practise it while walking (Kuvalayananda 1931: 65).

<sup>476</sup> What the swami probably refers to here is the concept of *prāṇasparśa*, the touch of *prāṇa* or breath where it enters the body. For a detailed discussion of *prāṇasparśa*, see Bhole (1982).

<sup>477</sup> Surprisingly, Kuvalayananda did not teach alternate-nostril breathing at all, but instead privileges *kapālabhāti* as a purificatory technique. It seems that alternate-nostril breathing did not become part of Kaivalyadhama’s *prāṇāyāma* practice until the 1970s, when it was introduced by Swami Digambarji as part of his interpretation of Kriyāyoga as mentioned in *Yogasūtra* 2.1 (Digambarji & Bhole 1972). Because in *Yogasūtra* 2.52, Patañjali refers to *prāṇāyāma* as the best of ascetic practices (*tapas*), the

seen in any of the *cakras*, which eventually leads to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (*ibid.*: 96). Of the three *prāṇāyāma* practices featured in the manual, the final one, *bhastrikā*, is said to have the highest spiritual value (*ibid.*: 115). Explained in four varieties, it is basically understood as a combination of *kapālabhāti* and *ujjāyī* (*ibid.*: 101-115). The specific focus on certain body areas during *bhastrikā* is the same as that in *kapālabhāti* and *ujjāyī*, and it again differs for the physical and spiritual culturist respectively (*ibid.*: 112).

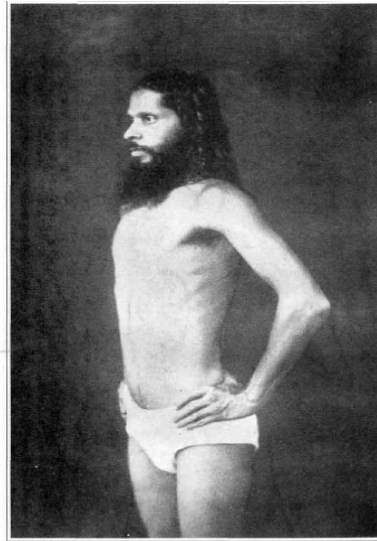
Although Kuvalayananda conceptually reached back to the Haṭha yogis to substantiate his twofold approach, the practices of the physical culturist are also inspired by Euro-American physical-culture manuals. Some of these were already widely disseminated by the 1920s in India, especially the manuals of such prominent exponents as J. P. Müller (Goldberg 2016: 76-77). One aspect that Kuvalayananda and Müller had in common was that they both find Yogi Ramacharaka's books questionable. Kuvalayananda refers to yogis like Ramacharaka as Western authors making "mischief" producing "counterfeit yogic literature" (Kuvalayananda 1926: 263-264). He was apparently among the few to realise that Ramacharaka was not the Indian yogi that his books presented him to be. Müller, in turn, dismisses "yogi breathing" in general, and he based his assessment solely on Atkinson's books (Müller 1914: 48-49, chapter 4.4.4). While Kuvalayananda took such a judgement somewhat personally, the swami also drew on Müller's work, though held – as did several other yoga pioneers – that its techniques and premises were inferior to his own. This is most obvious in Kuvalayananda (1928a: 19), in which the swami directly criticises Müller as to his view on the mechanics of the diaphragm (figure 5; chapter 4.4.4).<sup>478</sup>

An example in which Kuvalayananda likely copies Müller is when he recommends placing the hands on the waist during breathing exercises in a standing position so that the arms do not drag on the shoulder girdle, which would limit the expansion of the lungs (figure 17; Kuvalayananda 1930d: 67; Müller 1914: 43).

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first part of Kriyāyoga (i.e., *tapas*) can also be read as a recommendation to practise *prāṇāyāma*. For a detailed discussion of Kriyāyoga, see chapter 8.4.1.

<sup>478</sup> Kuvalayananda probably also opposes Müller by referring to "particular physical culturists [recommending] to practice Prāṇāyāma while taking violent muscular exercises" (Kuvalayananda 1931: 62, n. 3). Müller thought that it was healthier to perform deep-breathing exercises together with or directly after physical exercise (Müller 1914: 16-17).



Correct Standing Position for Ujjāyī

FIGURE 17: A RESEARCH SUBJECT IN “CORRECT STANDING POSITION FOR *UJJĀYĪ*”  
(KUALAYANANDA 1930C: 66; 1931: 70).

The more intriguing parallel is that Kuvalayananda’s manual on *prāṇāyāma* resembles Müller’s *My Breathing System* in its overall *appearance*. Both manuals contain anatomical drawings and discussions (figure 18), and both illustrate the practice with photographs. Moreover, the authors are keen to put forward their own theories on the mechanics of the diaphragm and take part in a discursive battle over the superior and “correct” physiological understanding. It should be noted here that Kuvalayananda based his theory of the relation between the ribs and the diaphragm (a notion that was subject to investigation in early twentieth-century medical discourse) on the practice of *uḍḍiyānabandha*, in which the diaphragm is lifted and almost sucked in under the ribs. The habitus of this practice, which informed much of premodern and modern forms of breath cultivation, led Kuvalayananda to an argument that was distinct from that of other contemporaneous medical interlocutors (Kuvalayananda 1928a).

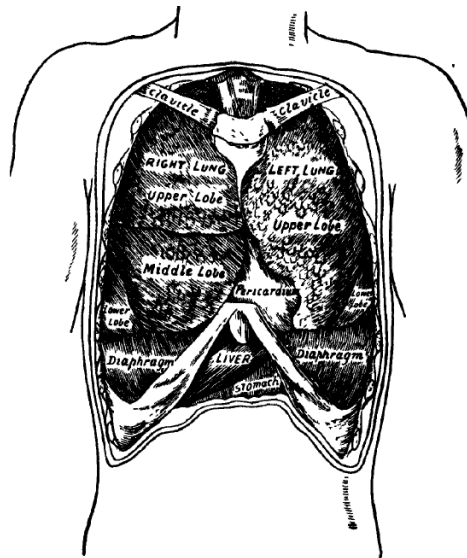


FIG. 6.—The Thorax Exposed.

FIGURE 18: ANATOMICAL DRAWING OF THE THORAX (KUALAYANANDA 1931: 16).

To sum up, *Prāṇāyāma* is one of the most elaborate manuals of breath cultivation in the first half of the twentieth century. This is owed to the density of description next to anatomical illustrations and physiological details, which aim to impart a fuller experience of the practice. Nonetheless, it was not entirely new to flank all these techniques with biomedical data. As we have seen, in following N. C. Paul, S. C. Vasu had already introduced several physiological details into his discussion of *prāṇāyāma* (chapter 6.3).<sup>479</sup> However, it was certainly innovative to produce some of the findings presented in *Prāṇāyāma* and related articles in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* in one's own science labs. Also, the medical discussion of the respiratory process exceeded the level of earlier turn-of-the-century publications. Anatomical and physiological analyses such as the functioning of the diaphragm in various forms of *prāṇāyāma* had not appeared before Kuvalayananda. As mentioned, he also had another role model for his *prāṇāyāma* manual besides Müller, namely Sundaram's *Yogic Physical Culture* (1929). Major differences are that Sundaram posed for the photographic material found in the manual himself (figure 23), while Kuvalayananda depicted some of his advanced students (figure 16; figure 17), and the former primarily focused on *āsana*. Both, however, were inspired by authors of Euro-American physical culture. Thus, several

<sup>479</sup> It is notable that Kuvalayananda's approach also perpetuated N. C. Paul's lineage in emphasising *prāṇāyāma* as *kumbhaka* and in measuring CO<sub>2</sub> reduction during exhalation in specific *prāṇāyāma* techniques in contrast to ordinary breathing (Kuvalayananda 1930a; 1930c). Though partly aligned with Paul's pioneering work, Kuvalayananda surprisingly nowhere explicitly refers to N. C. Paul or his *Treatise*.

precedents paved the way for *Prāṇāyāma* as the first illustrated manual of yogic breath cultivation.

### 8.3.1.3 *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in Light of Scientific Investigation

What makes Kuvalayananda's approach to *prāṇāyāma* unique in modern yoga is that he rejected a metaphysical discourse on *prāṇa*. The swami likewise refused to make claims about subtle problems of contemporary physics.<sup>480</sup> His research of yogic techniques was nevertheless placed within the larger framework of religion: he was not satisfied with merely physiological investigations, but promised to highlight *prāṇāyāma*, as mentioned, in the context of "nerve culture". This category appears to have served as a variable for something higher that could not be proved in the labs but was still part of yoga. With its psycho-physical framing of the human body, the term was still closer to scientific parlance than the employment of, say, subtle-body-related terminology in more traditional yoga narratives. Thus, veiling his motivation through scientific parlance, Kuvalayananda's vision encompassed the notion that higher meditative states of yoga may be gradually understood by science.<sup>481</sup>

In his early experiments on *prāṇāyāma* in the 1920s and 1930s, Kuvalayananda relied on the research methods of contemporaneous medical science like the analysis of diaphragm movements in certain *prāṇāyāma* techniques through x-rays. Scientific data was further collected through chemical and microscopic tests, measurement of internal pressure in lungs and intestines, and measurement of heart rate and blood pressure before and after *kumbhaka* (Gharote & Gharote 1999: 32).<sup>482</sup> In 1944, Kuvalayananda's approach broadened considerably, and he founded the Philosophico-Literary Research Department for the study of yogic texts. However, textual study was already (somewhat marginally) implemented in early texts like *Prāṇāyāma*. The manual interprets the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*'s understanding of *prāṇāyāma*, a theme that is later discussed extensively (e.g., Kuvalayananda 1956b), laying foundations of the swami's general interpretation of the technique. This is, on the one hand, a strong focus on breath *retention* (Kuvalayananda 1931: 47-48). On the other hand, in

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<sup>480</sup> "[N]o reference will be made, in this note, to the ultimate nature of matter and such other subtle problems of today's science" (Kuvalayananda 1930a: 123, n. 1).

<sup>481</sup> The swami holds that the world and technology were not yet ready for such an investigation: "The experiments on the astral and spiritual sides of Yoga have perhaps not yet reached the stage of being placed before the critical world" (Kuvalayananda 1928b: 314).

<sup>482</sup> For a detailed discussion of Kuvalayananda's approach to scientific experiments, see also Alter (2004: 73-108). If Kuvalayananda's research output was accurate is to be doubted, since research methods have significantly evolved, and Goldberg (2016: 106-108) has attested that several of the swami's findings regarding *sarvāṅgāsana* (shoulder stand) did not prove to be thorough or correct.

translating the *bhāṣya* to *Yogasūtra* 2.49, Kuvalayananda explains that air should be exhaled “from the chest” (*ibid.*: 50). This interpretation is not entirely correct, because the *bhāṣya* mentions that air is exhaled “from the abdomen” (*kaṣṭhya*).<sup>483</sup> I argue that the swami’s translation reflects his general understanding that the abdominal muscles should be kept controlled throughout the practice, probably deriving it from Euro-American discourses (as in Yogendra, see below).

As has been mentioned, regarding the interpretation of *prāṇa* within Haṭhayoga, Kuvalayananda had a down-to-earth approach. The swami holds that “the word *Prāṇa* as it occurs in the compound *Prāṇāyāma* has only one meaning and it is *breath*” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 47, his emphasis). Moreover, Kuvalayananda is certain that *prāṇa* “never indicates any psychic force or cosmic element” (*ibid.*: 46, n. 2). In this statement, he probably targets the occult interpretation of *prāṇa* prevalent in yoga pioneers of the first generation, where *prāṇa* is rendered an omnipotent force that far exceeded the capacity of what was normally attributed to breath. Such an occult understanding of *prāṇa* was certainly applied by Vivekananda. On the following pages of *Prāṇāyāma* he addresses Vivekananda directly:

Swami Vivekananda lectures on Rāja-Yoga are full of interpretations of Yogic things in the light of modern sciences. [...] Although we have adamant faith in the efficacy of [yoga] as a means to spiritual evolution, [...] we cannot accept the conclusions of the great master as scientific. Evidently Swami Vivekananda never tried these experiments and had to resort to speculation (Kuvalayananda 1931: 57-58, n. 3).

According to Kuvalayananda, nobody was authorised to make (scientific) claims on the nature of reality, unless they were backed by experiments that met the methodological standards of natural science. The discourse structure reveals that Kuvalayananda claimed superiority over Vivekananda, because he could support his statements by his findings in the labs. Indeed, Vivekananda’s statements were carried by an understanding of science that was ultimately based on an occult interpretation and William James’s notion of “experience” (De Michelis 2004: 171-173). In contrast,

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<sup>483</sup> The semantic range of *kaṣṭhya*, which is a derivative of *kaṣṭha*, is “being in the abdomen, stomach” (Monier-Williams 1899: 318). Additionally, the *bhāṣya* uses the word *vāyu* instead of *prāṇa*. The full reference to *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 2.49 that Kuvalayananda (1931: 50; 1956b: 47) engages is: “When āsana is [steady and comfortable], *prāṇāyāma* is cutting the flow of the inhalation and exhalation. [In other words], when āsana has been mastered, the cutting of the flow of both the inhalation, which is [like] sipping external air, and exhalation, which is emitting the abdominal air (*kaṣṭhyasya vāyor*), [means] their absence. This is *prāṇāyāma*” (*[sūtra] tasmin sati śvāsapraśvāsayor gativicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ | [bhāṣya] saty āsanajaye bāhyasya vāyor ācamaṇaḥ śvāsaḥ kaṣṭhyasya vāyor niḥsāraṇaḥ praśvāsaḥ, tayor gativiccheda ubhayābhāvaḥ prāṇāyāma iti*). Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves (2020).

Kuvalayananda's approach was to verify and explain yogic techniques by applying contemporaneous means of measurement.<sup>484</sup> However, Kuvalayananda was in some ways less far opposed to Vivekananda and others than he probably wanted to be.

An explanation in *Prāṇāyāma* on the efficacy of *prāṇāyāma* echoes Kuvalayananda's yogic-occult predecessors:

[W]e are hypothetically satisfied that the practice of Prāṇāyāma introduces high pressures both in the central canal of the spinal cord and the ventricles of the brain. These pressures centrally stimulate the whole nervous system. Owing to these central and peripheral stimuli, the human consciousness begins to be internalized and supersensuous perceptions begin to be possible. Worlds subtler and still subtler begin to be opened out in proportion to the consciousness itself getting more and more refined, till at last the individual consciousness merges into the cosmic and the individual becomes one with the Infinite (Kuvalayananda 1931: 128).

Much of this could well have been written by Vivekananda's hand. Especially vocabulary like "subtle" and "supersensuous" is typical of *Rāja Yoga* (Vivekananda 1896: 26, 51, 54). It seems that, ultimately, Kuvalayananda's programme was occult, too, in the sense that it tried to employ science for the purpose of presenting yoga as an ancient effective technique. It could be argued that Kuvalayananda tried to resolve the occult riddle that was posited right at the beginning of the formation phase of modern yoga, but the occult was now to be reconciled with the data in the lab. In his own words this meant that his scientific investigations attempted "to make the western laboratory methods of research reveal spiritual wonders [and] to develop the objective character of the Indian philosophy by subjecting the individual spiritual experiences of man to experimentation" (Kuvalayananda 1928b: 313-314). But Kuvalayananda made promises that he could not fulfil, and the swami had to "resort to speculation", too. Whether "spiritual wonders" have ever been revealed by these experiments is doubtful, and "individual spiritual experience" has not been demonstrated in the experiments either. In spite of lacking evidence, it should be noted that Kuvalayananda was probably right that the efficacy of "nerve-culture", the pivotal point of his

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<sup>484</sup> A similar argument is found once it comes to the discussion of notions of the subtle body and subtle physiology in *Prāṇāyāma*. Kuvalayananda cannot accept what most of his forerunners, including Vivekananda, propagated as a scientific view of the *cakra*- and *nāḍī*-system (though he himself, as mentioned, can only make hypothetical statements). For example, he challenges Vivekananda for referring to the *idā* and *piṅgalā nāḍī* as efferent and afferent nerve currents, and states that this interpretation "does not tally with the description of these Nāḍīs in the original Sanskrit texts" (Kuvalayananda 1931: 59-60). He also holds that the conclusions in Vasant Rele's *The Mysterious Kundalini* (1928) which are presented as scientific, are in fact "based on mere speculation" (Kuvalayananda 1931: 57, n. 3, his emphasis).

understanding of yoga, could not be thoroughly investigated by contemporaneous scientific methods in the 1930s. To bridge this gap, Kaivalyadhama's later post-war experiments included the measurement of "brain waves, pulse rates, and blood pressure to try to discover the subtle flow of *prāṇa* as it was encoded in [...] gross body functions" (Alter 2004: 91).

The scientific subjects in the Kaivalyadhama labs were mostly students of the "School of Spiritual Culture", in which they were trained for four years at the campus (Kavalayananda 1925: 308). Their intense yogic training was said to be the right prerequisite to function as test subjects in the scientific investigation of yoga. Additionally, they were expected to serve India to help it to regain its cultural significance and global recognition through yoga, which reflects Kavalayananda's nationalist agenda (Kavalayananda 1928b: 315; cf. Alter 2007). While Kavalayananda never investigates the inside perspective of these test persons, one of his students decided to focus on autoethnography as part of his doctoral thesis. Koor T. Behanan, a graduate student from Yale University who studied with Kavalayananda between 1932 and 1933, evaluated his experience of *ujjāyī prāṇāyāma* as follows:

In the first few minutes, I feel a "physical excitement" [...], an activeness which sometimes leads to the erection of hairs in the follicles on the trunk and hands, and this phenomenon is followed by a tingling sensation. Sometimes muffled sounds are heard within the ears and the phenomenon generally known as the "flight of colors" – different colors seen in rapid succession – is not an uncommon occurrence. In the second stage all this excitement dies down and is followed by an extremely pleasant feeling of quietude and relaxation. [...] Slowly, but unmistakably, one begins to feel that the mind takes a turn, becoming more and more "centripetal" (Behanan 1937: 243).

Behanan refers here to physiological effects of *ujjāyī* practice, and also to effects on the mind which prepared a practitioner for higher yogic techniques like *pratyāhāra* or *dhāraṇā*. In conducting this experiment in the larger Kaivalyadhama environment, he may have verified some of the yogic experiences mentioned in the texts. This is one of the rare statements on the effects of *prāṇāyāma* from the inside perspective of a medium-level practitioner in modern yoga. In choosing autoethnography as part of his doctoral dissertation, he bypassed Kavalayananda's strict empiricism based on laboratory investigation.



#### 8.3.1.4 Kuvalayananda, *Prāṇāyāma*, and the Making of History

Kuvalayananda's "Evolution of *Prāṇāyāma*" (1956), an article published in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, is unique within modern yoga in providing a historical perspective on the notion of *prāṇāyāma*. The general lack of research on premodern *prāṇāyāma* makes Kuvalayananda's account still relevant, wherefore it is briefly sketched here. It is also interesting for analysing how Kuvalayananda positions himself within yogic "tradition".

In "Evolution of *Prāṇāyāma*", Kuvalayananda describes *prāṇāyāma* in five evolutionary stages.<sup>485</sup> Starting with the Vedic age in which *prāṇāyāma* was part of religious *sūtra*- and mantra recitation lacking independent significance, he then marks out *prāṇāyāma*'s second evolutionary state in what he calls the "Smṛti period" (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 55-58). In this second stage, *prāṇāyāma* was part of mantra recitation but also gained significance as a religious action in itself; Kuvalayananda exemplifies this by quoting from the third-century *Manusmṛti* (*ibid.*: 56-57). Additionally, as an important step, the idea of *mātrā* was introduced in this period by various Purāṇic texts (*ibid.*: 57-58). The *Bṛhadīyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti* (c. seventh century CE), representing the teachings of the mythical Hiraṇyagarbha, then, marks the third evolutionary stage (*ibid.*: 58-59). Its crucial innovation lies in that *prāṇāyāma* became part of the "spiritual or mystic field" and the mantras accompanying *prāṇāyāma* were reduced to the much simpler *om* recitation, which allowed for the best possible concentration of mind (*ibid.*: 58). In this stage, *prāṇāyāma* became largely independent of religious ritual acts (*ibid.*: 59). In the pivotal fourth evolutionary stage, Patañjali rids *prāṇāyāma* even of compulsory *om* recitation.<sup>486</sup> In light of Patañjali's "psycho-physiological science", *prāṇāyāma* becomes now "a respiratory exercise pure and simple, no doubt, attentively carried out" (*ibid.*: 59). The fifth stage, then, is *prāṇāyāma* as part of Haṭhayoga, which divided the techniques into eight varieties (*ibid.*: 60).

Whether his model is generally accurate cannot be determined here. But let us shed some light on aligning his own endeavour with the idea of the "yogi-scientist"

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<sup>485</sup> Kuvalayananda clarifies that these evolutionary stages overlap and that "owing to the conservative character of Hinduism, even the oldest stage continues to persist to this day" (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 55, n. \*).

<sup>486</sup> That he associated the *Bṛhadīyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti*, dated to c. seventh century CE, to the third evolutionary stage, whereas Patañjali, who is nowadays dated to c. third century CE, exemplified the fourth stage is probably explained by the "chronological overlap" in these developments (*ibid.*: 55, n. \*, and as stated above). Furthermore, the *Bṛhadīyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti* is said to reflect the teachings of the mythical Hiraṇyagarbha, who had lived centuries earlier.

which has allegedly premodern roots. It is evident that Kuvalayananda mainly identifies his own mystical and even scientific endeavour with both Patañjali and the Haṭha yogis. The swami invokes Patañjali's understanding of *prāṇāyāma* as part of a “psycho-physiological science” (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 59). But it is historically misleading to claim that Patañjali understood his soteriological endeavour as science, psychology, or physiology, as these terms have no direct equivalents in the *Yogasūtra*.<sup>487</sup> Such an attribution is, again, reminiscent of Vivekananda, who pointed at Patañjali as a patron of both psychology and science (Vivekananda 1958 [1899]: 27). Kuvalayananda mainly indicates here that his approach is the latest offshoot of Patañjali's empiricism.

Similarly, Kuvalayananda presents the scientific enterprise of Kaivalyadhama as directly evolved from Haṭhayoga:

In this co-ordinated investigation [of *prāṇāyāma* in the labs, M.K.], the essential parts of the technique of *Prāṇāyāma* as developed by the Haṭha-Yogins are retained. But as the technique of *Prāṇāyām* [*sic*] has not been changed, this effort may be looked upon as a part of the fifth evolutionary stage of *Prāṇāyāma* (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 60).

In doing so, not Kaivalyadhama goes Haṭha, but also the Haṭha yogis are presented as exponents of “science”, which is not new in modern yoga discourses. But Kuvalayananda adds additional nuances to it in stating that they utilised a specific terminology to explain their observations: “The physiological results [of *kumbhaka*, M.K.] are, however, given in terms of āyurveda which are not quite intelligible to the modern scientist” (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 60). Kuvalayananda most likely refers here to the manuscript of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which had appended a fifth chapter on yoga therapy (*cikitsā*) which was critically edited by Kaivalyadhama in 1970 (Digambarji & Kokaje 1970). Contrary to Kuvalayananda's statement the explanation of yogic phenomena in Ayurvedic terms was quite rare and is only evidenced in a few Haṭha texts of which the *Haṭhapradīpikā*'s fifth chapter was one (Birch 2018: 23, 56-58).<sup>488</sup> As Birch and Powell have suggested, the fact that Kuvalayananda chose to translate and edit this manuscript reflects his modern scientific as well as therapeutic orientation, but less so the intentions of Svātmārāma's fifteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikā*, to which the fifth chapter was appended much later (*ibid.*: 56; Powell

<sup>487</sup> As mentioned, “*śāstra*”, a term to denote Patañjali's text, is often translated as “science” (chapter 6.3). A more accurate translation would be “teaching” or “instruction” (Monier-Williams 1899: 1069).

<sup>488</sup> Another example, according to Birch (2018: 23, n. 86), is found in *Yogayājñavalkya* 8.32–40ab.

2018: 60, n. 40). Kuvalayananda was indeed one of the modern pioneers to bring yoga, yoga therapy, and Ayurveda together (Gharote & Gharote 1999: 41), but it seems that Kuvalayananda (just like Krishnamacharya, chapter 8.5.2) saw himself more as building on an ancient lineage than claiming originality for his work.

#### 8.3.1.5 Summary

Kuvalayananda's endeavour was to link yogic practices and their scientific investigation. At Kaivalyadhama, the swami's efforts to make yoga scientific are considered as a kind of exertion (*tapas*) or sacrifice to the world, because yoga has "a complete message for humanity" (Kuvalayananda 1933b: 221). The swami's exertion was certainly successful: in the Madhavadasa-Kuvalayananda lineage, several followers were able to build on the swami's interest in *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>489</sup> Having "tradition" and "science" on their banner, this is one of the major modern yoga *prāṇāyāma* lineages. As for the swami's global influence, scientific research on yoga gained broad recognition by the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*'s publications, and countless evidence-based studies on yoga and yoga therapy followed, often with an emphasis on *prāṇāyāma*. The swami's attempts to investigate the physiology of yogic practices was the initial spark for today's flood of books that explain yoga in terms of physiology and anatomy. Kuvalayananda's findings on *prāṇāyāma* physiology and practice were further reproduced by subsequent yoga pioneers in India and Europe (e.g., by Swami Sivananda, Yogacharya Sundaram, and André van Lysebeth). But a close-reading of his *Prāṇāyāma* reveals that Kuvalayananda was also an experienced teacher with a fine-tuned approach. Despite several lengthy passages, the manual can be credited for its hands-on approach and relevant details. Although clearly drawing on figures like Müller and Sundaram, *Prāṇāyāma* stands by itself and presents Kuvalayananda's original view.

Kuvalayananda applies a triangulation of practices that include his interpretation and adoption of Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga, and Euro-American breath practices. The obvious innovations mostly affect the practices of the "physical culturist". Drawing on Euro-American contexts, he prescribes *prāṇāyāma* during walking, in the open, and in a standing position for increased oxygen intake. The practices of the "spiritual culturist" are oriented towards Haṭha traditions as found, for

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<sup>489</sup> There are two main (institutional) spin-offs of this lineage: Kaivalyadhama with several practitioners, teachers and swamis, as well as ongoing research and publications on *prāṇāyāma*, and the Lonavla Yoga-Institute represented by the Gharote family with their own publication and dedication to *prāṇāyāma* and *prāṇa*-related topics.

example, in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*. However, Kuvalayananda has a clear focus on *mātrā* as opposed to the concept of *yathāśakti* (practising according to one's capacity), which was quite prevalent in premodern texts. Although the swami emphasised *prāṇāyāma* orthopraxy for the spiritual culturist, these practices were also subject to a semantic shift that emerged from his scientific endeavour. In the dominating scientific parlance, the practice is no longer exclusive to Haṭhayoga, but spreads to a transnational horizon translating *prāṇa*-related terms into oxygen value, carbon dioxide tolerance, and pressure changes, affecting the respiratory centre, the nervous system, and the practitioner's brain waves.

### 8.3.2 Sri Yogendra's *Prāṇāyāma*: More than Breathing Methods

Manibhai Haribhai Desai (1897–1989) who is better known as Sri Yogendra, grew up in a village in Maharashtra not too far from Bombay.<sup>490</sup> During his college years he developed a keen interest in physical exercise and became a wrestling buff. As a college student, Desai encountered his yoga guru Madhavadasa of Malsar in 1916 – the same guru from whom Kuvalayananda would start to learn two years later. Apparently, the guru wanted him to become his successor, which the young yogi refused. Instead, he opened the Yoga Institute in Bombay in 1918 and, soon afterwards, a yoga clinic in New York in late 1920. While he first adopted the name Swami Yogananda at this time, he then changed it to Sri Yogendra. During 1919 and 1922 he stayed in England and America and expanded his medical and therapeutic knowledge through his encounter with several physicians, physical culturists, and physiologists, among these John W. Fox, John Harvey Kellogg, and Benedict Lust. In 1924, returning from New York to Bombay on a ship, he met the influential Sanskrit scholar and philosopher Surendranath Dasgupta (1887–1952). As to his guru's wish before his death in 1921 to return to his ashram, Yogendra refused, preferring to stay in the United States. Whatever the exact relationship to the senior yogi,<sup>491</sup> the guru lineage became an increasingly important factor to make the young aspirant an authority in yoga. Nevertheless, Yogendra largely abandoned the vigour of Haṭhayoga into which he was initiated, and instead intended to “simplify” yoga. Married to Sitadevi Yogendra (1912–2008) in 1927, he became a householder, and his lifelong dedication to yoga showed that this could be reconciled with domestic responsibilities.

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<sup>490</sup> This brief biography is largely based on Rodrigues (2015 [1982]) and Alter (2013).

<sup>491</sup> Goldberg (2016: 10-12) suggests that Yogendra may partly have been troubled by the overwhelming affection of his guru towards him.

The householder yogi who ran his Yoga Institute as a family enterprise contributed in many ways to the main phase of modern yoga. He published several works on yoga between 1928 and the 1970s. His yoga manuals *Yoga Physical Education* (1928),<sup>492</sup> *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931), and *Breathing Methods* (1932) were widely influential on the developments of transnational yoga. *Yoga*, the journal of the Yoga Institute was first published in 1933. Like the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, it presented both scientific data and discussions of premodern yoga-related texts. Mediating yoga to contemporary society while preserving its core traditions of Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga was the mainstay of Yogendra. He reflects on the tension between “ancient” and “modern” yoga in various publications that deal with cultural, social, and philosophical questions, for instance, in *Memorabilia* (1926),<sup>493</sup> in *Yoga Essays* (1960), in the edited volume *Yoga in Modern Life* (1966), and in *Facts about Yoga* (1971). His wife Sitadevi Yogendra focused on yoga for women, which yielded the manual *Yoga Physical Education for Women* (1934). His son Jayadeva Yogendra (1929–2018), who earned a PhD in Sanskrit, continued Yogendra’s work equally prolifically (Alter 2013: 73).

Ever since the influential studies by Alter (2004; 2005; 2013) and Singleton (2010) Yogendra has been a subject of modern yoga scholarship. Furthermore, Elliott Goldberg (2016) has dedicated several chapters to the discussion of Yogendra’s influence as a key figure of modern yoga. A breath-related technique termed “Yogendra rhythm” has been investigated by Goldberg (2016: 36-38) and Anya Foxen (2020: 241-243) and will therefore not be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say here that “Yogendra rhythm” basically means the combination of *āsana* and rhythmic breathing, and it serves the student as a “stepping stone in the advanced study of yoga breathing and the control of prāṇa” (Yogendra 2013 [1928]: 94). Like other preparatory techniques it can therefore be viewed as preliminary to *prāṇāyāma* in Yogendra’s system. My focus here lies on the tension between Yogendra’s adoption of Euro-American “breathing methods” and his praising of “yoga breathing methods”. While the former methods were presented in a book in 1932, the latter have likely never found the way into a monographic publication.<sup>494</sup> Another tension that will be

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<sup>492</sup> *Yoga Physical Education* is now published as *Yoga Asanas Simplified*.

<sup>493</sup> Later published as *Life Problems*.

<sup>494</sup> Yogendra had planned to write a book on “Yoga Breathing Methods” as part of the twelve-volume “Yoga Studies Series” (Vol. VI) as he hints at in his *Breathing Methods* (1932: 57). The book, like other volumes of the series, was likely never written due to lack of funding, as stated in the first edition of *Yoga* 1933 and in Yogendra (1935a: 34). Instead, *Breathing Methods* was published as *Yoga Breathing*

addressed is the relationship between Yogendra and Kuvalayananda, which is evident in their respective publications. The competition between Kaivalyadhama, which managed to gain sufficient support from the Indian government, and the Yoga Institute, which appears to lack recognition by the Indian government even today, likely contributed to the controversies.<sup>495</sup> In brief, the following investigation will shed light on discursive patterns of accreditation of certain practices and dismissal of others, the struggle for dominance over the emerging scene of medical yoga, and the yogis' positioning of their work between the tension of traditionalisation, scientification, and an obvious orientation towards Euro-American physical culture.

#### 8.3.2.1 Yogendra's Yoga at the Confluence of Hāthayoga and Hygiene

Much of the content of yoga manuals in the early twentieth century can be read as part of a history of hygiene with its origins in nineteenth-century central Europe. Originally, these practises, ranging from physical exercise to regulation of food, sleep, diet, and sex, mainly addressed white middle-class males, but a few decades later they also influenced programmes of self-care for women. In brief, informing various cultural contexts, hygienic discourses decidedly shaped the emergence of a transnational physical-culture movement (chapter 4.4). Even more explicitly than Kuvalayananda, Yogendra interpreted yoga as hygiene, which is most evident in *Yoga Personal Hygiene* of 1931. It devotes seven chapters to the “care” of various functions of the body and highlights “hygiene” as a “religious observance” (Yogendra 1931: 6). In its foreword, the surgeon Dr. John W. Fox, a medical missionary who invited Yogendra to the United States, states that “this work fills a *unique* place in the literature on the history of personal hygiene” (Fox in Yogendra 1931: ix, his emphasis; cf. Alter 2013: 72). Yogendra's appeal to hygiene, moreover, aligns his project with the incoming tide of interest in making yoga “scientific”. Yogendra also draws here on tendencies within physical culture to analyse and improve training systems by integrating medical insights into these systems. Thus, the yogi decidedly contributed to the scientific investigation of yoga available to him and used the results in his clinical work with patients (Alter 2013: 73). Nevertheless, his focus on hygiene is probably the more deciding factor in his work.

Another obvious concern of Yogendra was to continue – but also simplify – the practices he learnt from his guru at Malsar. He refers to them as Hāthayoga and at

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*Methods* in its third edition in 1940 (to which I do not have access), but apparently, the text remained largely unaltered (Yogendra 1940: 64).

<sup>495</sup> Mrs. Armaiti Desai from the Yoga Institute, personal conversation, Jan 26, 2019.

times as Kriyāyoga (Goldberg 2016: 72-73).<sup>496</sup> Both Kuvalayananda and Yogendra remain rather tacit as to the techniques that they learnt from Madhavadasa, but they bolster their instructions by references to Haṭha yoga texts. Yogendra also refers to some works that integrated yogic technologies and philosophical discourse like the *Yogacintāmaṇi*, the *Yogasārasaṃgraha* by Vijñānabhikṣu (both texts date to the sixteenth-century), and several Yoga Upaniṣads of the early eighteenth century. Apart from drawing on Haṭha texts and medical authorities, Yogendra was additionally influenced by contemporary authorities on yoga philosophy. For example, he collaborated with Surendranath Dasgupta to develop a specific understanding of *prāṇa* as “bio-motor force” which the two also termed “bionergy” (see below). The householder yogi also tacitly draws on theosophical translators like S. C. Vasu and M. N. Dvivedi, as will be expounded below.

Like many other yoga pioneers, Yogendra is located at the confluence of Haṭhayoga and hygiene. Yet in his case, the adoption of concepts and practices of hygiene seems to be based on the conviction of the rhetorical as well as actual efficacy of these techniques. His occasional dismissal of Western gymnastics notwithstanding (Singleton 2010: 118), he finds words of appraisal or pragmatic neutral acceptance for various concepts and practices from Euro-American contexts. The pivotal point of Yogendra’s yoga is Patañjali’s “psycho-physical” system of “self-culture”, as will become apparent below. But, as its attributes indicate, this system is charged with practices found in turn-of-the-century hygiene, physical culture, and Delsartism.

### 8.3.2.2 “Yogendra *Prāṇāyāma*” as Respiratory Hygiene

Yogendra deals with various forms of breath cultivation in *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931: 123-161), in *Breathing Methods* (1932), and in *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* (1940: 18-64).<sup>497</sup> Mainly addressing the purpose of “respiratory hygiene”, these practices draw from a pool of both Haṭha- and physical-culture-informed breathing techniques, and they are designed to aid the average student. Yogendra purposefully avoids introducing the “other higher yoga processes for breathing”, since they would require the guidance of an authorised teacher (Yogendra 1931: 136). Although some forms of

<sup>496</sup> For a discussion of Kriyāyoga, which is mentioned in *Yogasūtra* 2.1, see chapter 8.4.1.

<sup>497</sup> In terms of the exposition of breath cultivation, *Yoga Personal Hygiene* and *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* differ only in minor details. *Yoga Personal Hygiene* was later divided and published in three books (all of them published in paperbacks, partly with extended contents): *Way to Live* (1933), adopting and enlarging chapter 2–7; *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* (1940), a revised and enlarged edition of chapter 8–12; and *Haṭha Hygiene Simplified* (1950?), revising and enlarging chapter 1–7. The *prāṇāyāma*-related contents are for the most part congruent, but there are variations in references to other authors and Yogendra’s critique or acknowledgement of their work, e.g., regarding Kuvalayananda.

*prāṇāyāma* are treated in his 1931 book – which appeared in the same year as Kuvalayananda’s *Prāṇāyāma* – Yogendra goes into greater detail regarding the description of these practices in his *Haṭha Yoga Simplified*. Also, the emphasis on yoga breathing methods, including their superiority over Euro-American breathing methods, is more vehemently brought to the fore in his 1940 book. I therefore first outline the practices in *Breathing Methods* and then expand on themes of yogic breath cultivation in *Yoga Personal Hygiene* and *Haṭha Yoga Simplified*.

*Breathing Methods* (1932) comprises several techniques and their benefits. These techniques are practised in lying, sitting, and standing positions. By taking in the maximum amount of air, they are designed “to increase the lung-capacity by directly training and exercising the respiratory muscles” and they intend to “encourage health, peace of mind, and longevity” (Yogendra 1932: 7, 8, 28). Just like several previous Euro-American breathing manuals, Yogendra’s book features deep breathing as a prophylactic intervention, and it is said to help fight “disease germs” such as pulmonary tuberculosis (*ibid.* 19-20). As was ubiquitous in the larger physical-culture community, Yogendra also emphasises the role of the diaphragm as key for deep breathing (*ibid.*: 32-33). Today it is commonplace knowledge that, conscious or not, breathing is always fully dependent on the movement of the diaphragm, and the question rather is how *free* the diaphragm is to function well. But at Yogendra’s time this was subject to an extended medical discussion on breathing mechanics that had started to trickle into physical culture – and yoga.<sup>498</sup> Sentences like “*an infant breathes almost entirely by the movements of the diaphragm*” (*ibid.*: 32, his emphasis) moreover reflect the ideal of “natural breathing” at that time.<sup>499</sup> In brief, *Breathing Methods* gives special attention to the importance of the diaphragm, making the practitioner aware of its movements, and also of strengthening and bracing the abdominal muscles (*ibid.*: 31-39, 72-73, 58-59).

In this, Yogendra is clearly indebted to Euro-American protagonists of breath cultivation. The only exception is the description of the “vacuum breath” (same as *śūnyaka*, see below) and alternate-nostril breathing (Yogendra 1932: 56-57). In adopting the “complete breath”, Yogendra quotes almost verbatim from Yogi

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<sup>498</sup> A major discussion was how the ribs move in relation to the diaphragm, in which J. P. Müller, Swami Kuvalayananda, and the medical doctor J. F. Halls-Dally, to name a few, also took part (see, e.g., Kuvalayananda 1928a). Yogendra (1940: 18-19) reports about this discourse and echoes the findings of Kuvalayananda (without mentioning the Lonavla-based swami).

<sup>499</sup> Yogendra tacitly borrows this line from Howard (1916: 137), who exerted considerable influence on the yogi’s ideas on breath (see below).



Ramacharaka (1904: 34-35; Yogendra 1932: 60-61). Moreover, he employs the idea of a threefold division of breath space, which is also found in Atkinson/Ramacharaka and in the publications of various Delsartists (Yogendra 1932: 48-54; chapter 8.2; figure 19). He further adopts Genevieve Stebbins's "Packing Breath" (Stebbins 1892: 87; Yogendra 1932: 55), and her "anti-dyspeptic breath" (Stebbins 1892: 90; Yogendra 1932: 58-60), and fully embraces, though mostly implicitly, Stebbins's notion of "rhythmic breathing" (*ibid.*: 71; Foxen 2020: 240-244).

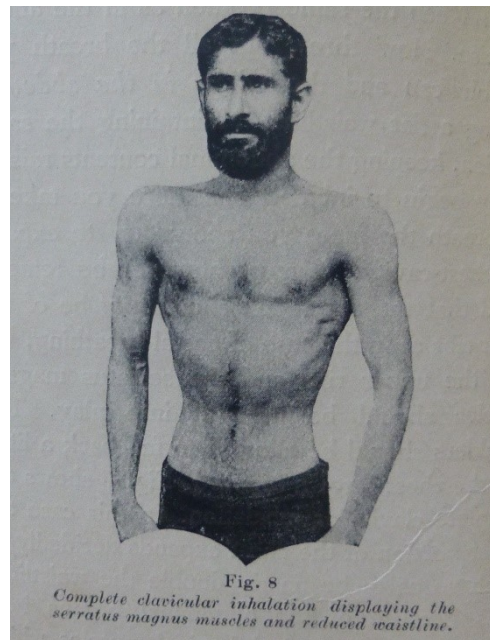


FIGURE 19: YOGENDRA PERFORMING "COMPLETE CLAVICULAR INHALATION" (YOGENDRA 1932: 52).

Yogendra moreover substantially draws on Müller's *My Breathing System* (1914), Howard's *Breathe and Be Well* (1916), and, to a minor extent, Macfadden's *Building of Vital Power* (1904).<sup>500</sup> At times, he directly cites these authors, but mostly reuses their work without attribution.<sup>501</sup> His basic guidelines for breathing exercises are already found in the books of these physical culturists (Yogendra 1932: 40-47). These are, for example, the emphasis on breathing through the nose,<sup>502</sup> the importance of exhalation over inhalation, the relevance of cleansing the nasal passage, and the need for a well-ventilated room for exercise (Müller 1914: 12-25). Photographs of the "right" facial expression which is said to be ideal for inhalation (opening of the nostrils

<sup>500</sup> Regarding the latter, Yogendra adopts the "dry friction bath" (Macfadden 1904: 205-216; Yogendra 1932: 42). In regard to the importance of taking in "fresh air", Yogendra also refers to Hippocrates, who was one of the authoritative figures within hygienic culture (Yogendra 1932: 20; Sarasin 2001: 33).

<sup>501</sup> Yogendra explicitly refers to Howard's *Breathe and Be Well* only once in this book (Yogendra 1932: 24). Next to tacitly borrowing from him on many occasions, he also quotes directly from Howard in Yogendra (1931) and gives credit to the American physician in this book. In contrast, he mentions Müller only rarely (e.g., Yogendra 1940: 19, n. 6; 2013 [1928]: 82).

<sup>502</sup> The most seminal publication to advocate nose breathing is Catlin's *Shut Your Mouth and Save Your Life* (1870), on which Ramacharaka (1904) and Müller (1914: 24) draw. For details, see chapter 8.2.2.

versus “ugly contortions of the face”) are found in both Müller and Yogendra (Yogendra 1932: 45-46; Müller 1914: 20-21; figure 20; figure 21). Another important theme which he adopts from Müller is to combine deep-breathing exercises with physical exertion and/or stretching; alternatively, one could engage breathing after more vigorous exercise (Müller 2014: 17). Just as Müller, Yogendra warns that intense exertion without deep breathing injures the heart and lungs (Yogendra 1932: 43; Müller 1914: 13-14, 81).

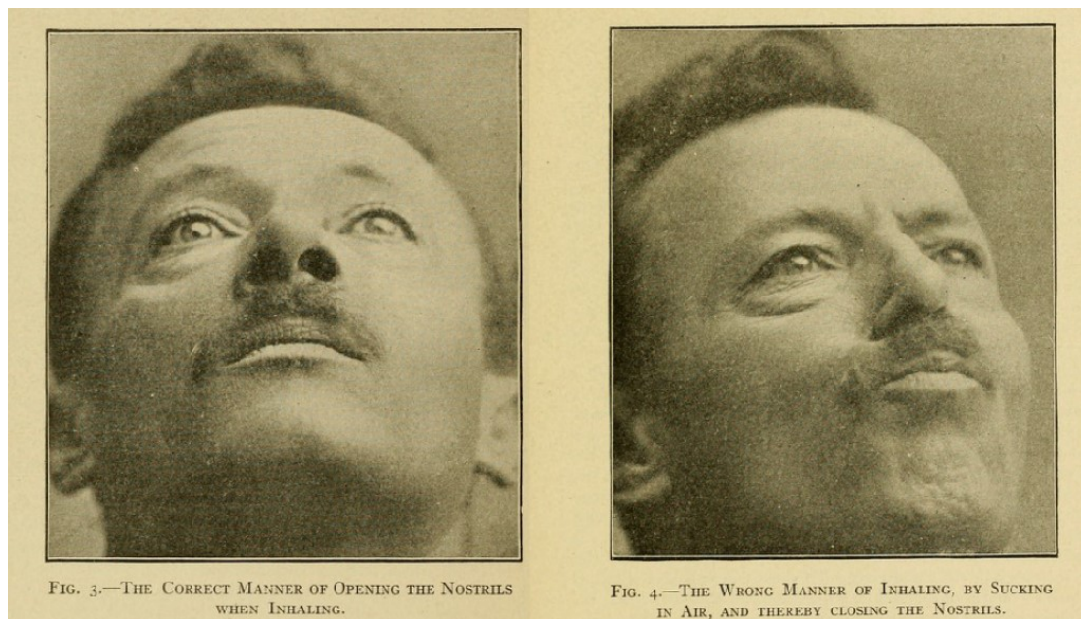


FIGURE 20: MÜLLER DEMONSTRATING “CORRECT” VERSUS “WRONG” USAGE OF THE NOSTRILS (MÜLLER 1914: 20-21).

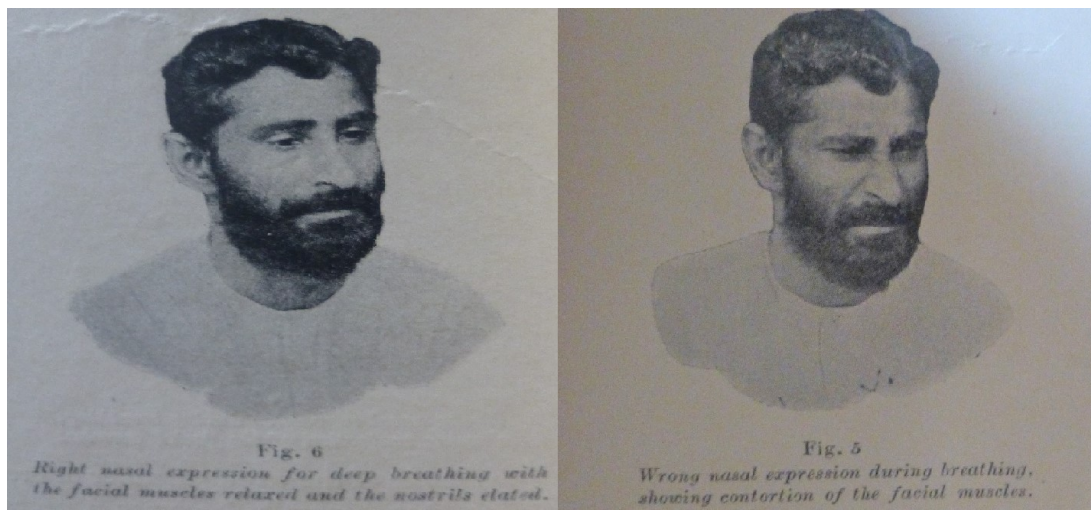


FIGURE 21: YOGENDRA DEMONSTRATING “RIGHT” VERSUS “WRONG NASAL EXPRESSION” (YOGENDRA 1932: 45-46).

Although I agree with Goldberg (2016: 38) that Yogendra was mostly influenced by Müller’s system in developing his “Yogendra rhythm” (the combination of posture practice with rhythmic breathing), the yogi was nevertheless also inspired by the hygienist William L. Howard (b. 1860). Both Howard and Yogendra suggest

combining stretching and deep breathing, insofar as stretching should be accompanied by inhalation (as opposed to exhalation) and held during retention (Yogendra 1932: 43; Howard 1916: 145). The overall purpose of these combined exercises is, according to Howard, “forcing oxygen into all parts of the body” (*ibid.*: 139), which is also acknowledged by Yogendra (1932: 29-30; 2013 [1928]: 90-91). Both delight in “fresh air cocktails” taken mornings and evenings (Howard 1916: 41-44; Yogendra 1932: 42). In fact, the title of *Breathing Methods* is most likely directly inspired by Howard, who mentions that physical exercise will induce rejuvenation, “but not unless right *breathing methods* are rigidly adopted and kept up” (Howard 2016: 120, my emphasis). Yogendra reuses several of Howard’s passages without attribution, including this statement, in *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931: 129-131).

Yogendra’s indebtedness to physical culturists like Müller and Howard and his overall focus on breathing methods is remarkable for various reasons. First, neither Müller nor Howard acknowledge various forms of yoga breathing. Müller argues against held-breath exercises and “Hindu Yogi Breathing”, as discussed above, and Howard cannot make sense of the alternate use of nostrils during breathing (Howard 1916: 146-148). This did not prevent Yogendra from taking their opinions and techniques seriously. Second, nowhere in his 1932 book does Yogendra mention the word *prāṇa* or *prāṇāyāma*, but he only speaks of “Yoga alternate breathing” on one page – and even here he introduces the economist Irving Fisher (1867–1947) and the medical doctor Eugene L. Fisk (1867–1931) as authorities in alternate-nostril breathing, who themselves refer to it as an “Oriental deep-breathing exercise” (Yogendra 1932: 56; Fisher & Fisk 1917: 25-26).<sup>503</sup> Yogendra apparently saw an advantage in presenting himself as an expert on several breathing exercises as developed by Euro-American protagonists. Third, the book is dedicated to “His Holiness Paramahansa Madhavadasaji” (Yogendra 1932: 5). Apparently, Yogendra thought himself to be aligned with his guru’s will by extending his knowledge far into the realm of physical culture – and by only vaguely pointing at Haṭhayogic techniques.

To sum up, although this book shows that Yogendra appreciated physical-culture-informed breathing techniques, it also points at their limitations (Yogendra 1932: 57). Compared to Kuvalayananda’s *Prāṇāyāma* of 1931, Yogendra’s *Breathing Methods* is nevertheless far more inclusive regarding the adoption of Euro-American breathing techniques. In contrast to Kuvalayananda, Yogendra draws on Müller not

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<sup>503</sup> These authors were chairs of the Hygiene Reference Board, an institution that ran the Life Extension Institute in New York City.

only in terms of the manual's format, but also heavily regarding its content. Just like its forerunners, Yogendra's manual is illustrated with anatomical charts and photographic material.

In negotiating breath cultivation gone global, it is notable that all the techniques referred to by Yogendra – whether Indian or Western – were integrated later into yoga *sensu stricto*. Termed “Yogendra Prāṇāyāma” from 1940 onwards (Yogendra 1940: 9), the terminological shift veiled the pioneer's early emphasis on Western “breathing methods” vis-à-vis “yoga breathing methods”.<sup>504</sup> Such a tendency is also reflected in the fact that *Yoga Personal Hygiene* was re-published as *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* in 1940, fully abandoning the term hygiene. But nevertheless, the influence of hygienic and physical culture on these works cannot be neglected. I therefore focus in the following on Yogendra's breath-related techniques that he presented as yogic, but also point at his further engagement of Euro-American authors and discourses.

Respiratory hygiene occupies a whole chapter in *Yoga Personal Hygiene* and *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* (Yogendra 1931: 123-161; 1940: 18-63). General rules to make yoga breathing methods effective in terms of their hygienic value, next to the abovementioned ones, include consciously emphasising and prolonging the phase of exhalation and keeping the abdomen controlled in all phases of the breath (Yogendra 1931: 133). Regarding the latter, this was also recommended by Kuvalayananda for increased oxygen intake, because expanding the chest also meant improving the function of the lungs, and was additionally valuable in terms of “nerve culture” (Kuvalayananda 1931: 71). In Yogendra's case, the idea of thoracic breathing is at least partly inspired by Sir Hermann Weber (d. 1919) and Thomas Lauder Brunton (1844–1916), who published the article “Means for the Prolongation of Life” in the *British Medical Journal* of 1903 (Yogendra 1931: 146, n. 2; 1932: 27-28; 1940: 43, n. 33). This article, from which Yogendra quotes several passages in full, promotes thoracic breathing with simultaneous compression of the abdomen to “maintain the elasticity of the chest walls” (Weber & Brunton as quoted in Yogendra 1932: 27-28).

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<sup>504</sup> A small booklet entitled *Prāṇāyāma made Easy* (1981) comprises the techniques that are nowadays taught in the Yoga Institute as “Yogendra prāṇāyāma”. This booklet was written by the Yoga Sadhakas, a group of successors and students of Yogendra at the Yoga Institute, headed by his son Jayadeva, the actual editor of the booklet (Armaiti Desai in a personal conversation, Jan 26, 2019). It contains eight types (I-VIII) of “Yogendra Prāṇāyāma”, in standing (I-III), lying (IV), and sitting positions (V-VIII). “Yogendra Prāṇāyāmas” I-IV are derived from *Breathing Methods*. The techniques V-VIII contain the cultivation of the four phases of the breath termed *śūnyaka*, *pūraka*, *kumbhaka*, and *recaka* (see below). All techniques are presented as “Standardised Techniques of Simple Prāṇāyāma”. In *Yoga Asanas Simplified*, “Yogendra prāṇāyāma” is referred to as the “safest way to study prāṇāyāma” (Yogendra 2013 [1928]: 110).

Yogendra probably takes the quoted passages not from the *British Medical Journal*, but from Vasu's *An Introduction to Yoga Philosophy* (1975 [1914]: 46-48), which contains all the passages that Yogendra cites. Vasu had suggested that Weber's and Brunton's "'Respiratory Exercises' mean Prāṇāyāma" (*ibid.*: 46), which is an assumption that Yogendra, however, did not make. While Yogendra's source seems to be clear, Kuvalayananda could also have been influenced by other proclamations of thoracic breathing, such as, for example, Joseph R. Buchanan's *Therapeutic Sarcognomy*, which expands on "thoracic hygiene" (Buchanan 1891: 394-419) and Edwin Checkley's *A Natural Method of Physical Training* (Checkley 1892: 31-44). Buchanan's *Therapeutic Sarcognomy* was, in any case, known to Yogendra (1940: 56-57, n. 62). In contrast to emphasising thoracic breathing during *prāṇāyāma*, premodern yoga texts seem to endorse abdominal breathing. For example, the thirteenth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.21ab states that "inhalation is filling the *abdomen* with the external air" (my emphasis).<sup>505</sup>

That Yogendra tended to read deep breathing methods into Haṭha-related terminology is also evidenced in the next example, which features a specific nomenclature of the four phases of the breath. Based on these four phases, Yogendra develops a breathing technique that employs the Haṭha- and Vedānta-informed terms *śūnyaka* ("absolute suspension of breath after exhalation"),<sup>506</sup> *pūraka* ("absolute and continuous inspiration"), *kumbhaka* ("absolute retention"), and *recaka* ("absolute continuous exhalation") (Yogendra 1940: 33-38). Yogendra aligns the cultivation of these four phases with Patañjali, his commentators, and the Haṭhayoga tradition (*ibid.*: 21, n. 8). He further states that this fourfold process of breathing was mentioned in the sixteenth-century *Yogasārasaṃgraha* by the Vedāntin Vijñānabhikṣu (*ibid.*).<sup>507</sup>

<sup>505</sup> *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* 3.21: *bāhyād āpūraṇaṃ vāyor udare pūrako smṛtaḥ*. Translation by Jason Birch in Birch & Hargreaves (2020). The term *udara* used here unequivocally denotes breathing into the belly, not into the chest, since its range of meaning is "belly, abdomen, stomach, bowels, womb" (Monier-Williams 1899: 184).

<sup>506</sup> *Śūnyaka* translates as "empty", "void" (Monier-Williams 1899: 1085). By adopting Vijñānabhikṣu's terminology (see below), *śūnyaka* denotes retention after exhalation and is therefore contrasted to *kumbhaka*, retention after inhalation. Other authors distinguish between *bāhya kumbhaka* ("external retention") versus *antara kumbhaka* ("internal retention"), e.g., Krishnamacharya in *Yoga Makaranda: Part II* (n.d.a.) and Iyengar in *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981) (chapter 8.5.2). The terms *pūraka*, *recaka*, and *kumbhaka* are, in contrast, ubiquitous in premodern Haṭhayoga (chapter 3.3).

<sup>507</sup> Vijñānabhikṣu in turn derives this from the *Brhannaradiyapurāṇa* (Jha 1894: 55). In applying this concept, Vijñānabhikṣu reconciles the four types of *prāṇāyāma* in Patañjali with the Haṭha terminology of *pūraka*, *recaka*, *kumbhaka*, plus *śūnyaka*. But Yogendra's interpretation of *śūnyaka* differs from Vijñānabhikṣu's, who held that *śūnyaka* was a "neutral process" defined by the absence of both inhalation and exhalation (*ibid.*: 56). Upon close inspection of the passage he cites, Yogendra makes unattributed use of Jha's translation of *Yogasārasaṃgraha* 2.39 (*ibid.*: 55). Ganganatha Jha was a "highly accomplished Sanskrit scholar" (White 2014: 106).

Assuming a cross-legged sitting position, each phase is prolonged and deepened (i.e., “absolute”), and can be practised either by itself or in sequence with the others. In a way, this is well-aligned with some premodern sources that hold that inhalation, exhalation, and, especially, retention are the defining categories of *prāṇāyāma* (Gharote 2017 [2003]: 14-15). But where Yogendra starts to depart from these sources is addressed in the following.

Yogendra at times distinguishes between *śūnyaka* (also called “yoga vacuum breathing”) and *kevalakumbhaka*: While, for him, both denote retention after exhalation, the former is external retention after forceful exhalation and the latter signifies retention after normal exhalation (Yogendra 1940: 33-34, n. 23). In contrast, in Haṭhayoga, *kevalakumbhaka* (“pure” or “perfect retention”) tended to be a spontaneous *result* of certain breathing techniques, and was not a practice which could be described – as opposed to the eight *kumbhaka*s that are classified as *sahitakumbhaka* (“accompanied retention”) (chapter 3.3.3). More importantly, it was associated with retention after inhalation rather than exhalation. When Yogendra applies the term *kumbhaka* for internal retention he terms it, on some occasions, *sahitakumbhaka* (*ibid.*: 36, 57, n. 63). These correlations become even more obfuscated when Yogendra (1931: 136-142), on other occasions, attributes all phases of the breath with “*kevala*”, in the sense of “absolute”, but also “deep”, “full” in the case of inhalation and expiration (*kevalaśūnyaka*, *kevalapūraka*, *kevalakumbhaka*, *kevalarecaka*). Here, *kevala* indeed adopts the meaning of “deep”, and therefore points more at nineteenth-century deep breathing discourses than at a Haṭhayogic understanding of *kevala*.

Another synthesis of Haṭhayoga and its modern interpretation is found in Yogendra’s treatment of alternate-nostril breathing. This technique, which plays a major role in Yogendra’s yoga breathing methods, is also referred to as *anulomaviloma* (Yogendra 1935c: 73).<sup>508</sup> Surprisingly, the yogi furthermore equates it with the Haṭha technique *sūryabhedana*, by referencing *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 2.48 (Yogendra 1940: 39-41).<sup>509</sup> He prescribes a timing for one round of alternate-nostril breathing

<sup>508</sup> *Anulomaviloma* is a term to denote alternate-nostril breathing in *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* 2.47, which expands on *sūryabhedana*. This passage in turn cites from the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (Birch & Hargreaves 2020).

<sup>509</sup> This equation is somewhat idiosyncratic, since *sūryabhedana/sūryabheda* is described in *Haṭhapradīpikā* and other texts as a repetitive action of inhaling through the right nostril, and exhaling through the left nostril (without the reverse pattern, which would indeed be alternate-nostril breathing). This is even more surprising, since *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.7–9 treats alternate-nostril breathing in detail (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 23). For Yogendra, it seems justified to equate *sūryabhedana* and alternate-nostril breathing due to the fact that his form of “solar breathing” starts with the right (*sūrya*) nostril (Yogendra



(consisting of two sets of all four phases of the breath) that takes twenty seconds, resulting in roughly three breaths in a minute (*ibid.*: 41).<sup>510</sup> Although suggesting a relatively defined *mātrā*,<sup>511</sup> he also recommends practising it “according to one’s capacity” (*yathāśakti*) (*ibid.*: 39). Stressing the balancing effect of alternate-nostril breathing by evening out the “positive” (*sūrya*) and the “negative” (*candra*) breath flow in the nostrils, he also thinks of this practice as “dynamic equilibration” (*ibid.*: 45). Bringing about “inner, organic, and natural harmony”, his rhetoric is likely inspired by Adelia Fletcher’s *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath* (1908), which he lists among other Western “scientific” authorities of observations on the “electromagnetic currents” flowing in the nostrils and lungs (Yogendra 1940: 45-46).<sup>512</sup> This breathing technique further enhances the tone of the respiratory organs and has sedative effects on the heart and the brain waves due to its psychosomatic principles (*ibid.*: 39-41).

It has been briefly noted above that “breathing methods” are said to bring about respiratory hygiene, but “yoga breathing methods” have additional advantages. Harnessing *prāṇa* is the main capital that radically distinguishes yoga breathing methods from Western deep-breathing exercises – in fact the life-sustaining principle, Yogendra argues, remains a conundrum for Western thinkers like Stebbins (Yogendra 1940: 56, n. 62). Thus, *prāṇāyāma* is better suited to “the absorption of oxygen, removal of carbon dioxide, neutralization of rhythm of movements, [bringing about] sedative nervous effects, and the conservation of Prana and Longevity” (Yogendra 1931: 145; 1940: 41-42). As a modern scientific yogi rooted in tradition, Yogendra quotes from N. C. Paul’s *A Treatise in Yogi Philosophy* (1851) to underscore the effect on longevity of *kumbhaka* (Yogendra 1940: 57, n. 63). Regarding the theme of carbon dioxide elimination, he further mentions, among other scientists, Karl von Vierordt (*ibid.*: 44), who was already cited by Paul (chapter 6.3). Yogendra’s breathing methods

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1935c: 74). Very likely, Yogendra quotes from the translation by the theosophist Iyengar, edited by Tatya, that lists *sūryabhedana* in 2.48 (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 30) (while other manuscripts explain *sūryabhedana* in 2.47).

<sup>510</sup> For the “lay student”, this rhythm could be decreased to one breath per minute as a maximum reduction of the breath frequency (Yogendra 1935c: 74). Drawing one breath a minute is elsewhere termed “Yoga rhythmic breathing” (Yogendra 1940: 53).

<sup>511</sup> He follows the Haṭha authority Gorakṣa Nāth by recommending the ratio of 6-8-5, or 1-2-1 (inhale-retain-exhale) (Yogendra 1940: 40; 2013 [1928]: 93).

<sup>512</sup> He further quotes from Henry Lindlahr’s *Natural Therapeutics* (1918) and from Fisher & Fisk’s *How to Live* (1917) (Yogendra 1940: 47, n. 40). It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss various scientific and medical literature that influenced Yogendra, but it should be noted that his reading and knowledge of this literature was extensive. Next to the already mentioned authors and scientists, he quoted from M. J. Rosenau, John S. Haldane & John Priestley, A. V. Hill & and H. Lupton, Charles W. Hack, and others (e.g., Yogendra 1931: 140-141; 1940: 43). For details on several others of Yogendra’s interlocutors of physical culture and (alternative) medicine, see Alter (2013: 74).

in combination with “sun, air and steam baths, massage, hydrotherapy and diet” (*ibid.*: 57), again vastly borrowing from physical-culture techniques, were successfully applied to cure asthma patients in his yoga clinics both in India and the United States (Yogendra 1931: 159-161; 1940: 57-64). Yogendra nevertheless invokes the superior cultural capital of Haṭhayoga for curing asthma and other ailments by referencing *Yogayājñavalkya* 9.37,<sup>513</sup> and concludes that “recent scientific findings are merely a rediscovery” (*ibid.*: 62, n. 65). Having the cultural capital of *prāṇāyāma* on his side, he accuses the Asthma Research Council of Great Britain for unacknowledged use of his *Breathing Methods* in their *Physical Exercises for Asthma* (1935). Although the claim may not be unjustified,<sup>514</sup> the similarity in the methods may also hail from Yogendra’s appropriation of physical-culture techniques.

This section has mainly dealt with Yogendra’s conceptualisation of the physical side of (yogic) breath cultivation – and has placed it at the confluence of Haṭhayoga and hygiene. Despite the fact that the yogi’s work has, up to the present, mainly been interpreted along the lines of a secularised and medicalised approach to yoga (e.g., Alter 2005; Singleton & Fraser 2013: 99), it should be noted that it was also – like Kuvalayananda’s – ultimately oriented towards the higher states of yoga. Just like his competitor, Yogendra occasionally alludes to these as well, which are inherent to the practice: Haṭhayoga is about the “control of the nervous system”, says Yogendra (1940: 112), but it is also the technique to achieve the “state of trance-consciousness (*samādhi*) [...] through the complete purification of the nervous system (*nāḍīśuddhi*) – when the fivefold nerve impulses are made to flow in absolute harmony through the *suṣumnā*” (*ibid.*). The “fivefold nerve impulses” denote the five *prāṇas*, which are brought under control through *prāṇāyāma* and other yogic techniques.<sup>515</sup> It is here that Yogendra presents a thoroughly traditional understanding of Haṭhayoga – he even mentions *suṣumnā* – but explains it, like Kuvalayananda, largely in medical terms. Ultimately, as Alter has noted, such a statement makes one ask whether “yoga can be explained by a science other than itself, or [...] it cannot” (*ibid.*: 141). When Kuvalayananda and Yogendra, in the final analysis, stuck to Haṭhayogic terminology

<sup>513</sup> While I was not able to trace the reference to *Yogayājñavalkya* 9.37 that would mention the curing of asthma, this text indeed features a synthesis of yoga practice and Ayurvedic therapeutics in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, e.g., in *Yogayājñavalkya* 8.32–40ab (Birch 2018: 23).

<sup>514</sup> I was not able to secure a copy of *Physical Exercises for Asthma* (1935).

<sup>515</sup> *Nāḍīśuddhi* seems to be connoted here with the result of Haṭhayoga in general as opposed to (the result of) a specific *prāṇāyāma* technique (in modern yoga *nāḍīśuddhi* is often used as a synonym for alternate-nostril breathing). For details on the concept of *nāḍīśuddhi*, see also chapter 3.3.2; for a discussion of the premodern notion of the five *prāṇas*, see chapter 3.1.



of the subtle body, it indeed seems that the higher states of yoga can only be referred to – and explained – by yoga itself.

The next section continues to outline Yogendra’s attempts to frame yoga as a holistic practice that encompasses not only the “physical”, but also the “psychological”, “mental”, and “spiritual” effects of breath cultivation (Yogendra 1936: 47-49). Moreover, yoga’s efficacy on various human levels was, according to Yogendra, grounded in the “universality” of yoga, which encompassed both science and religion.

### 8.3.2.3 Yogendra’s Hall of Mirrors: Between Patañjali and Delsarte

In one of the old works in Sanskrit, it is asked: “What is Life?”, and the reply is that “Life is the interval between one breath and another – *he who only breathes half, only lives half*; but he who has mastered the art of breathing has control over every function of his being.

Sri Yogendra: *Breathing Methods* (1932: 26, his emphasis).

Yogendra borrowed this quotation – though cloaked as a traditional and thus authoritative passage, – from the last page of Howard’s *Breathe and Be Well* (1916). Yogendra’s unattributed use of Howard’s passage shows his engagement with the physical-culture scene including Delsartism, which itself again claimed to be inspired by “yoga”, however, rather as an imagined category than an actual practice (Foxen 2020: 151-152). This hall of mirrors also features Yogendra’s reception of Stebbins. With a remarkable intuition, Yogendra often places a discussion of Stebbins next to an allusion or direct quotation from Swedenborg, who was an important figure in the Delsartist’s intellectual world (e.g., Yogendra 1932: 69-70; 1940: 50-51; chapter 5.2.1).<sup>516</sup> In these passages, he intends to establish an allegedly universal correlation between the breath and the mind that is found in Swedenborg and Stebbins, but also in Patañjali.<sup>517</sup>

That Yogendra was inspired by Stebbins’s “rhythmic breathing” is obvious and well-established (Foxen 2020: 241-242). He cites her *Dynamic Breathing and Harmonic Gymnastics* (1892) on various occasions (Yogendra 1931: 158-159; 1932: 69-70; 1940: 50-51, 56-57, 122-124). He further extensively draws on Stebbins

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<sup>516</sup> Yogendra only thought that he quoted Swedenborg (Yogendra 1932: 70), but was actually citing from Wilkinson (1849: 55), which is a common flaw in the reception history of Swedenborg within modern yoga (chapter 4.3.1).

<sup>517</sup> At times, Yogendra references *Yogasūtra* 1.34 as a relevant passage for exemplifying the “corresponding state of mental poise” (Yogendra 1940: 52), whereas, on other occasions, he references Stebbins and Swedenborg (Yogendra 1932: 69-71).

regarding relaxation (*ibid.*: 122-124, chapter 8.2.1). But his engagement with her “psycho-physical culture” might have shaped Yogendra’s synthesis on even deeper levels, as is shown in his references to both Patañjali and Delsarte. Explaining her system, Stebbins states that “[b]y the term psycho-physical culture we mean a completely rounded system for the development of body, brain and soul” (Stebbins 1892: 57). Yogendra’s elaboration on the eightfold yoga of Patañjali in an issue of *Yoga* starts out with very similar words: “Yoga is a complete practical system for self-culture working through the harmonious development of one’s body, mind and soul” (Yogendra 1934b: 4). This further leads to “physical well-being, mental harmony, moral elevation and spiritual unfoldment” (Yogendra 1936: 47). As has been shown in chapter 5.2, the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual – by drawing on Delsarte – were also important dimensions in Stebbins’s anthropology. He then continues to equate the eightfold path with various levels of his holistic programme, wherein *yama* and *niyama* are “a code of ethics”, *āsana* is “physical culture”, *prāṇāyāma* is “control of biological living/control of bionergy”,<sup>518</sup> *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, and *dhyāna* are “mental culture”, or “concentration”, and *samādhi* is “ultimate achievement” (*ibid.*).<sup>519</sup> Here, Yogendra created a synthesis that integrated Stebbins’s psycho-physical culture into Patañjali. In brief, Stebbins talked Delsarte and Yogendra rendered it Patañjali.

This is not further surprising, since Yogendra’s understanding of yoga as a “holistic” practice was truly expansive. It is an “exact science”, a “religion [...] matchless in its universality”, unveiling “psychic possibilities” by means of a “scientific process of conscious unfoldment (theosophy)” (Yogendra 1936: 47). The character of his perennialism and the attempt to accommodate both science and religion in his system is, as with other yoga pioneers, ultimately occult – although, next to mentioning “theosophy”, he preferred to call it “universalistic”. Indeed, in his early American days, the yogi also showed some interest in occultism. Besides adopting the works of Stebbins (who clearly had occult inclinations), Yogendra also engaged in William J. Flagg’s *Yoga or Transformation* (1898), which outlines yoga as a kind of spiritistic path for soul development with magical implications (Alter 2013:

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<sup>518</sup> “Bionergy” is a neologism that merges the words “bio” and “energy”, and Yogendra apparently derives it from a scientist called “Dorland” (Yogendra 1940: 55). While, strictly speaking, it would be more logical to combine the two words in the term “bioenergy”, Yogendra was consistent in his usage of “bionergy”.

<sup>519</sup> Passages in Yogendra’s *Yoga Asanas Simplified* (2013 [1928]: 20-26) are quite similar to this outline of the yoga of Patañjali in *Yoga* (1936: 47-51), but have been largely sanitised regarding their proximity to Stebbins as well as to the notions that point towards religion and theosophy. I therefore quote from *Yoga* of 1936 instead. The original 1928 edition of *Yoga Physical Education*, to which I do not have access, may have been closer to the passages in *Yoga* of 1936.

67).<sup>520</sup> Moreover, according to his biographer Rodrigues, Yogendra showcased his psychic abilities in various performances (Rodrigues 2015 [1982]: 96; Alter 2005: 138). His lecture titles ranging from “Control of Psychic Prana: Exercises for Concentration on Lotus of Psychic Centres” over “Truth about Psychic Phenomenon: The Law of Vibration” to “Way to Self-Realization” further betray his affinity to the occult (Rodrigues 2015 [1982]: 104). These titles also show that Yogendra initially walked the path of the famous Vivekananda, whom he later opposed. Indeed, his guru had encouraged him to do “the same thing for me that Swami Vivekananda did for Paramahansa Ramakrishna” – to popularise yoga in the West (Madhavadasa in a letter to Yogendra as quoted in *ibid.*: 111). The miraculous performances, presented alongside philosophical lectures, certainly propelled this endeavour.

The householder yogi’s universalistic programme, though, did not only address the physical culturists, Stebbins, and occultism on some occasions. Yogendra’s rootedness in South Asian yoga traditions that highlighted Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga, and Rājayoga as well as his exchange with the contemporaneous Indian yoga scene needs to be acknowledged, too. For practising *prāṇāyāma* with *mātrā*, Yogendra recommends certain “mental counts”, or “mystic formulas”, pointing at the use of mantras (1935c: 74). Later he also prescribed mentally reciting the *Gāyatrī* mantra in *prāṇāyāma* practice, which is deeply related to Hindu ritual practice (Yogendra 1940: 40). In his *Simple Meditative Postures* (1935), he advises the “spiritual student” to focus the mind on the rhythm of breathing for increased concentration (Yogendra 1935a: 85).<sup>521</sup> The last pages of this booklet features a timetable of practice for the “physical culturist” and the “spiritual student” respectively (*ibid.*: 86-88). This terminology is adapted from Kuvalayananda’s hierarchy of the “physical” and “spiritual culturist” discussed above.

Next to allusions to “mysticism” as part of the yoga traditions, Yogendra also delved deeper into the body of yogic scriptures. In an article entitled “Essentials of Vedantic Yoga”, Yogendra presents himself as a connoisseur of certain strands of yoga tradition that would integrate forms of yoga into Vedānta. He discusses Rājayoga as outlined in the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, where the term denotes a Vedāntic system of yoga

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<sup>520</sup> Yogendra (1931: 167) mentions Flagg in his chapter on sexual hygiene.

<sup>521</sup> *Simple Meditative Postures* employs *jālandharabandha* as well as *uḍḍiyanabandha* (Yogendra 1935a: 73-75). The technique of both *bandhas* as well as *mūlabandha* is not extensively treated in Yogendra’s other publications that I am aware of.

that includes fifteen auxiliaries (Birch 2013: 406).<sup>522</sup> Yogendra sees the *Aparokṣānubhūti* as a key text of Śāṅkarite Vedānta, although he is aware that the attribution to Śāṅkara is wrong (Yogendra 1934a: 103; Birch 2013: 406-407). He also refers to its reception line via the South Indian Yoga Upaniṣads, by mentioning that the *Tejobindopaniṣad* adopts several verses from the text (Yogendra 1934a: 106, n. 4; Birch 2013: 407).

Universalism brushed aside, Yogendra criticises the conflation of Rājayoga with what he calls the “Śāṅkara school of Vedānta Yoga” (Yogendra 1934a: 103) and the overall uninformed use of the term by modern writers. Most likely, he points at the stretched notion of Rājayoga as a mental practice that is likened to psychology by Vivekananda and his followers. He laments that many have “a hazy notion that all that concerns mental training is Rājayoga, whatever its theories and practices may be. [...] Popular belief credits it with supernatural endowments in the realm of spirituality or [...] with something that is the highest of all Yogas” (*ibid.*). Yogendra points out that Haṭhayoga, or *ghaṭasya yoga* (“yoga of the physical body”) was mainly physical and Rājayoga mainly a mental practice, whereas Vedānta Yoga engages “intellectual contemplation” (*buddhi*) that leads to final liberation (*ibid.*: 105, 109). He further states that Pātañjalayoga is “psycho-physical” whereas Vedānta Yoga interprets the fifteen auxiliaries to suit Vedāntic metaphysics, leading to all too “far-fetched” interpretations of Patañjalian and Haṭhayogic terms (*ibid.*: 104). In the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, *prāṇāyāma* is described as follows:

The throwing out of the illusion of these phenomena from one’s own nature is the Recaka [...]; the conviction I am Brahman is the real Pūraka [...], and then that immovable retention of this conviction that I am nothing else but Brahman is the real Kumbhaka [...]. This is the only course of *prāṇāyāma* as practised by the wise, whereas the ignorant torture their nose for nothing (*Aparokṣānubhūti* as quoted in Yogendra 1934a: 107).

Yogendra does not comment on the passage further, but he seems to be opposed to Vedānta and its intellectual attempts to harness *buddhi* for final liberation. He was a yogi to “torture his nose” – an allusion to nostril techniques – who walked the path of psycho-physical yoga. What is more, in his discussion of Vedānta Yoga (a term that may well be invented by himself), he most likely draws from Manilal Nabhubhai Dvivedi’s work *Rāja Yoga* (1885) that incorporates a translation of the

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<sup>522</sup> This text can be roughly dated between the twelfth and the fourteenth century (Birch 2013: 406-407).

*Aparokṣānubhūti*,<sup>523</sup> but also a thoroughly theosophical introduction to the text (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 1-55). Moreover, in this work, which probably also influenced Vivekananda (chapter 5.4.3), we find an exact counterpart to Yogendra's interpretation of Haṭhayoga as a physical versus Rājayoga as a spiritual practice (*ibid.*: 49). As mentioned above, the implicit references to this text point at his reception of theosophically influenced translations, and it may well be that theosophy is the source of his perennialism as well as his attempt to fruitfully combine science and religion.

This section has read Yogendra's work against the backdrop of Patañjali among other authors who informed his practice. As has been shown, he already considered Patañjali as an important framework in *Yoga Physical Education* and in early entries of *Yoga*, but Yogendra's interpretation of Pātañjalayoga has not received much attention in scholarship.<sup>524</sup> Next to his medical endeavours, which were part and parcel from the outset (Alter 2013: 65), interlacing Patañjali with several strands of Haṭhayoga, physical culture, and occult elements should be regarded as crucial for Yogendra's modern yoga. It was probably a discursive advantage to draw on all these strands, but it also reflects his multifaceted interests. Patañjali as the classical pioneer of psycho-physical culture – a theme that Kuvalayananda likely borrowed from Yogendra – was a good trademark for Yogendra's endeavours.<sup>525</sup> Before closing this chapter, light is shed on the marriage of a scientific and philological approach to explain *prāṇa* as “bionergy” in Yogendra's work – which reflects another of Yogendra's attempts to succeed in yoga's discursive battle.

#### 8.3.2.4 *Prāṇa*: “Bionergy” as a Weapon in a Discursive Battle

Although he apparently had good command of Sanskrit by quoting copiously from premodern sources, it is likely that Yogendra indeed did not know the language well enough to translate texts.<sup>526</sup> In any case, although Yogendra did cite Sanskrit texts, he never referred to the translations upon which, upon close inspection, he drew in many cases. It is further a well-documented fact that Yogendra relied on the Sanskrit

<sup>523</sup> The above-cited passage on *prāṇāyāma* is reproduced almost verbatim from Dvivedi (1890 [1885]: 105).

<sup>524</sup> Alter (2013: 74) mentions that Yogendra had turned to the *Yogasūtra* late in his career, yet also acknowledges that Yogendra had ordered a copy of the text when he was in the United States.

<sup>525</sup> It should be made clear that Kuvalayananda had used the concept of yoga as psycho-physiology from the very first issue of the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* onwards, but to render Pātañjalayoga a “psycho-physiological science” appears as late as in “Evolution of Prāṇāyāma” of 1956, as mentioned above.

<sup>526</sup> However, he translated Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* into Gujarati in 1918, and was rewarded for his outstanding translation by the Bengali poet.

authority Surendranath Dasgupta to discuss *prāṇa* in the light of premodern sources.<sup>527</sup> The scholar and the yogi arrived at the conclusion that *prāṇa* was a “bio-motor force” that pervades the entire body (Yogendra 1931: 156, n. 2) by comparing the functions of *prāṇa* in yoga texts and discourses of science. In agreement with Dasgupta and several scientists, Yogendra states that, in its life-sustaining capacity, *prāṇa*

upholds the body by keeping together the various mind and body substances in essential harmony and unity through its manifold activities. What the orthodox physiologists refer to as vital force, life energy or life force (Scott), the biologists as the biomotor force (Hæckel) or, better still, bionergy (Dorland), and the modern scientist as “the flying energy in the body” (Stiles) [...] – is in fact the very *prāṇa* referred to by scientific Yoga (Yogendra 1940: 55).<sup>528</sup>

This scientism certainly reflects Yogendra’s and Dasgupta’s fascination with the subject as well as their search for authoritative reference besides Sanskrit texts. They claimed not only that the contents of Sanskrit texts were “ancient”, but also that they were the first to point at the significance of *prāṇa*, or the life force with its many names (Yogendra 1940: 110-111). The fact that Dasgupta himself used the term “bio-motor force” in elaborating on *prāṇa* throughout Indian history in his influential and much-cited *A History of Indian Philosophy* certainly attests the discursive power of their joint project (Dasgupta 1952 [1923]: 261).<sup>529</sup> But while the philosopher translates the Sanskrit term *nāḍī* as “nerves” (*ibid.*: 263), Yogendra seems to go one step further when he updates yogic terminology with neuroscience. In his view, the five *prāṇavāyus*<sup>530</sup> are “nerve-impulses” and the yogic subtle body is elucidated in light of “yoga neurology” (Yogendra 1940: 108-109).

For all his occupation with “nerves” and “bionergy”, Yogendra, like many before him, encountered the problem of translation here. As chapter 6.4 has shown,

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<sup>527</sup> Yogendra does not clarify which texts they consulted but states that “nearly all the most important works in Sanskrit” were investigated (Yogendra 1940: 54, n. 53).

<sup>528</sup> I was not able to trace these terms in the works of the authors mentioned. An exception is the reference to the American physiologist Percy G. Stiles (1857–1936) which is likely taken from his *The Nervous System and its Conservation* (1917: 39). As to the other scientists, he most probably refers to the British-Indian entomologist Alexander Walker Scott (1800–1883), the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), and the American physician William Alexander Newman Dorland (1854–1956). Did Yogendra cite from a work that compiled these sources and appropriated the original terms incorrectly?

<sup>529</sup> In this helpful overview, Dasgupta discusses the notion of *prāṇa* from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* onwards by engaging several influential works and commentators, for example the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, Śaṅkara’s, Rāmānuja’s, Vācaspati’s and Vijñānabhikṣu’s commentary on the *Vedāntasūtra*, or Gauḍapāda’s commentary on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (Dasgupta 1952 [1923]: 256-264).

<sup>530</sup> The “five bodily winds” governing various body functions of which *prāṇa* is the foremost (chapter 3.1).

translating Sanskrit terms for yogic subtle anatomy and physiology into scientific terminology was one effective strategy to make yoga appear scientific, and to increase one's cultural capital by referring to both yogic and scientific sources. But in this process *prāṇa* is not only a different term for the concept of “life force”, it is also a highly effective one to boost modern yoga discourse along the power-knowledge axis. Partaking in these discourses, yoga pioneers could claim authority and demarcate their statements against those of others.

In this case, Yogendra's main target was Kuvalayananda. He assures the reader that *prāṇa* could never be translated as “air” or “breath” only, although he attests that it can have this meaning in some occasions (Yogendra 1940: 54; cf. Dasgupta 1952 [1923]: 259). Kuvalayananda's statement that *prāṇa* means only breath (see above) therefore makes him an “unauthorised author” (Yogendra 1940: 54). Yogendra criticises Kuvalayananda for writing “books on the intricate technique of *prāṇāyāma*” despite being unable to distinguish between *prāṇa* and *vāyu* (*ibid.*). One is left to ask if he was challenged by the fact that Kuvalayananda had published a full *prāṇāyāma* manual in 1931 whereas he himself only dared to depict initial and basic instruction for the beginning student. Pushing it further, Yogendra accused him of being an imposter who lacked “practical training, subjective experience [and] close acquaintance with academic findings” (*ibid.*), depriving Kuvalayananda of all the entitlements that the latter indeed believed himself to possess. On the flipside, it is likely that Kuvalayananda's success put additional pressure on Yogendra as a pioneering scientific yogi (Goldberg 2016: 61-62). At least in his 1931 book, Yogendra himself drew on the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* to explain *prāṇāyāma*-induced pressure changes (discussed, e.g., in Kuvalayananda 1930c),<sup>531</sup> and utilised photographic material from the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* to illustrate the practices.<sup>532</sup> Although being extensively informed by the work of Kuvalayananda, his acknowledgment is rare. He once calls him a “zealous and staunch exponent of science of Yoga”, likely with irony (Yogendra 1931: 156), whereas his criticism of Kuvalayananda is abundant.

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<sup>531</sup> Yogendra (1940: 43) states that certain findings “may be substantially corroborated by careful control experiments on intrathoracic, intrapulmonic and intra-abdominal pressures during yogi breathing”, while Yogendra (1931: 147) had given a clear reference to such experiments conducted by Kuvalayananda. Perhaps, their relationship became increasingly tense during the 1930s.

<sup>532</sup> The passage that is likely most appreciative is when Yogendra justifies the use of photographic material copied from the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* as follows: “I am pleased to acknowledge that figures 5 6 13 14 15 and 21 have been reproduced from the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*. This [is] *not* because of the fact that they cannot be replaced with the author's own photos but because they incidentally represent the essential details at their best” (Yogendra 1931: xxi, n. 1, emphasis his).

These cases of yogi polemics exemplify the competitive environment of modern yoga pioneers, unmasking their struggles for interpretational sovereignty. In these struggles, the notion of *prāṇa* becomes a tool to gain discursive power. It could be argued that this power is handed down to the most recent voice in a chain of statements in which a younger yogi would attack an established authority. Kuvalayananda indirectly criticises Vivekananda for his elastic use of *prāṇa* and other subtle principles, and Yogendra in turn dismisses his competitor as altogether unauthorised. This pattern is repeated by the occultist T. R. Sanjivi, founder of the Latent Light Culture, who completely disarms exponents of early modern yoga and theosophy like Vivekananda, Rama Prasad, and Kuvalayananda regarding their *prāṇa*-related epistemologies in the mid-1930s (chapter 9.1). Forerunners of such a fierce combat against other viewpoints are indeed found in the history of modern yoga, most evidently in Dayananda Sarasvati, who was known for his uncompromising rhetoric against other creeds.

#### 8.3.2.5 Summary

Yogendra's discursive relations with interlocutors, influencers, and competitors yielded an outstanding contribution to yogic breath cultivation. Indefatigable reader that he was, Yogendra integrated a large variety of sources into his approach to yoga as "hygienic spiritualism and metaphysical fitness" (Alter 2013: 68). It is precisely his integrating quality mingled with fierce demarcation that marks Yogendra's work as extraordinary in both scope and differentiation. For example, describing the value of "breathing methods" without labelling them as inherently yogic or essentially inferior accounts for a critical and eclectic, yet also open and distinctive voice. *Breathing Methods*, is, after all, the *prāṇāyāma*-related manual that among South Asian contributions drew most extensively on Euro-American sources. As one of the yogis that were active and successful both in India and the United States, Yogendra has been compared in his impact with Vivekananda (Goldberg 2016: 55-60; Albanese 2007: 368). But his legacy – quite abreast with Kuvalayananda's – was a down-to-earth understanding of practical yoga-cum-mysticism that was decidedly different from Vivekananda's. Yogendra's and Kuvalayananda's scientific and medicalised yoga found numerous reverberations in the work of subsequent yogis, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

The late Yogendra's contributions to modern yoga as a "physical philosophy" (Alter 2013: 62) could hardly be touched upon in this section. It should at least be



noted that Yogendra had much to say on yoga's position within modern society, and in a way, his own endeavour was part and parcel of the contradictions and dangers that he saw in modern yoga as a watered-down practice (*ibid.*: 74-75). But his emphasis on the reflective quality of yoga practice is indeed a rare asset in modern yoga. In old age, he continued to engage yoga as universal mysticism (Yogendra 1969 [1960]: 31-37). Such an understanding of yoga culminates in the direct perception of an ultimate reality which was, according to Yogendra, also admitted as a metaphysical possibility by Plotinus and Henri Bergson (*ibid.*: 34). His constant negotiation of yoga between science and mysticism, which bolsters the value of yoga techniques through Euro-American voices, is typical of the twentieth-century yogi. This is, of course, never attempted without claiming the superiority of yoga over other techniques. In doing so, the mystic and householder Sri Yogendra became a role model for the modern yogi, who is often conceived as both practically and mystically inclined. And these modern yogis must, for better or worse, negotiate several traditions and influences.

#### 8.4 Transnational Yogis of the North: Yogananda and Sivananda

Yogananda and Sivananda, both being connected to Northern India, gained transnational fame during their lifetime. Yogananda founded the Self-Realization Fellowship with its international headquarters in Mount Washington, California in 1920, and Sivananda established the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, North India in 1932. They popularised yoga, and their idiosyncratic interpretation of it, on a large scale. For all their individual characteristics in spreading yoga, there are some commonalities: their status as celebrities, which intermingled with their swami-ness, the institutional empires that they built that survive to this day, and their large number of followers both in India and in the West.

As for their individual approaches, Yogananda received initiation through a guru from whom he had learned for several years, and thus claimed to represent an ancient lineage. In contrast, Sivananda was initiated by touch (*dīkṣā*) from a yogi in Rishikesh, and subsequently mastered yoga primarily through self-study. While Yogananda remained protective of the details of the Kriya Yoga lineage and its *prāṇāyāma* teachings throughout his life, Sivananda seemed to be delighted to share all the sources that he was acquainted with in his *prāṇāyāma* manual. In other words, Sivananda offered a low-level access to his teachings, which – if necessary – could be entirely taught by correspondence, whereas the initiation system of Yogananda

maintained a high-level guru-dependency and centralisation of the practice within the lineage and institution.

Both swamis reached an international host of students via the postal service, although the process of accessing this “personalised” form of teaching may have differed between the two. The transnationalisation so acquired made the institutions immensely successful in propagating yoga as a holistic self-help practice that could lead to liberation or self-realisation. While both swamis were influenced by Vedānta and at least partly adopted Vivekananda’s thought, it was Sivananda who propagated the more monastic scheme. If one of Sivananda’s main themes was to establish celibacy (*brahmacharya*) in modern yoga, Yogananda at times preached celibacy, but tended more towards the sublimation of sex than total abstinence. During the vibrant years that were the 1920s, the emergence of these swamis occurred amidst a pan-Indian Yoga renaissance, conveyed to the world by their radiant personalities, yogic ingenuity, and a fair amount of salesmanship.

#### 8.4.1 Yogananda’s Yogoda and the Science of Breathlessness

Repair my nerve wires, O Mystic Electrician! [...]

O Builder of Bodies, O Divine Dynamo of all cosmic currents of life force! Resurrect the  
deadened wires of my wrecked nerves and infuse them with Thy power.  
Paramahansa Yogananda: *Whispers from Eternity* (1960 [1935]: 29-30).

Born Mukunda Lal Gosh (1893–1952) in Gorakhpur (then Greater Bangla) to a well-off Bengali middle-class family, the later Paramahansa Yogananda gained international fame as a yogi.<sup>533</sup> Yogananda, who first came to the United States in 1920, was the founder of the Yogoda Satsanga Society in India (established in 1917) and the Self-Realization Fellowship in America (founded in 1920). Roaming between the continents, Yogananda had followers in India, Europe, and the United States. After completing his B.A. degree from Calcutta University in 1915, he renounced the world and became a swami the same year. In his youth, Yogananda was inclined to religious topics but equally so to physical culture and bodybuilding. He also experimented with a quite intriguing mix of tantric rituals, mesmerisation, and spiritism – experiments that soon were banned by his worried father. However, Yogananda retained his reputation for possessing a hypnotic gaze with healing capacities throughout his life.

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<sup>533</sup> The title Paramahansa (*paramahansa*, “the great swan/goose/gander”) was bestowed on Yogananda in 1935 by his guru Sri Yukteswar. This biographical account is based on Foxen (2017a) and Yogananda (2016 [1946]).

His religious path is also the topic of one of the twentieth-century yoga best-sellers, Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946).<sup>534</sup> Next to the *Autobiography*, there are several recent monographs that sketch Yogananda's life. From these, Anya P. Foxen's *Biography of a Yogi* (2017) is most useful, which is a scholarly attempt to carefully dissect the lines between biography and hagiography in earlier accounts of Yogananda's lives, among other themes. And hagiographic accounts abound, for Yogananda belongs to the Kriya Yoga lineage, said to have been founded by Babaji, an immortal saint eternally wandering in the Himalayas and showing himself only to his most worthy disciples. Not only is Babaji a fair-skinned ever-youthful god-master, or *mahāvatāra* ("great incarnation"), he is also said to unite the teachings of both Krishna and Christ (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 298-299).

The fleshlier *paramparā* of Yogananda's Kriya Yoga starts with Shyama Charan Lahiri (1828–1895), or Lahiri Mahasya, who is believed to have met said Babaji in one of the farthest northern Himalayan corners of India. There he was taught a practice to be handed down to initiated disciples only. Being of Bengali origin, Lahiri had several students from the Bangla lowlands whom he taught in his home close to Benares. Among them were Calcutta-based Priyanath Karar (1855–1936), who gained his monastic name Sri Yukteswar by initiation into the Giri lineage in Bodhgaya around 1903 (Foxen 2017a: 95). Another student was Yogananda's father, who first disclosed yoga to his son in 1906 at the age of thirteen. In 1909, Sri Yukteswar became Yogananda's guru. Considering that most of Lahiri's disciples had several students themselves, it should be noted that there is a huge pedigree that branches off from Lahiri Mahasya with several fellowships and organisations founded in Calcutta, many of these sub-branches still being active in Bengal and India, but also in the United States. Most of the English-speaking disciples, however, are students of Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship or Yogoda Satsanga Society.

Following the example of Babaji and the this-worldly gurus initiated by him, Yogananda likewise attempts to lead his students to self-realisation in this life. The etherisation of the fleshly body is laced through the *Autobiography's* tales of his lineage. It is also reflected in the stories and photographic impression that remain from Yogananda's own life. The idea that Babaji and others initiated into Kriya Yoga (or a

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<sup>534</sup> I will henceforth use the abbreviated title *Autobiography*. It should be noted that it was significantly edited and made coherent by the American journalist and poet James Warnack, who collected Yogananda's short stories and jottings (Deslippe 2018: 38). Deslippe has argued that the book likely became so successful because the co-author was acutely aware of the American readers' demand for Indian metaphysics (*ibid.*)

similar technique) can materialise at will may be read as a thoroughly theosophical theme (Foxen 2017a: 70-75; Baier forthcoming). It should, however, be noted that the etherisation of the body was already an important step for becoming liberated-while-living (*jīvanmukti*) in pre-theosophical times, as is evidenced in premodern texts such as the eleventh-century *Amṛtasiddhi* and the c. fourteenth-century *Yogabīja* (Birch 2020b: 213-214, 218-220). Theosophists and disciples of the Babaji lineage may have been aware of this concept through the reception of the *Yogabīja*, of which printed editions were circulated in the nineteenth century.<sup>535</sup>

Yogananda refers to his system both as Kriya Yoga and Yogoda.<sup>536</sup> Details of (advanced) practices are only revealed to initiated students even today, making a full analysis of Yogananda's practical teachings impossible. There are however a few aspects of the practice that are documented from Lahiri onwards, which mainly consist of the latter's likely reception of the eighteenth-century *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* (see below). In my attempt to explain *prāṇāyāma* in Kriya Yoga, I will nevertheless try to place Yogananda's practice in the context of his lineage, but also highlight the innovations of Yogoda.

Generally speaking, the lines between Kriya Yoga and Yogoda are often blurred. Reading between the lines of Yogananda's publications, Yogoda is an adaptation of Kriya Yoga as handed down by Lahiri to also suit Western students. Hence, Yogoda is wedded to practices derived from New Thought as well as the bodybuilding of the early twentieth century. In any case, the basic metaphysics of Kriya Yoga seem to be retained in the Yogoda system. It should be noted that it is not clear from the textual sources if the term Kriya Yoga has been read into Babaji's lineage by Yogananda himself, or if the practice was indeed termed as such from Lahiri Mahasya onwards. It is possible that Yogananda adopted the term during the 1920s to authenticate his lineage,<sup>537</sup> and it is indeed not substantially expounded before Yogananda's *Autobiography* of 1946. I will nevertheless refer to the concept of Kriya Yoga as outlined in the *Autobiography* first, because it provides an important framework for the practices. While the swami's earliest publication *Science of Religion*

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<sup>535</sup> Jason Birch in a personal correspondence (Jan 2, 2021).

<sup>536</sup> The Glossary in *The Divine Romance* (2003: 483) explains that the neologism "Yogoda" is a combination of yoga and "da", which means "that which imparts". Yogananda probably refers to the Sanskrit root *dā* ("give") here. Yogoda thus literally means "that which imparts yoga". The compound makes more sense if one considers that Sanskrit "a" (but not "ā") is pronounced as "o" in Bengali.

<sup>537</sup> The earliest reference to Kriya Yoga that I am aware is found in the lecture "The Yoga Art of Overcoming Mortal Consciousness and Death" of 1923. The term also appears in Thomas (1930: 42) to describe Yogananda's teachings.

(1920) sets forth a four-yoga model inspired by Vivekananda, it does not provide substantial information or framework for yogic breath cultivation.<sup>538</sup> After elucidating the conceptual framework of Kriya Yoga and treating Yukteswar's *The Holy Science* of 1894 (which is an important precedent of Yogananda's work), I will briefly touch on Yogananda's notion of *prāṇa*. I will then explain the practical teachings as found in *Scientific Healing Affirmations* (1924) and Yogananda's first correspondence course, termed *Yogoda or Tissue-Will System of Physical Perfection* (1925), as well as some related lectures.

#### 8.4.1.1 Kriya Yoga: Patañjali as Mediated through Babaji and Lahiri Mahasya

According to the *Autobiography*, Kriya Yoga was taught in the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Yogasūtra*, and, after being forgotten for centuries, was re-revealed by Babaji to Lahiri Mahasya in 1861 (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 235-236). Offering a scientific explanation,<sup>539</sup> Kriya Yoga appears to be primarily associated with *prāṇāyāma* (or, more precisely, its decarbonising and oxygenating effects), for it is

a simple, psychophysiological method by which human blood is decarbonated and recharged with oxygen. The atoms of this extra oxygen are transmuted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centres. [...] The advanced yogi transmutes his cells into energy (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 235).

The passage that Yogananda cites from the *Bhagavadgītā* also points at *prāṇāyāma*, because Kriya Yoga is said to neutralise the “even currents of *prana* and *apana* in the nostrils and lungs” (*ibid.*: 236).<sup>540</sup> However, Kriyāyoga itself is neither mentioned in the *Bhagavadgītā* nor in any of the four commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā* by Śrīdhara, Madhusūdana, Viśvanātha, and Baladeva.<sup>541</sup> It appears that *Yogasūtra* 2.1,

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<sup>538</sup> Although it expands on the theme of “life force”, this book nowhere mentions the notion of breath or *prāṇa*, and, more significantly, does not describe any form of breath cultivation. It should be noted that this book is co-authored by Yogananda and Swami Dhirananda (a.k.a. Basu Kumar Bagchi), a fellow student of Yogananda at Calcutta university who accompanied him to America. There is evidence that most of it was written by Yogananda's associate, but after a dispute between the two, all references to his co-authorship were deleted in post-1929 editions (Foxen 2017a: 203, n. 2).

<sup>539</sup> I will refer to scientism and subtle-body-related themes in Yogananda's work more extensively below.

<sup>540</sup> This is a translation of *Bhagavadgītā* 5.27cd. Yogananda also refers to a passage of *Bhagavadgītā* 4.29. For these references to the *Bhagavadgītā* as well as to the text's commentators Śrīdhara, Madhusūdana, Viśvanātha, and Baladeva, I use the e-text available on GRETEL: [http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpustei/sa\\_bhagavadgItA-4comm.xml](http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpustei/sa_bhagavadgItA-4comm.xml) (accessed, Nov 19, 2020).

<sup>541</sup> The *Autobiography* correctly explains that *kriyā* and *karman* derive from the same Sanskrit root *kr* (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 235), which may have given rise to interpret *karmayoga* as Kriyāyoga. Indeed, Yogananda opines that “Kriya Yoga is inner or esoteric karma yoga” (Yogananda in Ghosh 2016 [1980]: 293). However, the passages cited from the *Bhagavadgītā* in the *Autobiography* also do not refer to *karmayoga*.

which Yogananda also cites, is indeed the main textual reference, on which he can build his understanding of Kriya Yoga. He explains that in alignment with the *Yogasūtra*, “Kriya Yoga [is] body discipline, mental control, and meditating on Aum” (*ibid.*: 237).<sup>542</sup> While *prāṇāyāma* is not explicitly mentioned here, I will explain in the following how the swami arrives at this interpretation, and how he includes *prāṇāyāma* in it.

According to a more text-based interpretation, Kriyāyoga, or the “yoga of action” of *Yogasūtra* 2.1 comprises ascetic practice (*tapas*), recitation and study (*svādhyāya*), as well as devotion to Īśvara, or God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*) (Larson 1987b: 28-29). After describing the practice for the yogi whose mind is absorbed, Patañjali offers Kriyāyoga as “an alternative practice for those who have distracted minds” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 6). The three aspects of Kriyāyoga were interpreted in varied ways already by premodern commentators. Since *Yogasūtra* 2.52 refers to *prāṇāyāma* as the best of ascetic practices (*tapas*), the first part of Kriyāyoga (i.e., again *tapas*) can also be read as a recommendation to practise *prāṇāyāma*. Study (*svādhyāya*) is explained in *bhāṣya* 2.1 as reciting *om* or other Vedic formulae, but it has also been interpreted as “the study of the self” (Chapple 2012: 233). The third aspect is devotion to God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*), or “offering up all actions to the supreme guru or renouncing their fruits” (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 25). Īśvara is invoked and becomes manifest by the syllable *om* (*ibid.*: 216; Chapple 2012: 233-234). Hence, it appears that Yogananda understands *tapas* as “body discipline” implying *prāṇāyāma* and other (Haṭha)yogic techniques, *svādhyāya* as “mental control” probably in the sense of self-study, and *īśvarapraṇidhāna* as *om* recitation and devotion.

While Yogananda interprets Kriya Yoga as part of Pātañjalayoga, he additionally presents it as an esoteric and perennial teaching revealed by Babaji. In this mould, Patañjali, Christ, the biblical Elijah, and the medieval saint Kabir (worshiped by Moslems and Hindus alike) were all aware of “*Kriya* or a similar technique by which they caused their bodies to materialize and dematerialize at will” (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 235). These saints and prophets, though not necessarily initiated into

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<sup>542</sup> *Yogasūtra* 2.1: “The yoga of action is: asceticism, recitation and devotion to Īśvara [the Lord] (*tapahsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ*)” (as translated in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 25). In all further references to the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, I use the GRETEL edition: [http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpus/tei/sa\\_patañjali-yogasUtra-with-bhASya.xml](http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/corpus/tei/sa_patañjali-yogasUtra-with-bhASya.xml) (accessed, Nov 19, 2020) which is based on the Sanskrit edition by Kāśinātha Śāstrī Āgāṣe (1904) (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 47), Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaye.

Kriya Yoga, were able to accomplish this by “summoning those irresistible powers of devotion” (*ibid.*: 479).

According to Yogananda, this approach works for the most gifted ones across the history of religion. For the ordinary man, however, a daily applicable “scientific” method is offered. Yogananda has already described such a scientific method as the most advanced one of four methods in his *Science of Religion* of 1920. His approach has been examined elsewhere for its similarity with Vivekananda’s four-yoga model, and I will therefore not expand on it (Yogananda & Dhirananda 1925 [1920]: 59-89; Thomas 1930: 152-155; Foxen 2017a: 203, n.2). Suffice it to say here that Yogananda remains enthusiastic about the “scientific” method based on the mysteries of breath, which he later describes as Kriya Yoga. Ultimately earth life depends on breath – even more so, breath *creates* form, individual consciousness, and any material object (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 478). It is, in turn, an “act of the mind: a dream breath” (*ibid.*: 240). What the yogi therefore wants to achieve is a “breathless state” or a “breathless and motionless trance” (*ibid.*: 119, 478). In its final perfected form, the yogi becomes a *jīvanmukta* who can choose to act (which implies breathing) while he is simultaneously absorbed in the divine (*ibid.*: 478-479). Although the *jīvanmukta* is free to do anything that he wants – the logic of the argument implies that the path of Kriya Yoga is a “science of breathlessness”, rather than a “science of breath” (*ibid.*: 480).

In Kriya Yoga, a major focus hence lies on *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>543</sup> “Breathlessness” implies that *prāṇāyāma* as breath retention is the defining practice. As to these forms of breath retention, no specifics have been made available to the public. The techniques that we can trace within the lineage are Haṭhayogic techniques like *śāmbhavīmudrā*,<sup>544</sup> *khecarīmudrā*,<sup>545</sup> *yonimudrā*,<sup>546</sup> *mahāmudrā*, and breath awareness through the *haṃsa* mantra. All of these are described in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, but only *mahāmudrā* and

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<sup>543</sup> Indeed, an advanced student of Yogoda Satsanga Society whom I met in Kolkata in May 2019 stated that “Kriya Yoga is nothing but *prāṇāyāma*” (own field data). An explanation that refers to a chant on “Lord Pranayama” also equates *prāṇāyāma* with Kriya Yoga (Yogananda 2015 [2003]: 3).

<sup>544</sup> The practice of *śāmbhavīmudrā*, in which one establishes a steady gaze without blinking (*Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 3.64–67; Vasu 1895: 26), is recommended by Lahiri to a student (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 328).

<sup>545</sup> A *mudrā* in which one inserts the tongue into the nasal cavity (*Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 3.25–32; Vasu 1895: 22-23) which is, for example, described in Ghosh (2016 [1980]: 294).

<sup>546</sup> In this practice one closes the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth with the fingers of both hands (*Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 3.37–44; Vasu 1895: 22-23). Yogananda adapted this for the Yogoda mail-order lessons (Lessons V) in which one merely closes ears and eyes. Thereby, one will see the “astral light” and hear various subtle sounds (Yogananda 1925: 19-20). His guru Yukteswar had previously applied theosophical terminology in describing the higher states of yogic practice (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 72-73). For details, see below.

*haṃsa* are directly breath-related. *Mahāmudrā* involves breath retention in a seated position in which one bends over one extended leg in combination with *jālandharabandha* while gazing between the eyebrows (*Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 3.6–8; Vasu 1895: 18). It is recommended by Yogananda as a useful “spine-stretching *āsana* that is done before practice of Kriya proper [which probably means *prāṇāyāma*, M.K.]” (Yogananda in Ghosh 2016 [1980]: 336). Because *haṃsa* is taught in Yogananda’s mail-order lessons from 1925 onwards, I will expound on it below.

As has been mentioned, some elements of Yogananda’s Kriya Yoga are derived from Vivekananda.<sup>547</sup> Not only did Yogananda borrow the four-yoga model from him, but he also adopted the tripartite scheme of consciousness with superconsciousness as the highest state (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 39-40, 55-56).<sup>548</sup> Another highly prominent thread in Yogananda’s system is yoga as science as propagated by Vivekananda and others before him. When Yogananda implores the “Divine Dynamo”, the “mystic electrician” to “repair [his] nerve wires” (as cited in the epigraph), these metaphors are highly reminiscent of those of the Bengali Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen (chapter 4.1.1). As late nineteenth-century Bengal was steeped in discourses on yoga as a science, Yogananda was probably familiar with the subject from a young age. A role model from whom Yogananda could directly learn was his guru Sri Yukteswar, who also repackaged yoga as science.

#### 8.4.1.2 Sri Yukteswar’s *The Holy Science*: A Precedent of Yogananda’s Yogoda

Originally written in Sanskrit in 1894,<sup>549</sup> *Kaivalya Darśanam* (1894), was first translated into English as *The Holy Science* in 1949. In this work, Yukteswar combines astrology and fringe-science speculations about magnetism and electricity with a treatment of yogic techniques and the subtle body (Baier forthcoming). Yukteswar is said to have been directed by Babaji himself to write this work in order to reconcile Hindu and Christian thought (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 336). Indeed, *The Holy Science* cites from the *Bhagavadgītā* as well as Sāṃkhya- and Vedānta-related texts which are

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<sup>547</sup> In discussing the *Yogasūtra*, also Vivekananda refers to Kriyāyoga, but it does not occupy a crucial position in his thought or practices. Instead, he defines it as a preliminary practice, or “working towards Yoga” (Vivekananda 1896: 145). In contrast, Yogananda tended to equate Kriya Yoga with Rājayoga, as the Glossary to *Divine Romance* (Yogananda 2003: 472) suggests.

<sup>548</sup> *Scientific Healing Affirmations* additionally applies the tripartite scheme of consciousness to various forms of chanting, among these “subconscious” and “superconscious” chanting (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 39-40).

<sup>549</sup> The *Autobiography* states that the original *Kaivalya Darśanam* (of which I was unable to trace a copy) was written in Sanskrit (Yogananda 2016 [1945]: 337-338). It is unlikely that several references to the Bible in this book were indeed quoted in Sanskrit, and I therefore assume that it featured several passages in English. The preface to the 1977 edition also does not clarify if only the *sūtras* in the text were translated from Sanskrit or larger portions of the work (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: v).



then related to Biblical passages from John's Gospel, the Corinthians, and the Book of Revelation. Yukteswar nowhere explicitly refers to Kriya Yoga, nor does he explain what it is. There is only a somewhat twisted allusion to *Yogasūtra* 2.1 which replaces the term *kriyāyoga* with *yajña* ("sacrifice") (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 35-36). That he altogether refrained from mentioning Kriya Yoga may have been due to the esoteric nature of Babaji's teachings, but it is still notable that the term appears neither in Yukteswar's text nor in Yogananda's early publications. *The Holy Science* can nevertheless be credited for developing some key concepts that Yogananda obviously borrowed from his teacher.

Apart from the attempt to give certain yogic terms a scientific veneer, one of the direct borrowings from Yukteswar is *om* recitation, which became a key practice in Yogananda's work. Yukteswar refers to *prāṇāyāma* and *om* recitation to purify the human system, making it ever finer so that it will resist the decay of the material body (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 53, 67). More specifically, the guru advises the reader to purify the "material", "electric", and "magnetic" body by breath control that leads to hearing the cosmic vibrations of *om* (*ibid.*: 67-68). Yogananda uses similar subtle-body-related and theosophy-inflected terminology (see below), and he holds that cosmic *om* vibrations purify and help to accomplish dematerialisation (Yogananda in Ghosh 2016 [1980]: 294). Additionally, Yukteswar equates the "holy sound" Aum (*om*) to the Christian Amen, which is also found in Yogananda (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 3; Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 39-40).<sup>550</sup>

Significantly, *prāṇāyāma* as a form of "conscious sleep" is already described by Yogananda's guru, and this is linked to the idea of the "science of breathlessness" explained above. Yukteswar holds – just like his student – that *prāṇāyāma* enables a kind of deep "rest", or "sleep" for the body's nervous and circulatory system that helps to replenish the nerves and body (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 52-53; Yogananda & Dhirananda 1925 [1920]: 71; Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 240-241). Indeed, Yukteswar goes as far as to describe *prāṇāyāma* as "control over death" (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 52). If *prāṇa* governs all life, why should death not be overcome by *prāṇāyāma*? It appears that the core meaning of *prāṇāyāma* is precisely this, and this was apparently also the esoteric meaning of St. Paul's statement "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:32)

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<sup>550</sup> The theosophist R. C. Bary had already equated *om*, "the most sacred word", to Amen of the "Jews, Christians, and Mahomedans" in *The Prayer Book of the Aryans* (Bary 1883: xix-xxi). Bary furthermore eulogises the benefits of *om* recitation for the "Aryan" if practised daily (*ibid.*: 26-28). As one of the few theosophical proponents of yoga practice, Bary also recommends the practice of mantra recitation in his "Hints to the Student of Yog Vidya" (Bary 1880: 176), an article that appeared in *The Theosophist*.

(*ibid.*: 54). Yogananda picks up on the theme more explicitly and infers that St. Paul had indeed practised Kriya Yoga or a similar technique (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 237-238). He further assures that in “conscious sleep” the yogi is capable of deliberately freeing himself from body-consciousness (i.e., a temporary “death”), and thereby can recharge himself with cosmic energy in the brain and “spinal centers” (*cakras*) (*ibid.*: 240-241).

In all these yogic practices that have been described here, the tropes of rejuvenation, overcoming death, dematerialisation, and “etherisation” of the body are highlighted. These are, as has been mentioned, tropes that were equally relevant to the theosophists, but they also have clear premodern precedents. If Lahiri had taught yoga from 1861 onwards, emphasising dematerialisation, it would have predated theosophical discourse, which did not gain influence in Bengal until the 1880s. But even if this lineage did anticipate some of the notions found in theosophy, Yukteswar and Yogananda still describe yoga using terminology heavily influenced by theosophy, which is especially evident in their description of subtle anatomy.

Linked to the view of the soteriological path as “etherisation”, subtle anatomy is an important concept in both authors. Yukteswar gives a clear outline of a subtle anatomy scheme with seven *cakras*. He speaks of the “five spinal centres” as well as the medulla oblongata and the brain that together form the “seven golden candlesticks” or the “astrally shining places” (Yukteswar 1977 [1894]: 71). For Yogananda, the yogi’s subtle anatomy also comprises the coccyx, the medulla oblongata,<sup>551</sup> the spinal centres, and the forehead.<sup>552</sup> All these are the physical loci through which to access subtle reality, including the “astral” and “electronic” body (Yogananda 1925: 19), and they are involved in the process of breath cultivation and other techniques of the Yogoda system. In these attempts to utilise the subtle body, the parlance of the occult sciences and the theosophical astral body indeed shine through.

*The Holy Science* is certainly mainly interested in the interpretation of yogic practice, but the reconciliation of yoga with Christian Biblical doctrine is also programmatic. As has been mentioned, interweaving Hindu and Christian doctrine is part of Babaji’s mythical lineage from the outset. This framework of Kriya Yoga has precedents in the Brahmo Samaj, who outlined Hinduism as a universal religion, an endeavour which was contemporaneous with the emergence of the Babaji-Lahiri

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<sup>551</sup> “The ‘mouth of God’ is the subtle centre in the medulla through which divine life energy [...] flows into the body from its cosmic source” (Yogananda 2003 [1939]: 130).

<sup>552</sup> The third eye located at the forehead is occasionally referred to as the “pranic star door” (Thomas 1930: 179).

lineage (chapter 4.1.1). Yogananda continues this narrative, also quoting from the Bible to substantiate some of his statements – or to make them accessible to a broader public. At least from 1920 onwards, this public is decidedly Western. Notably, he attracted a considerable number of liberal members of the Protestant Church in the United States to join the Self-Realization Fellowship (Thomas 1930: 175-176). In line with the Bengali Brahmo leaders, for Yukteswar as well as his disciple, this may have been a strategy to resolve issues with colonialism that tended to impose Christian faith on Hindus. After all, Christ is said to have been a practitioner of (something like) Kriya Yoga himself (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 235). Turning the spiritual capital associated with Jesus of Nazareth upside down, the message also is that anybody practising Kriya Yoga could become like Christ – a message that is also suggested by the many Christ-like depictions of Yogananda that ornament the Self-Realization Fellowship publications. Ultimately, this technique is said to be superior to the Christian faith, and implicitly Christianity is traced back to yoga as first taught by the seers of ancient India as its origin (Thomas 1930: 140).

#### 8.4.1.3 Yogananda's *Prāṇa* as Lifetrans

It has already been explained that involuntary breathing is to be overcome through Kriya Yoga. Breath is thus to be utilised wisely if one wants to cross the ocean of ordinary human life and reach a state independent of earthbound bodily existence (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 241; Ghosh 2016 [1980]: 337). Since breath constitutes the mind, it can be best transcended by controlling the breath. Breath, in turn, is manifested life force, or *prāṇa*, and harnessing it makes Kriya Yoga superior to other contemplative methods (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 242). This also means bypassing the fleshly human existence and to reach a state wherein “breath, life energy, and consciousness become one” (Yogananda in Ghosh 2016 [1980]: 337). The reader is by now well-acquainted with this understanding of *prāṇa*, which is certainly not new in yogic traditions. Although *prāṇa* receives at times a fanciful translation as “lifetrans” here,<sup>553</sup> the concept basically retains most of the connotations that it normally has. The parlance of *prāṇa*-as-lifetrans, however, utilises a scientific framework.

Yogananda's idea of lifetrans is not dissimilar of Vivekananda's understanding of *prāṇa*-as-vitality. Vivekananda's dual function of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* nevertheless seems to collapse here into an energetic monism, in which the term “lifetrans”

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<sup>553</sup> It is likely that Yogananda did not develop the term “lifetrans” until writing the *Autobiography*, since I have found no reference to it that would predate 1946. Earlier works use the term life force or *prāṇa*.

describes elementary particles of life, constituting an “underlying astral universe” (Foxen 2017a: 86). For Yogananda lifetrans are “finer-than-atomic energies intelligently charged with the five distinctive sensory idea-substances” (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 46). Apparently, lifetrans are conceived of as force-units charged with the functions occupied by *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in Vivekananda’s cosmological realm (Foxen 2017a: 86; chapter 5.4), and additionally with the idea of a five-fold *ākāśa* propagated by Prasad (chapter 5.3). Before Yogananda, Sri Yukteswar had already connoted subtle materiality with *prāṇa*, holding that an astral being’s body was made of *prāṇa* – a subtle vehicle endowed with consciousness and feelings – at least according to Yogananda’s account (Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 407).<sup>554</sup> In any case, Yogananda’s scientific strategy likely raised the religious capital of his system, which appears to be elaborate and learned as well as metaphysically relevant – at least for his followers (Foxen 2017a: 86). Turning now to the practical application of Yogananda’s “science of breathlessness”, it again includes several features that appeal to “science”.

#### 8.4.1.4 Yogoda in the United States: Health, Healing, and the Hong-Saw Breath

The metaphysics of Kriya Yoga also underpin Yogoda, which was termed as such when Yogananda founded the boys’ school in Ranchi, then Greater Bangla, in 1916 (Foxen 2017b: 509). In America the system was altered in significant ways. It is likely that additional practices were added that were not part of it before. Not only was Yogoda – in alignment with American New Thought practices – decidedly holistic; it also addressed the acquisition of health, wealth, and beauty. Yogananda attracted white middle-class women and to a lesser degree also men, and received considerable support from wealthy entrepreneurs and financial backers, many of which became “Yogodans” themselves (Thomas 1930: 173; Deslippe 2018: 27, 36). In addition, there was income for the society from the correspondence course, or mail-order lessons, from the membership fee, and from the swami’s public lectures and healing sessions, as well as concerts and yogi performances in collaboration with stage magicians (*ibid.*: 36-37; Thomas 1930: 169-170).

The mail-order lessons were termed *Yogoda or Tissue-Will System of Physical Perfection* and were sent out by Yogananda from 1924 onwards.<sup>555</sup> Teaching yoga by

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<sup>554</sup> This may correspond with the Vedāntic scheme of the five sheaths of the body, in which *prāṇamaya kośa* (“sheath made of *prāṇa*”) is described as an “energetic” body consisting of vital air. This scheme is also referred to by Yukteswar (1977 [1894]: 10, 16).

<sup>555</sup> Further courses to which I do not have access were “Scientific Technique of Concentration and Meditation” and “Art of Material and Spiritual Success” (Thomas 1930: 150).

correspondence had already been popularised in the United States through the mail-order lessons of Yogi Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2). Thus, Yogananda and Dhirananda, who was his fellow yogi at that time, could rely on a successful teaching model. Like *Science of Religion*, these lessons were co-authored by Dhirananda (Foxen 2017a: 110, 203, n. 2). They contained light calisthenics and muscle-control exercises which are similar to movement practices referred to as yoga by authors such as Ramacharaka. The Energizing Exercises (tensing and releasing certain portions of the body) are reminiscent of what later became known as progressive muscle relaxation, albeit not practised in a lying position but while standing or squatting. Most exercises consist of swings and rotations of the limbs and trunk. Seated *āsanas* for meditation or *prāṇāyāma* are absent; instead, students were advised to sit upright on a chair (Foxen 2017b: 508). While some of these practices also involve breath, there is little explicit breath cultivation (yogic or otherwise) found in these *Yogoda* lessons. In this respect, *Yogoda* and Kriya Yoga seem to differ, but it is possible that Kriya Yoga in the form of *prāṇāyāma* was taught only to advanced students and that therefore these techniques were not mentioned publicly.<sup>556</sup> Yogananda also barely applies the term *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>557</sup> Nevertheless, the practice is of key importance in his system, as has been shown. In the *Yogoda* correspondence course, the most explicit form of breath cultivation is Hong-Saw (*haṃsa*), a breath-witnessing practice derived from Haṭhayoga.

In the yoga traditions, *haṃsa* (lit. “goose” or “gander”) is said to be the natural sound produced by the in- and outbreath (*ha* and *sa*) which, if reversed, becomes *so’ham* (lit. “He am I”) (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 263; Thomi 1993: 104-105, n. 87, chapter 3.3.4). Both *haṃsa* and *so’ham* are said to praise the divine in every breath when the yogi becomes aware of this silent (*ajapa*) mantra (as found, for example, in *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.79–91; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 164-165). In the fourth lesson of the *Yogoda* correspondence course, Yogananda renders *haṃsa* into the Anglicised “Hong-Saw”, describing the practice as a preliminary one to suppressing the breath (i.e., *prāṇāyāma* in the sense of *kumbhaka*) (Yogananda 1925: 18). Once established in an upright seat with a calm gaze, one should watch the breath, mentally

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<sup>556</sup> Strictly speaking, it appears that within the *Yogoda* system, Kriya Yoga is defined as the most advanced form of meditation, into which only the worthiest disciples are initiated (Yogananda 2003 [1923]: 219). The glossary to *The Divine Romance* (2000: 472) additionally defines it as the initiation (*dīkṣā*) conferred to advanced disciples by Yogananda himself, or after his death, by the president of the Self-Realization Fellowship. This reflects the inherent hierarchical structure of the Fellowship.

<sup>557</sup> An exception is the early lecture “Yoga, the Art of Overcoming Mortal Consciousness” of 1923 which explains, “[t]he yogi learns that by means of imagination or visualization, will, and pranayama (life-energy control) he can dim the lights of the senses – [...] whenever he doesn’t wish to be disturbed by their messages” (Yogananda 2003 [1923]: 211).

recite “hong” (“Soul”) while inhaling and simultaneously join the right index finger and thumb; this is followed by mentally reciting “saw” (“Great Spirit”) while exhaling and opening the fingers again (*ibid.*). The exercise should be performed for at least ten minutes with complete effortlessness and could be extended in duration. It should lead to “greatest calmness” and the realisation of oneself “as Soul, superior to and existing independently of this material body” (*ibid.*). Echoing the meaning of *so ’ham*, Yogananda hints that the soul is united with spirit in this practice. But this is not the only result of it. The calm feeling gained from this “concentration lesson” should subsequently be applied in challenging situations of everyday life (*ibid.*: 21).<sup>558</sup> It has been briefly mentioned above that the theosophist R. C. Bary recommended to chant various mantras for the student of yoga in *The Theosophist*, and “Om”, “soham” as well as “hans-hans” are among them (Bary 1880: 176). The practice of *om*-, *so ’ham*-, and *hamṣa*-recitation is also ubiquitously found in the South Indian compilations of the Yoga Upaniṣads as well as in the c. fourteenth-century *Yogabīja* 146–152 (Ruff 2002: 5; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 32), which may have inspired both theosophists and Lahiri’s disciples.

As for the New Thought influence on Yogananda, it seemed to have increased while Yogananda resided in and toured through the United States (Thomas 1930: 145). However, he was probably already familiar with New Thought manuals while living in Calcutta (Singleton 2010: 136). Right thinking, thought force, affirmations, and nature-cure practices are major subjects in the talks and lectures that he gave in the United States.<sup>559</sup> In line with William James’s argument that yoga and relaxation yielded an effective cure against the widespread nervousness that was discussed at the turn of the century as “Americanitis” (Baier 2009: 452-454), Yogananda teaches how to overcome American nervousness through Yogoda (Yogananda 2005 [1927]).<sup>560</sup> Moreover, healing on the physical, psychological, and mental plane is an important topic, while Yogananda’s emphasis unsurprisingly lies on mind cure (Yogananda 2003

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<sup>558</sup> Another example in which witnessing the breath is relevant is found in Yogananda (2003 [1923]: 217-219), which expounds the notion of *titikṣā* (“equanimity”), or “the art of remaining evenminded while watching and analysing bodily changes” (*ibid.*: 217). The object of this witnessing practice can be blood circulation or painful body parts, but also the movements of the diaphragm as well as the expansion and inflation of the lungs (*ibid.*: 218). The mind being undisturbed by these sensations, overall emotional and mental excitement becomes neutralised (*ibid.*: 217). As in the Hong-Saw example, equanimity of mind is designed to help one to become aware of the soul’s independent existence of the body (*ibid.*: 219). Already *The Holy Science* mentions the concept of *titikṣā* in one of the *sūtras* written by Yukteswar (1977 [1894]: 35).

<sup>559</sup> As to the nature-cure practices, these were mainly recommendations of a fruit and vegetable diet, the application of baths and body rubs, as well as fasting (on the latter see below).

<sup>560</sup> Yogananda was indeed aware of the teachings of William James (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 10).

[1940]: 163-164). Healing oneself and others is therefore mainly achieved through “mind force” that recharges the “body battery” with “inner life-energy” (*ibid.*: 164; Thomas 1930: 167; chapter 5.2.5; chapter 5.4.4). Like Vivekananda and others before him, Yogananda avers that it is ultimately *prāṇa* and faith in God that heals, rather than the actual treatment like hands-on or distant healing techniques (Thomas 1930: 156).

In *Scientific Healing Affirmations* (1924), which promised to improve health and prosperity through the practice of affirmations, his emphasis on New Thought is even stronger. Yogananda had then started to offer free healing meetings after high-priced public lectures as well as radio healing sessions (Thomas 1930: 149, 161). The “public divine healing meetings and prayer affirmations” via “teleportal” radio, which made the swami a celebrity in Los Angeles and the wider American West Coast, provided the base for the New Thought-inspired booklet (*ibid.*: 147). While life force is indeed the main healing agent in these practices, typical New Thought practices such as affirmations were often combined with breath cultivation.

To prepare for the affirmations, one should sit either in a cross-legged pose or on a chair, concentrate on the medulla oblongata and breathe deeply three times (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 35). I give just one example of the many prayer-like affirmations: invoking the “life force” is described as a conscious act of summoning divine willpower to “charge” one’s tissues, muscles, and nerves (*ibid.*: 51). Further breath-related aspects are found in the “combined practices” in which one merges the physical and mental practice. Assuming a standing position with the hands resting on a chair, in the “exercise for the stomach”, one draws the bellybutton back to the spine and vigorously pushes it forward, which is repeated twelve times (*ibid.*: 64-65). Such an exercise reminds on the one hand on the *agnisāra* practice of *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 1.21 (Vasu 1895: 3-4). On the other hand, the advanced form of this practice is described in the *Yogoda* correspondence course as a “WAVY MOVEMENT of the bands of vertical muscles running over the abdomen” (Yogananda 1925: 14, his emphasis). This practice is, in fact, the Hāṭhayogic *nauli*, which was also featured in the bodybuilding school of Yogananda’s younger brother Bishnu Charan Ghosh (1903–1970) who awed the audience with physical feats based on breath-control (Ghosh & Sengupta 1930: 98-99; figure 22). Other than this practice, the repeated reference to life force, and the method of “superconscious chanting” (Yogananda 2012 [1924]: 39), *Scientific Healing Affirmations* is New Thought through and through.

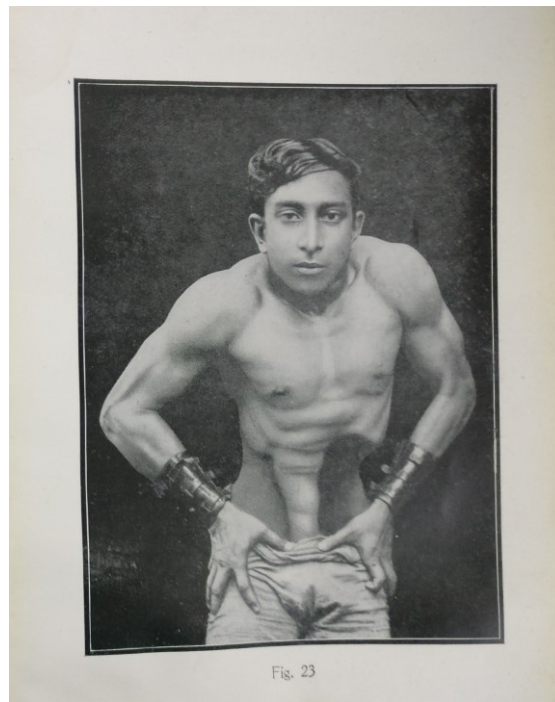


FIGURE 22: GHOSH'S STUDENT PERFORMING "ROLLING OF ABDOMINAL MUSCLES" (GHOSH & SENGUPTA 1930: 99).

Another keynote belonging to the larger New Thought ambiance are the references to personal magnetism – for example, in Yogananda's lecture "Magnetism: The Inherent Power of the Soul" (1939). Personal magnetism was popularised by such New Thought grands as Sydney Flower and Atkinson/Ramacharaka, the latter linking it to *prāṇa* (chapter 8.2.2). In this lecture, Yogananda refers to both hypnotism and animal magnetism, but he opines that animal magnetism, likened to "physical magnetism", should be transmuted into "spiritual magnetism" (Yogananda 2003 [1939]: 129). The practice of fasting accelerates this process by "train[ing] the body to rely more on cosmic energy" than on food (*ibid.*: 130). In other words, fasting enables the absorption of *prāṇa* and brings about "spiritual magnetism".

As for programme offered in the United States, the swami's repertoire far exceeded Kriya Yoga in its narrow sense, a teaching that could be only accessed by initiation. Subscribing to the *Yogoda* correspondence course or attending a public healing session was certainly tailored for the masses and provided a nice start, but both were only the first step to climb the ladder of Kriya Yoga. The swami's breath-healing practices were designed to underscore Yogoda's universal teachings. After all, Yogananda considered the quest to heal the soul or to attain "Bliss-consciousness" to be part of a universal religion and therefore far more important than merely mending the body (Yogananda 2003 [1940]: 169; Yogananda & Dhirananda 1925 [1920]: 32-34). The essence of Kriya Yoga is not only universal, but imparts a deathless reality,



which is based on the premise “breathlessness is deathlessness” (Yogananda 1925: 18).

#### 8.4.1.5 Summary

The practices analysed above range from Haṭhayogic practices to New Thought-inspired light calisthenics and healing practices. Singleton has argued that in the work of one of Yogananda’s predecessors, Frank C. Haddock (1853–1915), “affirmations are combined with physical exercise to create the corporeal conditions for cosmic influx” (Singleton 2010: 136). Most of the innovative Yogoda exercises and the “combined exercises” in *Scientific Healing Affirmations* follow exactly this pattern. Breath cultivation is part of the tensing and releasing exercises described in the *Yogoda* correspondence course, though certainly not their main concern. The Hong-Saw technique, however, can be classified as “cultivation through witnessing” (chapter 7.3). It stands alone as a purely breath-related practice, which is additionally directly derived from yoga. Like the unuttered *haṃsa* mantra, several other Kriya Yoga techniques are also found in the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, wherefore it can be assumed that it is an important source text for Yogananda’s lineage. While Kriya Yoga offers nothing short of self-realisation in this life, it appears to nevertheless have equipped its practitioners mainly with self-help capacities (Foxen 2017b: 502). Though the body is cultivated, it is ultimately also to be overcome, which means to render it ethereal and to live eternally on a subtle material plane. It is in this tension between cultivation and transcendence of the body that wealth, health, and the body beautiful as well as high religious goals such as union with the divine in this life find their place.

As Philip Deslippe has insightfully noted, “the *Autobiography* fixed the lens through which to view and understand Yogananda” (Deslippe 2018: 38). Additionally, the Self-Realization Fellowship, accumulating tremendous wealth under Yogananda’s lead, propagated the yogi’s saintliness in publications that were often significantly edited and made coherent after the yogi’s death. Yogananda’s public profile is largely responsible for the swami being recognised in records of the intermediate war period while many of his associates and competitors remain unnamed (*ibid.*: 8). However, on the downside, the saintly halo of the yogi was disputed during this time by his former associates, among these Deva Ram Sukul, Swami Dhirananda, and Sri Nerode. The latter two filed lawsuits against Yogananda, for reasons ranging from claiming back money to accusations of Yogananda’s fraudulent teachings and his improper relationships with female followers (*ibid.*: 36-38; Albanese 2007: 577, n. 78).

What made Yogananda nevertheless highly successful was his skill at rooting Yogoda in a transnationally active institution. The institution multiplied the swami's cultural and religious capital. His teachings were on the one hand secretive and on the other available in high-priced public lectures and correspondence courses that reached the many. Religious seekers in India and the United States were fascinated by the ancient practice of Kriya Yoga taught and revived by the mythical Babaji and his fleshlier lineage. As with many other yogis, combining "ancient" practice with fringe-science speculations and a fair portion of New Thought seemed to have met the needs of his audiences.

#### 8.4.2 Swami Sivananda: *Prāṇāyāma* and the Divine Life

Teach Yoga Asanas to thousands. Read my "Brahmacharya" article in all schools and colleges with demonstration of Asanas and Pranayama. [...] The whole city will be charged with spiritual vibrations. The study of my writings with a little explanation of Yogic terms will itself adequately constitute your Yoga Class.

Swami Sivananda instructing yoga teachers: *Autobiography* (1983: 59).

Swami Sivananda was born Kuppuswami Iyer (1887–1963) to a wealthy Brahmin family in Tamil Nadu.<sup>561</sup> He received an English education and was trained in Western medicine, providing care to patients in Trichinopoly, South India. Simultaneously he acted as editor for the health journal *Ambrosia*. After he spent a couple of years abroad, practising as a medical doctor in Malaysia and living under wealthy circumstances, he returned to India.<sup>562</sup> As part of his religious quest, towards which he was drawn thereafter, he wandered from Benares to Rishikesh where he finally settled at the edge of Ganga in the 1920s. By renouncing the world in 1923, he received his *saṃnyāsi* name "Sivananda". Afterwards, he mostly stayed in Rishikesh, read extensively on yoga, practised it, and offered free medical care as well as food to other *saṃnyāsis*. At that point, he also started to send his musings on yoga and Vedānta written in English to family members and friends in Tamil Nadu. Soon gaining fame as the English-speaking yogi in Rishikesh, streams of disciples headed towards Rishikesh, and he had built a stable group of followers by the end of the 1920s.

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<sup>561</sup> This paragraph is based on Strauss (2005), if not otherwise noted.

<sup>562</sup> Some accounts hold that Sivananda was married and had one or several children in Malaysia. This, however, is not confirmed by official records (Strauss 2005: 37). Generally, the Divine Life Society seems to downplay Iyer's life before he became Swami Sivananda (Alter 2004: 63).

Sivananda established the Divine Life Society in 1932 with the help of Swami Swaroopananda. This society was a transnational organisation with students that partly stayed in Rishikesh, and partly were reached via mail. His yoga-related correspondences with his students soon extended into a prolific series of books and pamphlets, his first publication being the voluminous *The Practice of Yoga: Various Practical Methods in Yoga and Meditation* (1929) with several books following in the 1930s. For the present context, the most relevant are *The Science of Pranayama* (1935), *Kundalini Yoga* (1935), *Yoga for Health* (1937), *Yogic Home Exercises* (1938), and *Svara Yoga* (1954). They were mostly published as cheap booklets and were widely circulated in India and among his international students. Sivananda eventually authored over two hundred books (Goldberg 2016: 332). It should be noted that most of the content of the *prāṇāyāma*-related materials is redundant.<sup>563</sup>

In terms of his own guru lineage, Sivananda is said to have been initiated by a sannyasin in Rishikesh whom he treated medically and who saw a distinct radiant glow (*brahmatejas*, “the splendour of brahman”) on his face (McConnell 2016: 15). After the initiation, the guru, however, departed for Benares the very next day (*ibid.*: 16), leaving the new swami to himself to gain further religious knowledge and expertise. Following this event, the renunciate travelled to the Himalayas as well as to South India where he also visited Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry (*ibid.*). Aurobindo, who aspired to be religiously devout as well as to promote Indian nationalism, was, for Sivananda, “a realised yogi” and “a glory to India” (Sivananda 1929: 211). Sivananda’s own lineage formation and the organisational structure of the Divine Life Society appear to be based on a similar foundation to that of Vivekananda’s Ramakrishna Mission. Initiated disciples became swamis, often wearing saffron robes, being addressed as “Maharaj” and, in Vedāntic fashion, as “thy own self”, which indicated that all are one and that “there is no such thing as diversity” (*ibid.*: xi). Like Vivekananda and Abhedananda, Sivananda too was a renouncer, and celibacy (*brahmacarya*) was one of his core teachings for attaining health, happiness, and nothing less than liberation-while-living (*jīvanmukti*). Becoming a *jīvanmukta* was probably also the implicit meaning of the organisation’s “divine life” motto.

In reflecting on his reading history – which will be the main material for analysis in this chapter – Sivananda clearly recurs on Vivekananda’s exposition of

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<sup>563</sup> For example, the passages on *prāṇāyāma* in *Yogic Home Exercises* (1938: 71-77) are largely redundant with those in *Hatha Yoga* (2013 [1939]: 87-104). However, the books are otherwise not fully congruent. *Hatha Yoga* for example lacks the treatment on hygiene.

*prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as the two main principles to constitute the cosmos (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: viii-ix). An ardent follower of Swami Vivekananda's texts, Sivananda also had a leaning towards teaching yoga and Vedānta with a universal gloss which was nonetheless situated in the nationalist mould. Regarding various techniques of yogic breath cultivation about which one could learn little from Vivekananda, Sivananda drew from a large variety of sources. As a well-educated Brahmin, the Rishikesh swami had access to several premodern texts on yoga, yet exclusively relied – as far as my *prāṇāyāma* analysis goes – on their English translations.<sup>564</sup> He was also acquainted with Rama Prasad's translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* (chapter 5.3). The swami is furthermore certainly a case in point for combining yoga and occultist approaches by mainly deriving his ideas from the influential Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2). As will be shown, Sivananda was inspired by Lonavla-based Swami Kuvalayananda and medicalised yoga (chapter 8.3.1). For Sivananda as a former physician, it was certainly relevant that Kuvalayananda could explain the functioning of *prāṇāyāma* and other techniques in medical terms. Analysis of some of Sivananda's seminal works, especially *The Science of Pranayama* (1935), shows that much of what he taught revolved around health and hygiene, complemented by loftier religious goals (and a nationalistic agenda). This blend, which is rather typical of modern yoga, constitutes the main topical thread in this chapter.

#### 8.4.2.1 Celebrating Celibacy and Universal Hygiene

The tropes of health and hygiene laid out by Swami Kuvalayananda and Sri Yogendra persist in Sivananda's work. "Money is wasted enormously in paying doctor's pills", says the former physician in *Yoga for Health* (Sivananda 1937b: 2). It seems that Sivananda now sided with the viewpoint of the practitioner who sought to attain health without drugs, pills, and injections – as many advocates of hygiene before him. Instead, Sivananda turned to the "Science of Suggestion" in adopting New Thought as the crucial part of the doctor's advice, asserting, however, that "Auto-suggestion is only an off-shoot of Vedanta" (*ibid.*: 3-4). Having studied Ayurveda from co-authors of his *Ambrosia* (Sivananda 1983: 6), Sivananda further reveals that health is

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<sup>564</sup> *Practice of Yoga* (1929: 215-217) gives an extensive list of recommended readings, mentioning more than forty (!) works in Sanskrit, many of these of the Vedānta canon, but also covering other *darśanas* like Mīmāṃsā as well as yoga-related works like the (*Laghu*)*Yogavāsiṣṭha* and several Yoga Upaniṣads. For some Sanskrit texts he recommends certain English translations. He also mentions theosophical literature focussing on spiritual practice, namely Blavatsky's *Voice of Silence* (1889) and Mabel Collins's *Light on the Path* (1885). Regarding modern yoga and tantra, he recommends several works of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Ram Tirtha, Swami Vivekananda, and three volumes of John Woodroffe. "Western philosophers" listed are Deussen, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.

maintained by the balanced action of the three humours (*doṣas*) (Sivananda 1937b: 7). It is further achieved and maintained by practices of the nature-cure movement that highlights the tropes of exposure to fresh air, exercise, baths, mental poise, and, according to Sivananda, also cheerfulness (*ibid.*). But health is, in turn, a prerequisite for practising *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, and one should remember that the goal of all these endeavours is self-realisation (*ātmajñāna*) (*ibid.*: 6, 8). To follow a yogi's path an intricate bundle of knowledge is recommended. One should have “elementary knowledge of Raja-Yoga, psychology, Ayurveda, physiology, family medicine, hygiene, Sankhya and Vedanta philosophy” (*ibid.*: 8) – implying that the fast track to attain this is probably the study of Sivananda's books.

As one of the most important practices of yoga and for maintaining health, Sivananda appraises celibacy (Sivananda 1937b: 17-23). Indeed, already in the classical Ayurveda of the *Carakasamhitā* (c. first century CE), celibacy is viewed as a pillar of health, albeit not necessarily practised in its extreme but in moderation (Alter 2008: 182, 194). Whether Sivananda was aware of it or not, Euro-American hygienist literature also had a clear interest in restraining the sexual activity of (male) practitioners (chapter 4.4.2). In Sivananda's agenda of combining religious pursuits and health issues through celibacy, *prāṇāyāma* played a special role. The swami holds that *prāṇāyāma* can help to control one's sexual thoughts, exercising “a wholesome check upon the sexual irritation. When some evil thoughts disturb your mind at once take to Padmasana or Siddhasana and practice Pranayama. The thought will leave you immediately” (Sivananda 1946 [1935]: 103).<sup>565</sup>

The practice of celibacy also affects the subtle body. Apart from *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (Sivananda 1946 [1935]: 97), its result is the transformation of the seminal energy into *ojas*: “When the seminal energy is sublimated, or transformed, it supplies abundance of prana to the system. It is stored up in the brain in the form of Ojas. Ojas is nothing but Prana” (Sivananda 2013 [1939]: 88). Derived from Ayurveda, *ojas* denotes subtle vitality pervading the body; more precisely it is a distillate of semen to which a certain lustre, splendour, power, and vigour is attributed (Alter 2008: 183; Monier-Williams 1899: 235). How this theme entered Haṭhayogic or tantric teachings

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<sup>565</sup> The control of semen is not always described in relation to celibacy. Sada (1935) has elaborated on what he termed “self-protection” in married sexual life. He explains how the control of semen functions as a form of birth control and a way to intensify love between the couple.

cannot be investigated here,<sup>566</sup> but, in any case, already Vivekananda has described *prāṇa* as transubstantiated into *ojas* due to “chastity” (Vivekananda 1896: 60-62). The varied and often ill-defined concept of *ojas* is not directly linked to *prāṇa* in premodern Ayurvedic texts, except through the notion that *ojas* “holds” prāṇic vitality (*prāṇadhāraṇā*) (Meulenbeld 2008: 163). The concept of *ojas*, and specifically *prāṇa*-as-*ojas*, seems to gain more momentum in modern contexts. The intensity with which *ojas* and celibacy underscore modern virility is striking (*ibid.*: 168; Alter 2008: 178). It is possible that *prāṇa*-as-*ojas* was popularised – if probably not invented – by our swamis’ contribution. Vivekananda had already established the idea of virility through celibacy within modern yoga, but it gains more weight in Sivananda’s thought and practice.<sup>567</sup>

*Yogic Home Exercises* (1938) is another book to bridge yoga and hygiene, devoting a full chapter to “Health and Hygiene” (Sivananda 1938: 21-40). It suggests that sun salutation, the performance of the *sandhyā* rite, as well as other forms of sun worship that result in both health and mental uplift have been practised in both India and the West (*ibid.*: 22-25). In doing so, Sivananda argues for a universal hygiene rooted in the cultivation of the body and the worship of the sun. In Sivananda’s system of hygiene, which draws on Vedānta, Ayurveda, Haṭhayoga, as well as New Thought and nature cure, it seems that mind rules over matter: “Thou art not this perishable body. Thou art the Immortal Self” (Sivananda 1937b: 14). Nevertheless, body-centred techniques have their place. This makes yoga a system of “self-culture” that renders the body a “moving temple of the spirit” (Sivananda 1938: iii, vi). In having touched on Vedānta and New Thought, *prāṇa*-as-*ojas*, and universal sun-worship as hygiene, we have established some frames with which to delve now into the main source material, which is the quite encompassing *Science of Pranayama*.

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<sup>566</sup> Suffice it to say that the seventeenth-century *Yuktabhavadeva* 3.51, a treatise on yoga, already mentions *ojas* by quoting without attribution from the *Carakasamhitā* (Birch 2018: 30-31). Hence, the link between *ojas* and yogic teachings has premodern roots.

<sup>567</sup> The link between *ojas*, celibacy and Haṭhayoga is also found in T. R. Sanjivi’s correspondence course *Advanced Course in Mental Sciences and Finer Forces* (1929 [1925]: 12) that may well have informed Sivananda (chapter 9.1). The most obvious borrowing of Sivananda from Sanjivi is evidenced in their common description of *sītkārī* in which one inhales through the mouth with “the two rows of teeth in contact” producing the “sound C C C C”, as found in both Sanjivi (1929: 23) and Sivananda (1962 [1935]: 76). While Sivananda draws almost verbatim on Sanjivi here, I have not encountered such a description elsewhere.

#### 8.4.2.2 *The Science of Pranayama*: Sivananda's Basic Understanding of *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma*

*The Science of Pranayama* (1935) is the only manual in Sivananda's prolific work which has the term "science" in its title. As has been shown, breath practices were first correlated with "science" by Rama Prasad which was further popularised by Vivekananda and Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 5.3; chapter 6.3; chapter 8.2.2). Unlike Prasad, Sivananda mainly applies the term to *prāṇāyāma*, and to a far lesser extent to *svara*-related techniques. The swami presents an abundance of *prāṇāyāma* teachings and draws from a considerable number of premodern sources, or more precisely, their English translations, as mostly published by the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund (chapter 6.4). In his compilation, Sivananda therefore heavily relies on yogic lore tinged by theosophy. With the authoritative pen of a swami, Sivananda mostly refrains from naming the sources from which he draws, but rather styles himself as a representor of traditional yoga – which consists in fact of several traditions. Like other *prāṇāyāma* and yoga manuals before this one (chapter 8.3; chapter 8.5.1),<sup>568</sup> it is illustrated with anatomical drawings, photographs of yogis performing *prāṇāyāma*, and depictions of *cakras* in the style of Arthur Avalon (pseud., John Woodroffe, 1865–1936).<sup>569</sup>

The manual does not read like a systematically outlined text, but more like a conglomerate of rather scattered passages on *prāṇāyāma*. Nevertheless, it has a rough structure that will be briefly presented here. Like most other manuals, *The Science of Pranayama* provides an overview of the nature of *prāṇa*, the subtle body, and some physiological details about breathing in chapter one. Chapter two addresses preliminaries like the ideal place and time for practice and the recommended yogic diet, as well as basic seated *āsanas* and the three *bandhas*. In chapter three, various techniques of yogic breath cultivation are described, drawn from (commentators on) the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and Haṭhayoga texts as well as from Yogi Ramacharaka's texts. This chapter also has a section on "Special Instructions" which almost reads like a "manual in the manual", structured in about fifty brief aphoristic statements. Judging from the unity of this text, it was possibly earlier published as a

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<sup>568</sup> Among these, most prominently, Sundaram's *Yogic Physical Culture* (1929), Kuvalayananda's *Prāṇāyāma* (1931), and Yogendra's *Breathing Methods* (1932).

<sup>569</sup> Arthur Avalon translated several tantric texts, for modern yoga contexts most importantly the *Ṣaṭcakra-Nirūpaṇa* in 1919 that made the seven-cakra system the authoritative one. Strictly speaking, the pseudonym Arthur Avalon is a "joint persona of Sir John Woodroffe (who knew some Sanskrit) and several Bengali collaborators" (Newcombe 2009: 991; cf. Taylor 2001).

separate booklet on *prāṇāyāma*. The Appendix, then, again recurs on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and features a question-and-answer section. The highly pluralistic sources on which Sivananda drew are to some extent disentangled in the following, and while not all of them can be traced, some major influences on Sivananda will be determined.

Sivananda's understanding of *prāṇa* is largely congruent with Vivekananda's. He outlines *prāṇa* as an omnipresent force that includes "heat, light, electricity, magnetism" and a vital principle that sustains all life (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 4-5). While Sivananda also recurs here on Patañjali, the most immediate source for *prāṇāyāma* as an "exact science" and as the control of "psychic Prana" (*ibid.*) is still Vivekananda. As for Vivekananda, so too for Sivananda *prāṇa* works both on "gross" (*sthūla*) and "subtle" (*sūkṣma*) levels of reality. Vivekananda did not explicitly apply these terms to *prāṇa* (but more generally to reality), but used the term "psychic Prana" which is equated by Sivananda with *sūkṣma prāṇa*, or "subtle Prana" (Vivekananda 1896: 48; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 3). For Sivananda, breath and electricity are examples of gross *prāṇa*, while subtle *prāṇa* is vital force, its vibrations producing thoughts and the overall functions of the mind. Thus, controlling the breath means controlling the mind. In explicitly utilising a *sthūla* and *sūkṣma prāṇa*, Sivananda may additionally be influenced by John Woodroffe/Arthur Avalon, who explicitly mentions this twofold classification in *The Serpent Power* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 3-4; Avalon 1974 [1919]: 212).<sup>570</sup> Vivekananda is again echoed when Sivananda eulogises *prāṇāyāma* as a practice bestowing omnipotence over both mental and physical forces and the acquisition of superconsciousness (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 53, 91). He also adopts Vivekananda's *prāṇāyāma* instruction for *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (*ibid.*: 69-70; Vivekananda 1896: 58).

Regarding his understanding of *prāṇa*, Sivananda further employs typical analogies of premodern texts to describe *prāṇa* as linked to both mind and semen. Without naming the original source, he echoes *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.2, and explains that the "mind is fastened to the Prana, like the bird to the string" (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 48). The Upaniṣad likens the mind to the bird which is tied to the breath, or the "string", implying that, when the bird moves, the *prāṇa* also moves (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 138; chapter 3.1.2). The breath and the mind find rest in a certain state of meditation, which is *susupta*, translated by Sivananda as "deep sleep"

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<sup>570</sup> Sivananda's acquaintance with Woodroffe/Avalon and *The Serpent Power* is evidenced in various lists of recommended reading, e.g., in Sivananda (1934: 55).



(Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 48). In highlighting the Haṭhayogic link between the breath, the mind, and the semen,<sup>571</sup> Sivananda explains that one can control each aspect to steady all three. He follows a common dichotomy, when he states that the Haṭha yogi controls the breath, while the Rāja yogi controls the mind to this end (*ibid.*: 71). Dvivedi (1890: vii) has described this in the Appendix to his commentary on the *Yogasūtra* in very similar words.<sup>572</sup> The influence of the theosophical translator on Sivananda will further be treated below.

As for some general remarks on Sivananda's *prāṇāyāma* teachings, I will first describe here a few guidelines for the practice. Sivananda's basic diagnosis is that in "ordinary worldly persons the breathing is irregular", while *prāṇāyāma* establishes a "correct habit of breathing" (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 53). Generally, it is not necessary to first master *āsana* to proceed to *prāṇāyāma*, but one can immediately start to practise and improve both (*ibid.*: 52). One should always inhale and exhale slowly and soundless unless the rationale of a respective practice like *kapālabhāti* and *bhastrikā* suggest rapid and forced, thus audible exhalation (*ibid.*: 99). A beginner is advised to start with practising *pūraka* and *recaka*, paying attention that the exhalation is double length of the inhalation, after which *kumbhaka* is introduced and gradually increased (*ibid.*: 102). This advice as to the ratio of inhalation and exhalation is likely directly borrowed from Kuvalayananda's *Prāṇāyāma* (1931: 53, 55; chapter 8.3.1).<sup>573</sup>

Alternate-nostril breathing is a fundamental exercise for Sivananda that needs to be briefly covered here. It is described no less than ten times in *The Science of Pranayama*, albeit not without redundancies. Sivananda also terms it "Easy Comfortable Pranayama" or "sukha purvaka" in this and other texts (e.g., Sivananda 2013 [1939]: 93-97; Sivananda 1938: 75). As already in Vivekananda's case, it is mostly combined with silent *om* recitation (or alternatively, with the silent recitation of the *Gāyatrī* mantra). Silent *om* recitation is Sivananda's preferred *mātrā* technique, which is also recommended for various other *prāṇāyāmas*, as, for example, for the practice of *bhastrikā* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 80). Following some premodern tantric texts, Sivananda holds that *prāṇāyāma* in combination with *om* or the *Gāyatrī* mantra (*sagarbha prāṇāyāma*) is "one hundred times more powerful" than without (*ibid.*: 59;

<sup>571</sup> The c. eleventh-century *Amṛtasiddhi* is likely the first text to teach that the mind, breath, and semen are connected, a notion subsequently found in many Haṭhayoga texts (Mallinson 2020: 415).

<sup>572</sup> "The great difference between *Hatha-* and *Raja-Yoga* lies in the fact that while the one believes that *vṛtti* (mind) follows *prāṇa* (breath), the other believes that *prāṇa* follows *vṛtti*."

<sup>573</sup> Sivananda also mentions Kuvalayananda's *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* in a list of recommended reading for Haṭhayoga (Sivananda 1934: 55). For more on Kuvalayananda's influence on Sivananda, see below.

chapter 3.3.4). Another technique that involves mantra is “concentration on breath” with the help of the *hamsa* or *so’ham* mantra (Sivananda 1929: 131), which is also prominent in Yogananda’s teachings. Both swamis ascribe considerable soteriological potential to so witnessing the breath, i.e., the realisation that the individual soul is *brahman* (*ibid.*). The following outlines the role of Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga in Sivananda’s 1935 text, and also his allusions to contemporaneous yoga masters like Kuvalayananda.

#### 8.4.2.3 Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga, and Kuvalayananda

In integrating almost all Hindu yogic traditions that were known at Sivananda’s time, *The Science of Pranayama* would certainly come to speak about *prāṇāyāma* as understood in Pātañjalayoga. In doing so, Sivananda takes whole passages from Dvivedi’s *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (1890) (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 54-57; Dvivedi 1890: 51-53).<sup>574</sup> Both texts conceive of *kuṇḍalinī*, a concept that is alien to classical Pātañjalayoga, as “the source for all occult powers” (*ibid.*: 52; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 56). While some late-medieval texts such as the seventeenth-century *Yogacintāmaṇi* already reconciled Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga (Birch 2013: 401), this phrase owes more to theosophical influence than to premodern syntheses.<sup>575</sup> In explaining the first three types of *prāṇāyāma* in Patañjali, these are, according to Dvivedi and Sivananda, inhalation, exhalation, and retention.<sup>576</sup> The fourth kind of *prāṇāyāma* explained in *Yogasūtra* 2.51, then, concerns itself – for Dvivedi, and thus Sivananda – with the “fixing of the Prana in the various lotuses (Padmas or Chakras) and taking it slowly, and slowly, step by step, and stage by stage to the last lotus in the head, where perfect Samadhi takes place” (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 57; cf. Dvivedi 1890: 53). In their interpretation of Pātañjalayoga, *prāṇāyāma* is thus intimately connected to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal and *samādhi*, and to the acquisition of occult powers.

Much of *The Science of Pranayama* adopts Haṭhayogic teachings. Sivananda advises to practise *prāṇāyāma* in seated poses like *padmāsana* or *siddhāsana*

<sup>574</sup> However, Sivananda (1962 [1935]: 57) also interpolates some passages from Jha (1894: 58). For more on Sivananda’s borrowing of Jha, see below.

<sup>575</sup> With regard to the synthesis of Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga, Dvivedi also appends a partial translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* to this edition, a translation that predates that by Iyengar of 1893. As treated in chapter 6.4, in many instances, this translation links yogic lore with theosophical thought. Dvivedi was also aware of Prasad’s *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884), since he correlates the varying length of the breath flow with the predominance of the prevailing *tattva* (Dvivedi 1890: 51-52, n. \*), an idea that is adopted also by Sivananda (1962 [1935]: 55). For more on *svarodaya*-related themes in Sivananda, see below.

<sup>576</sup> This is already posited by Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka* 3.24 (fourteenth century) that had equated the first three types of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma* with *pūraka*, *recaka*, and *kumbhaka* (see also chapter 3.2).

(Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 37-39). He also teaches the six cleansing actions (*ṣaṭkarma*), the three *bandhas*, and the eight *kumbhakas* (*ibid.*: 20-25, 41, 74-82). It is evident that Sivananda had at least partly learnt this from printed sources. In terms of Haṭha texts, he employs the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, the *Śivasamhitā*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the *Śivayogapradīpikā*, the *Yogayājñavalkya*, and the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā*.<sup>577</sup> Now let us look more closely at how Sivananda uses these texts to explain various aspects of Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*.

In chapter one, he gives a summary of purification of the *nāḍīs* through alternate-nostril breathing followed by the description of the *ṣaṭkarma* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 20-25). All this is found in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.7–35, more precisely, in its translation by Iyengar (1972 [1893]: 23-28). The swami draws on the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* in terms of the space that is occupied by the air current as it flows from the nostrils in various activities (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 9; *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.85–86; Vasu 1895: 45-46), alternate-nostril breathing in combination with the letters A-U-M (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 20; *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.48–50; Vasu 1895: 39) and in combination with the respective root (*bīja*) mantra of the five *tattvas* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 60; *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.38–44, Vasu 1895: 38). It appears that he adopted all these passages from S. C. Vasu’s translation of 1895. Drawing on Vasu’s translation of the *Śivasamhitā* he quotes almost verbatim the four stages (*avasthās*) of yoga in which certain *siddhis* are developed through *prāṇāyāma* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 43-46; *Śivasamhitā* 3.29–70; Basu 2004 [1887]: 19-24). However, while the *Śivasamhitā* subsequently promises that the practitioner will become like a “Kamdeba” (*kāmadeva*, or “god of love”) through *khecarīmudrā* (*ibid.*: 24-25), the celibate swami diverges from the subject beforehand.

In his creative patchwork, the swami also features Haṭhayogic sources that were not as popular as the “classical triad” of Haṭhayoga (chapter 6.4). One of the lesser-known sources he employs is the *Śivayogapradīpikā*, a fifteenth-century text composed by Cennasadāśivayogin that most likely originates in South India (Powell

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<sup>577</sup> There was no full translation of either the fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* or the twelfth-century *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* available at the time when Sivananda wrote his *The Science of Pranayama*. Instead, Sivananda draws (like Yogendra a few years earlier) from Ganganatha Jha’s translation of Vijñānabhikṣu’s *Yogasārasaṃgraha* of 1894. Jha discusses various Haṭhayogic sources, among these the *Yogayājñavalkya*, and the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā*. Sivananda directly employs Jha’s explanation of *kevalakumbhaka* (Jha 1894: 58; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 82) and a reference to Yogi Yājñavalkya regarding *prāṇāyāma* with *om* recitation as *mātrā* (Jha 1894: 59; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 62).

2018: 56, n. 28).<sup>578</sup> This text was first translated into English and commented upon by a swami (who remained anonymous) of the Ramakrishna Math in the bulletin *The Brahmavâdin* in 1903.<sup>579</sup> The English translation reveals several details of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* that caught Sivananda's attention (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 100-101). The *Śivayogapradīpikā* distinguishes between *prākṛta* versus *vaikṛta prāṇāyāma*, which is translated in the *Brahmavâdin* edition as “natural” versus “artificial” or “studied” breath control (Anonymous 1903: 506-510). Additionally, it equates *prākṛta prāṇāyāma* to Mantrayoga, *vaikṛta prāṇāyāma* to Layayoga, whereas Haṭhayoga is connoted with *kevalakumbhaka*, or “pure restraint of vital energy [...] which shines by itself” (*ibid.*: 510).<sup>580</sup> In drawing from this source, Sivananda unearths rare *prāṇāyāma* teachings that are not discussed in other texts on yogic breath cultivation that I am aware of. These passages are therefore an example of his noteworthy contributions as a compiler.

As has been mentioned, this compiler rarely refers to the Sanskrit text and never mentions the translation on which he draws.<sup>581</sup> Sivananda thereby appears to have supreme knowledge of the scriptures. The *Śivayogapradīpikā* is in fact the only text that is explicitly mentioned by the swami. Although drawing on several premodern sources, it becomes clear that Sivananda's Haṭhayogic endeavour is thoroughly modern when he also makes unattributed use of theosophical translators like Ganganatha Jha, Sris Chandra Vasu, and others. Yogendra, in contrast, though equally drawing on theosophical translations, at least referred to the details of the Sanskrit sources. Indeed, the Bombay-based yogis had relevantly pre-digested some of the material that Sivananda utilised by the mid-1930s.

In terms of the teachings found in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, they were partly mediated to Sivananda through Kuvalayananda. Sivananda describes the eight *kumbhakas* of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, following the order that is given in this text (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 74-82; *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.48-70; Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 30-35). Like Kuvalayananda, he holds that *bhastrikā* is a combination of *kapālabhāti* and *ujjāyī*, and that these two should be practised as a preliminary to *bhastrikā*;

<sup>578</sup> This text, which is also known as *Śivayogadīpikā*, integrates Haṭhayoga and Aṣṭāṅgayoga with aspects of ritual worship (*pūjā*) and devotion (*bhakti*) to Śiva (Powell 2018: 56). For a detailed treatment of the text see Seth Powell's forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>579</sup> The *Brahmavâdin* was first published in 1895 by the Ramakrishna Math Madras and later renamed *Vedanta Kesari*.

<sup>580</sup> The fourth yoga in this tetrad, i.e., Rājayoga is equated with “Amanaska”, the “yoga of no-mind” (Anonymous 1903: 510).

<sup>581</sup> An exception is the abovementioned list of recommended readings in Sivananda (1929: 215-217).

furthermore, both ascribe to this practice outstanding potential for *kuṇḍalinī* arousal (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 78-79; Kuvalayananda 1931: 115). Since Haṭha texts do not explain *kapālabhāti* (rapid exhalations from the lower abdomen) in detail, Sivananda relied on its description by Kuvalayananda. However, Sivananda was more concise here than Kuvalayananda, who wanted to be sure to get all the anatomical details right (*ibid.*: 79-100; Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 66-67). They both agree that *kapālabhāti* cleans the nasal passages and removes large amounts of carbon dioxide from the system. But Sivananda probably draws on his own medical intuition when he asserts that *kapālabhāti* cures asthma and prevent the bacilli of tuberculosis from breeding in the lungs (so does *bhastrikā*) (*ibid.*: 67, 79). These benefits are not described by Kuvalayananda.<sup>582</sup>

Before unearthing Sivananda's further entanglement with recent modern yoga discourses, I will analyse his engagement with another premodern text and its English translation, namely the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. As a post-Patañjalian text written around the same time as the earliest Haṭha sources, it is largely known as a philosophical rather than a practical treatise; however, it also expounds the harnessing of *prāṇa*. I highlight Sivananda's reception of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* because it appears that this pluralistic work was influential for vernacular religious cultures of the nineteenth century and hence also an important text to inform modern yoga. Now for the fascinating story of Yogi Bhuṣuṇḍa's yoga of *prāṇa* as told by Sivananda.

#### 8.4.2.4 The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* Resurfacing in *The Science of Pranayama*

Comprising approximately 30,000 verses, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* is also known in an abbreviated, or "light" form, which is the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, first translated into English by the South Indian theosophist Narayanaswami Aiyer in 1896.<sup>583</sup> Notably, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* features the "yoga of *prāṇa*", as Timalsina (2012) has termed it, in

<sup>582</sup> On a side note, Sivananda also draws on Kuvalayananda – and here explicitly – in a section that he terms "Asanology" in his *Practice of Yoga* (1929). In this section, Sivananda appraises the headstand (*śīrṣāsana*), which Kuvalayananda had termed the "topsy turvy pose" (Sivananda 1929: 229; Kuvalayananda 1933a: 62-72). Referring, then, to the experience of one Pandit Regunath Shastry, this *āsana* leads to "natural pranayama and Samadhi by itself" (Sivananda 1929: 231, his emphasis). Another yoga teacher that he had met regards the headstand as beneficial for meditation, because "the brain centres are supplied with a large quantity of blood [...] and draw plenty of prana" (*ibid.*). Moreover, *śīrṣāsana* is said to transmute sexual energy into *ojas* (*ibid.*: 231-232), which is why it is again relevant for celibates, and it became one of Sivananda's favourite practices (*ibid.*: 232). In this case, the swami speaks from the position of a practitioner rather than a compiler. This fully practical approach in the "Asanology" section of 1929 is echoed in *The Science of Breath* when he says that "[i]n those Yogic students who practise Sirshasana, Pranayama comes by itself" (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 70).

<sup>583</sup> For a detailed introduction to the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, see chapter 5.4. For some of Aiyer's texts and translations as published in *The Theosophist*, see chapter 4.3.3.

several chapters of the *Nirvāṇa* section of the text. In these chapters, the crow Bhuṣuṇḍa, a yogi and *jīvanmukta* who is knowledgeable about the three times (past, present, and future) and who has witnessed several world-ages reveals *prāṇāyāma* teachings to the sage Vasiṣṭha (Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 332-333; Timalisina 2012). These teachings highlight the manipulation of *prāṇa* and *apāna* – here understood as the out-breath and the in-breath respectively – to attain final liberation (*mokṣa*) and to become a *jīvanmukta*: the space occupied by the out-breath should be twelve fingerbreadths (*aṅguli*), and so should the in-breath, their equalisation leading to a neutral state of their mutual “consumption” (Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 339-341). *Kumbhaka* lies as a “space” both outside the body where *prāṇa* and *apāna* meet (i.e., twelve fingerbreadths measured from the nose), and inside, which is the (lotus of the) heart (*ibid.*: 338, 340). The nature of *prāṇa* and *apāna* is subtler than the filament of a lotus stalk divided a thousand times (*ibid.*: 339). The successful regulation of these happens “without any effort” and bestows “infinite bliss”, leading to *mokṣa* (*ibid.*: 339-340). Bhuṣuṇḍa also explains how to ward off death, and holds that he has been “engaged in meditation on Prāṇa which destroys all pleasure and pain and conduces to bliss, and which is one among the different forms of meditation on the self” (*ibid.*).

For Sivananda, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was one of the most relevant works promoting (in his view) Vedāntic teachings. He recommends studying it daily (Sivananda 1934: 7; 1933: 46). The swami tacitly borrows large portions of the fascinating dialogue between Bhuṣuṇḍa and Vasiṣṭha, as found in Aiyer’s translation, that deal with the mutual consumption of *prāṇa* and *apāna* (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 49-52; Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 338-341). He states, like Aiyer, that “all these practices lead to Moksha” (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 50). Additionally, he tells the “Story of Yogi Bhusunda [...] the longest-lived Yogi”, dwelling in a tree on Mount Kailash where, being desireless, he had attained “supreme Santi and Jnana [peace and knowledge, M.K.]” (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 109-110; cf. Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 332-333). Bhuṣuṇḍa was also said to having mastered the five *dhāraṇās*, which bestows *siddhis* and mastery over the respective *tattva* one meditates upon (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 107-110; Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 333). For example, by practising the *ākāśa dhāraṇā* one obtains the *siddhi* of levitation (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 108). These *dhāraṇās* are similarly taught in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* in chapter three on *mudrās* (*Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 3.68–81, Vasu 1895: 26-29), evidencing another link between the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and Hāṭhayogic teachings.

Unlike Vivekananda, Sivananda does not employ the concepts found in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in a larger cosmological rendition (chapter 5.4.2). Instead, he highlights the attainment of *siddhis* and the notion of *jīvanmukti* through mastery of *prāṇa* and the *tattvas*. But both Vivekananda and Sivananda may have derived the idea of the yogi's omnipotence from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. For example, the text suggests that once the yogi has mastered the five *prāṇas* “their nature will enable him to rule the universe, to attain Mokṣa and develop Siddhi-s” (Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 391-392). This is a programme that these swamis probably had in mind in their musings of the yogi's superlative powers. In any case, the passages cited by Sivananda contain a truly poetic *prāṇāyāma* instruction. Together with a stunning story of a *jīvanmukta*, they are indeed special pearls on a garland of a considerable variety of *prāṇāyāma* teachings in Sivananda's work.

The “pearls” on this garland so far discussed were mainly rooted in South Asian traditions, albeit mediated to Sivananda by translators as well as yoga pioneers and their *prāṇāyāma* manuals written before 1935. Another highly influential turn-of-the-century manual was, as has been discussed, Yogi Ramacharaka's *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904), which combined discourses of modern yoga, theosophy, New Thought, physical culture, American Delsartism, and occult practices like magnetic healing (chapter 8.2.2). Sivananda adopts this blend with some remarkable adaptations – one of which again involves the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Regarding his ideas on subtle physiology, Sivananda is also influenced by theosophy. I will now discuss the hybrid doctrines that resulted from these influences.

#### 8.4.2.5 Occultism Re-Examined: The Blend of Occult and Yogic Lore

Hybrid manual that *The Science of Pranayama* is, Sivananda places Patañjali next to Vivekananda, the topic of relaxation next to quotations from the Yoga Upaniṣads or the *Manusmṛti*, and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* next to occultism. It is left to the reader to navigate through this landscape of sudden topical changes and to integrate these highly diverse strata of traditions to which Sivananda relates. While his amalgamating style is often wholly uncommented upon, in passages that deal with occultism it seems that he re-examines common notions and practices. This is on the one hand evident in his interpretation of the subtle body, and on the other, in his treatment of Pranic Healing and rhythmic breathing.

It has already been noted that Sivananda, like Dvivedi, declared that *kuṇḍalinī* is the seat of all occult powers. Sivananda's own adoption of theosophical thought is

even more obvious when he calls *kuṇḍalinī* “an electric fiery occult or fohatic power, the great pristine force which underlies all organic and inorganic matter” (Sivananda 1929: 130).<sup>584</sup> “Fohat” is the term used in theosophy for a force connecting spirit and matter which is active on a certain plane of the cosmic hierarchy (Chajes 2019: 66). Sivananda cannot, however, be accused to blindly taking over theosophical or occult thought. Though holding that the *nāḍīs* were astral tubes – again a typical theosophical terminology – he also infers that *nāḍīs* were *not* the nerves (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 19), as the term was ubiquitously translated in other works known to him (e.g., Basu 2004 [1887]: 11; Kuvalayananda 1931: 148). Sivananda thereby also opposes the assumption of Vasant Rele’s *Mysterious Kundalini* (1928) and other works that notions of the subtle body, like *kuṇḍalinī*, the *cakras*, and the *nāḍīs*, would have an equivalent in the physical body (Rele 1931 [1928]: 24-27, 31, 35).<sup>585</sup>

In terms of his reception of occultism, of which traces can be found throughout the text, Sivananda also quotes – almost verbatim, yet uncredited – from Yogi Ramacharaka’s *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* in the space of several pages. The Rishikesh swami adopts the practices of Pranic Healing, distant healing, rhythmic breathing, and storing energy in the solar plexus (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 83-86, 106-107). To modify these teachings, he weaves references to ancient texts and sages into these passages, as for example in the passage on Pranic Healing. For Sivananda, as for Ramacharaka, Pranic Healing is distributing *prāṇa* in the body both by directing *prāṇa* through concentration and by touch (although Sivananda thinks of touch as a “massage”) (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 83-84). In order to heal others, Atkinson/Ramacharaka recommended that the healer “guard against depleting himself of Prana”, and “recharge himself” through rhythmic breathing (Ramacharaka 1905a: 162). Sivananda largely agrees, but then combines Ramacharaka with Indian lore, opining that

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<sup>584</sup> In *Practice of Yoga*, his first book, Sivananda also gives instructions for “astral journey” or “astral travelling” (Sivananda 1929: 181-182), being one of the most important occult practices in which first-generation theosophists were interested (Baier 2012: 153). Sivananda (1929: 183) mentions and directly employs Blavatsky’s *Voice of the Silence* there. It appears that his early works were even more infused with theosophical thought than his later ones.

<sup>585</sup> For example, Rele explicitly equates *kuṇḍalinī* with the “Vagus nerve” (Rele 1931 [1928]: 38). Sivananda’s opinion may have been influenced by Woodroffe/Avalon, who appears to generally have shaped Sivananda’s understanding of the subtle body (e.g., Sivananda 1940 [1935]: 79-132). Woodroffe holds that “some modern Indian writers have also helped to diffuse erroneous notions about the Cakras by describing them from what is merely a materialistic or physiological standpoint. [...] Physiology does not know the Cakras as they exist in themselves—that is, as centres of consciousness—and of the activity of Sūkṣma-Prāṇa-vāyu or subtle vital force” (Avalon 1974 [1919]: 6).



[t]hose who practise Pranayama, can impart their Prana in healing morbid diseases. They can also recharge themselves with Prana in no time by practising Kumbhaka. Never think that you will be depleted of your Prana by distributing it to others. The more you give, the more it will flow to you from the cosmic source (*Hiranyagarbha*) (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 83, his emphasis).

He goes on to recommend to “connect yourself with Hiranyagarbha [the mythical creator of the universe and a reincarnation of Viṣṇu, M.K.] or the cosmic Prana and imagine that the cosmic energy is flowing through your hands towards the legs of the patient” (*ibid.*). This is aided by an affirmation to command the cells of the affected body part to recover, as well as silent *om* recitation during the healing procedure (*ibid.*: 83-84). While this is an example in which Sivananda combines occult and traditional lore, he quotes from Atkinson/Ramacharaka in full regarding “distant healing” (*ibid.*: 85; Ramacharaka 1904: 59-60). Sivananda renders *prāṇa* a mesmeric agent here, just as Vivekananda has done before him (chapter 8.1.1). Furthermore, the application of affirmations as part of healing procedures is clearly indebted to Ramacharaka’s Pranic Healing (that equally harnessed *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent) and the wider networks of New Thought and occultism in which Atkinson was situated. Sivananda further combines concentration on the solar plexus – the energy storehouse of magnetic healing of Atkinson and Co – with alternate-nostril breathing as well as Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “walking exercise”, in which one counts the steps not in numbers, but with silent *om* recitation (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 71-72, 106-107; Ramacharaka 1904: 45-46).

Another example of interlacing occultist and yogic practice is found in Sivananda’s adoption of rhythmic breathing, or as he terms it, “rhythmical breathing”. While he had likely also borrowed it from Yogi Ramacharaka, Sivananda adds his own flavour to it. He describes rhythmic breathing in which one inhales and exhales on mentally reciting *om* six times, which is basically the recommendation of Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2). But besides employing this *mātrā*, Sivananda seems to define rhythmical breathing mainly in terms of the spatial length of the air current as it flows from the nostrils: normal breathing measures sixteen digits during exhalation, and only twelve digits in the inhalation, hence it is irregular and not “rhythmic”.<sup>586</sup> To compensate this, in rhythmical breathing, one should inhale and

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<sup>586</sup> Some premodern texts explain that the intensity of breath in various activities can be felt *outside* the body (e.g., during ordinary breathing, singing, sleeping, walking, sexual activity, and physical exertion as in *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 5.85–86; Vasu 1895: 45-46), i.e., in terms of the distance that it flows from the nostrils. This distance is measured in fingerbreadths, here termed “digits”. To exemplify this, it is probably helpful if the readers briefly engage in a small experiment. They may have noticed that heavy

exhale the same length of air current of sixteen digits, which leads to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal and a restful state (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 73). He thereby conflates the temporal measurement of the breath flow with a spatial one (the latter also indicates the *amount* of air that is drawn in and thrown out), and this is inspired by Aiyer's commentary on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, more precisely by the passage on Yogi Bhuṣuṇḍa's *prāṇāyāma* (as described above). In this passage, Sivananda holds that "[i]t will be beneficial if the Prana exhaled to the extent of 16 digits, is inhaled to the same extent. Only 12 digits are inhaled ordinarily" (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 50; cf. Aiyer 1975 [1896]: 339).<sup>587</sup> To sum up, a practice that was recommended in Aiyer's translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* for the "equalization of Prāṇa in inhalation and exhalation" (*ibid.*) is now termed "rhythmical breathing".

On a superficial level, one might assume that Sivananda is imitating Atkinson and Stebbins, but instead he draws on their concepts and combines them with Indian ones. The discourse structure suggests that the terminology coined by Stebbins and Ramacharaka was influential enough to be imported, but Sivananda indigenised it to a certain extent. It seems that he followed a wholly intuitive approach because he was probably not aware, like many other readers, that Yogi Ramacharaka was the pen name of a creative American New Thought advocate. Whatever his precise motives, Sivananda combined yoga and occultism, the banner under which already several themes of modern yoga were formulated. In so doing, he was not only informed by the teachings of theosophy and Atkinson/Ramacharaka, but also by those of T. R. Sanjivi. Sanjivi's popular journal *The Kalpaka* likewise tied yoga, occultism, and New Thought together (chapter 9.1). Sanjivi's informants were Atkinson and Woodroffe, among others, their books being promoted in *The Kalpaka* and sold by his Latent Light Culture from at least 1910 onwards. It is therefore reasonable to assume that a wide range of yogic-occult literature was mediated to Sivananda by Sanjivi.

In his encompassing programme, physical culture cannot altogether miss out. Thus, Sivananda also teaches deep breathing exercises, which are the only exercises

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breathing as in a workout will be felt lower down from the nose as, say, breathing during meditation, because the latter is a much calmer breath. One can experiment with that idea by breathing out heavily through one's nose while putting one's hand at the height of the navel. One will easily feel the breath flow hitting one's hand.

<sup>587</sup> This idea is also mentioned in a translation – again by Aiyer – of the *Yogakuṇḍalī Upaniṣad*, one of the Yoga Upaniṣads compiled in the eighteenth century (Aiyer 1914: 261). Aiyer indeed mentions the discrepancy between the in- and out-breath lengthwise. It may have been Aiyer's own commentary, since the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* itself talks about the length of the air currents being twelve digits, as described above and in relevant passages translated by Aiyer (1975 [1896]: 339-341). It could be argued that this is an early example of "deep breathing", since by inhaling sixteen digits one renders the breath deeper as by inhaling only twelve digits.

described in standing position and that clearly treat the importance of posture for the exercise (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 64-66). At least parts of it are highly reminiscent of Müller's exercises called "the ordinary complete breath" and "the special relieving deep-breathing exercise, consisting of two full respirations without accompanying movements" (Müller 1914: 43-46, 60-62). Unlike other imported exercises, however, these are not presented as particularly yogic and appear to be rather marginal in Sivananda's yoga.

To complete a full-circle analysis of Sivananda's encompassing patchwork of yogic breath cultivation, I will finally turn to his reception of *svarodaya* teachings as inspired by Rama Prasad. Surprisingly, the notion of *svara* and related techniques are not mentioned at all in *The Science of Pranayama*, but allusions to it found their way into *Mind: Its Mysteries and Control* (1946 [1935]: 171) and into *Kundalini Yoga* (1940 [1935]: 99-103). Sivananda's study of *svarodaya* techniques eventually yielded *Svara Yoga* (1954).

#### 8.4.2.6 Sivananda's *Svara Yoga*

*The Science of Pranayama* recommends studying by oneself and urges the reader *not* to wait for a guru who sits at one's side (Sivananda 1962 [1935]: 105). Instead, one should follow "the rules and instructions of this book very carefully" (*ibid.*), a statement that probably reflects Sivananda's own self-taught approach. Additionally, as cited in the epigraph, Sivananda encourages his students that "the study of my writings with a little explanation of Yogic terms will itself adequately constitute your Yoga Class" (Sivananda 1983: 59). It seems that even teaching teachers was solely dependent on Sivananda's all-encompassing advice as found in his books and letters. In contrast, *Svara Yoga* states that knowing the *svara* is an intricate "science" that "should be practised under the direct guidance of a fully qualified Yogi" (Sivananda 2000 [1954]: 13). Furthermore, this practice is "subtler and more comprehensive than the Science of Pranayama" (*ibid.*: 12).

*Practice of Yoga* (1929) has appended a treatment of "Svara Sadhana", presenting it as the "yoga of yogas" (Sivananda 1929: 220-229). It may not come as a surprise that Sivananda draws from Prasad's translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* here, though it must be said that it is better streamlined (in terms of integrating the quotations into the format and style of his own book) than much of what is presented in *The Science of Pranayama* (*ibid.*; Prasad 1890: 180-236). *Svara Yoga* of 1954 is less obviously indebted to Prasad, but, since Sivananda relied on Prasad's text in 1929, it

can be assumed that it still forms the basis of his 1954 text. Despite additional *svara*-related publications available on the market,<sup>588</sup> Sivananda appears to mainly synthesise his 1929 text with other publications dealing with either *prāṇāyāma* or the subtle body that he wrote between 1929 and 1954. It is noteworthy that he apparently introduced the term “svara yoga” for *svarodaya* teachings because no text predating *Svara Yoga*, to my knowledge, had used it.

Other than combining prognostication with breath cultivation such as *bhastrikā* and practical recommendations for how to change the flow in the nostrils (Sivananda 2000 [1954]: 29-30), *Svara Yoga* does not impart substantial new information on the subject. However, it is quite likely that it helped to disseminate *svarodaya* teachings on a global scale – a form of prognostication that was beforehand mainly known in occult circles. Most likely, it also inspired Swami Muktibodhananda’s well-known *Swara Yoga: The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing* (1984) published by the Bihar School of Yoga. The book of the Australia-based female swami features an English translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* with an Introduction, and her translation again raised the popularity of *svarodaya* teachings. After all, the books of Swami Satyananda Saraswati’s Bihar School of Yoga (a spin-off of Sivananda’s Divine Life Society) are some of the most-read in today’s yoga community, and they are often said to present “authentic” yogic teaching (own field data). There is much to suggest that the yoga presented in these books is rooted in the textual study that was part of Sivananda’s yogic path.

#### 8.4.2.7 Summary

According to Alter (2004: 63), Sivananda more than anyone was responsible for modern yoga’s transnationalisation. Along these lines, it could be argued that he also disseminated a huge variety of *prāṇāyāma* teachings, a range of which was addressed above. The present analysis shows that of all the yoga pioneers discussed Sivananda drew on the greatest variety of texts and practices to support his *prāṇāyāma* teachings. His knowledgeable and generous attitude toward disseminating his teachings may have been both his weakness and strength: Sivananda was nicknamed Swami

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<sup>588</sup> These were Sanjivi’s *An English Translation of “Svarodaya”* which was serially published in *The Kalpaka* from 1933 onwards (chapter 9.1); next, South India-based Elizabeth Sharpe (1888–1941), who was probably acquainted with Sanjivi, published a translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* as an Appendix to *The Secrets of the Kaula Circle: A Tale of Fictitious People Faithfully Recounting Strange Rites Still Practised by this Cult* (1936). Sharpe states that this “very old manuscript” entitled “The Science of Breath” has “never been published before”, which was perhaps a cheap advertisement for her book (Sharpe 1936: 75).

Propagandananda, accused of diluting yogic practices and teaching “yoga light”, which was accessible to any aspirant of yoga (Goldberg 2016: 332). His disciples were often taught by correspondence, and Sivananda considered this form of teaching as sufficient even to become a yoga teacher. But, whatever the result of his practical teachings (after all, the responsibility for choosing what to learn also lies in the student’s hands), on a textual level he compiles and to some extent synthesises a huge number of techniques and traditions. His *prāṇāyāma* manual is therefore a treasure box in which one can discover disparate ideas on yogic breath cultivation. No one can say that Sivananda did not know the Hindu yoga traditions – he showcases several of them in *The Science of Prāṇāyāma*, and his efforts in compiling these teachings are noteworthy.

Laced throughout Sivananda’s work overall is the notion of celibacy (White 2014: 186) that also concerns the notion of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*. As in Yogananda’s case, aspiring to become a *jīvanmukti* often dovetailed into a more modest version of well-being, stress-relief, and self-discovery in yoga retreats with spa-like environments (Goldberg 2016: 332). Apart from their institutional connection to the Indian north and their transnational success, there are further parallels between Yogananda’s and Sivananda’s teachings. Both apply the *hamsa* or *so ’ham* mantra as a form of breath cultivation, highlight the third eye as relevant for all religious aspirations, refer to Kriya Yoga,<sup>589</sup> indulge in healing discourses, and apply affirmations as directly inspired by New Thought. That they may have had further ties is suggested by Singleton; Bishnu Charan Ghosh, the brother of Yogananda, may have been involved in developing Sivananda’s *āsana* programme (Singleton 2010: 135). Although Yogananda is the torchbearer of a lineage that evidences quite an Indian pedigree ever since it was incarnated by the teachings of Lahiri Mahasya, the overall outlook of Sivananda’s work is vastly more indebted to Indian textual legacies. Though both reached a transnational audience, it seems that Yogananda tailored his mainly for American disciples, and Sivananda for Indian ones. However, the egalitarian approach of Sivananda’s texts made them available to a huge number of students worldwide – if they were able to figure them out – whereas many of Yogananda’s techniques remain largely protected from the public view.

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<sup>589</sup> Sivananda (1929: 59) treats Kriya Yoga with reference to the *Yogasūtra* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

## 8.5 Householder-Yogis of the South: Sundaram and Krishnamacharya

Yogacharya Sundaram and T. Krishnamacharya have quite different reputation as yogis. While Sundaram is a rather obscure figure whose work is quite understudied, Krishnamacharya is often appraised as the “father of modern yoga” who famously founded the yoga school of the Mysore Palace and created the prototype of Ashtanga Vinyasa. Their teaching style was likely altogether distinct: Sundaram was said to sympathise with his students while Krishnamacharya was known for his uncompromising approach. Nevertheless, this unlikely duo share quite a few common features besides their careers being located in the South Indian states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Both were married householder yogis who adhered to orthodox Brahmanism. They therefore at least partly understood *prāṇāyāma* as a religious practice that was often correlated with the recitation of hymns or mantras. Both teachers thoroughly extended yoga into physical culture and popularised their synthesis – including features of contortionism and muscle culture – through public demonstrations. However, while Sundaram awed the crowd with his perfected yogic poses that displayed graceful strength, Krishnamacharya had students of the Mysore Palace perform with often miraculous skill and synchronicity. *Prāṇāyāma* was not as publicly recognisable as *āsana* on stage, but for both teachers, yogic breath cultivation led the yogi deeper into the study of the human being. While Sundaram was quite prolific in both English and Tamil and produced texts that synthesised yogic tradition with physical culture, modern psychology, and New Thought, Krishnamacharya did not write in English, but in Kannada, Telugu, or Sanskrit. Additionally, Krishnamacharya did not present himself as the actual author of these texts, but they were allegedly revealed to him by either his guru or an ancient yogi to whose lineage he claimed to belong. In Sundaram’s case, his crucial *prāṇāyāma*-related publication (*Shanthi Yogam* of 1944) is written in Tamil. All these circumstances leave some gaps in the documentation of the yogis’ interpretation of *prāṇāyāma*, but we can still note some crucial ideas and lines of transmission.

### 8.5.1 Sundaram’s Yogic Physical Culture and Magnetic *Prāṇāyāma*

Seetharaman Sundaram (1901–1994), later known as Yogacharya (“teacher of yoga”) Sundaram of Bangalore, was born to a poor Brahmin family in Madurai, Tamil Nadu,

in 1901.<sup>590</sup> Having lost his mother at the tender age of nine, Sundaram himself got married at the age of just fourteen. Though initially a burden, the marriage eventually yielded eight children. When he moved to Bangalore in 1920, he apprenticed as a pleader in the court and ran his own law office from 1924 until his retirement in 1952. While this occupation paid for his bills, Sundaram's vocation lay elsewhere. Already in his youth, Sundaram had turned to yoga practice including *prāṇāyāma* and chanting hymns (Members of the Committee 1962: 18), and from 1922 onwards, Sundaram was a student in K. V. Iyer's Vyayama Shala (gymnasium) of physical culture, in which *āsana* was also taught. Touring Tamil Nadu with Iyer, the friends in yoga performed physical-culture and yoga *āsana* feats; Iyer focused on the former, and Sundaram on the latter. Clearly informed through an *āsana* practice that was blended with bodybuilding by Iyer, Sundaram was set on the yogi's path. From 1927 onwards, he additionally learnt yoga from a religious community that combined yoga practice with social service (*seva*). Brahmachari Ramachandra, a member of the Arya Samaj and the intellectual head of the group, had started to publish a journal titled *Brahmacharya*, to which Sundaram contributed articles on *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*. Sundaram established his own Yoga Shala in the 1930s and was known as a compassionate and highly gifted yogi and teacher, who was additionally said to heal others by touch and sight (Members of the Committee 1962: 18). Moreover, he engaged in politics and freedom fighting between 1935 and 1942. Although Sundaram was acquainted with and fascinated by a wide range of theosophical literature, it was Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga* that had lit a burning desire in the young yogi to attain *samādhi*. But Sundaram had to wait until 1940 to meet his guru, Sivaprakasa Ananda Giri, who was known as a Vedāntin and yogi. Under his guidance, Sundaram attained the higher states of yoga.

Yogacharya Sundaram became widely known for a revolutionarily practical yoga manual, *Yogic Physical Culture or The Secret of Happiness*,<sup>591</sup> which was first published in English in 1929 (Singleton 2010: 122-129; Goldberg 2016: 152-178). However, Sundaram also wrote several books on yoga in Tamil, among these *Ananda Rahasyam* ("The Secret of Happiness", being a translation of the homonymous 1929

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<sup>590</sup> This paragraph is based on the excellent exposition of Sundaram's biography in Goldberg (2016: 152-178) and the "Biographical Sketch" by the Members of the Committee (1962) in the souvenir booklet for Sundaram's sixty-first birthday. Judging from his first name "Seetharaman", Sundaram's parents were probably Vaiṣṇava Brahmins, too (just like Krishnamacharya's).

<sup>591</sup> Henceforth referred to as *Yogic Physical Culture*. The Yoga Publishing House that reprinted the book dates the publication to 1928; however, the copyright page of the first edition shows that it was written in 1928 and first published in 1929. I wish to thank Elliott Goldberg for providing me with a scan of the first edition of *Yogic Physical Culture* as well as the "Biographical Sketch" which contains important biographical details.

manual), *Yoga Sikichai* (“Yoga Therapy”), and *Shanthi Yogam* (“The Yoga of Peace”).<sup>592</sup> In our context, the most compelling publications are *Yogic Physical Culture* and *Shanthi Yogam*, the latter first being published in 1944. *Shanthi Yogam* is available only in Tamil so far, but some portions of it have been translated for the analysis in this chapter.<sup>593</sup> As is already announced in 1929 (but more extensively treated in the 1944 book), the subject of “Psychic Pranayam” reveals the “rousing of spiritual powers” (Sundaram 1929: 89). Despite having a narrower and more local scope, *Shanthi Yogam* simultaneously reflects the transnational occult discourses from which Sundaram drew. “Psychic Pranayam” is designed to allow the practitioner to attain “magnetism”, which is, according to Sundaram, in Indian context known as a “splendid lustre” (*tejas*) (Sundaram 1944: 15). As already the two works in focus here reveal, Sundaram’s work is, as with many other yoga pioneers, situated at the interface between the local and the global.

#### 8.5.1.1 Approaching *Prāṇāyāma* in *Yogic Physical Culture*

We do not know where exactly Sundaram had learnt *prāṇāyāma*. There are no detailed records of where he studied it in his teenage years, but it is reported that Sundaram upheld a strict daily schedule for yoga practice, practising *prāṇāyāma* as often as four times a day (Members of the Committee 1962: 18). Moreover, Sundaram performed the daily *sandhyā* rite. He devotes a whole chapter in *Shanthi Yogam* to *sandhyā* and mentions it in the chapter on “Breath Control or Pranayam” in *Yogic Physical Culture* (Sundaram 1929: 80).<sup>594</sup> The emphasis on *sandhyā* not only reflects Sundaram’s footing in orthodox Brahmanical religious practice (Members of the Committee 1962: 15), but also highlights the role of *prāṇāyāma* in this rite. In any case, Sundaram is certain that “a day spent without Pranayam is to be regretted” (Sundaram 1929: 88).

In *Yogic Physical Culture*, the yogi laments that there are too many experts of “rhythmic exercises” and “Pseudo-pranayams” out there in the physical culture market (Sundaram 1929: 80). One is well-advised to learn the importance of regular practice and controlling *prāṇa* through a reliable source, such as Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga*

<sup>592</sup> “*Shanthi*” is a contemporary transliterated Tamil spelling of the Hindi *shanti* or Sanskrit *śānti* (“peace”). I will stick to the Tamil transliteration when referring to this publication.

<sup>593</sup> I am indebted to Keith E. Cantú for translating several portions of *Shanthi Yoga: Part Two* (1944) into English, thereby making them accessible for this study.

<sup>594</sup> He also wrote a book in Tamil entitled *Sandhya Gayathri Japayogam* (n.d.a.), which describes mantra recitation (*japa*) during *sandhyā*, the most important one being the Vedic *Gāyatrī* mantra. The impact of this book apparently led several followers to turn to the daily *sandhyā* rite as well (Members of the Committee 1962: 27). Sundaram’s Tamil books were heavily propagated with the aim “for [them] to enter every home in Tamil Nadu” (*ibid.*).



(*ibid.*). But what is it that we control? Unsurprisingly, Sundaram echoes Vivekananda's outline of *prāṇa*: "Prana is the motive force of the body: Prana makes the plants grow and moves matter in every form [...]; Prana is everything and he who controls it becomes omnipotent", and, by further explaining the admired swami's words, "to the Yogis of India the macro-cosm exists in the micro-cosm" (*ibid.*: 76-77). *Prāṇāyāma* bestows "supernatural powers" that had already anticipated the latest findings of the natural sciences millennia ago (*ibid.*: 77). The yogi strives "for the realisation of Atman, for becoming Christ-Man, Buddha-man and Super-man" (*ibid.*: 76). Depicting the yogi as a religious superhero may reflect Sundaram's reception of the theosophical idea of superhuman adepts – and maybe his reception of the physical culture journal *The Superman*. Next to contemporaneous sources, Sundaram is also aware of the Upaniṣadic notion of the superiority of the breath over other vital functions (*ibid.*: 77; chapter 3.1.2). As will be shown, his later *Shanthi Yogam* adds additional nuances to the interpretation of *prāṇa* which are not found in his 1929 book.

In *Yogic Physical Culture*, Sundaram soon departs from Vivekananda and approaches the control of *prāṇa* in a more down-to-earth manner. Sundaram continues to highlight *prāṇāyāma*'s benefits within yogic physical culture, of which it is an invaluable part (*ibid.*: 78). Sundaram's debut entirely focusses on physiological benefits, holding that *prāṇāyāma* "brings in its train innumerable and indispensable benefits to the human body" (*ibid.*). But, to go deeper and master the practice on various levels, one will have to learn from a perfected guru (*ibid.*: 77). In its novel focus on physical culture, Sundaram closely follows the footsteps of Kuvalayananda. For example, he adopts the concept of the "vital index" with direct reference to the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*'s Volume II. The concept stresses the factor of "lung capacity" in relation to body mass (*ibid.*: 81; Kuvalayananda 1926: 257).<sup>595</sup> In contrast to other systems of physical culture also in vogue in India (Sundaram mentions the "muscle culturists"), yogic physical culture is said to increase the practitioner's vital index through *prāṇāyāma* (Sundaram 1929: 79, 81). However, the South Indian teacher seems to underscore the relevance of physical culture even more than the Lonavla-based one. He has decided to "leave aside [the] spiritual value" of *prāṇāyāma*, because its "physiological importance is no less" (*ibid.*: 78). This is an equation that Kuvalayananda would never have made, as for him the achievements of "yogic spiritual culture" were ranked higher than those of "yogic physical culture" (chapter

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<sup>595</sup> "The lung capacity divided by the weight of the body gives the *vital index*" (Sundaram 1929: 81, his emphasis).

8.3.1). But also Sundaram's physical culture is grounded in the conviction that the human body is "God-given" and an "instrument of perception and achievement" of all pursuits (*ibid.*: 1). The preservation of health therefore assumes almost religious prominence: "Health is happiness. [...] Health is the most essential ingredient in human existence" (*ibid.*: 5). Blending immanent aspects of human life with the concept of health resembles New Thought sentiments, which probably informed Sundaram on various levels, as will be shown.<sup>596</sup>

Zooming in on the Yogacharya's understanding of *prāṇāyāma*, much of his advice is indeed built on articles published in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*. He holds that one ideally should have mastered *padmāsana* before commencing *prāṇāyāma*, although a seat like *sukhāsana* or *siddhāsana* may also be chosen (Sundaram 1929.: 81-82). He also follows the Lonavla-based swami in saying that the length of the exhalation should be twice as long as the inhalation (*ibid.*: 83). For alternate-nostril breathing with *kumbhaka*, Sundaram suggests the ratio 6-6-12 (inhale-retain-exhale), to begin with. The length of *kumbhaka* can be increased up to over half a minute, yet Sundaram emphasises the importance of practising according to one's capacity (*yathāśakti*) (*ibid.*: 84). Rather than practising several rounds of *prāṇāyāma* at once, he advises repeating the practice, for greater benefits, twice or thrice a day (*ibid.*: 89).<sup>597</sup>

But in the details of breath cultivation, the Yogacharya differs significantly from the Lonavla-based swami. He holds that *prāṇāyāma* cannot be practised in a standing position, because this would divert the attention to the superficial parts of the body (*ibid.*: 81). Sundaram also suggests practising external breath retention (*ibid.*: 85-86), which is not prescribed by Kuvalayananda, but had already been specified before Sundaram by Vivekananda (chapter 8.1.1). Furthermore, his instruction for *kumbhaka* is peculiar and not found in the work of other yoga pioneers. During advanced breath retention, one should make the diaphragm lower while simultaneously pushing out the abdominal muscles. In other words, one imagines the air to descend into the lower

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<sup>596</sup> However, Sundaram may also have been influenced by the seventeenth-century *Yuktabhavadēva* here, which states at the beginning of the third chapter that "the preservation of the body is useful for Yoga, and that what belongs to the body (*śarīra*) is for the sake of cultivating detachment (*vairāgya*) and attaining knowledge of creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*)" (Birch 2018: 30). Besides his emphasis on the cultivation of the body, Sundaram additionally holds that the aim of *prāṇāyāma* is to "finally master his mind, spirit and creation" (Sundaram 1929: 77), which may again point at the concept of *sr̥ṣṭi* as explained in the *Yuktabhavadēva*.

<sup>597</sup> In later editions of *Yogic Physical Culture*, Sundaram holds that students of yoga must "keep their thoughts pure and free from sex ideas" (Sundaram 2010 [1929]: 134). In order to be "healed" from "wet dreams [...] one should practise Pranayam Nadi suddhi [i.e., alternate-nostril breathing, M.K.] and leave off evil habits which brought on these disorders" (*ibid.*). These allusions to masturbation, similarly suggested by Kuvalayananda, once more reflect the influence of hygienic discourse.

belly, which results in a swelling of the same. Then, one would reverse this action by again filling the chest with the held air (*ibid.*: 85), and this can additionally be combined with *jālandharabandha* (*ibid.*). Although a similar form of swelling and shrinking of the chest and abdomen during retention is described in American Delsartism and New Thought contexts (Stebbins 1892: 89-90; [Flower] 1901a: 39), Sundaram may have learnt this practice from one of his teachers or developed it on his own.

As Sundaram has made clear, practising *prāṇāyāma* is certainly not just concerned with the breath, but, owing to its psycho-physical nature, is also related to techniques that aid concentration. During all forms of *prāṇāyāma* the mind should follow the breath (Sundaram 1929: 83). The alertness of the practice could be increased by additional silent *om* recitation and the visualisation of a “luminous spot or flame” at the “region of the spine, nearest to the heart” during retention (*ibid.*). Its effects could further be amplified by using New Thought-inspired “autosuggestion” during *kumbhaka*,<sup>598</sup> for example, for the purpose of strengthening the heart and lungs (*ibid.*: 84).<sup>599</sup> All these techniques aim for the essential ingredients of “calmness, rhythm and fullness of breathing” (*ibid.*: 88). A practice so induced has “tremendous results” and moreover proves the “psycho-physical” effects of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 84-85). As to its specific benefits, the brain receives an increased blood flow, the heart is strengthened, and the nervous system is soothed (*ibid.*: 87-88). One receives greater “powers of concentration” and a beautiful complexion and voice (*ibid.*: 88). Many of these benefits that are often listed in premodern texts were also mentioned by Vivekananda (chapter 8.1.1).

Sundaram briefly touches on the notion of *bandhas* when he describes *prāṇāyāma*. He explains that in *siddhāsana*, the foot lock (*mūlabandha*) affects the sacral plexus, which is “the physical counter part [*sic*] of the psychical ‘Muladhara’ lotus” (Sundaram 1929: 82). Like other yoga pioneers, Sundaram seems to hold that the *cakras* cannot simply be identified with the physical body. In describing *uḍḍiyāna*, he largely seems to detach this practice from *prāṇāyāma* and presents it as *āsana* in

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<sup>598</sup> The practice of autosuggestion and affirmation is ubiquitously found in the teachings of the Latent Light Culture, founded by T. R. Sanjivi in 1905 (chapter 9.1). A Tamil native who was also familiar with theosophical literature, Sundaram was likely also aware of Sanjivi’s yogic-occult journal *The Kalpaka* which offered a wide range of New Thought-inspired teachings, most prominently those of Atkinson/Ramacharaka.

<sup>599</sup> Sundaram explains that the upper part of the lungs, which tends to be less ventilated, is a breeding ground for pulmonary tuberculosis (Sundaram 1929: 86). *Prāṇāyāma* counteracts this tendency, an argument which is also made at Kaivalyadhama (own field data).

standing position (*ibid.*: 68-72). He demonstrates *uḍḍiyānabandha* as the isolation of the obliquus abdominis, similarly described and depicted, for example, one year later in Ghosh's *Muscle Control* of 1930 (*ibid.*: 68-70; Ghosh & Sengupta 1930: 100-101; figure 23). Isolation of the abdominal muscles (including the rectus abdominis) was also prevalent in bodybuilding and mastered by the bodybuilding icon Maxick (Goldberg 2016: 169). Sundaram was partly infused with such practices through his close association and friendship with Iyer, which explains why he presents *uḍḍiyāna* independently from *prāṇāyāma*. It is only in later editions of *Yogic Physical Culture* in the section on "Bandhas" that he clarifies *uḍḍiyāna*'s relation to *prāṇāyāma* (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 118-120).<sup>600</sup> He also mentions that all three *bandhas* are applied in "Kundalini Pranayam", a practice that he does not however explain further (*ibid.*).

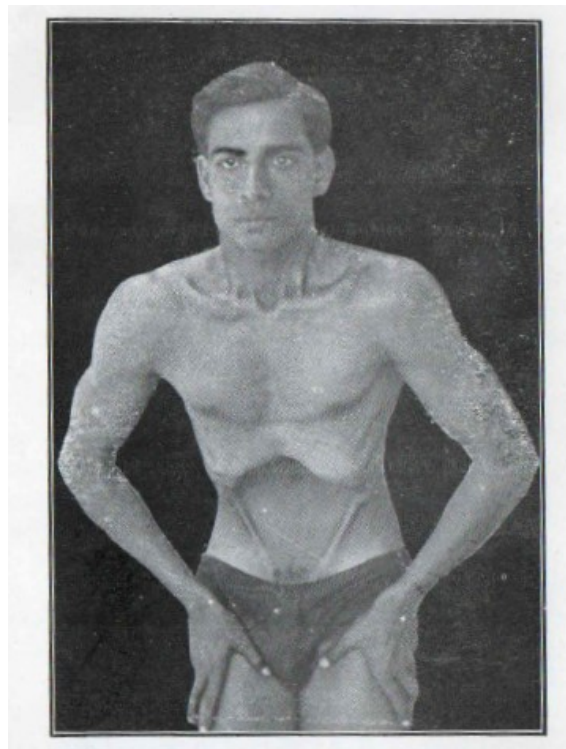


FIGURE 23: SUNDARAM PERFORMING "UDDIYANA OR THE ABDOMINAL SUCTION" (SUNDARAM 1929: 69).

For all the focus on physical culture in Sundaram's debut of 1929, his later *Shanthi Yogam* offers a different perspective. It is more indebted to occultism and modern psychology as well as to describing the higher states of Haṭhayoga, which are largely absent in *Yogic Physical Culture*. In *Shanthi Yogam*, he repeatedly asserts that the yogi should ultimately aim for Rājayoga, not Haṭhayoga (Sundaram 1944: 25, 32). Rājayoga can only be achieved in the presence of a guru (*ibid.*: 32). One has to increase

<sup>600</sup> He also explains the application of all three *bandhas* in *prāṇāyāma* in Sundaram (1944: 24-25).

the length of *kumbhaka* to finally arrive at what Haṭha texts term *kevalakumbhaka* (*ibid.*).<sup>601</sup> This probably reflects Sundaram’s acquaintance with the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, which teaches that Rājayoga results from successful Haṭha practice in its fourth chapter. Thus, in many ways, Sundaram’s text about the “yoga of peace” is a tribute to Sundaram’s occult and religious inclinations, as treated in the following.

#### 8.5.1.2 *Prāṇa*, Subtle Energy and the Magnetic Man

*Shanthy Yogam* certainly plunges deeper into the mysteries of *prāṇa* and its relation to the subtle body than *Yogic Physical Culture*, dedicating a whole chapter to the notion of “subtle *prāṇa*” (Sundaram 1944: 22-32).<sup>602</sup> It clarifies that *prāṇa* as a “subtle substance” is not “extant to the touch and to the sight”, hence differs from breath (*śvāsa*) (*ibid.*: 27). While subtle *prāṇa* cannot be caught or grasped, one should indeed “catch and control it” by yoga (*ibid.*). But even mere holding one’s breath is not *prāṇāyāma*. Snake-charmers and pearl-divers (who may pose as yogis and be able to hold their breath for a long time) should therefore not be regarded as yogis, because they ultimately fail to gain control over the life-force and are thus never free of disease (*ibid.*).

In furthering the merging of occult and yogic thought, *Shanthy Yogam* also aspires to explain the benefits of yoga and *prāṇāyāma* in Western – and occult – terms. In trying to grapple with the phenomenon of life which is *prāṇa* to Indians (Sundaram 1944: 6), “Westerners”, however, noticed that life-force could be enhanced and restored through “will-power” (known as “*icchāśakti*” in Indian contexts) (*ibid.*: 14-15). As a second step, they found that it could be restored and enhanced in another person. However, not fully capable of grasping the phenomenon of life, and without knowing its proper name, “Westerners” have termed this process “animal magnetism” (*ibid.*: 14). In translating this concept back into yogic terms, *prāṇa* can be stored in the body, which functions like a battery or a magnet to attract *prāṇa*, a notion that the reader is probably familiar by now. In any case, “magnetic leakage” of *prāṇa* should be prevented by avoiding unconscious and unnecessary movements such as the frequent blinking of the eye or a nervous shaking of the leg. For the accomplished yogi, then, the control of *prāṇa* brings about a certain lustre, or “fiery splendour” in

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<sup>601</sup> *Haṭhapradīpikā* 4.8–9, 16 declares that Rājayoga (which are treated as synonyms of *samādhi*, *jīvanmukti*, etc.) can only be achieved by the grace of a guru in a secluded space (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 62, 64).

<sup>602</sup> All references to *Shanti Yogam* refer to the pagination in the 1944 edition, of which portions have been translated by Keith Cantú.

one's appearance. The yogis thought of this concept as *tejas* ("heat", "fire"), while the West spoke of a person so radiating as the "magnetic man" (*ibid.*: 15).<sup>603</sup> This state, however, is never achieved without consistent and regular practice, and the best way to become "magnetic" is *prāṇāyāma*. The first step is cleansing the *nāḍīs* through alternate-nostril breathing (*nāḍīśuddhi*), and in its final stage *prāṇāyāma* leads, as mentioned, to *kevalakumbhaka* (*ibid.*: 15-16, 32). Besides linking the concept of *tejas* to magnetism, Sundaram also equated it in later editions of *Yogic Physical Culture* with "nerve-aurea", an inherent vital force to be preserved by yoga (Sundaram 2000 [1929]: 9).

As already in *Yogic Physical Culture*, Sundaram presents Western concepts like science, physical culture, and, in this case, animal magnetism to explain yoga and *prāṇāyāma* in contemporary terms. In doing so, he not only draws on science discourses, but also on theosophy, which had already explained yoga through animal magnetism (chapter 4.3.2). Another clear connection between mesmerism and yogic breath cultivation was further established by Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2), an author who was likely known to Sundaram.<sup>604</sup> In *Shanthi Yogam* and later editions of *Yogic Physical Culture*, Sundaram additionally showcases the hypnosis- and suggestion-centred Nancy School to explain the efficacy of autosuggestion during *śavāsana* (Sundaram 1944: 18-20; 2000 [1929]: 82). In the final analysis, however, Sundaram invokes the ultimate superiority of yoga over similar concepts in the West.

#### 8.5.1.3 Summary

As one of the few yogis to openly endorse some forms of Euro-American physical culture, Sundaram advances the dream of drug-free physical culture and hygiene as propagated by figures like Bernarr Macfadden (Sundaram 1929: 4). Despite focusing on yoga as physical culture in his debut, Sundaram is aligned with other modern yogis in their ultimate aim for loftier goals of yoga. Although *prāṇāyāma* is not the main focus in his successful yoga manual of 1929, it nevertheless gives insights into Sundaram's perspective on the subject. His exposition of the rationale of *prāṇāyāma*

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<sup>603</sup> *Tejas* is also a prominent concept in Ayurveda (as is the case with *ojas*, see chapter 8.4.2). Meulenbeld (2008: 163) explains that it is a "kind of fiery energy, denoting brilliance, brightness, glare. This explains its kinship to *agni*, the digestive and, in general, transforming fire". *Tejas* and *prāṇa* were furthermore related concepts in the Brahmanical period (c. 1000 – 700 BCE), in which they shared "the same connotation of *vīrya*, [i.e.,] vital power or energy" (Blezer 1992: 39).

<sup>604</sup> Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's works were widely disseminated in South India by the 1920s, especially in the yogic-occult networks of the South (chapter 9.1).

is indebted to Kuvalayananda, whom he openly endorses, but simultaneously Sundaram's approach features several details that make it distinct. *Prāṇāyāma*, as an art that comprises physical and mental aspects, is presented as a uniquely potent practice for supreme health. Highlighting concentration and autosuggestion as part of *prāṇāyāma*, the practice lies once more at the threshold between advanced yogic practice and New Thought-inflected self-help techniques.

The Yogacharya's entanglement with both premodern concepts and a modernistic interpretation of yoga, welded together in *prāṇāyāma*, becomes even more obvious in *Shanthi Yogam*. Therein, he not only connects mesmeric concepts, psychology, and hygienic culture to a modernistic interpretation of yoga, but also cites important sources of these cultural strands. In doing so, Sundaram makes his Tamil readers acquainted with a broad range of modernistic thought and adds – though hidden to the English-speaking world – to the multifaceted interpretations of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in the twentieth century. A full translation and analysis of this text would certainly yield remarkable results regarding the yogi's further contributions. But even a preliminary analysis of this text, together with the material accessed in *Yogic Physical Culture*, shows Sundaram's commitment to yoga-as-cure and yoga-as-religious-path, which includes the *sandhyā* rite and chanting mantras. That the body is the temple of spirit and that “knowledge of its working must guide the conduct in life” (Sundaram 1929: 1) has rarely been made as clear in modern yoga as in Sundaram's influential text of 1929.

#### 8.5.2 Krishnamacharya: Presenting *Prāṇāyāma* as Unaltered Tradition

The innovations and teachings of one of the most influential figures of modern yoga are now addressed. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) was the eldest child of a distinguished Vaiṣṇava Brahmin family in Muchukundapuram, Karnataka.<sup>605</sup> From an early age on, his father initiated the boy into yoga, which included the recitation of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*. After the father's demise, the ten-year-old Krishnamacharya received religious education in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism at the Brahmin college of Parakala in Mysore, which was headed by the boy's grandfather. This form of education is thoroughly aligned with Krishnamacharya's family tradition, which allegedly directly descended from the tenth-century yogi Nathamuni, the founder of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava school. And there are additional ties to Nathamuni as Krishnamacharya's ancestor and

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<sup>605</sup> This paragraph is based on Singleton (2010: 177-178) and White (2014: 197-224).

mentor. It is said that through a vision at Nathamuni's birthplace, the *Yoga Rahasya* was revealed to the then sixteen-year-old Krishnamacharya by the tenth-century yogi himself. Two years later, in 1906, Krishnamacharya started to study in various places of traditional learning such as Mysore, Varanasi, Calcutta, and Baroda. The young student thus earned several degrees in the six *darśanas* of Indian philosophy.

His quest took him even further north to the Himalayas, where he embarked upon a seven-year-long period of tutelage by the householder-yogi Rammohan Brahmacari, which probably happened in Nepal between 1911 and 1918.<sup>606</sup> At the end of this period, Krishnamacharya had absorbed "all of the philosophy and mental science of Yoga; its use in diagnosing and treating the ill; and the practice and perfection of asana and pranayama" (Desikachar 1998: 43). Returning to Mysore in 1925, Krishnamacharya married, and lectured on yoga during a period of five years in the larger region of Mysore, Karnataka. In 1931, he was offered a position teaching Sanskrit by the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodiyar IV of Mysore, and in 1933, Krishnamacharya opened a Yoga Shala in a wing of the Jaganmohan Palace of Mysore. According to Goldberg (2016: 214), Krishnamacharya was indeed the first to teach yoga to the royal family and associates. After the Yoga Shala had to close in the year of the Maharaja's death in 1950, the yoga guru and his family – by now he and his wife Namagiramma had raised five children – moved to Madras. There, his son, T. K. V. Desikachar, founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in 1976, which remains a centre of learning yoga and yoga therapy even today.

Krishnamacharya's impact on the development and recognition of modern yoga is unchallenged, and his influential students Indra Devi (born Eugenie Peterson, 1899–2002), Pattabhi Jois (1915–2009), B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–2014), and T. K. V. Desikachar (1938–2016) spread his legacy to nearly every corner of this planet. While Krishnamacharya is certainly one of the most significant reinventors of modern postural yoga, his influence on yogic breath cultivation is, for several reasons, more difficult to determine. First, in his early years of teaching at the Mysore Palace, *prāṇāyāma* was apparently only given to some disciples. For example, B. K. S.

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<sup>606</sup> While three biographers of Krishnamacharya insist that the apprentice yogi journeyed to Tibet on foot to meet his master (Srivatsan 1997; Desikachar 1998; Desikachar 2011 [2005]), White's more recent critical study uncovers several contradictory factors in these accounts. He convincingly argues that Krishnamacharya more likely met his guru in Muktinarayana (also known as Muktinath), Nepal, which is the site of an important Vaiṣṇava shrine (White 2014: 220-222). This is supported by the manuscript of Krishnamacharya's *Yoga Makaranda I* (1934) found in the archives of the Mysore Palace (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 51). The manuscript also indicates that Krishnamacharya's yoga training took place between 1911 and 1918, and not later, as Desikachar (2011 [2005]: 53) states. For a similar view on the location of Krishnamacharya's apprenticeship, see Nevvin (2005: 85-86, n. 4).



Iyengar, who studied with him between 1934 and 1937 and who was Krishnamacharya's brother-in-law, reported that he did not learn *prāṇāyāma* from his guru (Iyengar & Karnik 1990). Others like Indra Devi who were instructed in *prāṇāyāma* were asked to not teach it to their own disciples (Devi 1953: 38). Second, the *Yoga Makaranda Part I* (1934), which is the only text that was published during the period under scrutiny, does not contain abundant information on *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>607</sup> *Yoga Makaranda Part II*, which was probably written around 1940, was never published as a printed text, and thus sanctified, by the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram.<sup>608</sup> Originally written in Telugu and translated by an anonymous scholar, it is, however, published online by one of Krishnamacharya's disciples, A. G. Mohan (b. 1945). I will discuss this text below, since it contains the most detailed *prāṇāyāma* instructions in the oeuvre attributed to Krishnamacharya. I will also briefly touch on the *Yoga Rahasya* (1998), which echoes the teachings found in *Yoga Makaranda I & II*.

While Devi did not further disseminate Krishnamacharya's *prāṇāyāma* legacy, Iyengar and T. K. V. Desikachar did. As will be shown, the textual overlap between *Yoga Makaranda II*, Desikachar's *Religiousness in Yoga* (1980), and Iyengar's *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981) cannot be neglected. Krishnamacharya's son T. K. V. Desikachar was the disciple who received the longest training from the revered Vaiṣṇava yogi. He was instructed in *prāṇāyāma* and taught it to a myriad of students in India and abroad. Desikachar also continued Krishnamacharya's efforts to combine

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<sup>607</sup> Henceforth *Yoga Makaranda I*. This text was first published in Kannada in 1934 and in Tamil in 1938. There are several English translations available, among these that by Krishnamacharya (2016 [1934]) and that printed in Singleton et al. (2012).

<sup>608</sup> Henceforth *Yoga Makaranda II*. A. G. Mohan, who is the editor of the text, states in the preface that the text was probably written between 1934 and the early 1940s (Mohan in Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 2). Mohan further reveals that he had used this document to teach yoga in the 1970s and 1980s and that he clarified doubts regarding the English translation with Krishnamacharya personally (*ibid.*: 3). An attempted email correspondence with A. G. Mohan from Svastha Yoga & Ayurveda did not provide any further information about the document, e.g., when it was first made available online by the editor or who had translated the text into English (judging from the preface, it is probably not Mohan himself). To complicate the issue as to the bibliographical details of the text, the "Prologue" to the 2016 edition of the *Yoga Makaranda I* that I use (which is based on the 2011 edition), written by Kaustubh Desikachar, opines that, although Krishnamacharya intended to produce a follow-up to Part I, "records and anecdotes indicate clearly that there is no Part 2 of this book in existence" (Desikachar in Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 20). Mohan (2010: 134) explains that *Yoga Makaranda II* has not been published in book form, and indicated that the online document was uploaded after 2010. It is an open question why Mohan would publish a document ascribed to Krishnamacharya that he integrated into his own teachings of which the Desikachars are not aware. The case of *Yoga Makaranda II* is probably one of the many riddles yet to be resolved around the textual tradition of the Krishnamacharya lineage. In any case, the text appears to exist:

<https://archive.org/details/YogaMakarandaPart2SriTKrishnamacharya/Yoga-Makaranda-Part-2-Sri-T-Krishnamacharya/page/n9/mode/2up> (accessed Aug 17, 2021). If Mohan is right, it was written by Krishnamacharya himself and represents his teachings.

yoga and Ayurveda, resulting in a practice described as yoga *cikitsā*, or yoga therapy. Yoga therapy is, just as modern postural yoga and Ayurveda, a growing field that includes *prāṇāyāma* for healing purposes. Pattabhi Jois, the fourth distinct disciple, is likely responsible for spreading the technique of *ujjāyī prāṇāyāma*, which is now understood as a gentle contraction of the throat during inhalation and/or exhalation in *āsana* practice. The contributions of Desikachar, Jois, and Iyengar reflecting Krishnamacharya’s influence will therefore briefly be addressed below.

#### 8.5.2.1 *Prāṇa* and *Prāṇāyāma* in the *Yoga Makaranda* and the *Yoga Rahasya*

*Yoga Makaranda I* (“The Nectar of Yoga”) of 1934 treats *prāṇāyāma* only marginally. As part of an exposition of the eight limbs of yoga, the introduction lists some of *prāṇāyāma*’s health benefits such as strengthening the bone marrow and improving blood circulation, factors which are highlighted in Ayurveda as the very base of health and well-being (Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 50). It further briefly describes benefits derived from concentration on the *cakras* during *prāṇāyāma*. These are, for example, sexual vitality (*vīrya*) when focusing on the *mūlādhārācakra*, or the acquisition of love, kindness, and knowledge through meditation on the *anāhatacakra* (Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 51-54). Concentration on the *ājñācakra* together with alternate-nostril breathing is said to purify the *nāḍīs* (*ibid.*: 54). Other than that, the focus in this text lies on *āsana* practice which is combined with either external or internal breath retention (e.g., *ibid.*: 79, 81, 116, 122; Singleton et al. 2012: 350).<sup>609</sup> An analysis of breath cultivation in *āsana* (which includes transitions between *āsanās* such as *kumbhaka* during jumping) is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

While *prāṇāyāma* is mostly understood as a tool to aid successful *āsana* practice, Krishnamacharya also elaborates on the role of *prāṇa* in this text. In contrast to most yoga pioneers, Krishnamacharya does not seem to follow an occult understanding of *prāṇa* as it was promoted by Vivekananda. Instead, he refers to it as *prāṇa-as-breath* or as an entity by which one unites the individual soul (*jīvātman*) with the universal soul (*paramātmā*) (Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 87). This is a metaphysical assumption that echoes *Yogayājñavalkya* 1.44, a medieval Hāṭhayoga

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<sup>609</sup> The terms applied in this work for external and internal breath retention are *pūraka kumbhaka* and *recaka kumbhaka*, respectively, whereas in Krishnamacharya (n.d.a.: 96; 2003 [1998]: 137), they are *antar/antaḥ kumbhaka* and *bāhya kumbhaka* (see below). It should be briefly mentioned that various texts considered in this analysis (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.; 2003 [1998]; Iyengar 1983 [1981]) refer to internal breath retention as either *antara*, *antar*, or *antaḥ kumbhaka* (*antara* is used only by Iyengar 1983 [1981]). All these adjectives are synonyms denoting “internal” and derivatives of *antaḥ* (Monier Williams 1899: 43).

text on which the yogi extensively drew (White 2014: 201; see also below). Krishnamacharya further holds that *prāṇa* should be tamed like wild animals, a notion that he derives from *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.15 (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 25; Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 87).<sup>610</sup> Moreover, the yogi associates the role of purifying *prāṇa* (*prāṇasūddhi*) through *prāṇāyāma* with balancing the Ayurvedic *doṣas* (*ibid.*: 93; Singleton et al. 2012: 347). As such *prāṇāyāma* is an excellent tool to prolong the life-span. To bolster his theory of *prāṇa* and longevity, the yogi then elaborates on the five principal and the five subsidiary *vāyus* as found in the *Yogayājñavalkya* 4.67–71 and other Haṭha texts (Mohan 2000: 65; Krishnamacharya 2016 [1934]: 102–103).

In contrast to *Yoga Makaranda I*, *Yoga Makaranda II* has much to say about *prāṇāyāma* techniques. It is therefore the main reference point in this analysis. Invoking the authority of Patañjali and Gorakṣa Nāth, the general rule for Krishnamacharya is to first master *āsana* and *bandhas* before moving on to *prāṇāyāma* (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 89). The work lists the eight *kumbhakas* of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* plus *kapālabhāti* and *nāḍīśodhana* (the latter is used synonymously here for alternate-nostril breathing) (*ibid.*: 88). However, the text does not describe *plāvinī*, *mūrcchā*, and *bhrāmarī* in detail, holding that they bestow only mundane benefits. In contrast, much importance is given to *ujjāyī* (see below). Furthermore, *sūryabhedana* (in which one inhales through the right nostril and exhales through the left) is said to be highlighted by Svātmārāma, the author of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and eulogised for “eliminat[ing] all those obstructions in the body which hamper the proper regulation of heat and light in the body” (*ibid.*: 89–90). Additionally, Krishnamacharya holds that *sūryabhedana*, *ujjāyī*, and *nāḍīśodhana* are the best choice to practise daily because they “ensure the wellbeing of the body, and in addition aid in the control of the mind and to reach the higher stages which are the real aim of Yoga” (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 102). The remaining four *prāṇāyāmas* (*sītākārī*, *śītalī*, *kapālabhāti*, and *bhastrikā*) are applied only for certain curative purposes (*ibid.*).

The work’s terminology and associated practices are certainly worth noting on their own account. A terminological feature of the text is *samantraka* (“with mantra”) and *amantraka* (“without mantra”) *prāṇāyāma*, which is in premodern texts usually

<sup>610</sup> Next to the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, *Yoga Makaranda I* lists 26 further Sanskrit texts as a “padded academic bibliography” (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 66) on which Krishnamacharya drew in terms of yoga theory and practice (Krishnamacharya 2016 [1935]: 42). Among the prominent examples are the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā*, and several Yoga Upaniṣads, among these the *Śāṇḍilya*, the *Amṛtabindu*, the *Nāḍabindu*, and the *Dhyānabindu Upaniṣad*. Another Haṭha text which appears to have been particularly influential on Krishnamacharya is the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya*, which is, however, not listed here.

terned *sagarbha/agarbha*, or, in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.47–57, *sabīja/nirbīja prāṇāyāma* (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 133, 163-164; chapter 3.3.4). More innovatively, Krishnamacharya distinguishes between *prāṇāyāma* with *samavṛtti* (“even movement”) and *viṣamavṛtti* (“uneven movement”). The former denotes a ratio in which the four phases of the breath have the same length (e.g., 4-4-4-4, inhale-retain-exhale-retain), the latter a ratio with uneven breath counts (e.g., 1-4-2-1, inhale-retain-exhale-retain). To my knowledge, this terminology is not found in premodern texts.<sup>611</sup> Beginners are advised to exclusively practise *samavṛtti prāṇāyāma*, which leads to “general health and well-being” (*ibid.*: 87), and Krishnamacharya tends to dismiss the *viṣamavṛtti* form (Mohan 2010: 148). It is notable that the yogi does not favour the oft-quoted ratio 1-4-2 (*ibid.*), but he also does not recommend practising “according to one’s capacity” (*yathāśakti*).<sup>612</sup> However, Krishnamacharya advises that the phase of the breath which is the shortest in a given moment of practice should be one’s individual measurement, to which all other phases are made equal (*ibid.*: 95). The four phases of the breath were already taught by Vivekananda, Yogendra, and Sundaram; now, they are introduced by Krishnamacharya as part of a recommended ratio.

This practice implies that Krishnamacharya consistently teaches external breath retention. While Vivekananda had advised practising it as a preliminary to internal breath retention,<sup>613</sup> for Krishnamacharya external breath retention is an advanced practice (as it is for Sundaram). Moreover, it is likely Krishnamacharya who developed a terminology for it that became widely influential. He speaks of *antar kumbhaka* (“internal breath retention”) and *bāhya kumbhaka* (“external breath retention”) (e.g., Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 93, 96).<sup>614</sup> All three *bandhas* are applied in

<sup>611</sup> In his “Evolution of Prāṇāyāma”, Kuvalayananda explains that a ratio of 1-1-1 was prescribed by authors of the Purāṇas (Kuvalayananda 1956a: 57-58), which would suggest that the ratio that Krishnamacharya taught indeed existed in premodern texts. However, a search in the collection of GRETEL e-texts, which contains sixteen different Purāṇas, did not indicate that the term *samavṛtti* was applied in any of these (in the context of *prāṇāyāma* or otherwise). Thus, the practice may have existed, while the terminology is likely innovative.

<sup>612</sup> The concept of *yathāśakti* is, however, mentioned in *Yoga Rahasya* 1.92 (Krishnamacharya 2003 [1998]: 85).

<sup>613</sup> I have traced Vivekananda’s notion of external breath retention to Genevieve Stebbins (chapter 8.1.1). In the case of Krishnamacharya, no allusion to Stebbins is found in his work, making it unlikely that he would have received the idea of the four phases of the breath from her 1892 book. Rooted in Tamil Brahmanical culture, he, however, was certainly not interested in listing Euro-American sources, even if he had known them. Krishnamacharya may have learnt this practice from his guru in Nepal or from books by his modern yogic predecessors. Whether South Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavism included external breath retention (e.g., in its ritual practices) cannot be investigated here.

<sup>614</sup> Strictly speaking, *bāhya kumbhaka* is contradictive, since *kumbhaka* denotes holding the breath as “holding a full pot”, not an empty pot (Jason Birch in a personal conversation, Nov 25, 2020). To my knowledge, this terminology is not used in premodern texts, although external breath retention as a

various forms of *prāṇāyāma*, and the yogi holds that *uḍḍiyānabandha* should be practised during exhalation and, occasionally, during *bāhya kumbhaka* (e.g., *ibid.*: 91; Krishnamacharya 2003 [1998]: 138). Though rarely found in premodern *prāṇāyāma*, *bāhya kumbhaka* is widely practised today, and it is further disseminated through Iyengar’s *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981) (see below).

In referring to the elusive *Yoga Kurunta*,<sup>615</sup> Krishnamacharya presents another innovative form of breath cultivation with peculiar terminology. *Prāṇāyāma* can be practised *anuloma* (“with the grain”), *viloma* (“against the grain”), and *pratiloma* (“both with and against the grain”) (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 103-104). The ingredients of this terminology are not new – the term *anulomaviloma* is found in Brahmānanda’s nineteenth-century *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* 2.47 in which it denotes alternate-nostril breathing (Birch & Hargreaves 2020; chapter 6.4). But in Krishnamacharya’s *Yoga Makaranda II*, the terms adopt new meanings. *Anuloma prāṇāyāma* denotes interrupted inhalation (the inhalation is interrupted by several short retentions). *Viloma prāṇāyāma* refers to interrupted exhalation, while *pratiloma prāṇāyāma* combines both interrupted inhalation and exhalation (Krishnamacharya

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practice existed in some contexts. External breath retention may have been part of Patañjali’s four types of *prāṇāyāma* (chapter 3.2), and the terms *bāhyavṛtti* and *anataravṛtti* to denote exhalation and inhalation are found in works that comment on Patañjali, for example in Vidyāraṇya’s fourteenth-century *Jīvanmuktiviveka* 3.24 (Birch & Hargreaves 2020). However, the terms *bāhya* and *antara kumbhaka* are mentioned neither in the *Yogasūtra* nor in its commentaries. There are some rare passages in premodern Haṭhayoga that mention external breath retention, e.g., the manuscript of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* with ten chapters that probably dates to the eighteenth-century (*Haṭhapradīpikā* 4.67; Gharote & Devnath 2017 [2001]: 96; Birch 2018: 8-9, n. 32), and the seventeenth-century *Kumbhakapaddhati* 31 (Gharote & Devnath 2016 [2000]: 9). While *Haṭhapradīpikā* 4.67 does not apply the adjective *bāhya* (“outside”) at all, *Kumbhakapaddhati* 31 utilises *bahih-kumbhaka*, which is closest to the *bāhya kumbhaka* frequently used today. *Bāhya* is a derivative of the adjective *bahih*, and both denote “outside” (Monier-Williams 1899: 730). It should also briefly be mentioned that at least some tantric traditions included external breath retention in their teachings. For example, in her study on the Vaiṣṇava text *Jayākhyasamhitā* (one of the most authoritative texts of the Pāñcarātra tradition), Marion Rastelli has found that external breath retention is part of a daily ritual that, as a preparative mode, aims to purify the elements (*bhūtaśuddhi*) both inside and outside the body. While it cannot be expounded in detail here, the relevant aspects of *bhūtaśuddhi* are *pūraka*, *recaka*, *kumbhaka*, and *dhāraṇā* practices. The latter visualise various elements in their symbolic and actual form (which also includes the recitation of a specific mantra for each element), and *dhāraṇā* is also practised after exhalation (Rastelli 1999: 201-238). However, to my knowledge, this practice is not termed *bāhya kumbhaka* there. To complicate things, Gharote (2017 [2003]: 16) states that the terminology of *bāhya kumbhaka* and *antara/ābhyantara kumbhaka* is derived from *Saurapurāṇa* (which is traditionally associated with the *Brahmapurāṇa*, Rocher 1986: 220). A search in GRETIL e-texts has shown that the term *bāhya kumbhaka* is not employed therein, while Gharote is probably right that external breath retention is described through other terminology. In brief, while the practice existed, the term *bāhya kumbhaka* was likely introduced in the modern period or, if one considers the passage in *Kumbhakapaddhati* 31, in the seventeenth century.

<sup>615</sup> The *Yoga Kurunta* had existed, according to Krishnamacharya and his legacy, as a (now lost) manuscript written in Nepali. It is, however, equally likely that the text is part of the yogi’s imaginative textual tradition, the construction of which essentially is a “reframing of the ancient and unchanging logos of yoga” (Singleton & Fraser 2013: 98). For a detailed discussion of the *Yoga Kurunta*, see Singleton (2010: 184-185).

n.d.a.: 104-105). All of them are said to be “highly beneficial, and as the mind has constantly to watch the steps, [it] aids in the practice of concentration” (*ibid.*: 105).<sup>616</sup> Additionally, these techniques can be combined with *ujjāyī*, *sūryabhedana*, and other forms of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*). It should be noted that interrupted inhalation was already described by the voice teacher Edgerly/Shafesbury, the Delsartist Genevieve Stebbins (in which it was termed the “Packing Breath”), and Atkinson/Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2). However, a clear influence of these authors on Krishnamacharya cannot be determined at the present state of research.

As to the sources employed by the yogi, others have noted that Krishnamacharya drew on the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* (White 2014: 201; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 490, n. 21).<sup>617</sup> This is a text that utilises the framework of Aṣṭāṅgayoga in the context of Vaiṣṇava teachings, and it borrows from the twelfth-century Vaiṣṇava *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* (Birch 2013: 434, n. 83). The text’s influence on Krishnamacharya can also be determined in the *Yoga Makaranda II. Yogayājñavalkya* 6.44 describes the practice of *śītalī*, in which one first inhales through a u-shaped tongue, then “retains [the air, M.K.] at the base of the tongue, and drinks the nectar” (Mohan 2000: 82-83). “Drinking the nectar” is commonly associated with *khecarīmudrā*, in which the yogi rolls the tongue back and inserts it into the nasal cavity (Mallinson 2007a: 21), thereby consuming the nectar which drips from a lotus or “moon” in the skull. Krishnamacharya likewise describes *śītalī* in combination with *khecarīmudrā* (as well as *jālandharabandha*) during retention: “Roll the tip [of the tongue, M.K.] inwards and upwards so that the tip touches the back of the soft pallet [*sic*] as far behind as possible” (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 103).<sup>618</sup> Krishnamacharya also recommends mentally counting the *mātrā* with the mantras *raṃ* or *oṃ*, which is similarly suggested in *Yogayājñavalkya* 5.17–20 and 6.11–15 (Mohan 2000: 73, 78; Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 88).<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> This is in accordance with Singleton & Fraser (2013: 90) who found that Krishnamacharya aimed to constantly engage the mind “through counting breath rations in *prāṇāyāma*, considering philosophical questions, or chanting slokas”.

<sup>617</sup> The *Yogayājñavalkya* referred to here is different from the original *Yogayājñavalkya*, composed around the eighth century. For more information on the distinction between these two, see Wujastyk (2017). Wujastyk clarifies that the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya* is strongly represented in South India, and manuscripts are found in various scripts, e.g., in Devanagari, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, and Grantha (*ibid.*: 163). Telugu was said to be the preferred script of Krishnamacharya, but, in any case, he was able to read the text in Sanskrit too. It is nevertheless worth noting that translations of it are found in Bengali from 1897 onwards, followed by translations into Gujarati, Hindi, and English in the twentieth century.

<sup>618</sup> *Śītalī* is similarly described in *Yoga Rahasya* 1.100 (2003 [1998]: 88-89).

<sup>619</sup> *Yogayājñavalkya* 5.17–20 combines meditating on the syllable “*raṃ*” during retention with alternate-nostril breathing (Mohan 2000: 73). This passage is also quoted by Vivekananda (1896: 226). It is

As mentioned earlier, The *Yoga Rahasya* (“Secret of Yoga”) is said to have been revealed in a vision to the young yogi, but the text considerably evolved and changed throughout his teaching career (Singleton & Fraser 2013: 97).<sup>620</sup> First published in 1998 after the yogi’s death, I consider it to be one of Krishnamacharya’s late *prāṇāyāma*-related texts. It describes *prāṇāyāma* in essentially the same manner and with the same idiosyncratic terminologies and practices as *Yoga Makaranda I & II*. Therein, Krishnamacharya holds that *prāṇāyāma* is an excellent tool for purifying and healing the body as well as quieting the mind (Mohan 2010: 147-148, 150). The yogi also highlights the role of *prāṇāyāma* in *yoga cikitsā*, and gives suggestions for pregnant women. They should avoid *kapālabhāti* and *bhastrikā*, while alternate-nostril breathing, *ujjāyī*, and *śītalī* are said to be beneficial (*ibid.*: 148-150). Krishnamacharya’s *Yoga Rahasya* is another example in modern yoga that highlights the *sandhyā* rite in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, attesting that through both “the body and the senses are kept clean” (Krishnamacharya 2003 [1998]: 53).

To sum up, Krishnamacharya’s teachings evolved throughout his lifetime, making him an innovator and inventor even in the years prior to his death (Singleton & Fraser 2013: 98). The “principle of adaption for the individual student” (Singleton 2010: 188-189) guided much of the yogi’s teachings, and it likely contributed to the plasticity and evolving nature of the practices.<sup>621</sup> In terms of *prāṇāyāma*, this also meant that the Ayurvedic method of assessing the individual’s pulse was applied before a particular practice was prescribed. Furthermore, there were clear settings for the beginner and the advanced student. While complex ratios and the recitation of mantras were reserved for the latter, all students were offered basic breath-control and breath-witnessing practices (Nevrin 2005: 70; Singleton & Fraser 2013: 88).

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further notable that the *Yogayājñavalkya* 8.32–40ab features “a rare example from a premodern Yoga text of a true synthesis between the practice of Yoga and [Ayurvedic, M.K.] humoral theory” which additionally highlights the role of *prāṇāyāma* for healing (Birch 2018: 23). Krishnamacharya’s emphasis on health and healing in his teachings is notable, and it may well be that he was also inspired by the *Yogayājñavalkya* in this regard. However, it is likely that the yogi had also received Ayurvedic training, since he applied pulse diagnosis in his *yoga cikitsā* sessions. The combination of pulse diagnosis as part of prescribing *prāṇāyāma* techniques, as, for example, found in the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram or in the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute (own field data) is likely grounded in the rather novel idea of merging yoga and Ayurveda.

<sup>620</sup> As to the text’s origin, Krishnamacharya’s student Mohan attests that “there is no doubt that the text known as the *Yoga Rahasya* was not composed by Nathamuni, nor was it composed at one sitting. The text is an assorted collection of verses on yoga and related subjects written by Krishnamacharya” (Mohan 2010: 137). In this paragraph, I refer to the useful summary of the *Yoga Rahasya* in Mohan (2010: 146-151).

<sup>621</sup> This principle is occasionally termed *vinīyoga* (an allusion to *Yogasūtra* 3.6) and laid out in the *Yoga Rahasya*’s second chapter (Krishnamacharya 2003 [1998]: 99-144). For details on the meaning and etymology of the term, see Nevrin (2005: 85, n. 1, 87, n. 7).

Generally, Krishnamacharya's approach to *prāṇāyāma* is “characterized by great subtlety, gentleness, and refinement” (*ibid.*), which is also reflected in both Desikachar's and Iyengar's *prāṇāyāma* teachings. Before I turn to their interpretation of Krishnamacharya's teachings, I will once more briefly shed light on *ujjāyī prāṇāyāma* as part of his legacy. Yoga therapeutics as well as yoga performances may have shaped *ujjāyī* practice as it is understood today.

#### 8.5.2.2 *Ujjāyī Prāṇāyāma* and the Five Breaths in Yoga Performances

Most practitioners of modern yoga associate *ujjāyī* with producing a frictional sound in the throat while inhaling and/or exhaling. Many of them are taught to apply it during *āsana* practice. This seems to be particularly widespread in the Ashtanga Vinyasa flows of Pattabhi Jois (Singleton 2010: 182), but this practice also trickled into other schools. While we do not have enough historical evidence to fully expound on the history of this interpretation of *ujjāyī*, I shall sketch some of the most important points that probably led to it. First, *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.51–53 prescribes *ujjāyī* while standing or walking (Birch 2011: 15, n. 61). This passage may have triggered the association of *ujjāyī* breathing with non-seated practice. It also advises to produce a sound from the throat during inhalation; however, the nature of the sound (e.g., if frictional or voiced) is not expounded further.<sup>622</sup> Second, Krishnamacharya already altered the practice as described in *Yoga Makaranda II*. One should practise *ujjāyī* with a “rubbing sensation in the throat”, which will, in time “be felt as low down as the diaphragm” (Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 91). More innovatively, Krishnamacharya continues to explain three different forms of *ujjāyī* practice i.e., *anuloma*, *viloma*, and *pratiloma* (*ibid.*: 91-93).<sup>623</sup> While this is practised in seated position, another passage suggests that a sequence of postures to benefit menstruation should be accompanied with “deep, even and long [breathing] and with a rubbing sensation in the throat” (*ibid.*: 117). This may well be the birth of *ujjāyī prāṇāyāma* as the world knows it today.

Reasons to combine frictional breathing and *āsana* may, however, be more trivial. Singleton hints that when Pattabhi Jois and other apprentice yogis participated in Krishnamacharya's *āsana* demonstrations, they would stay in a posture for “five

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<sup>622</sup> *Haṭhapradīpikā* 2.51–53 additionally explains that one exhales from the left nostril in *ujjāyī*.

<sup>623</sup> Confusingly, these terms do not describe interrupted inhalation and exhalation here, as in Krishnamacharya (n.d.a.: 104-105), but they denote *exhalation* through alternate nostrils, while one inhales through both nostrils with frictional sound (*anuloma*), and *inhalation* through alternate nostrils while one exhales through both nostrils with frictional sound (*viloma*). *Pratiloma* denotes here alternate-nostril breathing with one throat-breath (exhalation-inhalation with frictional sound) every time before one starts to exhale with the other nostril (*ibid.*: 91-93).



[...] audible ‘ujjayi’ breaths” (Singleton 2010: 195). To synchronise the performance, these breaths needed to be audible to the yogis on stage – which is another effective and useful application of *ujjāyī*. This would also explain why *ujjāyī* during postural practice is so prominent especially in Ashtanga Vinyasa flows, which were introduced by Krishnamacharya to suit the spectacle of yoga demonstrations (Goldberg 2016: 243). Thus, *ujjāyī* could also have evolved out of mere practicality while performing *āsana*. In tracing the origin of today’s *ujjāyī* practice, we encounter the tension between yoga as performance and yoga as a healing art. Varying light has been shed on Krishnamacharya’s yoga innovations in both regards.<sup>624</sup> In any case, whether it first served ailing women during menses or yogis in the spotlight, *ujjāyī* is probably by far the most popular and ubiquitous breath practice of modern postural yoga.

### 8.5.2.3 Krishnamacharya’s Legacy: Light on B. K. S. Iyengar

Using Krishnamacharya’s *Yoga Makaranda II* as a prism to read B. K. S. Iyengar’s and T. K. V. Desikachar’s *prāṇāyāma* teachings yields fruitful results. In the case of Desikachar, it is not surprising that the son would have been deeply influenced by the father’s approach, since he studied with him over forty years. This imprint on Desikachar is also reflected in course material on *prāṇāyāma* which is reproduced in *Religiousness in Yoga* (1980).<sup>625</sup> It is more surprising that also Iyengar’s approach to *prāṇāyāma* has remarkable overlaps with Krishnamacharya’s, since Iyengar, who had been teaching independently from 1937 in Pune onwards, reported that he had “no-one to guide [him]” in the process of learning *prāṇāyāma* (Iyengar 1983 [1981]: xx).<sup>626</sup> The contributions of Iyengar’s *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981) are briefly sketched

<sup>624</sup> See the contrasting interpretations of Krishnamacharya’s motivation to develop his system of yoga as “health and healing” by Desikachar (1998) or yoga as performance (Singleton 2010: 190-196; Goldberg 2016: 223-233). Goldberg concludes that his motivation was probably “multilayered” and “multidetermined” (*ibid.*: 245).

<sup>625</sup> In a course given to a group of students at Colgate University, New York State, in 1976, Desikachar elaborates on several topics of yoga in theory and practice, one of them being *prāṇāyāma*. Desikachar employed *samavṛtti* and *viśamavṛtti prāṇāyāma* in four phases of the breath (Desikachar 1980: 118-119). He utilised the concept of *ujjāyī*, both in its *viloma* and *anuloma* varieties, just like Krishnamacharya (*ibid.*: 119-121); *ujjāyī* is described as a “restriction in the throat” which is also “used in āsanās” (*ibid.*: 119), aligning the concept with both Krishnamacharya’s and Pattabhi Jois’s work. *Śitalī* is, as in the *Yogayājñavalkya* and in Krishnamacharya, also practised in combination with *khecarīmudrā* (*ibid.*: 121-122). Desikachar certainly adds helpful instructions, for example, he explains how to construct a ratio that suits the individual’s daily needs as opposed to forcing a specific ratio onto the practitioner (*ibid.*: 123-126).

<sup>626</sup> In an interview with Neela Karnik, Iyengar explains that he received only rudimentary instruction from Krishnamacharya in 1940, when the latter visited him in Pune (Iyengar & Karnik 1990: 74). In 1944, he had the rare opportunity to observe his guru during *prāṇāyāma* practice, but the student was unable to imitate the teacher (*ibid.*: 75). What inspired Iyengar to stick to the practice was his own slow progress (which included many occasions of failure) and the art of listening to the breath, which evolved over forty years.

here.<sup>627</sup> Without doubt, the influence of Krishnamacharya's work was amplified on a global scale by Iyengar, among other prominent students. *Light on Prāṇāyāma* is often conceived as the definitive guide to *prāṇāyāma* from a guru with supreme authority. Nevertheless, Iyengar stood on the shoulders of Krishnamacharya, albeit certainly expanding the art of *prāṇāyāma* through his own approach full of diligence and attention to detail.

In the preface to *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981), Iyengar expresses his gratitude to his guru, to whom he is “indebted [...] for his tributes to the book” (Iyengar 1983 [1981]: xxi). Krishnamacharya also wrote an introductory “Tribute”, which, together with the invocation of the god Hanuman, forms the first lines of the book (*ibid.*: xi). If Iyengar was not taught *prāṇāyāma* directly by Krishnamacharya, he was most likely familiar with the then unpublished *Yoga Makaranda II*.<sup>628</sup> In fact, most of Iyengar's basic technicalities can be explained through the influence of Krishnamacharya's approach. First, he adopts the concept of *prāṇāyāma* with and without mantra, though calling it *bīja* and *nirbīja prāṇāyāma* (as in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 5.47–57; Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 163-164; Iyengar 1983 [1981]: 114-117). Second, he distinguishes between *samavṛtti* and *viṣamavṛtti prāṇāyāma*, drawing on Krishnamacharya (*ibid.*: 118-120). In accordance with his guru, he also prescribes the former for the beginner, while he cautions that the latter should only be practised under the direct guidance of a guru (*ibid.*: 119-120). Teaching four phases of the breath, Iyengar also prescribes *bāhya kumbhaka* in the context of various *prāṇāyāma* practices, often in combination with *uḍḍiyānabandha* (*ibid.*: 94-95, 110-11, 118-119, 140-145). Third, he employs the concept of *viloma prāṇāyāma*, which denotes interrupted inhalation or exhalation here (*ibid.*: 146-151). For Iyengar, *anuloma prāṇāyāma* means inhalation with two fully open nostrils, and exhalation with either partially closed nostrils or one fully closed and one partially closed nostril; *pratiloma prāṇāyāma* denotes exhalation with two fully open nostrils, and inhalation by partially closed nostrils or one fully closed and one partially closed nostril (*ibid.*: 194-202). Although the terminology of *viloma*, *anuloma*, and *pratiloma* is employed slightly differently than in Krishnamacharya's

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<sup>627</sup> A detailed and full analysis of this rich work is beyond the scope (and time frame) of this study, hence only the points of Krishnamacharya's direct influence are outlined here. For an evaluation of *Light on Prāṇāyāma* in the larger contexts of modern yoga (albeit with little reference to Krishnamacharya), see De Michelis (2004: 224-235). For a discussion of Iyengar's approach to “remedial yoga”, see Newcombe (2019: 215-222).

<sup>628</sup> Although this is indeed speculative, Iyengar may have been acquainted with a manuscript of this text which appeared to have been known to A. G. Mohan by the 1970s. Alternatively, these techniques could have been mediated to Iyengar by Mohan or T. K. V. Desikachar in person or by Desikachar (1980).

work, each of the techniques can nevertheless be found already in *Yoga Makaranda II*. Finally, both authors treat *nāḍīśodhana*, for them a synonym of alternate-nostril breathing, as one of the most important techniques (*ibid.*: 209-220; Krishnamacharya n.d.a.: 102; 2003 [1998]: 90-91).

Next to several other differences which cannot be discussed here, the most obvious one is Iyengar's emphasis on relaxation and ease during *prāṇāyāma*. Most of the techniques should be practised either in seated or lying position, and Iyengar advises practising *śavāsana* after every sitting with *prāṇāyāma*. Additionally, he concludes the book with a full chapter on *śavāsana*, which he translates as “relaxation” (Iyengar 1983 [1981]: 232-254). In the preface, Iyengar hints that there is an “infinite number of permutations and combinations possible in this noble art and science” (*ibid.*: xxi). He may have gathered this from Krishnamacharya's approach, which similarly reflects an almost endless innovative playfulness with the practice.

#### 8.5.2.4 Summary: Krishnamacharya's Appeal to Tradition and Innovation

Having Nathamuni as a bright star in his family banner and being a polyglot in several Indian philosophical schools, Krishnamacharya is, first, to be understood as a proud representative of several Indian traditions. Simultaneously, he was, as Goldberg has rightly attested, a “brilliant innovator” (Goldberg 2016: 238). Nevertheless, his innovations and inventions of new techniques were literally cloaked by Sanskrit terminology. The *śāstrī* certainly knew how to utilise the cultural capital of Sanskrit as an apologetic tool to synthesise his innovations with “tradition”. He utilised Sanskrit as a living language and yoga as a living tradition. This is accomplished by what I have earlier called the “agency of translation”, while Krishnamacharya, however, moved “upstream” (translating new techniques into Sanskrit, thereby making them seem to be arcane), and not, as other translators did, “downstream” (making concepts/techniques enshrined in Sanskrit available to a broader public). In the context of *prāṇāyāma*, this is exemplified, as has been shown, by the concept – and Sanskrit term – *bāhya kumbhaka*, among other examples. Another strategy of Krishnamacharya is to attribute his innovations to either *śāstra*, or his guru (Singleton et al. 2012: 341), which is, as Goldberg (2016: 241) has noted, an effective form of self-protection in forestalling criticism in the fierce combat of an ever-more-quickly modernising “yoga tradition” in India.

Innovations, however, did not stop with Krishnamacharya. Relying on the concepts of *ujjāyī* breathing during *āsana*, Desikachar, Jois, and Iyengar were also

celebrated gurus on their own account. For example, Jois was popularised as a South Indian *prāṇāyāma* guru by André van Lysebeth's *Pranayama: Le dynamique du soufflé* (1971) (Goldberg 2016: 247-248). In Iyengar's case, the underlying structure of *Light on Prāṇāyāma* is most likely Krishnamacharya's *Yoga Makaranda II*, notwithstanding Iyengar's major contributions and innovations. What would today's *prāṇāyāma* look like without the legacy of Krishnamacharya? We would maybe never have heard of *anuloma*, *viloma*, and *pratiloma prāṇāyāma* (but rather, of *anulomaviloma* to denote alternate-nostril breathing, as in the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* 2.47), nor of the benefits of *samavṛtti prāṇāyāma* (a concept similar to rhythmic breathing, though here not termed as such), nor of an interrupted inhalation and exhalation as part of *prāṇāyāma* practice with a Sanskrit name. We would probably not give the same importance to “external” *kumbhaka* as to “internal” *kumbhaka*, as is the case in most modern schools nowadays. And most of us would probably breathe more soundlessly during *āsana*.

## 8.6 Summary: The Varied Paths of Yogic Breath Cultivation

This chapter has given voice to ten highly influential spokespersons of yogic breath cultivation. As has been shown, Vivekananda's *prāṇa* theory was so influential that most yoga pioneers adopted it. However, some also rejected his concept, insisting that *prāṇa* – as harnessed in *prāṇāyāma* – simply meant “breath” and did not denote a metaphysical principle. This objection was advocated primarily by Kuvalayananda and Krishnamacharya. As we shall see, chapter 9.1 will highlight another position which likewise provides a critical reading of Vivekananda's seminal theory. Such differences notwithstanding, the idea that movements of *prāṇa* are related to the fluctuations of the mind was understood to be an almost universal one and was therefore accepted by all protagonists.

As for the varied paths of yogic breath cultivation, they began to diversify only after Vivekananda had already left the scene. Among the first-generation yogis even Abhedananda, who innovatively integrated Haṭhayogic *āsana* practice into his teaching style, did not yet teach other forms of *prāṇāyāma* than alternate-nostril breathing. Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka, who was a contemporary of Abhedananda, also promoted alternate-nostril breathing as “yogi breathing” at the turn of the century. However, as he was primarily influenced by Euro-American hygienic practices that were beginning to blend with the occult, his innovative vigour to integrate new breath practices into yoga was much stronger. In no small part due to

the influential teachings of Stebbins, he combined breathing exercises with movements of the limbs, a form of practice that became widely influential in modern yoga. Both Stebbins and Atkinson/Ramacharaka promoted such important practices as rhythmic breathing, the idea that one could “breathe through one’s limbs” (Stebbins: “yoga breathing”; Atkinson: the “Grand Yogi Psychic Breath”), and interrupted breathing termed the “Packing Breath”. Atkinson/Ramacharaka was also responsible for integrating the “complete breath”, which uses all three breath spaces, into yogic breath cultivation and for the dissemination of the influential concept of “Pranic Healing”. Both can further be credited with making breath practices, and subsequently yoga, “psycho-physical” (Stebbins) and holistic in the sense that it aimed to address all levels of the human being (Atkinson/Ramacharaka).

After these crucial developments, we see further creative ingenuity – although always entangled with the authoritative appeal to traditional practices – in the work of second-generation modern yogis, which gained momentum in the 1920s and 1930s. As is already the case in first-generation modern yogis, these yogis also primarily used English language to disseminate their teachings. It was first Kuvalayananda who systematically described and taught Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* (*ujjāyī*, *kapālabhāti*, and *bhastrikā*) in his *Prāṇāyāma* of 1931, which became, moreover, the first illustrated *prāṇāyāma* manual in English language. Similarly, Yogendra drew on Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma* but aimed to “simplify” the practices, thereby making them available to the general English-speaking public. Despite their borrowing from Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga, they also referred to Euro-American hygienic and physical culture as an important backdrop for the practice of *prāṇāyāma*. This was similarly continued by Sundaram and Sivananda, who were decidedly informed by Kuvalayananda’s distinctive approach to Haṭhayogic *prāṇāyāma*, which placed a strong emphasis on breath ratios. All of these protagonists relied on Haṭhayoga texts, in most cases the readily available English translations. In Sivananda’s case, he compiled a considerable number of various premodern *prāṇāyāma*-related topics in English language, but this diversity did not reflect in his subsequent lineage. Today, most schools of his lineage teach a mix of alternate-nostril breathing, *kapālabhāti*, some of the eight *kumbhakas*, and preparatory practices like “deep breathing”, and Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “complete breath”.

Yogananda, who was also active in the 1920s and 1930s, was deeply informed by a theosophical understanding of the subtle body which also left its imprint on his breath and meditation practices. Another important influence on his Kriya Yoga was

the late-medieval *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* in which the *haṃsa* breath (rendered into English as “Hong-Saw” by Yogananda) is found. Just like Sivananda, also Yogananda, drew decisively on (Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s) New Thought which informed these yogis’ understanding of *prāṇāyāma* in relation to healing and mind cure. Crucial developments of yogic breath cultivation were further introduced by Krishnamacharya. Being the only protagonist who exclusively published in South Indian vernacular languages, his teachings nevertheless became widely influential through his English-speaking students. Krishnamacharya shaped *ujjāyī* practice as we know it today (i.e., in relation to *āsana*), popularised *bāhya kumbhaka*, and taught a variety of *prāṇāyāma* practices with innovative Sanskrit terminology to describe them. These practices included interrupted breathing, various (even and uneven) ratios, and mantra recitation, and they were later disseminated by his influential students Jois, Desikachar, and Iyengar.

## 9 THE INTERTWINED PATHS OF YOGA AND OCCULTISM: TRANSNATIONAL ECHOES OF PRĀṆA AND YOGIC BREATH CULTIVATION

Constantly interweaving and exchanging ideas, modern yoga and occultism are considered sister genres in this study. While the investigation of this mutual exchange would have to involve several topical threads,<sup>629</sup> it can also be observed regarding yogic breath cultivation. In wrapping up, this final chapter will treat two case studies of the intertwined paths of yoga and occultism that featured yogic breath cultivation. It once more addresses some neural nodes of the discourses analysed in this thesis, and, in doing so, it shifts the focus to a broader discussion of how yoga and occultism were merged in transnational networks before 1945. The main protagonists highlighted here are the occultist T. R. Sanjivi, who was active in South India (chapter 9.1), and the Russian actor Constantin Stanislavski (chapter 9.2). However, in discussing these protagonists we will also briefly revisit the contributions of such influential figures as Rama Prasad, Swami Vivekananda, and Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka, among others. As will be shown, Sanjivi was on the one hand a receptacle for yogic-occult ideas, but on the other turned a critical eye on them. Moreover, the occult organisation that Sanjivi headed was influential beyond India and inspired the occultism of no less than the British mage Aleister Crowley. In the next section, we will briefly address Stanislavski's theory of acting, which incorporates *prāṇa*-inflected techniques as found in Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's texts. As one of the most influential actors of the twentieth century, Stanislavski not only infused the stage with *prāṇa*, but also built a legacy of yoga-related theory and practice of acting that, as will be shown, likewise includes occult ideas.

Yoga and occultism are often combined in the work of a single author, which results in a hybridisation of yoga and its practices. This necessitates the terminological phrase "modern occult yoga" (Cantú forthcoming-b). As the reader may be aware by now, Vivekananda and nineteenth-century occultists had already prepared these developments, but Atkinson/Ramacharaka was a major player in combining and disseminating yogic breath cultivation as a blended product of yoga, occultism, and physical culture. The echoes of his influence are dealt with here. The Outlook (chapter

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<sup>629</sup> See the recently founded research network Occult South Asia Network (OSAN) and its forthcoming publication (Baier & Mukhopadhyay forthcoming).

9.3), however, is not specifically dedicated to the study of the interwoven paths of yoga and occultism, but summarises some salient aspects of yogic breath cultivation in the 1930s and after the Second World War.

### 9.1 Indian Occultism: Sanjivi's Latent Light Culture

The Latent Light Culture is an organisation founded in 1905 by Dr. T. R. Sanjivi (1880–1941) which was situated in Tinnevely (nowadays Tirunelveli), Tamil Nadu until 1951. The organisation became influential through its journal, *The Kalpaka: A Magazine of Knowledge* (first edition 1908),<sup>630</sup> as well as through teaching by correspondence. The Latent Light Culture, which remains operative up until today, though mainly in Northern India,<sup>631</sup> shows a thorough interest in occult themes, reflected in the journal's publications. As an announcement in the June edition of *The Swastika* (a New Thought journal published in Denver, Colorado) notes, the organisation aspires to discuss "Occultism in all its branches", and "invite[s] the co-operation of all New Thought advocates in America, as well as in Europe" (Anonymous 1907: 43).<sup>632</sup> It also advertised itself in various New Thought-oriented journals published in the United States like *The New Age Magazine* and *Nautilus*.

In some ways, the role of the Latent Light Culture is similar to that played by early theosophy in spreading yoga. This holds particularly true for the developments on the Indian subcontinent in the early twentieth century up until the Second World War, but, expanding on a transnational scale, the Latent Light Culture reached out to such prominent figures as John Woodroffe, William Walker Atkinson, and Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). Just as early theosophy did, these occult networks provided important organisational structures for the dissemination of occult ideas: for example, Atkinson's prolific series under the pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka (chapter 8.2.2) was published and disseminated in India by the Latent Light Culture. In turn, the Chicago-based Yogi Publication Society sold issues of *The Kalpaka*. Referring to Atkinson as

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<sup>630</sup> The journal's title can be translated as "the wishing tree", which alludes to a story of a magical tree that gives people whatever they truly wished. The journal's subtitle changed over the years: in 1917, its subtitle was "A Magazine of Knowledge devoted to Indian Mysticism and Advanced Thought", possibly alluding to Atkinson's journal *Advanced Thought*; in 1918, it was "An Indian Psychic Review", and since 1920, "The Psychic Review of the East".

<sup>631</sup> The organization relocated to Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, in 1951.

<sup>632</sup> John Patrick Deveney shared several details (this one included) of the Latent Light Culture's involvement with other occult organisations in the United States on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/kalpaka/> (accessed April 12, 2021). Presenting an outstanding collection of occult journals, magazines, and texts (among these, some editions of *The Kalpaka*, *The Swastika*, *Nautilus*, and *The New Age Magazine*) of the nineteenth and twentieth century, this homepage is an invaluable source for the study of occultism.



the “eminent, practical, matter-of-fact Occultist of the day” in the September issue of 1910 (Sanjivi & Mukerji 1910: 2), the society sold his alias-Ramacharaka books and a number of Atkinson’s publications under various pseudonyms. Indeed, Atkinson wrote as Yogi Ramacharaka for *The Kalpaka* even after his last publication in book form appeared in 1909. As to the other informants, from roughly 1915 onwards, there are several references to Woodroffe’s/Avalon’s contributions to tantrism. While Crowley never explicitly referred to the Latent Light Culture, he had likely learned from one of its members (see below). As one of the most influential twentieth-century mages, he had a huge followership, which would be indirectly informed by South Indian occultism blended with yoga.

Several other yogic-occult protagonists interacted with the Latent Light Culture. Om Prakash Swami (1872–1947) who was a student of the South Indian yogi Sri Sabhapati Swami (c. 1828–1923/4) also published articles in some 1909 issues of *The Kalpaka*.<sup>633</sup> Henry Proctor, a British fellow of the Latent Light Culture, wrote a series of articles on “The Breath of Life” in the January 1916 issue – by blending Atkinson’s and Swedenborg’s axioms (Proctor 1916).<sup>634</sup> Furthermore, second-generation protagonists of South Asian yoga like Sundaram and Sivananda also drew from Latent Light doctrines, pointing at the importance of the organisation’s work.<sup>635</sup>

A good twenty years before Sanjivi had entered the scene, yogic and tantric texts by theosophical translators were distributed in various hermetic orders (like the H. B. o. L., the Golden Dawn, and the early Ordo Templi Orientis). Producing new translations and unearthing further Sanskritic material and its translation, Sanjivi often vehemently opposed the contributions of his earlier occultistic brothers and sisters, as will be shown. In providing a point of intersection, interaction, and delineation, his texts are thoroughly discursive. In three main texts discussed here, which are the

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<sup>633</sup> Om Prakash was a “Fellow of the Latent Light Culture”, or “F. L. L. C.”, which is reminiscent of the abbreviation “F. T. S.” (“Fellow of the Theosophical Society”) used by the theosophists. For details on these figures, see Cantú (2021; 2022).

<sup>634</sup> Proctor reports about learning yoga and occult techniques from Mukerji in *Perpetual Youth: An Occult and Historical Romance* (1913: 28-31), which is also noted on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/self-culture/> (accessed April 26, 2021). Proctor also advertises The British Esoteric Society in the May and June 1914 issues of *The Kalpaka*, of which he was likely a member, evidencing again the occult transnational networks in which the Latent Light Culture participated.

<sup>635</sup> Both authors were evidently acquainted with theosophical literature. At least in Sivananda’s case it was certain that he drew on the teachings of the Latent Light Culture. In his work there are substantial overlaps regarding the theme of *ojas* and celibacy, and he additionally drew on Sanjivi’s correspondence course of 1929 (chapter 8.4.2). Sundaram’s employment of New Thought discourses like autosuggestion and mesmerism, which merge into a yogic-occult conception, could easily have been inspired by *The Kalpaka* as well (chapter 8.5.1).

*Advanced Course in Mental Sciences and Finer Forces* (1925) and “An English Translation of ‘Svarodaya’” as well as “Svarodaya: An Explanation of the Above Texts” (the latter two published from 1933 onwards in *The Kalpaka*), Sanjivi explicitly refers – in mostly disdainful ways – to Rama Prasad’s *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas* (1890), to Vivekananda’s *Râja Yoga* (1896), and Adelia Fletcher’s *The Law of Rhythmic Breath* (1908). All of these protagonists were highlighted in this thesis in chapter 5, because their cosmological frameworks for yogic breath cultivation were indeed seminal, a fact to which Sanjivi responds. In contrast to his dismissive attitude towards them, Sanjivi’s texts absorbed Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* (1904) as well as New Thought themes like magnetic healing. He makes both credited and uncredited use of the works of Blavatsky, whom he appraises as an accomplished occultist.

*The Kalpaka* exemplifies how themes of occultism like psychic research, suggestive therapeutics, and magnetic healing were received in South Asia and incorporated into yogic teachings. Moreover, Sanjivi understood yoga and tantra as inherently occult, and, for him, India was the cradle of occultism. Though infused with theosophical ideas, the focus of his correspondence lessons was entirely practical. Sanjivi acted mainly as the editor of *The Kalpaka* and author of correspondence courses that were based on secrecy obligations as known from secret societies and brotherhoods. He was therefore not as publicly visible as other transnational yogis, but was nevertheless influential. Sanjivi’s close collaborator was A. P. Mukerji, the author of *The Doctrine and Practice of Yoga* (1922) and a “Yogi of the South India Order” (as the title page of his book suggests). Mukerji himself may have been taught by K. T. Ramasami,<sup>636</sup> the editor of the journal *Self-Culture*, which was also based in Tinnevely. Although teaching similar topics by correspondence, Ramasami was less successful in his endeavours than Sanjivi and Mukerji.<sup>637</sup> The abovementioned Om Prakash Swami, along with Mukerji and Ramasami, were together designated as important exponents of South Indian yoga lineages, of which the journal considered itself to be a representative organ.

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<sup>636</sup> As suggested by John Patrick Deveney on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/self-culture/> (accessed Aug 13, 2020) and Proctor (1913: 28). Biographical data of Mukerji and Ramasami are as yet unavailable.

<sup>637</sup> As indicated by John Patrick Deveney on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/self-culture/> (accessed April 26, 2021).

### 9.1.1 Teaching Breath Cultivation by Correspondence: *Advanced Course* and *The Holy Order of Krishna*

The Latent Light Culture taught by correspondence from the outset, as multiple advertisements in *The Extract* (1907–1908) and in *The Kalpaka* (1908–) show.<sup>638</sup> The first correspondence course to be advertised in the January 1908 issue of *The Extract* was titled “India’s Hood Unveiled: Occult Mysteries Revealed”. The contents of this course were “Personal Magnetism, Hypnotism, Mesmerism, Suggestive Therapeutics, Psycho Therapeutics, Mind Reading, Telepathy, Magnetic Healing, Development of the Will, and Clairvoyance”.<sup>639</sup> Some editions of *The Kalpaka* additionally offered “Practical and simple ancient Hindu methods for Clairvoyance, Vayusthambam (Levitation) and Samadhi (Burial Alive) and Spirit Sight at Will”.<sup>640</sup> These lessons were not just ordered in India; some were plagiarised and sold as correspondence courses in the United States, a main case in point being L. W. de Laurence’s *India’s Hood Unveiled: South India Mysteries* (1910).<sup>641</sup>

One of Sanjivi’s later correspondence courses was titled *Advanced Course in Mental Sciences and Finer Forces* (1925).<sup>642</sup> Therein, the themes of magnetism, mind cure, distant healing, and the attainment of various *siddhis*, acquired by various yogic and occult techniques, persist. While chapter one “Prana: Or Life (Personal Magnetism)” introduces the reader to secrets of *prāṇa*, the remainder of the course teaches various forms of yoga and yoga-related themes in six chapters: “Ghata Yoga”, “Hata Yoga”, “Gnana Yoga”, “Laya Yoga”, “Bhakti Yoga”, and “The Chakras and Adharas”.<sup>643</sup>

In the first chapter, *prāṇa* is presented as the substance that makes up the *prāṇamaya koṣa* (“sheath made of *prāṇa*”) which is explained as a kind of aura

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<sup>638</sup> *The Extract* was the society’s journal that preceded *The Kalpaka*.

<sup>639</sup> As advertised in the January 1908 issue of *The Extract*.

<sup>640</sup> As advertised in the September 1908 issue of *The Kalpaka*.

<sup>641</sup> That de Laurence plagiarised the society’s correspondence courses is also suggested by John Patrick Deveney on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/kalpaka/> (accessed April 12, 2021).

<sup>642</sup> Henceforth *Advanced Course*. *The Kalpaka* of 1925 advertises the society’s correspondence course under this title. Already the January 1924 issue of *The Kalpaka* combines the title of the earliest correspondence course with the latest: “India’s Hood Unveiled! Occult Mysteries Revealed!! Our correspondence course in Mental Sciences and Finer Forces is the first and foremost of its kind ever published by anybody”. Although the phrase “finer forces” alludes to Rama Prasad, it is nowhere employed or explained in the entire course. However, W. J. Colville’s article in *The Kalpaka* “Finer Forces and Mental Sciences”, which does treat the subject, may have inspired the title of Sanjivi’s course (Colville 1910: 9). The first part of the title is most likely inspired by Ramacharaka’s *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy* (1905).

<sup>643</sup> Ghata yoga is derived from Sanskrit *ghaṭayoga* (“yoga of the physical body”), Hata Yoga, a typical South Indian spelling in the modern era, stands for *haṭhayoga* and Gnana Yoga for *jñānayoga*. The term *ādhāra* means *cakra*.

charged with *prāṇa*. As Sanjivi suggests, this aura also groups atoms around it that form the physical body. Thus, the *prāṇamaya koṣa* is linked to the physical body, which is fully permeated by *prāṇa* (*ibid.*: 3). This provides a framework for the practices presented in the course that aim to purify and “tame” *prāṇa*. In its untamed form *prāṇa* “is a force that eats up, destroys things, or rather destroys the appearance of things” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 4). In “scientific parlance”, this is linked to the process of “oxidation in the universe [which] is a constant, unceasing and unvarying factor” (*ibid.*). Sanjivi then gives a detailed outline of the *cakras* and the functions of the subtle body. The *cakras* are “centers of Prana”, forming a link between the subtle body, the physical body, and the mind (*ibid.*: 10). The solar plexus is described as the “abdominal brain” and “the great power-house, or storage battery, of vital force of physical energy” (*ibid.*: 8).

Chapter one also explains that, in their advanced form, the practices lead to *kuṇḍalinī* arousal. The rising energy of “nerve Pranic vibration” stored in the coccygeal gland, leads to awakening of the pineal gland, or “third eye” which is “the chief organ of spirituality, the seat of genius, the Magical sesame that uttered by the purified thought of the Yogins opens the vistas of infinitude” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 11). Moreover, yogic practice was also an alchemical process. Sanjivi suggests that all carbon in the body can be transformed into a diamond, or “Adamantine carbon star” (*vajrasattva*), which is perceivable and active in the *sūṣumnā* as the “life principle” (*jīva*) (*ibid.*: 13). Hence it is not surprising that Sanjivi describes *prāṇa*, by explicitly referring to Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* (1888), as “correspond[ing] to pure Air which if dissociated alchemically would yield the spirit of life and its elixir” (*ibid.*: 16).<sup>644</sup> As should be clear by now, much of Sanjivi’s description of subtle anatomy is based on theosophical credenda as well as – in the case of the solar plexus – on those of Atkinson. The alchemical parlance employed in Sanjivi’s text, including codewords like “personal magnetism”, probably also alludes to practices of sexual magic as found in Atkinson’s works (chapter 8.2.2) – which the members of the Latent Light Culture tended to link to tantric practices.<sup>645</sup>

<sup>644</sup> Sanjivi also makes uncredited use of a passage in *The Theosophist*, in which Blavatsky acknowledges the remarkable effect of hyperventilation as an anaesthetic prior to surgery (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 25-26; Blavatsky 1881: 72; chapter 4.3.3).

<sup>645</sup> Sanjivi’s collaborator Mukerji (1922: 58) plagiarises Atkinson’s lessons on drawing up and storing the reproductive energy in the solar plexus, as observed by John Patrick Deveney on <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/kalpaka/> (accessed April 26, 2020).

The second chapter introduces Ghata Yoga (from *ghaṭa* “pot”, here “physical body”), which is said to be preliminary to other forms of yoga. It is mainly concerned with purifying the *nāḍīs* through *prāṇāyāma*, which is an important prerequisite for *kuṇḍalinī* arousal. In teaching yogic breath cultivation, the chapter amalgamates Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s *The Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath* and Haṭhayoga. Exercises one to seven comprise the practical wisdom of Yogi Ramacharaka. First, one is advised to feel the rhythm of one’s pulse as a prerequisite for rhythmic breathing (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 18; Ramacharaka 1904: 52). The second exercise combines rhythmic breathing and Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s cleansing breath (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 19; Ramacharaka 1904: 40). Rhythmic breathing is described, as in Atkinson/Ramacharaka, in the ratio 6-3-6-3, and in its advanced form it helps to cast a “protective aura or Pranic force” around oneself (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 19; cf. Ramacharaka 1904: 61).<sup>646</sup> The “Nadi-Invigorator” is a perfect adoption of Ramacharaka’s “Nerve-Vitalizing Breath”; however, “nerve” was translated as “*nāḍī*” here (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 19-20; Ramacharaka 1904: 41). In this case, it is notable that Sanjivi transformed a yogi-styled practice originating from physical culture into one that is presented as even more yogic by taking up a key term of the subtle body. Next to Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s complete breath, alternate-nostril breathing is finally introduced as part of the first set of exercises, but regarding the latter Sanjivi’s description differs from Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 20-21). Being acquainted with alternate-nostril breathing as inherent to yoga traditions in which he saw himself placed, Sanjivi was clearly the expert in that.

In a second set of practices, the lessons on Ghata Yoga describe Haṭhayogic breathing techniques like *sūryabhedana*, *ujjāyī*, *śītalī*, and *bhastrikā* (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 23-25). All of these should be practised in a cross-legged sitting position like *sukhāsana* or *siddhāsana*. The course also prescribes *uḍḍiyānabandha* before exhalation to arouse *kuṇḍalinī*, as well as *khecarīmudrā* for “develop[ing] the latent powers of the Prana body” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 24, 43).<sup>647</sup> The “Prana body” is probably related to the *prāṇamaya koṣa* mentioned above. The final instructions in this chapter again echo Atkinson/Ramacharaka, by describing the “Grand Yogi Breath” as well as the “vocal developer” (*ibid.*: 30, 32; cf. Ramacharaka 1904: 67-68, 42).

<sup>646</sup> It is at times termed “rhythmic psychological breathing”, especially when combined with “imagination” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 27).

<sup>647</sup> *Khecarīmudrā* is described here as “retroversion of the tongue being directed to turn the uvula up” (*ibid.*: 119).

The remainder of the chapters will only briefly be touched upon here. Surprisingly, the third chapter, on “Hata Yoga” does not display a great affinity to Haṭhayoga insofar as it does not describe varieties of *prāṇāyāma* or *āsanas*. Instead, it seems to be more aligned with tantric practices focusing on the recitation of mantras (*japa*), *khecarīmudrā*, and the “Svara Shastra” (*svaraśāstra*, “the doctrine of *svara*”) (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 34, 43).<sup>648</sup> This chapter further proposes that the reader may become a “superman”, attaining the “power to create” (*ibid.*: 57), and other mental feats through visualisation techniques and autosuggestion (*ibid.*: 47-53). In general, the more advanced the lessons of this course, the more they indulge in topics like astral travel, lucid dreams, phreno-hypnotism, and various occult powers derived from yoga and magnetism.

The influence of New Thought practices as presented by Atkinson and others is particularly evident in the prominent role of the solar plexus in some practices. Relaxation is said to be aided by letting go of the solar plexus, which induces right breathing (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 27). It is also stated that mediums intuit through their solar plexuses, gesturing towards a theme that *prāṇa* was now conceived of as the subtle agent for psychic (i.e., clairvoyant) sensitivity (*ibid.*: 29).<sup>649</sup> The chapter that deals with the *cakras* describes *uḍḍiyānabandha*, which is to be alternated with a slight outward push of the abdominal muscles to vitalise the solar plexus (*ibid.*: 117, 119). The solar plexus is equated here with the *maṇipūrācakra*. Apart from highlighting “personal magnetism”, some chapters treat forms of magnetic healing like hands-on and distant healing (*ibid.*: 20, 77-80, 82-83). While some practices clearly adopt Atkinson’s language – employing *prāṇa* which is coloured by the thought of its sender (*ibid.*: 83) – others are reminiscent of the correspondence courses on magnetic healing arts written by Flower.<sup>650</sup> Although Sanjivi dismisses Adelia Fletcher’s *The Law of the Rhythmic Breath* (1908) in his commentary on the *Svarodaya* (see below), he nevertheless tacitly quotes from it, describing the benefits of the “held-breath” for various ailments (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 82-83; Fletcher 1908: 53, 90).

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<sup>648</sup> Sanjivi uses “Svara Sastra” synonymously with “Science of Breath” here, which points at the fact that Rama Prasad’s translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* as the “science of breath” was still influential. For more on his interpretation of the Svara Shastra, see below.

<sup>649</sup> The abovementioned article by W. J. Colville, “Finer Forces and Mental Sciences” sketches the magnetic person as particularly sensitive to the “mystic prana”, highlighting sensitivity as the pivotal point that, however, needs to be guarded wisely (Colville 1910: 7).

<sup>650</sup> Sanjivi describes the “closing of the circuit” necessary for the magnetic healer to restore their own energy, which is also found in Atkinson’s texts on magnetic healing and in *A Course of Instruction in Magnetic Healing* by [Flower] (1901b: 8). The second passage in Sanjivi (1929 [1925]: 80) mentions *prāṇa* as perceived in the body as “spirit movement”, a reference to *prāṇa* that I have found nowhere else except in [Flower] (1901a: 23).

When the correspondence course *The Holy Order of Krishna* was published, the Latent Light Culture underwent a significant change. While the *Advanced Course* relied on earlier lessons and was already being disseminated during 1925, the new correspondence course, with a stronger focus on things Indian, was advertised in *The Kalpaka* from 1929 onwards. Additionally, *The “Order of Krishna” Manifesto* was published in 1931 by the Latent Light Culture to make a case for the new organisational structure for initiates. The manifesto states that a secret order had taught the eternal doctrine of Krishna for millennia, which was first celebrated by Zoroaster’s followers in ancient Persia and then resurfaced in India in the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā* (Latent Light Culture 1931: 1). The perennial Indo-Aryan wisdom that the order both protects and teaches allegedly also lies at the base of several occidental esoteric groups like the Rosicrucians and the Templars (*ibid.*). The Latent Light Culture is only the latest public organ through which the Order of Krishna acts (*ibid.*: 2), and its teachings can be accessed through the twenty-four *Holy Order of Krishna* correspondence lessons. Moreover, these lessons were embedded in a system of grades inspired by freemasonry and its three craft degrees (Bogdan 2014: 180). The organisational structure of this course is an intriguing mix of teaching by correspondence and the hierarchical commitments of a secretive order. The lessons served the double purpose of helping the society to survive economically and building a hierarchy through grades of initiation that required study in secrecy (Latent Light Culture 1931: 3-4).

With its new correspondence course, the Latent Light Culture presented a programme that may be framed as “Indian Occultism”. Although Sanjivi did not apply this exact terminological phrase, it is implied in several statements. For example, in “Notes of the Month” of the September 1910 issue it is explained that India is the birthplace of occultism (Sanjivi & Mukerji 1910: 2). The subtitle of the new correspondence course even synonymised yoga and occultism: *The Holy Order of Krishna: Practical Instruction in Occultism (Yoga)*. In general, Sanjivi now focused on tantra, yoga, and the occult interpretation of Vaiṣṇava texts like the *Bhagavadgītā*, whereas, during the first twenty-five years of the society’s activities, he mainly relied on the teachings of American Occultism and New Thought. Rendering occultism as inherently Indian was not new, however, as tantra had already been presented as “Indian Occultism” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Drawing on earlier theosophists like Barada Kanta Majumdar, the phrase was promoted by Woodroffe and the joint translation project that acted under the name “Arthur Avalon” with the aim of rehabilitating tantra (Strube 2021a: 134, 140-141, 150). As for the

content of the new secretive correspondence course, it probably retains the core idea of promoting both yogic and occult practices. As the title of three lessons that introduce the reader to the first grade show, they also teach breath-related themes like “Life is not a Slave to the Breath”, “Prevention of the Flow of Prana”, and “Using the Breath Rhythm”.<sup>651</sup> They foreshadow Sanjivi’s Introduction to the Svāra Shāstra and yogic breath cultivation, as will be further expounded below.

Sanjivi’s legacy certainly became influential through the correspondence courses described above. Although their precise impact on a transnational scale is difficult to assess, it is certain that influential occultists such as Atkinson and Crowley knew and disseminated them in their own networks (Bogdan 2014: 198). The Latent Light Culture was headed by Sanjivi until his death in 1941. While Sanjivi did not appear to author many articles in the early issues of *The Kalpaka*, during the 1930s he published some profound essays in which he interpreted Sanskrit texts and thereby taught, as he was convinced, occult knowledge from its purest source. A major contribution is the translation of and commentary on the (*Śiva*-)*Svarodaya*. In these essays, Sanjivi both continues and opposes the legacy built by Rama Prasad and his influential “Nature’s Finer Forces” theme.

#### 9.1.2 Breath is *Not* Life: Sanjivi’s Commentary on the (*Śiva*-)*Svarodaya*

Life is *not* dependent on the act of breathing at all; this is *just* what the science of Yoga postulates; and this is exactly where Yoga has been misunderstood by those that take it that  
breath is life.

T. R. Sanjivi: *An English Translation of “Svarodaya”* (1942a: 1, his emphasis).

Sanjivi’s translation of the *Svarodaya*<sup>652</sup> together with his commentary first appeared in the January issue of *The Kalpaka* (1933) and continued to be treated in subsequent issues until 1935.<sup>653</sup> This commentary draws on Helena Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley, but sharply criticises Rama Prasad and Swami Vivekananda and, additionally, deconstructs their statements on *svāra*, *prāṇa*, and breath. Sanjivi’s main

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<sup>651</sup> As advertised in the April 1929 issue of *The Kalpaka*.

<sup>652</sup> Sanjivi refers to the text as the same one which was translated by Rama Prasad, i.e., the *Śivasvarodaya* (chapter 5.3). However, the portions translated by Sanjivi (1942a) appear to be only parts of the *Śivasvarodaya* as translated by Prasad.

<sup>653</sup> Personal conversation with Munish Kumar on Aug 10, 2020. However, I quote from a source collected from the Adyar Library that issued this text as a book. Unfortunately, the book format is undated, but Kumar asserted that it was first printed in 1942. This book has two parts with separate pagination, which are *An English Translation of “Svarodaya”* (1942a), and *Svarodaya: An Explanation of the Above Texts* (1942b).



critique is that Prasad and Vivekananda confused and thus obfuscated these breath-related Sanskrit terms. He further holds that their flawed concepts were subsequently displayed in the works of their followers, for example in Adelia Fletcher's *The Law of Rhythmic Breath* (Sanjivi 1942b: 2-4, 29). In brief, Sanjivi disagreed with most yogic-occult spokespersons who participated in the discourse of *prāṇa*: it is not synonymous with life, nor is life dependent on breath (Sanjivi 1942a: 1). Simultaneously, he points at the missed opportunity of theosophists as well as Vivekananda and his followers – in the course of the “Great Hindu revival” induced by them – to establish a “clear Svara Shastra” (Sanjivi 1942b: 13). Instead, they left everyone interested in *svara* or *prāṇa* (i.e., literally the entire yoga community of the twentieth-century, as could be argued) in great confusion (*ibid.*).

Consequently, Sanjivi's commentary aims to undo some of these errors. The author expands on the anthropological level of these misunderstood notions, while he studiously avoids cosmological considerations about them. He first clarifies that each Sanskrit term is not interchangeable with others and that their respective meanings can only be determined in a given context. All Sanskrit terms explained by Sanjivi are therefore only relevant in the context of *Svarodaya*, which expounds the Svara Shastra. Contrary to Prasad, he does not translate *svara* as “breath” or “breath of God”, but as “tone”, or “note” (Sanjivi 1942b: 9). Each individual is marked by a different *svara* that is to be “heard” or studied through the Svara Shastra, its main tool being the study of breath (*śvāsa*).<sup>654</sup> The *nāḍīs* and the *svara* that flows therein together constitute the *śarīra*, or human “form”, which is often wrongly understood as the “physical body” (*ibid.*: 9-10).

As to the role of *prāṇa*, it can again only be studied and regulated through the breath, but it differs from breath and *svara*. *Prāṇa* is hidden away behind the *śvāsa*,<sup>655</sup> and it can be observed in the alternation of breath in the nostrils and in the various functions of the five bodily winds (Sanjivi 1942b: 26, 45). *Prāṇa* is marked as a subtle entity which possesses form and lies in between matter and idea: “It is not matter, *na sat* [‘it is not’]; nor is it an Idea, *na asat* [‘it is not non-existent’, M.K.]; it has a form, the form of the exhaled breath” (Sanjivi 1942b: 48).<sup>656</sup> Pushing the idea that *prāṇa* is

<sup>654</sup> Sanjivi states that the exact meaning of the term *śvāsa* (“breath”) is “that which is one's sister, born with one, that which dies with the body” (Sanjivi 1942b: 26).

<sup>655</sup> Sanjivi refers here to the Sanskrit *śvāsa antah stitah prāṇah* (“The breath stands in front of *prāṇa*”, my translation), but does not specify, where this verse is found.

<sup>656</sup> The notion of the breath having a specific form may be linked to the idea that the shape of the outbreath (e.g., a triangle or a halfmoon; each form is produced by the ruling *tattva* or “element”) project itself onto a mirror if held at the right distance and angle (Sanjivi 1942b: 28-29).

oxidation further, Sanjivi holds that *prāṇa* is not life but death and the destroyer of living matter (*ibid.*: 38; 1942a: 1). Breathing itself is a sign of “waste”, and disease is the “accumulation of filth and dirt” from this wasting process (*ibid.*). Sanjivi then concludes that “in the true Hindu Yogi Science of the Breath” *prāṇa* is not an eternal cosmic energy, but it is the “*content* of the Breath as it *is exhaled*” (Sanjivi 1942b: 48, his emphasis), which again points at *prāṇa* as linked to the waste product of carbon dioxide expelled in the out-breath. Although Sanjivi’s understanding of *prāṇa* may be peculiar, it is not without precedents. A similar view of *prāṇa* that highlights the role of both carbon dioxide and *prāṇa* as related to the out-breath has been posited by N. C. Paul (chapter 6.3). While the idea that *prāṇa* “eats up” and “destroys things” is not a common one, the idea of *prāṇa* as the “eater” of living matter was also posited by some Vedic texts (Bodewitz 1992: 55). This was a way to express *prāṇa*’s superiority (i.e., the role of *prāṇa* as a “king” or “ruler”) over other life functions that merged into *prāṇa* at the time of death (*ibid.*).

At the level of practice, Sanjivi explains that through careful observation of the breath the yogi counteracts the functions of decay. He even may turn the body’s carbon into a diamond, as has been mentioned. For all these alchemical processes, *prāṇāyāma* as taught in the Svara Shastra is crucial. It provides the means to “cure yourself of diseases and the tendency to diseases by regularising the breath” (Sanjivi 1942b: 48). After observing the breath, which helps one to become aware of one’s habitual breathing pattern,<sup>657</sup> one trains the organism to accept any breathing rhythm (or *mātrā*) as suggested by various Haṭha texts (*ibid.*: 25).<sup>658</sup> Thus, “we arrive at the understanding of the true Breath [...], the Will Breath or Vaashi that is the Sva [the “self”, M.K.] of the Shvaasa” (*ibid.*: 25-26).<sup>659</sup> Indeed, the aim of the Svara Shastra is that “the Sva or self” becomes the master over the breath and not vice versa (*ibid.*: 27).

As mentioned, a good portion of the text consists of interpreting the *Svarodaya* against the backdrop of Prasad’s work, which is harshly criticised. Prasad had interpreted the *Śivasvarodaya* as a text that reveals correspondences between the

<sup>657</sup> The *Advanced Course* makes the interesting observation that the “Breath is a habit” (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 18).

<sup>658</sup> The Haṭha texts listed by Sanjivi are the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the *Śivasamhitā*, the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, the *Gorakṣasamhitā*, and the *Yogayājñavalkya*. He also refers to the *Saundaryalaharī* in both the *Advanced Course* and the *Svarodaya* commentary (Sanjivi 1929 [1925]: 117; Sanjivi 1942b: 31). For details on the *Saundaryalaharī* which is part of the South Indian Śrī Vidyā school, see Golovkova (2012).

<sup>659</sup> Vaashi or, in Sanskrit, *vāṃśī* (a term frequently used in South India) is a flute made of bamboo, but the term can also denote “breath” (personal conversation with Keith Cantú, Nov 6, 2020; cf. Cantú 2022; Monier-Williams 1899: 935). Previously Blavatsky (1980 [1890]: 615) had employed the term “will breath” and stated that its control is the aim of the Rāja yogi.

microcosm and the macrocosm by an analysis of the breath flow that displays the ruling *tattva* in any given moment (chapter 5.3.1). Thereby, he links this “science of breath” – in Prasad’s work a synonym for *svarajñāna* (lit. “the knowledge of *svara*”) – to both astrology and divination. Although Sanjivi certainly highlights the importance of breath cultivation, he opposes that the Svara Shastra does not offer a technique of divination or prognostication, nor are macrocosmic phenomena influenced by manipulating one’s breath (Sanjivi 1942b: 27, 30-31). Prasad’s interpretation is therefore a “pack of cards that is [...] built into a house” (*ibid.*: 17). In contrast, Sanjivi holds that determining the cycle of the *tattvas* only serves the purpose of revealing the individual’s constitution, which may indicate disease in any given moment (*ibid.*: 18).

In brief, the South Indian occultist heavily polemises against obfuscating details as found in Prasad’s texts. However, he is even more offensive towards Vivekananda’s understanding of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*, and, as the above description of the “Will Breath” has shown, Sanjivi’s instruction indeed diverts from Vivekananda’s. Vivekananda was aware of *svarodaya* techniques, but never referred to a textual source of these practices (chapter 5.4.2). The fact that Sanjivi nevertheless incorporates Vivekananda in his commentary on the *Svarodaya* shows that Sanjivi ultimately perceived the discourses around *svara* and *prāṇa* as interrelated. He could not neglect that Vivekananda had laid out influential theories on the latter. However, for Sanjivi, the conflation of the swami are “inexcusable”, and Vivekananda’s chapter “The Psychic Prana” in *Rāja Yoga* is cited at length, the plain reason for this being to “state its inherent dangers” (Sanjivi 1942b: 17-20).<sup>660</sup> Indeed, Vivekananda’s techniques for *kuṇḍalinī* arousal are nothing but detrimental (*ibid.*: 23), and his idea that *prāṇa* is the muscular power that moves the lungs makes *prāṇāyāma* appear to be “after all gymnastics” (*ibid.*: 42). In “correcting Vivekananda’s airy statements”, Sanjivi further dissects the swami’s notion of *prāṇa* as “eternal” energy that is said to produce evolution and involution (*ibid.*: 40, 42). That the “control of the Praana [*sic*] that exists through eternity” should be likened to *prāṇāyāma*, as Vivekananda suggests, “is rather childish” (*ibid.*: 42).

Sanjivi’s polemics amount to an overall critique of the contemporaneous modern yoga scene. “Gentlemen” like Kuvalayananda are advised to not disclose their knowledge of yoga (if they possess any), since that would result in dangerous

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<sup>660</sup> For example, Sanjivi holds that Vivekananda’s instruction lacks the important information that any strain in imposing a certain rhythm on the breath is to be avoided (*ibid.*: 20).

misguidance of the public (Sanjivi 1942b: 6-7). As Sanjivi makes clear, *prāṇāyāma* has nothing to do with “gymnastics”, “breathing exercises”, or “physical culture” (*ibid.*: 26, 42). However, this also marks a discontinuity with the practices presented in the *Advanced Course*, including those of Atkinson/Ramacharaka, which were in turn markedly influenced by the physical-culture movement.

Misled by the works of Prasad, Vivekananda, and Kuvalayananda, the adept does well to consult Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* (1888), Ouspensky’s *Tertium Organum* (1912), and the works of Aleister Crowley (Sanjivi 1942b: 20-23, 29). Sanjivi advises the average modern-day students of occultism and yoga – Westerners and Easterners alike – to study *prāṇāyāma* as found in Crowley’s *Equinox* series, taught to him by a “Madurai guru” (*ibid.*: 20).<sup>661</sup> In his “Liber E vel Exercitiorum” (1909), Crowley indeed recommends practising *prāṇāyāma* in a ratio that gradually builds up, always taking into account the progress that is made before the ratio is increased in length and complexity (Crowley 1909: 29). Crowley emphasises the importance of practising without strain, but simultaneously aiming for “depth, fullness, and regularity of breathing” (Crowley as quoted in Sanjivi 1942b: 21; cf. Crowley 1909: 29). That the practices are always practised to their fullest can also be seen in Crowley’s own practice as documented in his “Liber RV vel Spiritus” (1912) (figure 24).<sup>662</sup> The “remarkable phenomena” that result from this practice include sweating, tremor, and jumping into the air in a seated position, which ultimately leads to levitation (Crowley as quoted in Sanjivi 1942b: 21-22).<sup>663</sup> The most advanced practices of suppressing the breath may lead to *samādhi*, or, alternatively, to oblivion (Crowley as quoted in Sanjivi 1942b: 22-23).

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<sup>661</sup> There is some controversy as to whether Crowley studied yoga in Madurai in the 1910s and as to the persons who may have informed his practice or taught him. A person who likely taught/informed Crowley is Swami Karunananda (Bogdan 2014: 186-187). It is, however, certain that Crowley learned yoga in Ceylon (nowadays Sri Lanka) (Djurdjevic 2014: 37).

<sup>662</sup> The explanatory text to the photographs states that the “bad definition of the image is due to the spasmodic trembling which accompanies the action” (Crowley 1912: 62).

<sup>663</sup> These *siddhis* and advanced practices described below are not discussed in Crowley’s *Liber E*. I was unable to trace these passages attributed to Crowley. However, they have precedents, for example, in the *Śivasamhitā* 3.39–42 (Basu 2004 [1887]: 29).

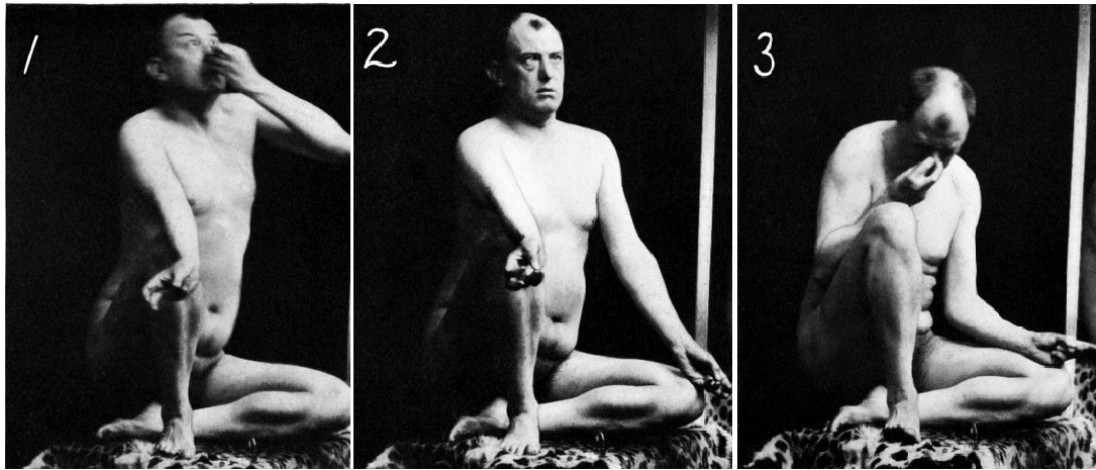


FIGURE 24: CROWLEY PERFORMING “PRAMAYAMA [sic]: 1. THE END OF PURAKAM [sic]; 2. KUNBHAKAM [sic]. 3. THE END OF REKAKAM [sic]” (CROWLEY 1912: 62).

Sanjivi’s motive for uplifting Blavatsky, Atkinson, and Crowley was probably to establish a lineage of “true” occultism vis-à-vis the teachings presented by other yogic-occult predecessors, whom he scathingly dismisses. In any case, his *Svarodaya* provides a discursive node that ties several influential voices together. Sanjivi is certainly right that both Vivekananda’s and Prasad’s ideas were highly influential and handed down to subsequent modern yoga pioneers. Although others have found Vivekananda’s view to be doubtful, Sanjivi is arguably the voice that offers the clearest criticism of Vivekananda, and he consistently swims against the tide here. Sanjivi’s critique of Prasad is equally rigid, and mainly based on the argument that *prāṇāyāma* is relevant exclusively to the human being, having no cosmological relevance or divinatory capacities at all.<sup>664</sup> While his own premises on *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* appear to be unique, they should be credited for preciseness, refinement, and a thorough investigation of source texts. Though mainly acting in a secretive underground, Sanjivi echoes the voices of yoga-cum-occultism that so prominently shaped the field of yogic breath cultivation from the outset. His text also shows that these voices were still vibrant in the 1930s.

### 9.1.3 Summary

Sanjivi’s ties to the English-speaking occult circles were extensive. His journal and correspondence courses reached – via diverse pathways – a broad audience in the United States and Britain. His indebtedness to Atkinson is enormous, and the latter indeed appears to be an initiating spark for successful correspondence courses in the

<sup>664</sup> However, that *svarodaya* practices were used for prognostication is clearly attested in premodern texts, as in the fifth chapter of the *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra (Qvarnström 2012: 164-236).

United States, India, and Europe. Though never fully lost, the traces of the yogic-occult endeavour of Atkinson and the like were even influential on the yoga scene of the 1950s and 1960s which, however, extricated itself gradually from the occultist milieu, for example in Desmond Dunne's work (Jain 2015: 41; Newcombe 2019: 49; Kraler forthcoming). Atkinson was likely the initial spark for a jargon and literary genre that addressed the reader in a somewhat personal way and benefited from the transforming impact of American-style magical New Thought. As Sanjivi's *Advanced Course* reflects, Atkinson's broad understanding of yogic breath cultivation includes hands-on and distant healing, but also seemingly disparate themes like health, casting a protective aura, and sexual magic. These themes are complemented by Sanjivi through his references to *prāṇāyāma* that produces alchemical transubstantiation, the yogi's ability to "deceive time" (so as to live eternally),<sup>665</sup> and magical feats such as levitation. What was already yoga- and *siddhi*-inspired in Atkinson/Ramacharaka now became significantly extended by the knowledge and means offered by Sanjivi.

Sanjivi's *Kalpaka*, however, cannot be held solely responsible for the spread of yogic-occult ideas in India. Other journals in a similar mould were *The Brahmavâdin*, published from 1895 onwards by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras; the *Hindu Spiritual Magazine*, published by Motilal Ghose in Calcutta from 1906 onwards; and the aforementioned South Indian *Self-Culture*, published by Ramasami from 1909 onwards. Especially *Self-Culture* and *The Hindu Spiritual Magazine* were packed with occultist ideas, and they evidence almost infinite ways to weave together occult and yogic strands.

## 9.2 Yoga, Occultism, and the Arts: A Note on Stanislavski's Theory of Acting and *Prāṇa*

I have no desire to prove whether Prana really exists or not. My sensations may be purely individual to me, the whole thing may be the fruit of my imagination.

Constantin Stanislavski: *An Actor Prepares* (2003 [1936]: 215).

Regarding the intertwined paths of yoga and occultism, a final spotlight is now thrown on the *prāṇa*-related theory and practice of the famous actor Constantin Stanislavski (1863–1938). While this move may come as a surprise, the connecting thread, once more, is Yogi Ramacharaka. Although the section above was partly concerned with

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<sup>665</sup> The theme of "deceiving time" is posited in Sanjivi (1942b: 28).

the reception of Atkinson's teachings in India, it also highlighted the discursive battle that negotiations about yogic breath cultivation sometimes induced. Atkinson's prolific work disseminated through his yogi persona certainly paid off. Although much of the influence that Atkinson gained came to fruition after his death in 1932 (Deslippe 2011; 2019), the main protagonists highlighted in chapter 9 – Sanjivi and Stanislavski – drew from Atkinson.

Yogic and occult breath cultivation in the field of the arts would certainly deserve a thorough analysis by itself. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this study, Constantin Stanislavski's seminal theory of acting involving *prāṇa* is treated here as a case study of how yogic-occult discourse influenced the performing arts. In doing so, I mainly draw on the insights of White (2006), a pioneering study to examine Stanislavski's involvement in yoga. While Stanislavski's mission was ultimately devoted to the stage, preparation for performance included forms of self-cultivation that drew in part on Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's techniques. In fact, the American yogi's writings had both theoretical and practical significance for the artist. In Stanislavski's theory of acting, *prāṇa* is ascribed a certain function, which is linked to the actor's identity and simultaneously aligns him with the role he is playing. Additionally, *prāṇa* becomes a medium for the actor's communication with the audience. Here, *prāṇa* once more turns into a kind of force-substance, charged with attention, that is projected to reach the audience.

In practice, this meant that Stanislavski would teach his students to “send ‘prana’ rays of communion into the space and to each other” (White 2006: 79). The role model here is the yogi as mediated by Atkinson/Ramacharaka. The actor, completely assimilating his role, finds himself in *samādhi* (*ibid.*: 87). For Atkinson/Ramacharaka, this was the state of “I AM”, which is “the consciousness of one's identity with the Universal life” (Ramacharaka as quoted in *ibid.*). Stanislavski likewise opined that “I am” is the mantra for the “actor's communion with the role” (White 2006: 87). As has been shown, oneness with the universe is a crucial soteriological outlook that Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's yoga provides. Stanislavski, then, assures us that this is a state “which brings all *prana* together into one” (Stanislavski as quoted in *ibid.*). The actor's focused attention coincides with yogic practice, amounting to a state in which the actor would “let the self take care of itself” (Atkinson as quoted in *ibid.*: 85). This principle is also applied in Stanislavski's famous technique of the “Circles of Attention”, which helps to cope with the actor's

self-consciousness in “public solitude” through increased attention and concentration (*ibid.*; Tcherkasski 2016: 91).<sup>666</sup>

Stanislavski’s (and Ramacharaka’s) approach to yoga was attested to be watered-down by Nikolai Roerich (1874–1947) and Helena Roerich (1879–1955), a theosophical couple who were active in Russia and who founded Agni Yoga (White 2006: 82-83; Baier forthcoming). This, however, neglects the fact that several strands of modern yoga have been influenced by precisely the same author from whom Stanislavski drew. In light of this, Stanislavski’s understanding of yoga is as original as the interpretation of yogic breath cultivation in light of the influence of yogis like Atkinson can be. Stanislavski’s theory of expression charged with attention and oneness through *prāṇa* may even point back at another occult predecessor, the influential Genevieve Stebbins, who was an actress herself. After all, she would probably agree with Stanislavski’s premise that his success on stage was “the fruit of [his] imagination” (Stanislavski 2003 [1936]: 215). In both Stebbins’s and Stanislavski’s view, acting is turning imagination into expression through voice and movement that is carried by breath.

Indeed, Stanislavski’s preoccupation with *prāṇa* may point at a discourse that predates Atkinson/Ramacharaka and even Stebbins. The orator enthraling the audience through magnetism is a theme that was formulated as early as the 1790s in the context of the French Revolution (Fulford 2004). Until the late nineteenth century, musings about the “orator [who] can magnetize the crowd” (Wilson 1882: 226) reflect the multiple nuances that magnetism could adopt during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Atkinson, in fact, tied on to sources that combined “personal magnetism” and rhetorical skills, which is the case, for example, with Atkinson’s predecessor Shaftesbury (chapter 8.2.2). Additionally, Atkinson explicitly equated the mesmeric fluidum with *prāṇa*. As has become apparent, *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent could be used for a variety of purposes – for example, to give a shiny performance on stage. Fascinatingly, this was precisely what Stanislavski gathered from Yogi Ramacharaka’s teachings: harnessing *prāṇa* as an essential practice for both the yogi and the orator.

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<sup>666</sup> In applying “Circles of Attention”, the actor first focuses on the “Small Circle” (the space that encompasses their own head and hands), then on the “Medium Circle” (the actor and the close environment), then on the “Large Circle” (the stage), and finally the “Largest Circle” (stage and auditorium) (Merlin 2003: 50). This could also be translated into the way the actor “guides” the audience, e.g., from barely audible sounds to the resonant voice of an actor to the silence between the verbal interactions (*ibid.*: 96).



I briefly touched upon Stanislavski here because his concept of *prāṇa* comes full circle to one of the many themes addressed in this study. It points at the agency of *prāṇa* on various levels by connecting to oneself and others. Stanislavski's circles of attention, involving a stage and an audience, loop back to the technologies of the self in yoga – a self that acts upon itself. So far, this chapter has highlighted two protagonists that echoed the work of Atkinson/Ramacharaka. These echoes lead us to the question of the further dissemination of the discursive strands dealt with in this thesis, of which a necessarily brief overview is now provided.

### 9.3 Outlook: Developments of Yogic Breath Cultivation in the 1930s and after the Second World War

#### 9.3.1 An Overview of the 1930s in the United States and Europe

At a much faster pace, I now present some salient texts for yogic breath cultivation in North America and Europe in the 1930s. Additionally, some crucial publications after the Second World War that appeared in the United States, Europe, and India are discussed. Since these were not only yogic-occult in nature, this section departs from a narrower focus on occultism in relation to yogic breath cultivation, which was the main theme above. After a discussion of Stebbins and Atkinson in chapter 8.2, chapter 8 has turned entirely to South Asian yoga pioneers, though partly operating in the United States. A few more South Asian yogis that were active in the United States should briefly be mentioned. Besides Paramahansa Yogananda's prominent yogi persona, also "Super-Akasha" Yogi Wassan and Bhagwan Singh Gyanee gained public attention (Deslippe 2018). However, in terms of *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation their contribution is marginal since they mainly drew on bodybuilding discourses as well as techniques found in Yogananda and Atkinson/Ramacharaka (Singleton 2010: 140-141).

The works of some North American authors were widely read in the period in which South Asians were prohibited from entering the United States and the growing yoga community lacked teachers (Melton 1990: 504). One of these studies was Kovoort T. Behanan's *Yoga: A Scientific Evaluation* (1937), which has already been treated in chapter 8.3.1. Another case in point is *Yoga Explained* (1937) by Francis Yeats-Brown (1886–1944). Yeats-Brown appears to have been generally well-informed about yoga and *prāṇāyāma*, but he advocated not only yoga but also fascism, as Imy (2016) suggests. Yeats-Brown learnt yoga from Pierre Bernard (c. 1875–1955) in 1924 and

1925, but he had also studied yoga in India before the First World War (Imy 2016: 336). His 1937 book mainly recommends three forms of *prāṇāyāma* and describes them in detail: (1) *bhastrikā*, which he defines as rapid exhalations, leaning forward during exhalation and straightening the spine during inhalation; (2) alternate-nostril breathing in the ratio 1-4-2, here also termed “rhythmic breathing”; and (3) *bhrāmarī prāṇāyāma* which is described as producing a “droning sound” with “vibration [that] is started in the mouth, and carried eventually through the bones” (Yeats-Brown 1952 [1937]: 72-79). The author also prescribes performing *yonī mudrā* and meditating on the sound “so ham”.<sup>667</sup> Both techniques are mentioned in the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* 3.37–44 and 5.83 (Vasu 1895: 22-23, 45). Yeats-Brown also seems to be aware of *svarodaya* teachings and shows a general interest in tantric practices including Kali worship (Yeats-Brown 1952 [1937]: 124-136).

Another work published in the same year by the Frenchmen Felix Guyot (pseud., C. Kerneiz, b. 1880) should be briefly addressed.<sup>668</sup> Guyot’s *Yoga: Science of Health* (1937), originally published in French as *Le Hatha Yoga*, treats *prāṇāyāma* in the chapters “The Pranayama or Science of Breathing” and “The Exercises of Pranayama” (Guyot 1937: 76-121). The former features the “Pranic body”, highlights the “positive and negative” polarisation of *prāṇa* through *piṅgalā* and *idā*, and explains the importance of breath for nourishing the subtle body. Preferably, one should “insulate” oneself from negative energies before practice by sitting on “non-conducting” materials such as a white woollen blanket; this is said to be the reason yogis practise *prāṇāyāma* on deer skin or tiger skin (*ibid.*: 99-100). This shows that Guyot continues earlier equations of *prāṇa* and electromagnetic energy and builds a logic for practice on these premises. In a mix of references to Prasad’s positive and negative breath currents and Catlin’s “Shut Your Mouth” motto (chapter 5.3; chapter 8.2.2), Guyot recurs on various themes in the history of yogic breath cultivation. He also gives recommendations on how to balance the breath flow in the nostrils, instructions for “nasal hygiene”, and how to breathe “slowly, rhythmically and completely” which should be combined with mental calmness (*ibid.*: 84-89). This translates into the practical exercises of yogic breath cultivation: since “Prana is extremely sensitive to the suggestion of the will”, one should always practise with focused attention (*ibid.*: 97). Hence, practice starts with witnessing the breath in a lying

<sup>667</sup> Meditating on *so ’ham* and practising *yonimudrā* in order to listen to inward sounds is also found in the “concentration lessons” of Yogananda (1925: 18-21). See also chapter 8.4.1.

<sup>668</sup> Generally, modern yoga literature in French is quite under-studied, the only pertinent study being Ceccomori (2001).

position (*ibid.*: 102-103). Ten further exercises are combined with standing and squatting positions as well as movements of the limbs in the style of Atkinson/Ramacharaka, on whom Guyot at least partly draws. His outline therefore owes more to turn-of-the-century deep-breathing discourses than to inherently yogic techniques, but he nevertheless utilises (as did many others before him) the label yoga for his system.

In *The Yoga System of Health* (1939), Yogi Vithaldas (1911–1989), who taught in Berlin during the 1930s, aspires to gain mastery over *prāṇa* (or “Form Force”) through “the science of *Prāṇāyāma*” (Vithaldas 1960 [1939]: 61-64). This reminds on Vivekananda, whom he cites, but he also refers to the “great Chinese sage” Lu Tzu to expound the relation between the breath and the mind (*ibid.*: 63-64). Vithaldas then continues to explain several *prāṇāyāma* techniques like *kapālabhāti*, *bhastrikā*, *sītkārī*, *śītalī*, as well as alternate-nostril breathing by (at least in part) tacitly borrowing from Kuvalayananda (*ibid.*: 73-82).

All these texts were available and read in the United States and Europe. In contrast, the anglophone works by South Asian yogis that appeared in the late 1920s and 1930s (such as Kuvalayananda’s, Yogendra’s, Sivananda’s, or Sundaram’s) were printed in India and had only a limited circulation in the United States (Melton 1990: 504). The same probably holds true for European countries. The influence of the abovementioned authors is therefore significant and relevant for post-war developments.

### 9.3.2 Developments after the Second World War in the United States, Europe, and India

Moving on to post-war developments, some publications are highlighted here due to their popularity and impact on the learning and teaching of yogic breath cultivation. They draw on features of the ten main protagonists of modern yoga discussed in this thesis (Stebbins included), but also introduce some new ones. These developments will be sketched here in light of *prāṇāyāma* discourses prevalent before the Second World War. I will first provide an overview of publications printed in the United States and then proceed with those in Europe and India.

The first watershed publication in these contexts is *Haṭha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* by Theos Bernard (1908–1947). He was awarded a PhD for this text in 1943, and the work was first published in book form in 1944. However, the book’s impact, translated into several languages, gained impact in the 1950s and

1960s,<sup>669</sup> a time-span which is often considered the beginning of the second wave of yoga in America and Europe. Bernard claimed that he had learnt Haṭhayoga from a guru in Ranchi, then Greater Bangla, India (Bernard 1944: vii). Although there is some debate as to whether this information is correct,<sup>670</sup> Bernard's text appears to be a detailed autoethnography of studying yoga including *prāṇāyāma*. Bernard's insider perspective reveals details of his *prāṇāyāma* experience, which include, after warming up with *bhastrikā*, holding the breath for up to four minutes during ten sequential rounds of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 31). To extend the phases of *kumbhaka*, Bernard also applied *khecarīmudrā*, which he describes as "swallowing the tongue" (*ibid.*). In short, the practice explained is more intense than most of what modern yoga pioneers suggested in their yoga manuals (and who moreover barely reported on their personal experience or progress).<sup>671</sup> His account has often been credited as conveying authentic Haṭhayoga. For example, Sjoman (1999 [1996]: 38) praises it for being "virtually the only documentation of a practice tradition" containing "traditional oral teaching". However, as Alter (2004: 23) has noted "the paucity of any clear history of practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should raise a red flag of sorts concerning the putative antiquity of everything that is now counted as Haṭha Yoga". In any case, Bernard's insider perspective is certainly a valid one for studying the varied paths of *prāṇāyāma* in the modern period.

The scholarly treatise *Yoga: The Method of Reintegration* (1949) by the Frenchman Alain Danielou (1907–1994) contrasts with Bernard's practical approach. In dealing with *prāṇāyāma*, Danielou draws on several premodern texts, most notably the *Yogasūtra*, the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*, the *Śivasaṃhitā*, and the Yoga Upaniṣads (Danielou 1949: 57-59). His interpretation of Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma*, which describes the breath as becoming *dīrgha-sūkṣma* (i.e., "long and subtle") (*Yogasūtra* 2.50) is peculiar. It holds that *dīrgha* is "deep" (not "long") breathing (by breathing into the navel), whereas *sūkṣma* is "light" breathing (by breathing into the chest or throat) (*ibid.*: 59). To correlate the concept of *dīrgha-sūkṣma* with specific breath spaces is idiosyncratic, but, also among South Asian interlocutors in the twentieth century, it is

<sup>669</sup> His book was also widely circulated in Britain at that time (Newcombe 2019: 29, 34).

<sup>670</sup> Hacket (2012b) mentions several yoga gurus that Theos and his father Glen met during their travels in India, including Yogendra and Kuvalayananda. Additionally, Theos had learnt yoga from his father in the 1930s while studying law and philosophy in Arizona. Hacket indicates that many of the "autobiographical" details presented in Bernard's work in fact either reflect his father's life (Hacket 2012b: 461, n. 23) or are fictitious (Hacket 2012a: 355).

<sup>671</sup> The only other text that specifically highlights *prāṇāyāma* and personal experience that I have encountered is Behanan's autoethnography of 1937 mentioned above.

not uncommon to interpret Patañjali's doctrine of prolonged (*dīrgha*) breathing as "deep breathing".<sup>672</sup>

The Russian expatriate Indra Devi (born Eugenie Peterson, 1899–2002) is also among the few authors to reveal first-hand accounts of learning yoga including *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>673</sup> In *Forever Young, Forever Healthy* (1953), the yogini reflects on her journey to India where she studied with Kuvalayananda and Krishnamacharya in the 1930s. Teaching in Hollywood from the 1950s onwards, her books became widely popular. Since Krishnamacharya discouraged her from teaching *prāṇāyāma*, Devi instead advises practising the easier and safer method of deep breathing, to which she devotes a whole chapter in her 1953 book (Devi 1953: 28-41). The prescribed exercises, which involve rhythmic breathing as well as movements of the limbs, closely resemble Stebbins's and Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's instructions (*ibid.*: 40-41, 168-169). In general, Devi echoes the deep-breathing discourses that infused yogic breath cultivation at the turn of the century. Meanwhile, however, voices in the broader scene of body and breath work had risen that discredit the alleged benefits of overexaggerated deep breathing. Such new ideas are found, for example, in Mable E. Todd's *The Thinking Body* (1937), which was widely read (but probably not by Devi). It states that "in the tidal air of quiet breathing there is all the oxygen needed for the use of the individual under ordinary circumstances" (Todd 2008 [1937]: 240-241). Like other yoga protagonists of her time, Devi does not address this new development.

Right on the heels of her books, another yoga author who was active in the 1950s and 1960s gained much attention: the Irishman James Lee-Richardson (b. 1913), who wrote under the pseudonym Desmond Dunne (Newcombe 2019: 44-49). His contributions were, like Devi's, on the threshold between occult and secular yoga. Dunne followed Atkinson's lead by becoming a highly successful author of correspondence courses that were turned into several influential publications (Dunne 1951; 1956; 1978 [1961]). In terms of breath cultivation, he includes rhythmic breathing and the "Grand Yogi Psychic Breath" in his courses, among other familiar features of the New Thought and physical-culture discourses (Kraler forthcoming). In mimicking Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's parlance to address his Western students, Dunne adopts much of his predecessor's holistic programme for open-ended self-development as inspired by New Thought sentiments.

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<sup>672</sup> See, for example, the practice of "Dheergha Swasa Kriya" on <https://himalayanyoganepal.com/science-of-one-nostril-breathing-and-pranayama/> (accessed Jan 23, 2021). See also chapter 7.2.

<sup>673</sup> For a detailed discussion of Devi's work, see Goldberg (2016: 338-363).

With their base in Switzerland, Hungarian-born Elisabeth Haich (1897–1994) and South Indian Selvarajan Yesudian (1916–1998) also contributed to the European yoga landscape in mid-twentieth-century. One of the couple’s first books was *Yoga and Health* (1953), which was highly successful and also circulated in Great Britain (Newcombe 2019: 34). The illustrated manual features five full chapters on *prāṇāyāma* and breath-related themes. First, the modern Western man is diagnosed as breathing too shallowly (Haich & Yesudian 1954 [1953]: 48-57). In echoing Vivekananda, yoga is, once again, presented as spiritually superior Eastern remedy for an inferior and unbalanced West. The authors then describe “Complete Breathing” *sensu* Ramacharaka, including the threefold division of breath space and recommendation to breathe through the nose (*ibid.*: 58-70). Informed by New Thought, the authors highlight autosuggestion and right thinking as part of yogic breath cultivation (*ibid.*: 55-56). Deep breathing and yogi breathing cures one from colds and catarrhs, tuberculosis, masturbation (a sign of fearfulness), and overindulgence in sex (an indicator of an inferiority complex) (*ibid.*: 65-66). These outcomes reflect the inherently hygienic themes that predate the couple’s work. While several predecessors from whom they adopted techniques remain unnamed (among these, Stebbins, Ramacharaka, and Sivananda, *ibid.*: 115-127), they explicitly draw on Kuvalayananda’s research project in referring to further physiological benefits of *prāṇāyāma* (*ibid.*: 52, 65, 67). A new element is the advice to practise Haṭha techniques like *ujjāyī*, *kapālabhāti*, and *bhastrikā* (as described in Kuvalayananda’s *Prāṇāyāma*) in a standing position. The practical instructions for approximately twenty breathing exercises list the “therapeutic” and “psychic effects” of each practice. In summary, the book reflects a quite typical range of exercises that were widespread in Europe from the 1950s onwards (and for which it even may have been seminal). Like Devi and Dunne, the influential Swiss-Indian couple dispense with explaining the occult effects of advanced *prāṇāyāma* in this volume.

Turning once more to the Indian scene, an influential work that appeared sixteen years later is *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha* (1969) by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009) (Sarbacker 2021: 216). The Sivananda disciple and founder of the Bihar School of Yoga in the North-Indian town of Munger, Bihar, compiled the material from teacher-training courses held in his school, making the book somewhat encyclopaedic, especially regarding *āsana*. In the section on *prāṇāyāma*, Satyananda mainly draws on Sivananda and to some extent Atkinson/Ramacharaka. In discussing preliminaries, he first explains the functions of

the five breaths and also refers to “Swara Yoga” as inspired by Sivananda’s *Svara Yoga* of 1954 (Satyananda 1973 [1969]: 246-249). In borrowing from Yogi Ramacharaka, he first introduces the threefold division of breath space, and then explains the complete breath here termed “Yogi Breathing” (*ibid.*: 250-252). Satyananda then describes alternate-nostril breathing with and without *kumbhaka* preceded by a phase of witnessing the breath (*ibid.*: 255-258). Alternate-nostril breathing is “an indispensable prelude to the advanced meditational practices” (*ibid.*: 258), which corresponds to the importance that Sivananda placed on this practice.

Another classic on yogic breath cultivation that appeared around the same time is *Pranayama: Le dynamique du souffle* (1971) by André van Lysebeth (1919–2004).<sup>674</sup> The Belgian yogi was trained by Swami Sivananda and Pattabhi Jois, and he significantly propelled the development of yoga in Europe. The book comprises three parts with a total of forty-two chapters which can only briefly be outlined here. In recurring on Vivekananda, van Lysebeth discusses *prāṇa* as the universal source of electromagnetic energy and as a vitalistic principle that is absorbed by the organs in the human body in the first part of the book (van Lysebeth 1971: 17-67). He also echoes turn-of-the-century tropes of fresh air for health and vitality (*ibid.*: 68-79). The second part of the book discusses various *prāṇāyāma* techniques that are found in premodern Haṭhayoga (*kapālabhāti*, *bhastrikā*, *ujjāyī*, and others) (*ibid.*: 80-234). After addressing some preliminaries, the author introduces rhythmic breathing (aligned with Stebbins, Ramacharaka, and Sivananda),<sup>675</sup> breath ratios, and alternate-nostril breathing for cleansing the *nāḍīs* (*ibid.*: 80-102, 122-127). In describing the advanced technique of *kumbhaka* that includes the control of the lower abdomen (*ibid.*: 103-120, 146-167), he recurs on Kuvalayananda by directly quoting from an article that appeared in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* in 1930 (*ibid.*: 156; cf. Kuvalayananda 1930c: 12-13). The prescription of *viloma prāṇāyāma* (interrupted inhalation/exhalation), *samavṛtti prāṇāyāma* (even ratio), and *ujjāyī prāṇāyāma* (frictional breathing) reflects Krishnamacharya’s teachings as mediated to him by Jois (van Lysebeth 1971: 128-133, 173-179, 228; Goldberg 2016: 247; chapter 8.5.2). The third part of the book explains “esoteric” *prāṇāyāma*, which introduces subtle-body concepts like *prāṇa* and *apāna*, *kuṇḍalinī*, and the *cakras*, and also the three *bandhas* as applied during *prāṇāyāma* (van Lysebeth 1971: 235-311). It is surprising that van Lysebeth’s teaching

<sup>674</sup> The book was translated into several European languages, its English title being *Pranayama: The Yoga Art of Breathing*. I quote from the first edition in French.

<sup>675</sup> Van Lysebeth’s *Yoga Self-Taught* (French: *J’Apprends le yoga*) (1968: 31-40) engages the theory and practice of Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s complete breath.

of yogic breath cultivation appears to be clearly influenced by Jois and Kuvalayananda, but not so much by his official guru Sivananda. Although the author's work has clear precedents in yogic breath cultivation, his book adds several aspects making it a nuanced and valuable contribution for the study of *prāṇāyāma*.

### 9.3.3 Summary

This Outlook has presented several books by Euro-American authors that appeared just before the Second World War, and some seminal post-war publications. The tropes that have been highlighted throughout the study served as the main lens through which to read and briefly introduce these texts. Although each work adds innovations to *prāṇāyāma* discourses, the impact of first-generation and second-generation yogis of the early period is still neatly visible. Next to these tip-of-the-iceberg publications, other seminal post-war works that expand on yogic breath cultivation like Sivananda's *Svara Yoga* (1954), Desikachar's *Religiousness in Yoga* (1980), and Iyengar's *Light on Prāṇāyāma* (1981) have been discussed in chapter 8.4.2; chapter 8.5.2. Up to the present, numerous books on yogic breath cultivation have been published that cannot be named or discussed here. The reader is asked to look for titles like "science of breath" or "science of *prāṇāyāma*", a search that will undoubtedly yield an abundance of publications for further study.



## 10 CONCLUSION

Having traversed a wide range of theories and practices, this study has examined the reinvention of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in the modern period between c. 1850 and 1945. It has treated breath as a physical basis from which a bodily practice like *prāṇāyāma* is derived but also as a representation of life in general. As has become clear, such a theme has religious implications that are taken up by various discourses in traditional and modern yoga – namely the quest for the origin, preservation, and meaning of life. If we narrow this broad topic a bit and look at the conceptualisations and applications of yogic breath cultivation, we come to the core of what this study is about: harnessing a vital principle called *prāṇa* (and in some cases related ones such as the breath of life, ether, and/or *ākāśa*) to enhance, deepen, and prolong human life. As proposed in premodern yoga, this opens up the perspective of achieving a state of complete liberation from worldly suffering. Such a position still appears to underpin some currents of modern yoga. For authors like Vivekananda, this also implies full empowerment to do whatever one wants, and omniscience. As presented in Vivekananda's and others' perspectives, this thesis has also explored how the mastery of *prāṇāyāma* is embedded, at least in part, in thinking about life at large and in cosmological ideas. In other words, the intimate and manifold relation between *prāṇa*-as-vitality, *prāṇa*-as-breath, and yogic breath cultivation has concerned us throughout.

With this in mind, I conclude here by addressing the major threads covered in this thesis and revisiting the main research questions raised in the Introduction. Accordingly, I first recapitulate the basic roles and meanings that *prāṇa* has assumed in the modern period, as well as general tendencies of yogic breath cultivation. Regarding the latter, one can observe tendencies to become less austere (i.e., “simplified”) and to adopt practices that were unknown to premodern yoga. I then summarise the entangled history of yogic breath cultivation as it unfolds between modern yoga, nineteenth-century occultism, and hygienic culture. The benefits that modern yogis derived from utilising all these cultural strands helped them to shape influential interpretations and install *prāṇa* discourses and *prāṇāyāma* practices into the global modern culture. Finally, yogic breath cultivation is recapitulated here as a form of self-cultivation that pursues both mundane and soteriological goals. In the final section, I will outline some further steps in *prāṇāyāma* research.

## 10.1 Vitalising *Prāṇa* and Simplifying *Prāṇāyāma*

*Prāṇa* has become a key concept for the religious and hygienic aspirations of modern yoga. However, its significance, though most obviously relevant within *prāṇāyāma* practice, is even more fundamental to modern yoga's ideas about the interconnectedness between humans and the cosmos. Following some Vedic strands of its interpretation, the cosmic *prāṇa* also animates the physical body and can therefore be harnessed through practices that are directed inward. This, at least, is the approach of Vivekananda. But Kuvalayananda, who understands *prāṇa* primarily in terms of its physiological function as “breath” also seems to conceive of it as a key to unlocking the potential of human physiology. For him, this serves both hygienic and soteriological goals. Thus, it could be argued that the broader implications of *prāṇa* make it a crucial and effective agent, and within the potentiality of *prāṇa*, *prāṇāyāma* is the central practice. Moreover, the notion of *prāṇa* began to blend with mesmeric thought – as early as in the Latin edition of the Upaniṣads by Anquetil-Duperron in 1801/1802 and German romantic mesmerism, but increasingly so in theosophy and modern yoga – by taking on the additional meaning of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent. Likewise, the application of *prāṇa* expanded from *prāṇāyāma* and related techniques as part of a technology of the self to its mediation and application to others. The *relational* aspect of using *prāṇa* to heal others is thus perhaps the most recent connotation that *prāṇa* has adopted.

In studying premodern as well as modern *prāṇāyāma*, it is crucial to note that it is not an isolated technique that bears little relationship to other yogic practices. Rather, manipulating *prāṇa* is also used in *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā*, and in some cases it is said that the advanced states of yoga from *prāṇāyāma* up to *samādhi* are but an extended state of *prāṇāyāma*, which here denotes breath retention. This indicates that Hāṭhayoga conceived *prāṇāyāma* primarily as breath *retention*. If we look, however, at the larger historical developments, in modern yoga, the importance of *prāṇāyāma* as breath *retention* was already waning by the late nineteenth century. In 1851, N. C. Paul still understood *prāṇāyāma* as controlling respiration *and* circulation, i.e., as a means to reduce the beating of the heart. Notwithstanding the application of medical concepts, his definition of *prāṇāyāma* was basically Hāṭhayogic. In contrast, Sris Chandra Vasu has noted that “now-a-days”, which in this context we may take to begin as early as 1887, “those who practise Yoga and pranayam generally do not think of reducing the normal action of the heart. They wish to harmonise the faculties by

slow, steady and synchronous breathing” (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlvi, his emphasis). Although the feats performed by the fakirs of remaining breathless and pulseless in an airtight container are reiterated within modern yoga to this day, Vasu’s observation hints at a subtle shift in the way the practice was conceived. Indeed, a description of *kevalakumbhaka* (“pure retention”) is rarely found in modern yoga.<sup>676</sup> In describing these early developments of yogic breath cultivation, Vasu’s analysis also anticipates what becomes increasingly dominant in the years to come.

In a sense, breath cultivation becomes “more” than *prāṇāyāma*, as the term begins to denote a variety of new practices in addition to those previously subsumed under it. Several examples that fit Vasu’s narrative are innovations from the Euro-American gymnastic scene. Practices such as “rhythmic breathing”, the “complete breath”, the “cleansing breath”, and conscious breathing in combination with movements of the limbs find their way into modern yoga through the texts of Genevieve Stebbins, and, even more influentially, Yogi Ramacharaka. These moderate practices are often combined with breath awareness and relaxation. They come to the forefront in modern yoga and are often used for hygienic purposes. For example, practices I have described as “cultivation through witnessing” are presented as part of the yogic breath-cultivation set. New techniques (or at least new terms) that are styled as Haṭhayogic, like *samavṛtti/viśamavṛtti prāṇāyāma* and *viloma ujjāyī*, were most likely developed and coined by Krishnamacharya. Nevertheless, the importance of Haṭhayogic practices like some of the eight *kumbhakas* (particularly *sūryabhedana*, *bhastrikā*, *śītalī*, and *ujjāyī*) as well as *kapālabhāti* and alternate-nostril breathing persists. Other *kumbhakas* like *plāvinī* and *mūrcchā prāṇāyāma* are “no longer in vogue”, as Iyengar (1983 [1981]: 154) attests, and they are indeed those less frequently addressed in the time span under consideration.

In short, yoga pioneers like Yogendra actively sought to “simplify” yogic techniques including *prāṇāyāma* as seen in his *Breathing Methods* of 1932 and *Haṭha Yoga Simplified* of 1940. Thereby, yoga – and *prāṇāyāma* as one of its crucial techniques – was meant to be rendered easier than the ascetic breath-holding disciplines of premodern yoga, making them more accessible to the general public. But as Vasu’s diagnosis shows, these developments were already underway in the 1880s. Conversely, theorising about *prāṇāyāma* (and some of its practices) also became more complex due to the convergence of multiple cultural strands influencing

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<sup>676</sup> An exception is Yogacharya Sundaram’s *Shanthy Yogam* of 1944, composed in Tamil.

the techniques. Although premodern theories about *prāṇāyāma* were also multilayered, the new complexity resulted from different intersecting systems for explaining the practices. Since N. C. Paul, yogic breath cultivation has been increasingly conceptualised in biochemical terms, and these concepts sometimes supplemented or even replaced premodern *nāḍī*-physiology (although the interpretive map of *nāḍī*-physiology was never fully abandoned and, as a fascinating relic of premodern yoga, regained currency during the twentieth century). The overlap between premodern concepts and modern biochemical, biomechanical, anatomical, and physiological terminologies and frameworks increasingly determined how yogic breath cultivation was conceived. For instance, in the case of the threefold division of breath space, the anatomical conception of body areas potentially involved in breathing also led to new forms of practice. This is also a good example of how breath practices sometimes also became more complex as to their technical details – but were still less strenuous than premodern ascetic practices. To deepen a final discussion of the changes that the key notions *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* have undergone, I shed light on yogic breath cultivation as part of modern yoga’s entangled history. Although I have touched on some examples of innovative practices above, the broader contexts underlying them are summarised in the following.

## 10.2 The Entangled History of Yogic Breath Cultivation: Yoga, Occultism, and Hygiene

Apart from “simplifying” the practices, how else can we explain the various ways in which *prāṇāyāma* was conceived in early modern yoga? The theory of entangled history provides crucial answers to this. Transnational exchange between colonial India and Euro-American cultural fields deeply informed yogic breath cultivation, and this exchange was, in many cases, not one-sided. For instance, Vivekananda was as informed by nineteenth-century occultism (particularly theosophy and New Thought) as Atkinson was by the yoga of Vivekananda and Baba Bharati’s Advaita-related thought. Nevertheless, both Vivekananda and Atkinson also remained rooted in their “indigenous” religious contexts. Their hybrid (alternative-)religious identities were meaningful considering the fruits they yielded for modern yoga. As this example shows, entangled history is more than the transnational exchange of ideas. In our case, it is rather an entanglement of entire cultural fields, the most salient ones being yoga (as part of inherited traditions and as popularised by the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya

Samaj, and theosophy), nineteenth-century occultism, and hygienic culture.<sup>677</sup> To map transnational exchange within modern yoga at a deeper structural level, I propose that the entangled history of these three cultural fields, each with multiple diversifications, explains most of the discourses and practices of yogic breath cultivation.<sup>678</sup>

I would argue that yogic breath cultivation perfectly exemplifies how yoga and occultism became intermingled within early modern yoga. This is, for one, because *prāṇa* is not just part of a larger premodern cultural heritage within South Asian traditions, but is also passed down and understood as a concept within occult movements such as mesmerism, theosophy, and New Thought. Wendell Thomas (1930: 233) and De Michelis (2004: 160-162) have already identified the mesmeric aspect of *prāṇa*, and in the case of the latter, she has read the concept as part of esotericism within modern yoga. In other words, this correlation has not been established as part of research on *āsana*, but as part of an uncovering of epistemic frameworks and cosmological ideas within modern yoga. In deepening this proposition, this study has treated on various premodern and modern notions of *prāṇa*, and has shown that theosophists were major transmitters of occult ideas that informed Vivekananda and others. The most salient concepts in this regard were *prāṇa*, *svara*, *ākāśa*, superconsciousness, and fringe-science speculations that involve the subtle body. Rama Prasad's phrase the "science of breath", which in his work denoted *svarodaya* techniques, was particularly influential. All these concepts have a clear footing in the yoga traditions, but they are also reinterpreted in the light of nineteenth-century occultism. It is also here, as well as in the works of salient thinkers of the Brahmo Samaj, that the correlation of religion and science is established and gains momentum in the interpretation of yoga-as-science. As another important influence, theosophy also adopted a crucial theme originated by Emanuel Swedenborg (i.e., the intimate correlation of thoughts, emotions, and breath) which was reiterated in several subsequent texts by theosophical translators/commentators and modern yogis and merged with statements about *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*.

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<sup>677</sup> These three pillars correspond with the fields established in the "*prāṇāyāma* grid" (chapter 6.1), which has also addressed the fact that premodern (Haṭha)yoga had both religious and hygienic implications. Hence, quadrant A and B are represented by "yoga", quadrant B and C by "hygienic culture", and quadrant D by "occultism".

<sup>678</sup> Although there are overlaps between occultism and hygienic culture (e.g., in the case of Stebbins's and Atkinson's texts, the latter exemplifying how New Thought discourses adopted hygienic ones), I will focus in these concluding thoughts on those between yoga and occultism, and between yoga and hygienic culture, respectively.

Not just in terms of concepts but also on the level of practices the exchange was thorough. In this regard, Atkinson alias Yogi Ramacharaka had the clearest impact through direct textual transmission. Furthermore, in having institutional ties to the Latent Light Culture and T. R. Sanjivi, he is one of the main agents to disseminate occult ideas. The most salient practices that represent this exchange are the “rhythmic breathing” mentioned above, the “psychic breathing” (which enables a practitioner to heal others), and the storing of reproductive energy in the solar plexus. Moreover, New Thought affirmation techniques which were, in Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s case, termed “mantrams” were linked to charging oneself with life force, or *prāṇa*. Next to Sanjivi, another South Asian yoga pioneer to draw on Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s yogic-occult blend was Sivananda, but traces can also be found in Yogendra (who borrows some breath practices and ideas from Yogi Ramacharaka and Stebbins). While Yogananda may not have directly appropriated Atkinson/Ramacharaka, he adopted the successful marketing strategy of teaching by correspondence, as well as appropriating New Thought’s affirmation techniques to mentally strengthen one’s practice. Moreover, he and his teacher Sri Yukteswar were decidedly influenced by theosophical terminology to describe subtle anatomy and physiology.

Another important aspect of modern yoga’s entangled history is the overlap between yoga and hygienic culture. Although hygienic practices were part of premodern Haṭhayoga, these practices become intermingled with typical hygienic tropes of nineteenth-century central Europe. These are the importance of fresh air, sexual hygiene, and moral constraints for health, in addition to overall well-being and self-cultivation as an end in itself. Moreover, hygienic culture started to promote nose breathing and deep breathing as key concepts for health from roughly the 1850s onwards, and these claims were also the concern of medical experts. What crucially distinguishes hygiene from biomedicine is the promotion of drug-free self-help techniques as opposed to drug prescription by a physician. In other words, both modern yoga and hygienic practices assume that they are effective through practices rather than medications. Further overlaps between yoga and hygiene are the importance placed on a “natural” and health-promoting environment, dietary prescriptions, and regulation of sexual intercourse, including semen retention. A prominent example of these congruences is the notion of how (thoughts of) sex and masturbation can be controlled – or abandoned – through yogic breath cultivation (e.g., in Ramacharaka, Sundaram, Kuvalayananda, and Sivananda). Another factor to link these cultural fields is the fact that several South Asian yoga pioneers explicitly adopted the language and

terminology of hygiene. For example, Yogendra's *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931) directly "translates" Hāṭhayoga into hygienic terms, Kuvalayananda draws on the hygienic concept of "nerve culture", and Sundaram and Sivananda promote yoga as drug-free self-help. Although Atkinson/Ramacharaka again plays a key role in propelling breath-related hygienic themes (nose breathing, the "complete breath", and the tropes of diet, fresh air, and ventilation of rooms), there are numerous other influential protagonists who advanced hygienic culture (e.g., J. P. Müller, Bernarr McFadden, Irving Fischer, Eugene Fisk, to name a few) and who made these concepts so successful within modern yoga.

As has been discussed, along with physical and hygienic culture, the idea of breathing exercises as "psycho-physical culture" starts to trickle in. In our contexts, this concept was, for one, advocated by Stebbins, and her outline of a psycho-physical American Delsartism had direct bearings on Yogendra's (interpretation of Patañjali's) yoga. Its roots reaching back to at least the early nineteenth century, psycho-physiology also aimed to explain the relation between body and mind in scientific terms. Several modern yoga pioneers adopted it to explain breath-related themes (Kuvalayananda, Yogendra, Sivananda, Yogananda, Sundaram), because breath was also conceived as a mediator between various dimensions of the human being. For them, this is expressed in the concept of *prāṇa* that permeates all levels of human physiology (the lungs, the blood, the cells, the brain, etc.), but this concept was, for the purposes of biochemical arguments, also to be linked to the idea of oxygen intake and distribution. Psycho-physiology and the biochemical aspects of breath were helpful in describing the complex effects that breath cultivation had, and moreover proved, among other means, that yoga was cutting-edge "science".

Some yoga pioneers indeed stretched the concept of hygienic culture even further, and it seemed to be almost universally applicable. It has been shown that Sundaram and Sivananda most obviously promoted and practised *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite (as crucially addressed by Dayananda and subsequent authors involved in the Arya Samaj) in which it serves purposes of moral "cleansing" or expiation. In the chapter "Health and Hygiene" of *Yogic Home Exercises* (1938), Sivananda explicitly placed the worship of the sun (in the form of both *sandhyā* and *sūryanamaskar*) centre stage as part of a concept that amounts to a kind of universal hygiene. According to him, worship of the sun paired with physical culture and breathing exercises to cure diseases was efficiently practised in India and Euro-American contexts for centuries. Although a similar idea was already posited by

Stebbins, it is maybe here that the rite at dusk and dawn is most evidently interpreted in modern terms, thereby underscoring the significance it still held, despite, or because of, its ancient origins. This also exemplifies how the religious and the hygienic can be seen as two sides of a coin, and how both are relevant for various interpretations of *sandhyā*, as well as for *prāṇāyāma*.

In summary, yogic, occult, and hygienic breath practices constitute the main pillars of modern yogic breath cultivation, even as it is still practised today. Among the successful ingredients are the works of theosophical translators who rendered yogic concepts into English, which then served as an interpretive map to understand, translate, and disseminate crucial concepts of yoga. However, as to the influence of North American strands of occultism, occult breath *practices* as found in the teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph and the H. B. o. L. as well as New Thought-inflected healing and affirmation techniques were no less influential. Hygienic culture was another highly successful backdrop. In drawing on its terminology and practices, yoga pioneers raised their cultural capital, because they thought of yoga-as-hygiene as almost universally applicable. In adopting concepts of medical science like anatomy, biochemistry, and cutting-edge body-mind theories, they sought to gain the upper hand in discursive battles to explain and apply *prāṇāyāma* for various ends. Fortifying *prāṇāyāma*'s significance (and their own as experts on yoga) was further accomplished through linking these concepts back to the ancient and universal "science" that was yoga. One may finally note that the interconnectedness of yoga, hygiene, and occultism weaves a tight net of transcultural exchange that made the coherence and conceptual links connecting these practices apparent and logical. The breath practices discussed often transition smoothly from the yogic to the occult to the hygienic, and the lines of demarcation are blurry – what remains is the pool of practices that I have termed yogic breath cultivation. As a penultimate question we may inquire into the relevance of these practices considering the goals that have been posited within these fields and salient discourses.

### 10.3 Yogic Breath Cultivation Between Mundane and Soteriological Goals

This thesis has framed yogic breath cultivation as a form of "self-cultivation". To briefly recapitulate the various theoretical implications of this term, it has been first understood as a set of technologies of the self, and within a Foucault-Sarasin approach, it mainly addresses nineteenth-century hygienic practices of central Europe. In this study, this notion has been extended into the field of modern yoga through an actual



historical link between hygienic culture and yoga, as shown above. The habitus forms that are established within the field of modern yoga, then, serve as an interface category to reflect the transmission of teachings from teacher to student. However, they also represent a form of cultural capital that makes yogis “yogis”, often acting to unify “traditional” forms of practice and “innovative” ones. In Indian anti-colonialist contexts, yogi-ness is also a form of “national” capital that has been invested in practitioners. We see the impact of this equation even after India gained independence in 1947. A context-dependent understanding of self-cultivation is therefore never just relevant regarding the development of the individual, but it also has cultural, social, and political implications. Nevertheless, this final summary will focus on the goals that the individual can achieve through yogic breath cultivation, as promised by modern yoga pioneers.

A crucial feature of modern yoga is that it encompasses both mundane and soteriological aspects. As chapter 6.1 has suggested, mundane achievements are mainly relevant within hygienic culture, and soteriological ones within various religious strands. However, it has also been made clear that this axis is conceived as a continuum rather than as discrete opposites. In other words, one could move from practising *prāṇāyāma* for (maintenance of) health, then smoothly shift to focus on stilling the mind and preparing oneself for the higher yogic states. Regarding the soteriological goals relevant within (modern) yoga, the reader should be briefly reminded that the path to attain final liberation is arguably a complex interplay of practices that, in yogic contexts, normally includes the manipulation of the subtle body through *prāṇāyāma* and *prāṇa*-related techniques. As prerequisites, such a manipulation often requires moral and sexual restraints, and in some cases (e.g., Advaita-related traditions) a gnoseological aspect is involved. As complex as this process may be, modern yoga pioneers promise that final liberation can be achieved on the yogic path and that *prāṇāyāma* is a crucial technology to help attain it. Such promises may be part of their role as gurus expressing themselves in “Guru English” (Aravamudan 2005; cf. Newcombe 2009: 990) but they are also a marker for the religious within modern yoga. As Martin Riesebrödt has argued, the *promise* of salvation is a key element in constituting what classifies, in his system, as religion (Riesebrödt 2010 [2007]; chapter 2.2).

In chapter 2.2, I have discussed a basic scheme that explains how mundane and soteriological goals are conceived and achieved by yogic breath cultivation. To recapitulate, I have distinguished between three main categories, which are (I)

soteriological goals, (II) soteriological becoming or paths (“*mārgas*”) to liberation, and (III) mundane benefits. The mundane category includes *prāṇāyāma* practice (IIIa) for hygienic purposes, (IIIb) for attaining occult powers, and (IIIc) to enhance artistic skills.

Regarding (I), several figures like Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Sivananda, and Yogananda seem to conceive of final liberation as a state that can be reached in this life, thereby implying the concept of *jīvanmukti*, or liberation-in-life.<sup>679</sup> However, other concepts like *kaivalya* are also mentioned, for example, by Vivekananda as part of his interpretation of the *Yogasūtra*. It should be noted that various terms to denote final liberation are often applied in a synonymous way in modern yoga, and there is no strict line to distinguish between concepts like *kaivalya*, *mokṣa*, *jīvanmukti*, or *ātmajñāna* and *brahmajñāna* (chapter 2.2). In some outlines of modern yoga, *prāṇāyāma* plays a direct role in (at least temporarily) attaining soteriological goals. In following Aiyer’s translation of the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha*, Sivananda holds that equalising the subtle flow of *prāṇa* and *apāna* within the body and the space that surrounds it leads directly to *mokṣa*. Yogananda suggests uniting oneself with the “Great Spirit” through witnessing the breath along with the silent Hong-Saw (*hamsa*) mantra. Atkinson/Ramacharaka holds that through “Yogi spiritual breathing” (an advanced form of rhythmic breathing) the practitioner will become one with universal consciousness (“at-one-ment”). But, as indicated and as Atkinson/Ramacharaka also explains, these goals could be temporary states on a soteriological *path* rather than a *final goal* to be attained, or a fixed irreversible state.

The goals that lie, so to speak, on the path (II) are generally more frequently addressed, and they often relate directly to yogic breath cultivation. In the following, I will discuss the promises made in relation to *prāṇāyāma* as an *indirect* soteriological means to liberation or as goals on the path. The most important faculty here is *prāṇāyāma*’s function of stilling the mind. This idea is basically applied by all yoga pioneers and has its roots in the ancient *prāṇa*-mind nexus. For instance, in Vivekananda’s work controlling the mind and the subtle body through *prāṇāyāma* (this being a prerequisite for Rājayoga) is highly prominent. In Vivekananda and others, it is often “rhythmic breathing” (in the sense of Stebbins but also in its premodern equivalent of applying *mātrā*) that helps to calm the mind, because

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<sup>679</sup> While it can be safely said that these are the most salient categories in which benefits of *prāṇāyāma* practice can be classified, the following examples used to elucidate these categories summarise the findings of this thesis, but should not be read as encyclopaedic.

irregular breathing is said to be a symptom of an unstable mind. Successful practice (whether through rhythmic breathing or other forms of yogic breath cultivation) leads to the temporary cessation of breath, which is a prerequisite for higher states of yoga. Moreover, in the context of the *sandhyā* rite (and as suggested by the *Manusmṛiti*), *prāṇāyāma* also functions as a means for expiation and as a means of producing “heat” (*tapas*) to burn up sins. Another indirect soteriological tool is *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, which is often said to be achieved through *prāṇāyāma* (Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Kuvalayananda, Sivananda). On the side of appropriating occult thought, the idea of drawing up and storing reproductive energy in the solar plexus is part of sexual magic practices as they emerged in the nineteenth century. Sexual magic practices were also termed “divine alchemy” or divine union (chapter 5.2.5), which can therefore also be read as part of a soteriological path.

Regarding the mundane goals, it has been extensively discussed that hygienic practices and goals (IIIa) constitute one of the most important frameworks for yogic breath cultivation. The main objectives here are the attainment and maintenance of health as well as balancing body and mind. Another basic idea is that *prāṇāyāma* (often contrasted with Euro-American breathing techniques) trains the respiratory organs (primarily the elasticity of the lungs and diaphragm), strengthens the heart, raises the vital index, and therefore promotes longevity (e.g., Yogendra, Kuvalayananda, Sundaram). *Prāṇa*’s beneficial vibrations can be directed towards any diseased part through *prāṇāyāma* (e.g., Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Ramacharaka, Yogananda, Sivananda). Emphasis is placed on breathing through the nose, and the significance of diaphragmatic and deep breathing is stressed (e.g., Ramacharaka, Yogendra). *Prāṇāyāma*, by making the breath slow, regular, and rhythmic, is utilised to calm the emotions and the mind (e.g., Vivekananda, Kuvalayananda, Yogendra). Its effect of cleansing the *nāḍīs* is said to work on both the subtle and physical body. Cleansing the *nāḍīs* promotes health, but is also considered a prerequisite for the practice of *kumbhaka* as well as for manipulating *prāṇa* during *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā* practices (as such, it is also relevant within II). While the most common technique prescribed here is alternate-nostril breathing (with *nāḍīsuddhi*/*nāḍīsodhana* as synonyms in the modern period), Kuvalayananda ascribes the same cleansing effects to *kapālabhāti*.

In describing hygienic purposes, Kuvalayananda is probably the most influential spokesperson. Backing up his statements through scientific data, several subsequent yoga pioneers uncritically adopted his insights. Although some of his findings are questionable from the perspective of today’s scientific analysis,

Kuvalayananda can still be credited with having described some anatomical, physiological, and biochemical processes involved in *prāṇāyāma* in greater detail than any other yoga pioneer. Some of his statements addressed the benefits of *prāṇāyāma* in broad strokes: Kuvalayananda argued that *prāṇāyāma* is basically helpful for all systems working in the body (i.e., the circulatory, respiratory, nervous, digestive, and endocrine systems). However, by providing detailed biochemical data, he claimed that the main benefits were the positive effects of oxygenating the blood and increasing carbon dioxide tolerance, the latter being achieved especially through *kumbhaka* practices. Both Kuvalayananda and Yogendra argued that there is increased oxygen intake through controlling the abdominal muscles during inhalation and *kumbhaka*, which both aimed to prove through scientific investigation. It should nevertheless be noted that Abhedananda's and Atkinson's/Ramacharaka's approaches had already featured increased oxygen intake. As to the health-enhancing benefits of *prāṇāyāma*, Yogendra and Sivananda also underscore the curative effect of certain breath practices in the fight against pulmonary tuberculosis and asthma (Yogendra: deep breathing and *prāṇāyāma* in combination with nature-cure practices; Sivananda: *bhastrikā*, *kapālabhāti*). Several yoga pioneers also cite Haṭhayoga texts that list the therapeutic aspects of certain *kumbhakas*. For example, in following the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, Krishnamacharya praises *sūryabhedana* for generating heat and light in the body. However, he also prescribes *ujjāyī* in combination with *āsana* for menstruating women, a recommendation that, to my knowledge, is not found in premodern texts.

Within modern yoga, one may further attain occult powers (IIIb) through yogic breath cultivation. As in the case of hygienic practices, the acquisition of occult powers (*siddhis*) also has premodern roots, but a certain set of powers (partly drawing on premodern yoga) is also prevalent within nineteenth-century occultism. In modern yoga contexts, those often listed are clairvoyance, omniscience, astral travel, levitation, extraordinary perceptions (e.g., vision of colours and light), and the power to heal others. A few examples will suffice here. Occult powers are sometimes attained through *prāṇāyāma*-induced *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, which bestows "super-conscious perception" and "Divine Wisdom" (Vivekananda). Another option is fixation of *prāṇa* (*prāṇadhāraṇā*) within a *tattva* to be conquered, which endows the practitioner with certain powers, for example, the *ākāśa tattva* makes one levitate and become airborne (Sivananda with reference to the *Yogavāsīṣṭha*). A technique also related to the idea of *tattvas* is *svarodaya* (observing the breath-flow in the nostrils) which helps to detect

the predominant *tattva* in a given moment, and thereby one can diagnose disease or even prognosticate future events (Prasad, Fletcher, Sanjivi, Sivananda).

These examples illustrate that occult powers are achieved by harnessing a form of subtle energy (i.e., *prāṇa*, the breath, the mesmeric fluidum) to manipulate the subtle body or subtle matter (i.e., the *tattvas*, *ākāśa*, ether). In many cases, this is induced by a combination of concentration on certain (subtle-)body areas and yogic breath cultivation (e.g., Yogananda: medulla oblongata, third eye). This may result in the perception of light in a certain *cakra* or bodily area (Sundaram: through *prāṇāyāma*, mental *om* recitation, and concentration on the heart; Kuvalayananda: through *kapālabhāti* and *bhastrikā*). Alternatively, subtle sounds may be heard (Vivekananda: during *prāṇāyāma*; Yogananda: during Hong-Saw breathing). Rhythmic breathing (Vivekananda, Sivananda) or psychic breathing (Ramacharaka) leads to the ability to heal others through hands-on or distant healing techniques. Atkinson/Ramacharaka termed this “Pranic Healing”. In Atkinson/Ramacharaka and subsequently Sivananda, a prerequisite for this is storing one’s own energy in the solar plexus through rhythmic breathing, which points at mesmeric influences as well as sexual magic as found in *Lebensreform*-oriented and occultist circles.

Yogic breath cultivation is also practised to enhance artistic skills (IIIc). Although this category is arguably of least importance within modern yoga (which is in itself not an artistic but hygienic-soteriological endeavour), it nevertheless exists. The adjacent fields that adopt – and in turn influence – *prāṇa*-related themes and (yogic) breath cultivation that have been treated in this thesis are voice culture, oratory, and theatre. One of the clearest examples is found – as a precursor for certain aspects of yogic breath cultivation – in the works of Stebbins, who describes “dynamic breathing” as a holistic means for self-expression. For Stebbins, such a “psycho-physical” training would entail occult layers, and self-expression as well as self-development were at least partly interpreted as soteriological becoming. Breath cultivation as linked to voice culture (which itself was influenced by hygienic practices) is also evident in Atkinson’s/Ramacharaka’s “vocal breath” and “cleansing breath”. In the latter case, influence of the singing and voice teachers Leo Kofler and Edmund Shaftesbury is likely.

To sum up, the lines between these soteriological and mundane categories are permeable. Such is the beauty of the practice: harnessing *prāṇa* for a particular goal may launch a practitioner into a wholly different dimension. I would further argue that the permeability of these categories points at the significance that soteriological

*becoming* has. Considering modern yoga texts between c. 1850 and 1945, it is safe to say that yoga would not be yoga if a soteriological aspect was not involved. And, while many modern practitioners would not define their practice as aiming for soteriological goals like final liberation, many of them are probably open to a path of holistic hygiene that may eventually dovetail into soteriological becoming.

#### 10.4 Further Steps in *Prāṇāyāma* Research

Finally, we will ask what the next steps in *prāṇāyāma* research could look like based on the present results. As should be clear by now, there is no fixed canon of *prāṇāyāma* practice, and what qualifies as such is still negotiated, and depends on the school and teacher from whom one learns. In this respect, research on *prāṇāyāma* is also an ongoing process. In my opinion, the most important next move, building on the material presented in this thesis, would be to deepen the comparison of individual practices within different schools. One could ask, for instance, how *bhastrikā* is described and practised in the lineage of Kuvalayananda, Krishnamacharya, and Sivananda. Another aspect of such an approach would be comparing *prāṇāyāma*-related notions such as (the application of) *prāṇa* and *apāna* or even the five bodily winds within various schools (the latter, for example, seem to become a theme in the contemporary Iyengar Yoga movement).<sup>680</sup> It will be fruitful to further study textual material; however, ethnographic fieldwork would certainly complement such a study with valuable insights. As Mark Singleton has shown, Krishnamacharya is a prime example of how the combination of textual analysis and ethnography makes perfect sense. This is mainly because, as also discussed in chapter 8.5.2, there are several problems regarding the metadata of the sources associated with or attributed to Krishnamacharya. In terms of *prāṇāyāma* research, it would be most relevant to clarify textual metadata of the *Yoga Makaranda Part II*, a text that I have identified as being most informative for *prāṇāyāma*. As has been shown, the text was attributed to Krishnamacharya by A. G. Mohan; however, the guru's family members and representatives of KYM dispute this attribution. Apart from this, it would be worthwhile in the context of archival research to study photographic material of various *prāṇāyāma* practices (e.g., in conjunction with textual analysis and

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<sup>680</sup> In attending the Iyengar Yoga Convention held in Vienna in May 2018, I was surprised that Birjoo Mehta built *āsana* as well as *prāṇāyāma* practice on a particular system of employing the five bodily winds. I have further noticed that the description of the functions of *prāṇa* and *apāna* in the 1896 translation of the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha* by Aiyer differs considerably from the interpretation of these functions in Desikachar's *Religiousness in Yoga* of 1980.

ethnography), as they sometimes reveal peculiarities of the practice that are not explained in the written material.

Another fascinating study would be a reconstruction and investigation of several lineages branching off from Lahiri Mahasya. During my fieldwork in Kolkata, I noticed that Yogananda is just the tip of the iceberg of an otherwise vast family tree, represented primarily in West Bengal (and perhaps Bangladesh). Since Kriya Yoga is essentially breath cultivation, it would be important to find out more about the practices of this school (into which one must be initiated). Furthermore, a researcher would need to have a good command of Bengali for fieldwork and textual research (this lineage has also produced extensive material in Bengali that is not arcane). A similarly fascinating study would be to research the works composed in Tamil by Sundaram (most importantly *Shanthi Yogam*), of which I have had just a taste, but was soon convinced that this is rich material. In general, the South Asian Tamil yoga traditions (that have survived in Tamil and Sanskrit) need more attention, which would provide important background information on both Krishnamacharya and Sundaram.

There is certainly much more to be discovered, especially if one is interested in the wider dissemination and reception history of yogic breath cultivation. While this thesis has been more concerned with identifying trajectories of emergence and distinctive interpretations of yogic breath cultivation, the reception history in various national contexts has been largely left out. In terms of further historical research on yogic breath cultivation, a case study of the Mazdaznan movement founded by Otoman Zar-Adusht Ha'nish, which was highly successful in Euro-American contexts between c. 1900 and 1950, would be promising. Invoking an alleged Indo-Aryan heritage and emphasising the tropes of hygiene, breath practices, and vitalism, Ha'nish adopts certain terms and practices that resemble *prāṇāyāma*. In addition, sun worship was an essential component of Mazdaznan practice. Related to that, occult societies with a hygienist orientation like Levi D'Guru's Zoist Brotherhood and Thomas Lake Harris's Brotherhood of the New Life in North America, which have only been briefly touched upon in this study, could also be analysed. In terms of reception history, another fascinating endeavour would be to examine yogic breath cultivation in the context of Hermetic orders (e.g., the Ordo Templi Orientis or Aleister Crowley's A.:A.) as well as the adoption of *prāṇāyāma* and related themes within German Occultism by figures such as Gustav Meyrink, Theodor Reuß, Karl Brandler-Pracht, and Peryt Shou, to name a few. As for *prāṇa* discourses informing contemporary philosophies, it would be interesting to analyse the works of Lenart Škof and Luce Irigaray, which exhibit

vitalist tendencies and treat “breath” as a central concept. Another approach not strictly historical in nature would be to examine contemporary practitioners’ experiences with *prāṇāyāma* as a stand-alone study or in comparison with the historically salient features of yogic breath cultivation as brought to the fore in this study.

Finally, I would like to advocate for a closer collaboration between modern yoga research and Indological research. This study has referred to premodern material wherever necessary or helpful and has endeavoured in part to address continuities and ruptures between the premodern and modern material. However, I am also aware of how much deeper such an analysis could go, which was beyond the scope of this one (due to time constraints, the amount of literature that needed to be covered in the modern period, and lack of Sanskrit reading practice). It is crucial to point out that in-depth publications on premodern *prāṇāyāma* practices are pending, especially with regard to Pātañjala *prāṇāyāma*, which would serve as an important background for modern interpretations of Patañjali’s four types of *prāṇāyāma* (which, as I have shown in part, are highly variable). The area revolving around *svarodaya* teachings also requires more investigation (as Jason Birch has noted in a personal conversation). An examination of the premodern material will further clarify the occult interpretation of the “science of breath” by crucial figures such as Rama Prasad and T. R. Sanjivi. As for theosophy and occult movements in India, research on Occult South Asia should be integrated into South Asian Studies more thoroughly. It would be helpful if the latter would acknowledge the relevance and existence of these movements, and begin to recognise them as crucial influences within the history of yoga. Furthermore, yoga research as a field should increasingly engage in collaborative projects to integrate premodern and modern perspectives. Modern yoga research will gain depth if it starts to consider premodern sources more thoroughly, and Indology will become relevant to a broader audience if it expands its perspective on themes that are still highly influential today. In short, both sides would benefit from such an approach, and these integrative efforts would certainly yield fruitful results.



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the modern reinvention of *prāṇāyāma* (lit. “breath control”) within early modern yoga. Originally rooted in Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga, *prāṇāyāma* is still of great importance in modern yoga. However, premodern practices were also subject to considerable change, and from c. 1850 onwards, new concepts and techniques seeped from Euro-American into South Asian contexts. I therefore employ the term “yogic breath cultivation” to encompass all traditional and imported techniques. By examining major developments between c. 1850 and 1945 of this understudied subject, this thesis intends to contribute to modern yoga research, particularly to the entangled history of its salient practices. Additionally, I discuss significant concepts related to the practices that address the human embeddedness in the cosmos, first and foremost *prāṇa*, which denotes “breath” in its life-sustaining quality. Since Vedic times, the broader meaning of *prāṇa* is also “vitality”, but in modern yoga it takes on even wider connotations, such as “energy” and “force” as in Swami Vivekananda’s seminal *Rāja Yoga* (1896). By addressing *prāṇāyāma* as a form of “self-cultivation” to foster physical health and well-being on the one hand and religious aspirations on the other, I traverse a wide spectrum of influential fields and their salient ideas. These are the premodern legacy of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*, notable developments within the Hindu reform movements Arya and Brahmo Samaj, the influence of nineteenth-century occultism, and the contributions of transnational hygienic and physical culture. I also describe the reinvention of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* as it accelerated through Indian nationalism and anti-colonialism, the impact of medical and (proto-)scientific investigation, and the emerging print culture that started to disseminate yoga manuals and translations of premodern Sanskrit texts. Against the backdrop of these diverse influences, I give voice to several pioneers of modern yoga and elucidate their respective interpretations of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*. In the work of most yoga pioneers, the fields of yoga, occultism, and hygienic culture overlap, and, as this thesis argues, an analysis of yogic breath cultivation that takes all of these fields into account can sufficiently explain *prāṇāyāma* as we know it today.

## ABSTRACT (GERMAN)

Diese Arbeit widmet sich der Umdeutung von *prāṇāyāma* (wörtlich: „Atemkontrolle“) im frühen modernen Yoga. *Prāṇāyāma*, das ursprünglich im Pātañjalayoga und Haṭhayoga wurzelt, ist auch im modernen Yoga immer noch von großer Bedeutung. Doch die Praktiken begannen sich ab ca. 1850 deutlich zu verändern: neue Konzepte und Techniken aus dem euro-amerikanischen Raum beeinflussen die Entwicklungen im südasiatischen Raum maßgeblich. Ich verwende daher den Begriff „yogic breath cultivation“ um alle traditionellen und importierten Techniken zu adressieren. Mit dieser Arbeit, die die wichtigsten Entwicklungen zwischen 1850 und 1945 des modernen *prāṇāyāma* behandelt, möchte ich einen Beitrag zur Modern Yoga Research leisten, insbesondere zur Aufarbeitung der an transnationalen und transkulturellen Aspekten reichen Geschichte dieser Praktiken. Außerdem gehe ich einschlägigen *prāṇāyāma*-bezogenen kosmologischen und anthropologischen Konzepten nach, allen voran *prāṇa*, ein Begriff der seit vedischer Zeit als „Lebensatem“ oder „Lebenskraft“ verstanden werden kann. Im modernen Yoga nimmt *prāṇa* jedoch weitere Konnotationen an, z.B. jene von „Energie“ und „Kraft“ in Swami Vivekanandas bahnbrechendem *Rāja Yoga* (1896). Ich skizziere in dieser Arbeit *prāṇāyāma* als eine Form der „Selbstkultivierung“, die zum einen der Förderung der Gesundheit und des Wohlbefindens dient und zum anderen dem Erreichen von religiösen Zielen. Von dieser Grundannahme ausgehend stelle ich im ersten Teil wichtige Kontexte der *prāṇāyāma*-Praxis vor. Dazu gehören das vormoderne Erbe von *prāṇa* und *prāṇāyāma*, die Beiträge der hinduistischen Reformbewegungen Arya und Brahmo Samaj, sowie der Einfluss von Okkultismus und der transnationalen Hygiene- und Körperkultur. Weitere wichtige Faktoren für die Umdeutung von *prāṇa* und *prāṇāyāma* waren die indisch-nationalistische bzw. antikolonialistische Bewegung, der Einfluss medizinischer und (proto-)wissenschaftlicher Untersuchungen, sowie die Verfügbarkeit von Yoga-Handbücher und Yoga-Schriften, die aus dem Sanskrit ins Englische übersetzt worden waren. Vor dem Hintergrund dieser Einflüsse lasse ich im zweiten Teil der Arbeit wichtige Pioniere des modernen Yoga zu Wort kommen, deren jeweilige Interpretationen von *prāṇa* und *prāṇāyāma* sowohl überlappend als auch spezifisch sind. In der Arbeit der meisten Yoga-Pioniere überschneiden sich jedoch die Bereiche Yoga, Okkultismus und Hygienekultur. Es wird sich zeigen, dass eine Analyse von „yogic breath cultivation“, die alle diese Bereiche berücksichtigt, moderne Formen *prāṇāyāma* zu praktizieren ausreichend erklären kann.