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Cosmic Awareness and Yogic Absorption in the Nāṭh Literature

1. Introduction

1.1. Sitting by the fire called dhūnt and smeared with ashes, practicing various forms of yoga, singing mystic songs, with their matted hair and ears split with rings, Nāṭh Siddhas are easy to recognize. These Śāivite ascetics are also known for their pheri, a melodious recitation at night, door-to-door, once or twice a year. Although becoming less common, pheri songs are for awakening in a literal and figurative sense, and for the general population, these chants bind the evil spirits and witches, weaving a net of spells that block them from access to the households. ‘Who are these yogins?’ and ‘What are their practices?’ are the questions that have attracted not only laymen but also modern-day scholars. Often criticized by other communities, these yogins retain nuances from the ancient Kāpālikas,2 the teachings of the Sahaja Siddhas,3 and the Pāśūpata and other Śāivite traditions.4

1.2. Considering Gorakhnāth as their founding master, Nāṭh Siddhas have their own philosophy and the yogic methods to achieve the goal, the siddhi, as they call it. The application of the term siddhi in the Nāṭh literature cannot be limited only to the attainment of supernormal powers on the pathway to samādhi, but also refers to the highest state, that of becoming Śiva.5 This highest realization for the Nāṭhs is beyond the realm of conceptualization in terms of duality and non-duality.6

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1 I am very grateful to Professors David White, Walter Slaje, and Rebecca Moore, and Ms. Mary Hicks for valuable suggestions and corrections.

2 For the study on Kāpālikas, see LORENZEN 1991; UPAĐHAYA, 1983.

3 For studies on Sahaja Siddhas, see DAVIDSON 2002a / 2002b.


5 brahman jivitam aha bhūtā

6 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

7 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

8 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

9 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

10 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

11 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

12 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

13 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

14 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

15 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

16 brahma jivitam aha bhūtā

This text cites Aṣṭhadattāgīta 3.56 in this context to confirm that the highest reality is

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dhīś, following these yogins, is the means for knowing the true nature of one’s own self as Śiva. This specific approach allows us to confirm that the Nāth yoga is world-affirming and bodily lived. As has been mentioned, Nāth literature weaves together various other contemporaneous pan-Indian esoteric traditions. The objective of this essay is to identify the unique aspects that constitute Nāth yoga as a philosophical system with its own worldview and yogic method for the highest realization, with particular attention paid to their understanding of the body and the cosmos. In order to discover the nuances of this yoga system, the primary focus will be upon the literature ascribed to Gorakhnāth. The next objective of this essay is to examine what self-realization would mean within the setting of Nāth yoga, in light of their understanding of the self and its interconnectedness with body and the cosmos. These investigations facilitate an understanding of the Nāth tradition, particularly their interconnected concepts of pinda and brahmāṇḍa, the concept that the world is the play of consciousness (cīvīlāsa), and the concepts of nāda and binda in light of the practice of Kūnḍalī. A closer examination confirms that although Nāth yogins, Kaula Tantric, and other esoteric traditions share the same terminology, there are subtle differences in each application of the terms. The metaphors that play a vital role in maintaining both the esoteric and aesthetic aspects of Nāth tradition and literature build upon the practices of other traditions. By analyzing these constituents, the yoga system of the Nāth Siddhas can be clearly seen in light of other Yoga and Tantra traditions.

1.3. Although less frequently found even in their own community, many Nāth Siddhas are householders. As committed Śaivites, the narratives found within the Nāth tradition describe Gorakṣanāthā (Gorakhnāth in the vernacular), the founding master, as a disciple of Matsyendranāth. Although it is difficult to confirm this relationship as historical, two aspects are relevant: Gorakṣanāthā chronologically follows Matsyendra, generally considered to be the founder of the Tantric Kaula tradition, and second, Gorakṣanāthā reformed the left-hand oriented Kaula system devoid of the character of duality and non-duality.

and developed the Nāth system based on the shared Hatha yoga foundation. The yoga of the Nāth Siddhas can be synthesized, in their term, as the yoga of the body (pinda) and the cosmos (brahmāṇḍa). Their affirmation of the body as the cosmos in its true form, with dormant power sleeping in each and every individual, the awakening of which transforms an individual to Śiva, brings this concept closer to Tantric Kaula philosophy. Their alchemy of purification, consolidation, and the transformation of mercury as a means of achieving supernormal powers is found in both Tantric and Āyurvedic texts. Hatha yoga, now found in various forms and popular as a way to a healthy life, is primarily found in the literature taught by these Siddhas. Although the scope of this essay is not to explore hatha yoga, this nonetheless deals with the exalted part of this practice, analyzing the connections this yogic system has found between bodily perfection and spiritual perfection.

1.4. The yoga technique of the Nāth drastically differs from that found in Patañjali’s yoga system. Despite the seeming similarities between the two systems, the differences are many: a six-fold yoga, instead of the eight limbs prescribed by Patañjali; a focus on the serpentine power considered to be abiding within the body in coiled form identified as kundalī; and the yogic techniques of absorption that utilize sound (nāda). Grounded on hatha or ‘sudden’ techniques that rely on bodily positions and various forms of breath control exercise (prāṇāyāma), the Nāth yogic practice of inborn (saḥaja) samādhi differs from the Patañjalian and various other yogic absorptions. The concept of the body and the cosmos found in both traditions also differ from each other, so that these two yoga traditions cannot be reconciled as one. Furthermore, the body-affirming approaches of the Nāth and their concept of bodily purity in its less exaggerated form maintain these distinctions. The external practices, such as singing nāda, sitting by the dhūni, splitting ears and wearing kundalī (earrings), or smearing ashes, rely upon the core tenets of this system, the recognition of Śiva as the supreme reality that the practitioner can embody through yogic practice, and the deeper realization of the interconnectedness of the body and the cosmos. The underlying philosophy of the world that explains the role required of an

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7 For scholarly discussion upon divinizing the body, see Wirtz 1996 ("Chapter Seven: Corresponding Hierarchies: The Substance of the Alchemical Body," 184-217; and "Chapter Eight: Homologous Structures of the Alchemical Body," 218-262), Sorrinn 2006, 374-390.

8 I have adopted the Nāth terminology for the serpentine power as Kundalī based on the frequency of the use of the term instead of Kūnḍalīnī, as found frequent in Tantric literature. This, however, is not the case that Nāths never use the term Kūnḍalīnī. For example, see GS 46.51: SSS 1.6.

9 For discussion on Pīndabrahmāṇḍa, see Dvivedi 1966, 114-126.

10 Six-fold yoga found in Nāth literature is only a small part of the wider tradition of six-fold yoga system. Scholarly discussion on this can be found in Vasudeva 2004, 367-436; Ghosh 1996, specifically 3-16 for six yogas in Hinduism; Serra 2000 ("Introduction,"

11 For application of sahaaja-samādhi, see Amaraghasāsana, in śastra 1918, 9.
individual for his spiritual growth as understood by the Nāthas maintains its distinctness from the Patañjalian and other yoga systems.

1.5. The literature of the Nāth Siddhas ranges from classical Sanskrit texts attributed to Gorakṣaṇātha to vernacular literature that includes mystical songs (Dwivedi 1978). Many of the texts are difficult to ascribe to a particular author, and this anonymity has often perplexed scholars. To confine this study only to the philosophy and practice of Nāth yogins, this essay explores the essential writings ascribed to Gorakṣaṇātha, Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati (SSP), Gorakṣaśāstra (GS), Amanaska-yoga (AY), along with some other literature ascribed to him or to other Nāth Siddhas who have a clear connection to these texts. In order to establish a relationship between the Kaula and Hātha traditions, comparisons will be made with Tantric literature and the texts of hātha yoga. Again, in order to confine the scope of this essay, I will discuss only the correlation of the body and cosmos as the central point of their philosophy, and the fundamental concepts of bindu and nāda as found in their exalted philosophy and their practice.

1.6. As the texts being examined in this study are not always systematic and often fuse different techniques, it is particularly difficult to trace a unique model in all the writings of this tradition. Synthesizing the literature of the Nāth Siddhas and finding parallels with the aforementioned literature, this essay concludes with establishing the centrality of samarasa in their yoga techniques, with the application of both the kundali practice and nāda for this yogic absorption. The Nāth yoga technique of samarasa, if compared with the specific terminology used in other yoga texts, such as amanaska yoga, unmani, or manonmani, all refer to the state of consciousness where mental functioning is stopped, with the notions such as subject and object dissolved. The focus on this yogic absorption, I argue, is the central deviation from the parallel yoga tradition of Patañjali, although the absorption, identified as asanprajñātā or the state of no-cognition, opens the space for the argument that the ultimate experience found in both techniques is the same. The yogic method applied in the Nāth tradition brings this system comparatively closer to the Tantric Kaula system. For example, the concept of ‘absorption into oneself’ (nījāveśa) found in the Nāth literature closely parallels the concept of samāvēśa found in Tantric literature. The mystical genealogy in which both the Kaula Tantric tradition and Nāth yoga system share a connection to Matsyendranātha, also supports a parallel reading of these traditions.

1.7. Analysis of the language used by the Nāth Siddhas further confirms the same conclusion, that these yogins are conceptually aligned with the Śaivite Tantric tradition and the Sahaja Buddhist Tantric tradition rather than the Patañjalian yoga system. Analysis of the doctrine of the play of consciousness (cīdvilāsa), the body as the cosmos (piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa), and the practice of bindu and nāda reveals the inner structure of Nāth literature, which in turn allows for a broader comparison among pan-Indian traditions.

2. The World as the Play of Consciousness (cīdvilāsa)

2.1. Found primarily in SSP and scattered in other writings of Nāth Siddhas, two essential concepts that explain the Nāth philosophy of the body and the cosmos are:

1. cīdvilāsāvāda (the doctrine that the world is the play of consciousness), and
2. piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍavāda (the doctrine that the body and the cosmos are identical).

These two doctrines complement each other and not only explain the interrelationship of the body and the cosmos but also confirm the very body that is immediately felt as the entire cosmos, and support the concept of yogic awakening (jāgaraṇa) as an experience of the expansion of one’s self-experience. Both of these concepts are quite compatible with the Tantric philosophy, all of which are drastically different from the Advaita of Śaṅkara, although both the non-dualism of Śaṅkara and the yogic doctrine of the Nāth yogins confirm a single reality manifested in many forms.

2.2. Following the doctrine of cīdvilāsāvāda, pure consciousness is the

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12 The reference for the edition of SSP used in this article is Mallik 1954. For discussion on the philosophy found in SSP, see Basak 1962, 25-32.
13 For the effort to identify the texts specific to Gorakṣaṇātha, see Dwivedi 1966, 106-113; White 1996, 131, 139-141, 418.
14 For discussion on amanaska yoga, see Vasudeva 2004, 384, 434, 436; White 1996, 141, 249; White 2003, 81; Birch 2006.
15 For application of nījāveśa, see SSS 5.11. Another central constituent of Tantric description of the awakened state, sāmāvēśa, can be compared to the Nāth understanding of samāvēśa. See SSS 5.59.
16 For a detailed discussion of piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa, see Dwivedi 1966, 114-126.
ultimate reality. Non-dual awareness-in-itself as the absolute truth is recognized in both Śaṅkara’s Advaita and Tantric Advaita. The yogic traditions, both Patañjalian and the system of the Nāṭh Siddhas, acknowledge pure consciousness as the experience of highest yogic absorption. The fundamental distinction between the Tāntric and Nāṭh yoga traditions on one hand, and Śaṅkara’s model of Advaita is that consciousness, according to the first set of schools, is vibrant, fluid, or spontaneous in the sense that it transforms into multiple forms and contracts into its solitary form. The concept of parināma or transformation is closely compatible with the concept that the world is the play of consciousness (cīdviśāsā). Following Śaṅkara’s model, the world is the false projection (vivartta) of this highest reality, with consciousness having no modification. According to the doctrine of cīdviśāsa, on the other hand, the world is the transformation of Brahman itself and is not false appearance, but rather the play or glory of the powers within Brahman. Here, cit or consciousness is equated with Brahman. However, unlike the Brahman understood in Advaita Vedānta, the Brahman here is endowed with infinite powers, and the cosmos is the play or expansion of its powers. The world, according to this model, is not a projection of illusion, but rather, the play of consciousness. Viśīsa here also refers to expansion, as the opposite term used is saṅkoca (retraction). According to this, there is nothing that is devoid of consciousness; however, for sentient entities, their consciousness is in its dormant form, sleeping with the possibility of ascending to its true nature. The approach of a yōgin is to strive for recognizing this all-embracing consciousness as the foundation of the self and the cosmos.

2.4. The concept of Brahman and of māyā, with the affirmation of monism, makes this yoga system different from the Patañjalian yoga. The philosophical ground where the Patañjalian yoga functions is the dualistic Sāṅkhya system, where the distinction between prakṛti and puruṣa with the world as the transformation of prakṛti is taken for granted. Following Nāṭh yoga, however, although the world rises with mahāmāyā functioning in this expansion, it is not dualistic, as in essence, the world is merely the play of awareness.

2.5. The SSP describes the rise of the second power, parā śakti as: tasyā unmakhamātreṇa parā śaktir utthitaḥ | (SSP 1.6a).

The power identified as parā is arisen with only the sorcuping of the power (identified as niṣṭa) [tasyā]).

This power identified as parā is described in five terms: is-ness (astītā), of the character of not being an object of knowledge (aprameyatā), the character of being inseparable (abhinnatā), the property of having no end (ananatā), and the property of being unmanifest (avyaktatā) (SSP 1.9).

2.6. The SSP describes the rise of the third power, aparā śakti as: tasyāḥ spandaśanmātreyenāparā śaktir utthitaḥ | (SSP 1.6c).

The power identified as aparā is arisen with the mere pulsation of that (power).

Again, this aparā (śakti) is described in five terms: the property of being manifest (sphuritaḥ), the property of having been manifest (sphatatā), the property of expansion (spharitaḥ), the property of being cracked (sphatah), and the property of having been expressed (spharitaḥ) (SSP 1.10). These terms designate the states of the powers being manifest and the accomplished state of that manifestation.
2.7. In this picture, the rise of powers in the process of the manifestation of the world is sequential. After the rise of the two aforementioned powers, the fourth power identified as sūkṣma comes into play:

\[ \text{tato 'hantārđhamāřeṇa sūkṣma śaktir utpānī (SSP 1.7ab),} \]

(the power identified as sūkṣma is arisen after that, only with an instrument of] the half of aham). 18

2.8. This subtle energy is interpreted in five terms like the previous forces: of the property of having no parts (nirāmāśatā), continuity (nirantaratā), motionlessness (niścalatā), fixedness (niścayatā), and of the character devoid of mental construction (nirvikalpatā) (SSP 1.11).

2.9. The last power to manifest in this sequence is kundali. Following SSP, this is of the character of sensation (vedana). 19 This power is also explained in five terms: completeness (pūrṇatā), of the character of counter-image (pratibimbatā), being endowed with excessive force (prabalatā), of the character of rapid movement (proc-chalatā), and of the character of inwardness (pratyānakhatatā). What is evident in this description is that Kundali is the most external among the forces, the most physical, and of the property of sensation (vedana). The rise of the Kundali, following this description, is merely the rise of the most external among the five forces. The yogic goal of liberation is achieved with the rise of all five powers.

2.10. These powers parallel the five powers of Lord Śiva as explained in Kashmiri Śaivite texts: the power of awareness itself (cīt), the power of bliss (ānanda), the power of volition (iecha), the power of knowledge (jñāna), and the power of action (kriyā). The rise of these powers, according to the Trīka system, is sequential, and the external expansion of these powers leads to the manifestation of the world, whereas the rise of these powers dormant in living beings leads to self-realization. The technical terms applied in describing these powers, the categorization of the powers as Parā and Apara, and the concept of the serpentine power dormant within the body are just a few of the features that allow this yoga system to be compared with the Tantric Kaula system.

18 For discussion on the Trīka Śaiva understanding of I-sense (aham), see Flood 2004, 147-154.

19 tato vedanastīḥ kundaliśca jñātā ugata ŚSP 1.7cd.

3. The Body as the Cosmos

3.1. Following the second essential doctrine discussed in SSP, the body is identical with the cosmos; i.e., pinda is brahmāṇḍa. In the first level of instruction, this yoga system teaches that the body mirrors the cosmos and a yogin visualizes accordingly. At the most exalted level, the yogin is considered to have achieved supernormal powers through the realization of this identity. This doctrine, that the body is identical with the cosmos, is the consequence of the first, that the world is the manifestation of consciousness. When there is no real difference between the first pulsating power and its external manifestation, there can be no difference between the external body, the cosmos in a collective sense, and the body at the individual level. The five aforementioned powers consequently manifest themselves within the body and the cosmos, living individually as well as at the cosmic level. The concept of the transformation of these five powers in cosmic and bodily forms parallels the transformation of five powers as described in the Tantras. 20

3.2. These five powers each with five aspects are collectively present in the collective mass or Andā. 21 This primordial cosmic being is explained in five terms: the immanent-transcendent (aparampara), the supreme abode (paramapada), void (śūnya), free from defilements (nirālātana), and the supreme self (paramātman) (SSP 1.15). This Andā possesses in its first attribute (aparampara) the character of sūkṣma or the property of swelling or expanding only, which, as the cosmic principle, is the power or potency of expansion, or the power to manifest. Furthermore, this attribute, compiled of two terms apara and para, explains the Andā as a constellation of all apara or individual bodies, while having its own para or transcendent form. The second attribute, paramapada, characterizes this cosmic body as the supreme abode of the yogins in their realized state. This state, as manifest in the individual, has the character of conceptualization (bhāvanāmātra). The third attribute, śūnya, refers to the empty void as experienced in the yogic trance. Although this cosmic body is the collective being of all that is manifest, this is experienced by yogins as empty void. This emptiness is not to be understood as non-being, but rather, this is of the character of self-existence.

20 For discussion on pentads, see Weitz 1996, 206-210. Select examples from the Trīka tradition are: Prasūddhābhāvāvān 10, 11; Spandānāvyavahāra 10, 11; Mahābhūtavādāvatā, verse 37 with Parināma, Īddāya in Śveçchāndaśāstra 1.3-4.

21 The general terms used to designate this collective body are paraśīdu, Hiranyagarbha, and samūṣṭipīṅḍa.
alone (svasattāmātra). The next term, niraṇjana, or free from defilements, describes the never-bound, infinitely free nature of this cosmic body. SSP explains this term as svasākṣātkāramātra, or of the character of being immediately experienced by the self alone, or of the mode of the self experiencing itself (SSP 1.15). The last of the attributes of Āṇḍa is paramāṭmā, the supreme self. These attributes explain the essential nature of Āṇḍa as sharing existence and awareness in its undefined nature.

3.3. This cosmic body is further explained in five terms: supreme bliss (paramā nanda), awakening (prabodha), the rise of awareness (cicirāyu), light (prakāśa), and the essence of ‘I am that’ (sohambhāva) (SSP 1.22). The first term, supreme bliss, refers to the bliss experienced by yogins while visualizing the cosmic body and is explained in terms such as spanda or pulsation. This bliss interpreted in terms of spanda further elucidates the expansion of the cosmic body in plurality as the manifestation of the nature of bliss in manifoldness. This pulsating nature of power is another aspect that brings this yogic system closer to the Tantric doctrine. The second term, prabodha, refers to constantly awakening nature of this cosmic body. This is interpreted in terms of ‘rise’ (udaiva) or ‘blossoming’ or ‘bulging’ (vikāsa), and at the level of contraction, describes the awakened character of consciousness as the rise of the I-sense. The third attribute, cicirāyu, explains the rising nature of the cosmic force, sleeping contracted in its dormant form. This awakening of awareness is explained in terms such as sahbāva or the essence of being, as this cosmic presence is the immediate experience of being that permeates all. The term ‘light’ refers to the self-aware character of this cosmic being which is recognized as ‘resting’ (viśrānti). This can be interpreted as ‘I-ness’, which is the resting of the self-aware consciousness on itself. The last term applied to interpret this Āṇḍa, the essence of ‘I am that’, further explains ‘I-ness’ in its pure form that collectively permeates all individual I-ness and the bodies that are the foundation of limited I-ness. Along these lines, the rise of this cosmic I-ness is due to the rise of the powers, categorized in five sections, each having numerous characteristics. This state is explained in terms such as the potency of experiencing the entire world (viśvāvahāva-sāmarthya).

3.4. In the sequence when the world arises, this supreme mass (para pīṇḍa) unfolds in the sequence of sky, air, fire, water, and earth, allowing

physical extension of the powers endowed with consciousness. The rise of various divinities parallels the rise of the cosmos comprised of these vital principles.23 A yogin endeavors to unite the individual properties such as mind, intellect, and I-sense, with the cosmic forces emanating in the creative process of specific principles. This process of union is called samarasa-karaṇa or mingling the fluids. In yogic absorption, a yogin experiences that the cosmic forces and the individual forces are one and the same. This is the awareness of bliss in recognizing oneness in the pulsating and manifold cosmos.

3.5. The last in sequence of the cosmic manifestation to arise prior to individuality is prakṛti-pīṇḍa, or the mass of the procreative force. All of the individual bodies (vyāṣṭi-pīṇḍa) evolve from this mass of the procreative force.24 The gendered bodies share the same properties of this prakṛti-pīṇḍa.

3.6. The individual body is comprised of seven categories:

1. bhūta-pīṇḍa. This body is constituted of the principles of sky, air, fire, water, and earth. The properties found in these principles correlate with the characteristics of the body.

2. antah-karaṇa. The inner senses constitute another category within the body. The understanding of the ‘inner sense’ in the Nāth literature is somewhat different from that found in Sāṅkhyā and other traditions. Following the description found in SSP, the five constituents of the inner sense are the mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), I-sense (ahankāra), conscious organ (citta), and consciousness (caitanya). Although the first three are commonly found in other literature and the understanding here does not differ from the Sāṅkhyā understanding, two terms, citta and caitanya need further explanation. Citta is explained as comprised of the properties such as disposition (mātuṣṭa), endurance (drṣṭi), memory (smṛti), abandonment (tyāga), and ac-

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23 This extension of the cosmic body in iconic form refers to eight divinities: Śiva, Bhairava, Śrikantha, Śadāśiva, Īśvara, Rudra, Viṣṇu, and Brahm (SSP 1.36). This hierarchy contains two additional deities between Śiva and Śadāśiva, while the three Purāṇic divinities of emergence, sustenance, and contraction are also incorporated within the system. The worlds are experienced within these eight aforementioned images. The worlds abiding in these eight images are directly related to the notion of emergence (prakṛti), mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), law (dharma), aesthetic last (rasa), and bliss (ānanda).

24 tavatahbrühmaṇoḥ sakāśād avadhiṣṭhaya mānavābhāvoyā pākprātipiṇḍah samupanṣas tac ca pūcācādiḥāvāmaḥ sātvatram uti (SSP 1.57). Although I have cited this passage following Mallinckrodt's edition, I prefer the version that reads tato brühmaṇaḥ...
ceptance (śvākāra). Caitanya is explained in five terms as well: reflection (vimāraṇa), self-conduct (śīlāna), endurance (dhairya), meditation (cintana), and dispassion (niḥsṛṣṭa).  

3. kula-paṇcaka. By the constellation of five (kula-paṇcaka), three qualities such as satva, rajas, tamas, and the living being (jīva), and time (kāla) are understood (SSP 1.49).

4. vyakti-paṇcaka. The group of the self-manifest, constituted of five characteristics, includes volition (iccā), action (kriyā), limiting factor (māyā), prakṛti, and speech (vāk).

5. The five instruments of direct perception, action (karma), desire (kāma), fire (agni), sun (sūrya), and moon (candra) are manifest in the process of knowing through the senses.

6. nāḍī-samsthāna or the system of nerves. Founded upon three principal nāḍīs, iḍā, pīṇgala, and suṣumnā, the body consists of seventy-two thousand nerves.

7. vidyā-samsthāna. Ten different life forces are distributed in different parts of the body.

3.7. This physiology demonstrates distinct thinking within the Nātha literature where, although some parallels can be drawn from the Śāṅkhya and Tantric literature, it nonetheless is unique and complete in its own. Yogic realization, following this system, is through the reflection upon the body (pīṇḍa-vicāra). In the process of this reflection, a distinct esoteric physiology is explained, according to which the body is comprised of nine cakras, sixteen bases (ādharā), three centers of fixation (laksṇa), and five voids.

3.8. This depiction of the body poses another challenge: on one hand, this yoga endorses ‘body’ at the center of the yogic practice, while on the other hand, the body, as visualized or examined in this system, does not exactly correspond to the actual physical body. Without the knowledge of the ‘yogic body’, progress is not possible. However, the knowledge of the body, when received by the practitioner, is also a projection of the cosmos, a layer on top of the corporeal body. Recognition of the body in this system is therefore not the recognition of the corporeal body but rather the realization of the bodily interface, a layer that overarches the corporeal body and merges both the subjective and objective aspects of the body. The knowledge of this yogic body, according to the Nātha yoga, allows a yogin to have knowledge of all sentient and insentient entities. A yogin with the knowledge of this body, as explained in the Nātha literature, possesses infinite powers and can assume many forms.

3.9. This view of the body as the miniature form of the cosmos is yet another aspect that begs for a comparative outlook. The connection of microcosm, the body, and macrocosm, the cosmos, has very ancient precedents in India. The interconnections span many traditions: the Vedic idea of Puruṣa, the Upaniṣadic concept of Vairāj, Hiranyagarbha, and Īśvara with the parallel drawn between the three states of the individual self identified as viśva, taṭāsya, prājñā, the concept of Lord Kṛṣṇa as a yogin and his projection of the viśvarūpa (cosmic form), and the Tantric visualization of the cosmos within the body in the process of ritual installation (nādiśā). What changes from one tradition to another is the way the macrocosm is visualized within the body and the experience of omnipresence that is reinforced through the yogic practice. Again, when comparing the Nātha literature and Patañjali yoga, the concept of the body as the miniature cosmos is more closely aligned to the Tantric literature.

3.10. Following the Yogasūtra (YS), the visualization of the sun, moon, or polar star grants the perfection of knowledge concerning the cosmos, stars, and the movement of a particular star, while specific visualization within the corporeal centers grants different perfections. As long as the ground is, it can be argued that Patañjali yoga does not focus on the cosmic vision, neither does it consider cosmic vision to be characteristic of absorption (samādhi).

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26 SSP 1.43-48.
27 naivacakram kālāhāram triakcam vamopasaṭkam | samayev etan na jñānai so vṛti | naivadibhārak | SSP 2.31. Instead of nine cakras, the common cakra system found in Tantric and Nātha literature is that of six cakras. The commonly found esoteric physiology of six cakras in GŚ 13 parallels Netraśāstra 7.1-2.
28 pindaśāmśa carīcaras sa jñānai so vṛti pindaśamśāta bhojant | SSP 31.
29 aćcayāsakaśām vyapti mūrvikām śaṅkacaro sa prāgānti swetacarā vajjathidvayāh | Yogāśītha 55. in Gorakṣinaśādhanāsaṅgāraha p 67.
30 For discussion, see White 1996, 15-47.
31 he only indication that the sun, moon, and polar star discussed in YS can refer to corporeal centers is Vyākā's usage of the term sūrabhūta (the gate of the sun) in his commentary on YS 3.26. This, however, cannot conclusively indicate the original intent of the author of the Śūraśāstra.
3.11. On the contrary, both Tantric philosophy and ritual reinforce the concept that the body is the miniature cosmos. The Trika Saiva concept of pūrnāhātā (complete I-awareness), and the concept of viśvaṃayatā (awareness of the totality as the self) specifically promoted by Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja, have bearing upon the subsequent Tantric development that sees the body as the cosmos in its microcosmic form. Virāpākṣapaṁcāśikā (VP) is one of the subsequent texts closely aligned with the concept of pindaḥrahmāṇḍa discussed above. In it, the body is identified as pīṇḍa (VP 1.2; 2.15). The entire world from void to earth is the body of the conscious self; just as the body is an object of perception, so is the world (VP 1.2). The constellations of worlds are located within the body and appear as if outside due to illusion (VP 4.1). The concept of viśvadeha (the cosmos as the body), found in VP 1.4, reinforces the same concept.

3.12. The Trika philosophical concept of immanence (viśvaṃayatā) parallels early Tantric ritual visualizations and purification rituals that describe the identity of the body and the cosmos. The ritual purification of bhūvanas prescribed in chapter five of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra (MVT), and the ritual installation within the body found in chapter 6 exemplify such ritual that paved the path to the cosmic vision of the yogins. The subsequent development that most Tantric texts recorded rituals and visualizations confirms this idea. Examples can be given from Bhairavyāmala, in which the body is comprised of nine vyāhas, and from Kulārṇavatantra, which describes the ritual installation (nyāsa) of various worlds within the body.

3.13. Although this discussion shows the similarities between the Nāth and the Tantric concepts of the identity of the body with the cosmos, it is not appropriate to declare these concepts as identical. Significant differences constitute the Nāth yogic vision of prakṛtipiṇḍa and vyāsāpiṇḍa and the sevenfold analysis of the individual body. Again, what this comparison confirms is that the Nāth yoga system is comparatively closer to the Tantric tradition; however, it has its own unique categories that warrant its distinct position in the history of Indian thought.

4. The Yoga of ‘Sound’ and ‘Drop’

4.1. The yoga of the Nāths is the awakening to the expanded reality, wherein the body of the yōgin permeates the cosmos and the being of the yōgin identifies with the highest reality known as Śiva. Through the practice of samarasaka (in which the yōgin’s individuality sequentially merges with the highest reality), the yōgin is the cosmos in corporeal form. One of the constituents that distinguish this yogic realization from others is their description of this yoga as amanaska (that which is devoid of mind). This is not simply ‘no-mind’: something is actively present and is revealed when there is no mental activity. The suffix -ka used after the term amanas refers to the reality that is endowed with ‘mindlessness’. This rejection of the mind functions as a rejection of language. And the language describing the body of the yōgin as the cosmos becomes merely a figurative expression in order to suggest the yogic experience, for which common language falls short.

4.2. How do Nāth yogins solve the paradox that without language, teaching reality is not possible, as it requires the active presence of mind, and in language the heightened reality cannot be expressed? Their yogic realization is not merely an intellectual achievement, it is finding one’s active presence in the cosmic state. The language used as a tool to both direct the progress for this awakening and to describe the yogic experience, therefore, cannot have a single application: that which leads to the truth also opens itself up and reveals the truth in its deeper core meaning. At the initial level, this works as language revealing what is external, while in the absolute sense, it transforms into the inner reality that cannot be deciphered in terms of intellectually cognized external objective phenomena.

4.3. The practice of hamsa exemplifies this phenomenon. Nāth yoga features a primary focus on this yogic exercise of breathing. While the practice of hamsa connects Nāth yoga practice with the Tantric yogic system, this aspect also distinguishes Nāth yoga from the Patañjalian yoga system. This hamsa, literally a ‘goose’, and figuratively a yogin

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32 This can be found also in Suucaḥdatantra with different number of bhūvanas (Suucaḥdatantra, Chapters 4 and 10).
33 This is found in citation in the Lakṣmidhara’s commentary on Saumoraśalabha 34. It is also discussed in Kaśyapa 1972, 43-45.
34 Kulārṇavatantra, Chapter 4.
35 Many Tantric texts can be cited to show the practice of hamsa. The most common one, Vijñānabhairava (see, for instance, verses 24-22, 67, 69, 154-156) is historically one of the early Tantric texts to endorse this practice. For the practice of hamsa in the Nāth literature, see GS 22, 42, 43, and 47. The Čakra system is yet another category to relate Nāth yoga with the Tantric yoga system and distinguish it from Patañjalian yoga tradition. GS 22 explains the rise of prāna in the svaśiddhiḥ sūtra in the navel.
who is able to discriminate between what is real and what is not and not be stained while living in a world tainted by limitation, is not a term to refer to any of these; this is simply a breathing exercise. What happens to the meaning revealed by language? The terminal meaning describes the yogic attributes, the yogin is recognized in his society as Hamsa or Paramahamsa; however, this ‘hamsa’, for the yogin, is his practice of breathing.

4.4. This hamsa is considered to be the Gayatrī mantra. Now, the natural breathing that sustains life turns into mystical chanting, a yogic practice. What is natural is brought into intentional practice. Just as a ‘layered’ body subordinates the corporeal body, the layered breathing with imposed meaning as the mantra of Kūndalinī subordinates the natural breathing. On one hand, breathing in itself is not yoga, on the other hand, yoga is breathing. The value imposed upon breathing, with numbered repetitions layered with visualization of various cakras, is what constitutes this as a yoga. The two sounds found in the word hamsa correspond to the two binary aspects of male and female, or solar and lunar, further demonstrating the primacy of superimposed meaning that allows identification of this word with a yogic practice. What is significant is the corporeality of the term: understanding its terminal meaning is not the point of this yogic practice. Language becomes a physical function, and what is suggested and the act of suggesting become one. When the yogin actually becomes Hamsa, a yogic state referring to a realized yogin, he experiences amanaska or that which is beyond mind. The yogic experience is found in the mindless state when there is no breathing. The mantra or the language ceases in front of the reality, giving up its essence to the subject who finds his identity with the referent of the word. Ironically, in order to become a Hamsa, he has to be able to stop the process of regular breathing to free himself from the regular course of hamsa.

4.5. This internalization of language, the corporeality of signs, and the actual yogic awakening as the abandonment of language or the incineration of the suggestibility of language is what distinctively identifies Nāth yoga. Application of terms as both literal and suggestive, and their reference to external objects as well as inner physical phenomena can be further demonstrated in the use of nāda and bindu, terms found in both Nāth and Tantric literature and absent in the Patañjalian system.

5. Bindu and Nāda

5.1. The importance of bindu and nāda, in the Nāth yoga system, brings it closer to Tantric tradition. However, bindu and nāda, at both the cosmic and epistemic levels, differ in a subtle sense from the way these terms have been applied in the Tantras, particularly the Kauśā Tantra system. Before entering into differences between the Nāth and Tantric application of these terms, they need to be analyzed in their etymological sense. The term bindu can be derived from two different verbal roots: bind, which means ‘to split’, and bidi which means ‘to know’. long with the suffix and according to the first verbal root, the term refers to the separate drop; following the second root, it identifies an autonomous entity in knowing: something that is conscious. The second term, nāda, is derived from the verbal root nāda, which means ‘to make an unmanifest sound’. Nāda, along these lines, refers to the sound that is not heard. In the Tantric and Nāth literature, both of these terms, bindu and nāda, have various meanings, referring to its external or physical aspect, and the inner modes. In the external sense, bindu, or drop, is both the offering to the deities in the māndala as well as the seminal drop that gives rise to the body. As a body comes into being through the seminal bindu, so is the body of the māndala, the cosmic body, vivified with the offering made in the māndala. Nāda, on the other hand, refers in its external aspect to the horn generally carried by Nāth yogins, tied with their sacred thread.

5.2. The corporeal aspect of the drop is explained in the Nāth literature along the lines that the drop (bindu) that causes the body has two aspects, the white drop symbolizing semen and the red drop, blood. These two principles are considered as the aspects of Śiva and Śakti. The red drop also symbolizes the sun while the white drop symbolizes the moon. In the esoteric body, the two aspects further represent the two channels of tāḍa and pingalā. At the physical level, yogins endeavor to capture the seminal drop within the body through the practice of various pārāśic exercises. The practice of bindu, in this sense, is the practice of holding the seminal drop within the body. The physical presence of the drop (bindu) in the body is described as having the form of a ball located below the
svādhīśṭhāna cakra. This bindu is also considered to be the center upon which a yogic adept focuses in order to enter into the body of the disciple he is initiating into this yoga. The physical drop becomes a means of yogic entry to another realm. Although this identification of bindu with sakra (GS 76) is not unique to Nath literature and is also found in Tantric texts, the esoteric discussion of three bindus and particularly the discussion of visarga which often accompanies the discussion of bindu found in Trika literature and in the writings of Abhinavagupta, is absent from Nath writings.40

5.3. The Abhinavaguptian concept of bindu is not simply corporeal, but also epistemic and cosmic. For him, bindu is the light (prakāśa) devoid of distinction.41 Tantras conceive of bindu in three categories, and this concept is also found in the chronologically later Upanisadic literature.42 There are three bindus, the drop of fire, sun, and moon found in the base, heart, and eyebrow. Visualization of the bindu incorporates the meditation of aspects of fire, sun, and moon within the body. Tantras describing the process of bindu and nāda do not always follow the same sequence in explaining their precedence. According to Svachchandatantra (ST), bindu manifests of the nāda.43 The drop is the manifestation of the power of action (kriyāśakti) endowed with cit, consciousness. The manifestation of bindu in the form of the objective world is therefore the manifestation of consciousness. The subtle visualization of bindu is atop the power of volition (icchā-śakti).44

5.4. The ST describes this drop as having ten different forms where each of three aspects of fire, sun, and moon interpenetrate and form nine drops visualized in white, red, yellow, black, green, reddish-brown, blue, multi-colored, crystal color, and clear with distinct color (ST 12.154). The collective bindu is considered as the tenth, which is compared with the light of the moon, or a flash of lightning (ST 12.155-156). This specific visualization of bindu occurs in the Sādāśiva stage. Visualization of the drop varies according to different levels of spiritual awakening. Following ST, Sadāśiva is considered to be below the veil of the drop, while the drop visualized at the Īśvara level is comprised of four distinct kalās.45

5.5. Following Abhinavagupta and Jayaratha, bindu is spontaneous in the act of knowing.46 This autonomy is inherent even when the true nature of the living being (jīva) as Śiva is not recognized. When awareness in the highest form of bindu arises, the cosmic body that the yogin realizes is experienced as the conjoined form of Śiva and Śakti (TA 3.111). As there are different subjective stages corresponding to the bodies of the cosmic images, bindu, or the consolidated form of knowing, is found in various grades as well. Along these lines, bindu is the contracted state of Śiva.47

5.6. Abhinavaguptian analysis identifies the drop (bindu), and emission (visarga) as the contracting and expanding modes of awareness, or the essential nature of the self. The play (vilāsa) of cit underlies these two aspects. It is explicit that this connection of bindu and visarga has a Kālic implication, where bindu or semen is necessarily linked with its emission (visarga). However, the role of visarga is explicitly reversed in the Hatha yoga practice described in Nath literature. Tantras explain bindu and visarga as two phonemic states, in which the bindu that evolves through nāda which is considered to be the lower bindu, is said to cause the rise of the letters. The bindu that is above the causation of nāda is addressed as mahābindu, and the bindu that gives rise to all the letters is considered to be the lower bindu.48 As all mantras are essentially comprised of the letters, so are the letters of the bindu, and the recognition of this bindu is also the recognition of the source of all mantras. The cosmic image that is endowed with procreative force and is instrumental in the rise of the world below māyā is considered to be comprised of bindu. Along these lines, not only the bindu in its limited form but also

40 For example, the awakening through the rise of bindu in Abhinavaguptian literature is identified as an 'entry into the cave' (gshara-viśeṣa), where bindu finds its true identity as the conjoined body of light (prakāśa) and reflection (vimarśa). Abhinavagupta follows the text Gadhvāraśastra when describing binduvedha. See TA 20.244-45.
41 avśāhāvy prakāśa sa bindhā puramo hi nāḥ | TA 3.111.1c.
42 For threefold bindu, see TA 3.112134 and the Viveka commentary of Jayaratha thereon.
43 Similar discussion is found in Dvīvānabigrāntha 26-27.
44 nādā bindha samapannah śāyukatāt sāmyaprabhaḥ, ST 11.9abh.
45 See Īḍāvsta commentary on ST 11.9-10.
46 ST 12.157; 11.10-11, and the Īḍāvsta commentary thereon. See also ST 10.1214 and the Īḍāvsta commentary thereon.
47 TA 3.111, and bindha veadvātā puraḥ prakāśaḥ... Viveka, TA 3.112-13.
48 For the Śuddhānīma Śaiva theology with ample reference to bindu and nāda, see Astapramanika.
49 RTP 22, and the commentary of Aghoraśiva thereon.
the cosmic image (sākara pinda) that causes the pinda, possess the body which is the constellation of the bindu.49

5.7. As has been discussed, the bindu has different functions, some at the cosmic level, others in the individual body, and also the process of the rise of letters (mārkṣṇa). Considering these various functions, bindu is invoked as the word principle (śabdātātva). Significantly, this drop (bindu), which is often identified as the binary opposite of sound (nāda), is addressed with terms like ‘unstruck sound’ (anāhata), which connect both terms at their inner form. As this drop is essentially a means to reveal something that is devoid of objects, it is also addressed as void (śūnya).50 This explains that the binaries function at the external level, and their inner reality is one. These words refer to the experience which is expressed in other words as the experience of nothingness or void.

5.8. The stimulation or movement in this bindu gives rise to the world, and when the bindu is motionless, the world contracts. This unfolding, enfolding nature of bindu is commonly found in both Tantric and Nāth literature. Due to the generative nature of bindu and nāda, these are identified with Śiva and Sakti.51 The presence of this primordial couple is found in the world through the presence of bindu and nāda, and the realization of Brahma, or the Śiva principle as the essential nature of the self, also occurs through the medium of bindu and nāda.

5.9. Although frequently addressed together with bindu, nāda warrants separate analysis, as these terms often refer to two distinct processes at the cosmic (anda) and individual (pinda) levels. Like bindu, nāda is recognized in various forms, particularly in the process of the yogic practice and in the culmination of yogic absorption. Before addressing the philosophical understanding of nāda and comparing it in different Tantric texts, it is contextual to show how nāda is practiced in the Nāth tradition. A brief description of nāda practice found in GVS follows:

Settled in a relaxed position and one-pointed, a yogin should listen to the sound situated inside [his body] in his right ear, making (sandhāva) the gesture [called] Śambhavi. In whatever location the mind first becomes engaged in sound, [it] becomes fixed there and dissolves into that [sound]. The practitioner of silence (muni) should fix his mind on the sound that he hears when both ears are have been covered with both hands until he reaches the fixed state. In the first practice, a loud sound is heard in various forms; when the practice grows, a subter and subtler [sound] is heard. In the beginning [the sounds like that] of the ocean, cloud, kettle-drum (bheri), and that emerging from a water-fall, in the middle [sounds] arising of drum, conch shell, bell, and a large drum (kāhala), and at the end, the sounds of a tinkling ornament (kinkin), flute, lute, and bumblebee: in this way various types of sounds moving inside the body are heard. Even when the loud sound such as that of cloud or of kettle- drum (bheri) is heard, [the yogin] should contemplate upon the subtler-than-subtle sound. The sound that is found of the unstruck word (śabda), the object of knowledge is inside [that sound] and mind is inside of knowledge. The mind gets dissolved there. That is the supreme abode of Śambhu. Whatever is heard in the form of the sound (nāda), that is Śakti. That which is formless at the end of all the principles (tattvānta) is the supreme Lord.52

5.10. These verses demonstrate the Nāth understanding of nāda as a means of yogic practice, with various forms of sound being heard during the course of practice which culminates with the dissolution of the mind in the dissipation of sound. The parallels drawn from musical instruments and natural sounds such as that of the ocean or a cloud provide guidance to the sounds that change from loud to subtle along the path to the inner, unstruck sound (anāhata). This equation of nāda with Sakti agrees with

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49 RT 57.59, and the commentary of Aghorāśīva thereon.
50 RT 70.71.
51 Aghorāśīva, vṛtti in Tatvopakāśa 27.
52 RT 455-456, and the commentary of Dvivedi 1966, is timely.
the detail where nāda and bindu are compared with Śakti and Śiva.

5.11. On the basis of yogic awakening, this sound is analyzed in four stages: the stage of the beginning (ārambha), of holding inside (ghata), of specific selection (paricāya), and the stage of accomplishment (nispattī). These states of yogic awakening are affiliated with four physical centers considered to be opened by distinct sounds. The yogic awakening described in these states is compared either with sounds coming from different musical instruments or is described in terms of experiencing the supreme void (mahāśūnya).

5.12. Entering into the inner sound is often taught along with the practice of articulation of Om. More important than counting a specific number of repetitions or reflecting upon its meaning, Om is articulated in order to hear the rise of nāda and experience its transformation in various forms and its culmination in the inner sound. Hearing the sound of Om or listening to the natural sound of regular respiration is supposed to connect the articulated sound with the inner sound that can be heard with concentration. In this description, dhvani and nāda often refer to both the external and inner sounds. The inner sound transcends all categories, dissolving the mind, lifting the awareness of the yogin to the state of Śiva (Nāḍa-kārīkā 1).

5.13. Nāda is described as the sound that reveals the meaning. In this sense, nāda is interchangeable with the Word Principle (Śabda Brahma). The recognition of meaning does not occur at the same moment as the articulation of the word, which vanishes after it is spoken. What then gives rise to the meaning is the nāda— the exalted form of the sound heard audibly, transformed into the specific form of the inner sound, giving rise to specific awareness (Yogapradīpikā 11). This inner sound therefore bridges the sounds heard outside and the inner sound which is awareness itself. What is explicit is the penetrating nature of this sound that is articulated audibly and through inner senses, reaches the awareness of the listener. The articulation of words or expression of language is categorized as occurring in the process of reflection (vimāśa), awareness (bindu), sound (nāda), expression (śphota), and word (śabda).

Although these terms are sometimes used alternatively, here they express a sequence where inner awareness manifests in the form of sound, giving rise to the external body of awareness in the form of language.

5.14. Nāda is divided into two: the higher nāda that gives rise of the lower nāda, and the lower nāda that abides in each individual, giving rise to consciousness. The higher sound that collectively embodies all the lower sounds found in different individuals is addressed with multiple terms that designate distinct roles this nāda plays revealing various functions and attributes. This nāda is also the ground where mantras evolve (MM 24).

5.15. When bindu and nāda are interpreted with this depth of meaning which incorporates the aspects of both cause and effect, the world is merely an expression of bindu and nāda. As the two primordial principles that give rise to the world, Śiva and Śakti, bindu embodies the cosmic body and as hāṃsa, or two sounds corresponding to bindu and nāda, these two refer to the individual body (piṅḍa). In the form of articulated sound, nāda is categorized into ten forms.

5.16. This elaborate practice of nāda typically demonstrates two tendencies: external instrumental sound that is practiced with the use of a musical instrument, or is heard, such as the sound of the waves in the ocean or the clouds, and the inner sound that is heard in different centers of the body during the meditation, the sound that is commonly heard when...

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53 The Brahma-granthi, Visnu-granthi, Rudra-granthi, or the 'knots' identified with various deities who have the distinct roles of creation, sustenance, dissolution, play the same role: identifying the corporeal body with the cosmic body.
54 Yogapradīpikā 4.70-76.
55 Śripūjākāla, cited in MM, p. 86.
ears are closed. In both these external and inner modes of sound, there is a tendency of going towards what is subtle. When a particular level is reached, however, both modes are dropped. The approach is explicit: to enter into the inner and inarticulate sound by means of the external sound, and finally to allow the mind do dissolve into emptiness. This approach is addressed as amanaska yoga.

5.17. Although the description varies as to which specific sound is the highest, a method for listening to the inner sound as a means of absorption is common to all the practices. Different terms used to express the sound, such as dhvani (MVT 12.12) or śabda (ST 11.6.7), refer to the same inner sound. The articulation of the first sound in the process of the unfolding of the cosmogony is subsequent to the touch (sparśa) of Śiva and Śakti. This sparśa also expresses the inner experience of touch a yogin feels where mind is absorbed and the sound dissolved. This dissolution of sound is measured in extremely subtle increments, the most subtle stage being unmanā, the state that transcends mind. Svachchanda Tantra explains the higher stages of the practice of sound with the terms vyāpiṇi, samanā, and unmanā, where the void that is experienced and is the state of volition governed by volition itself is samanā, vyāpiṇi as the state where transcendent void is experienced and the aspect of knowledge is governed by will, and śakti as the state where action is governed by will. This śakti is the power that gives awareness of meaning and it is where the first nāda evolves (Uḍḍayata, ST 11.5).

5.18. A common categorization of sound found in Tantric literature is fourfold: struck (hata), unstruck (anāhata), both struck and unstruck (anāhata-hata), and beyond struck and unstruck (anāhata-hatotttṛta). The first level of the sound is the physical, articulated in the throat or palate, comparable to the vaikārī level of speech. The second, accordingly, is compared with madhyamā level of speech and is considered as the origin of the articulated sound. As this is not the sound coming through physical limbs, this is addressed as anāhata. The third one is identified as the sound that is heard when the eardrums are closed. This is the unstruck sound, as there is not an external physical instrumentality other than the inner flow of the life-force (prāṇa) in the channels inside the body. Utārīma is the sound that resides in the supreme void and is heard when mental conception ceases. Due to its nature of not being grasped by the mind, it is also addressed as asparśa (untouched).

5.19. What is noteworthy in this discussion is that the application of nāda in Hatha yoga texts is explicit: they identify the nāda practice of listening to the inner corporeal sound; Nath yogins are often found using one or the other musical instrument, including a trumpet, explicitly connecting the cosmic understanding of nāda with its physical application in the course of yogic practice. The Tantric description of nāda, although parallel in many respects, is not identical in its application. Singing songs in different rāgas, for example, is not an integral part of Tantric nāda practice, as is the case with Nath yogins. Often found practice of dhān, melodious sound, among the Nath yogins, is essential to sing the vernacular songs, dolās, which keeps this esoteric system alive among the non-elite. The physical articulation of sound in this yogic tradition illuminates the hierarchy of hata or ‘struck’, and anāhata, the ‘sound occurring without effort’.

6. The Language of the Siddhas

6.1. Two aspects of the Nath yoga literature, their cosmogony and metaphysics, and their yoga of the recognition of the self in its cosmic form, utilize an abundance of metaphors. Borrowing directly from the earlier Siddha tradition and Tantric literature, Nath writings are rich in the use of suggested meaning (dhvani). Because yogic or esoteric experience often defies language, the application of metaphors and indirect expression in order to describe yogic awakening can be a tool to understand the deep structure of the cognitive processes discussed in Nath literature. The fundamental aspects, the awakening of Kundal, the recognition of the body as identical to the cosmos, and the realization of the world as the play of consciousness are all expressed through select metaphors. Some typical examples are:

1. The play of consciousness (ciddvālāsā): The term ‘play’, whether interpreted as a sport or ‘acting’, derives from common-sense experience to describe the cosmic process.

2. pindā and cūḍā: The terms ‘mass’ and ‘egg’ here refer to the body and the cosmos. The term pindā does not literally mean ‘the body’, nor does ‘egg’ mean the cosmos.

3. sankusco and vikāsa: The manifestation of the world and its retraction to the original nature of pure consciousness is explained here in terms of the blooming and folding of lotus. Some Tantras compare this with the process of contracting and unfolding process of the female genitalia. The application of these terms
in order to describe the cosmic process depends upon metaphorical understanding.

4. **vedha**: Piercing, is used in this description to describe subtle yogic awareness when certain centers within the body are addressed as pierced. In the case of piercing the Nath yogin’s ears for wearing a set of big earrings, this term is literal. However, there is no actual piercing inside the body that gives rise to the notion of cosmic awareness. The sensation a yogin feels in certain prāṇic functioning is described as ‘piercing’, comparing the experience of being pierced by a needle.59

5. **prabodha**: ‘Awakening’ describes yogic experience and compares with the waking state of consciousness.

6. **tamarasa**: ‘Mingling the fluid’ describes the yogic experience when two cosmic forces are experienced as mingled together. The experience of the highest reality in some ‘fluid’ nature is metaphorical.

7. The terms such as nisparīṭi for attainment of the yogic awareness, literally applied to describe an extraction of juice from the soma plant or removing husk from the grains of rice, or uttirna for describing the level of nāda that is outside ordinary experience and transcendent to instrumental sound, literally ‘floated’ above in water, are further examples of metaphoric expression for the yogic experience.

8. Terms such as hamsa, literally ‘goose’, applied either to describe a yogic process of breathing, or to identify the yogin practicing the specific course of yoga, are further separated from their literal application.

6.2. Unique to the Nath tradition is the practice of Hatha yoga and alchemy as tools for actualizing the body as the microcosm that reflects the entire cosmos. This belief is deeply rooted in their expression of the rise of Kundalī, breathing exercises, and the dissolution of mind. The language used in the alchemical process of purifying mercury or the transmutation of base metals into gold parallels that utilized for the process of yogic awakening. Noteworthy terms include vedha (penetration), here referring to transmutation of base metals into gold, and the initiation called vedha-dīkṣā for the practice of Kundalī. The svedana (sweating) of mercury parallels the sudden rise of Kundalī with the resulting heat and sweat in the body of a practitioner. The bodhana (awakening) of mercury parallels the yogic awakening through the rise of Kundalī. Terms such as mūrcchana or mārana, used in the alchemical process of the purification of mercury, parallel those that describe the Hatha yogic approach to control mind. The term bindu has a wider yogic implication in the Nath literature and refers to both mercury and the seminal drop in the body.60 As the available texts on Indian alchemy predate those on Hathayoga, it can be argued that the yogic tradition has utilized the alchemical language, with the literal being alchemical discussion and the metaphorical found in yogic application. However, on the contrary, all these terms, such as svedana (sweating), mūrcchana (fainting or swooning), mārana (killing), and bodhana (awakening) are possible only by a conscious being, in this case the body, mind, and Kundalī of the yogin. Even the term bindu that refers to the drop of mercury appears to be metaphorical, as the first application to seminal drop is closer to its verbal root śīd = to know. Piercing cakras with the rise of Kundalī is more literally related to the term vedha than is the purification process of mercury.

6.3. Nath literature possesses many descriptions of yogic practice with the rise of the serpentine power dormant within the body addressed as Kundalī. The select constituents of the Nath yoga system discussed in this paper, the concept of the identity of pinda and brahmānda, and the concept of the yoga of bindu and nāda, both are linked to the practice of Kundalī. Techniques such as amanaska, hatha, samarasa and so on, all describe Kundalī yoga. Different metaphors discussed in this paper serve as markers to the gradual or sudden awakening of Kundalī, with some terms referring to the process and the others, to its result.61

6.4. With this exploration into a few specific terms that describe the yogic process and the highest state, it is quite clear that the metaphors applied in the Nath yoga literature relate to bodily emotions and their transformation in the yogic process, physically-felt heat, and sound as instruments for the physical transformation that corresponds with the esoteric experience.

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59 For the Vedhamayā initiation and the concept of vedha in Indian alchemy, see WHITE 1996, 312-322.

60 This issue is addressed in detail in WHITE 1996 (“Chapter 9: The Dynamics of Transformation in Siddha Alchemy” 263-302).

61 For discussion, see SIEBER 1998.
6.5. Now the question is, what is the significance of the application of language in this description? The drop or bindu is actually referring to the light (prakāśā) that is identical with reflection (vimarsā), which, in essence, is awareness itself. The nāda or sound is referring to something soundless. Both are collectively identifying a yogic state beyond mind (amanaskā). It is as if the categorization of drop and sound, at their inner and external levels, offer their essence in the process of revealing, actually granting experience in the flash of which a yogin recognizes the meaning.

6.6. What is significant in the application of both drop (bindu) and sound (nāda) as two instruments of yogic absorption is their corporeality. Instead of intellectual realization, this is something physically felt. The seminal drop is physically felt in its emission. A yogin, by holding it within the body and not allowing emission, can feel its active presence in the body. The yogic meditation to hold semen within the body makes the yogin conscious of its actual presence. The sound, along the same lines, is felt within the body before it can no longer be heard. The application of language, in this yogic process, becomes a means where language drops its external meaning, stops referring external objects and returns back to its inner meaning, along with its felt and corporeal reality, before being consumed in the void of mindlessness.

6.7. This corporeality of language in the inner yogic meaning transforms the yogic recognition of limited bodily awareness to the cosmic awareness. In other words, it is the language that allows the yogin to not only express but also experience his cosmic presence, his totality, or his expansion. As the absence of sound is identified as a different level of sound, or as the drop is interpreted in both its cosmic and corporeal forms, so does language express the reality present, in an actual absence of language. When the language and that which is being expressed become one, that One reveals itself, becomes its own language and experience.

6.8. The general categorization and esoteric meaning are both derived figuratively, and the primary meaning of words refers to external objects. Both fall short in the case of all the terms analyzed in this context: the yogic meaning that refers to breathing practice is not the etymological meaning of the term hamsa. The real meaning merely mimics regular breathing. When this practice unites the practitioner with the breath, he achieves the identity of Hamsa, now in a figurative sense. The next set of two terms, bindu and nāda, poses a different situation. The primary meaning derived from the verbal root is lost in common use when the term bindu refers to a drop and nāda to commonly heard sound. The subjective experience and the unmanifest sound are not figuratively found: the esoteric becomes the primary meaning and experience, somehow lost and regained through this practice. What is metaphorical is the external world, the objective or phenomenal reality. What is real is not metaphorical, and the essential experience encapsulated in these terms distilled through yogic practice is not derived through secondary meaning. The term amanaskā, or the state beyond mind, is recognized and conceptualized by the mind. As mind gazes at its end, so does language, speaking that which cannot be spoken.

7. Conclusion

7.1. The first conclusion to draw from the above description of Nath yoga is its intimate relationship with Tantric tradition, although multiple Tantric systems coexist, even within the Śaiva Tantras. The Śaiva and Bhairava Āgamas focus their teachings differently, and indeed, each and every Āgama demonstrates a different practice. This variety complicates the task of comparing Tantric and Nath yogas. Nonetheless, it may not be an overstatement to say that Nath yoga stands as a unique Tantric system. The overlap found in the Nath and Tantric systems can be compared to the distinctions found among various Āgamas, or at least the Śaiva and Bhairava Āgamas. The comparison of select terms common to Kaula Tantric and Nath traditions, nevertheless, suffices to distinguish between these traditions. These parallels and differences support the practice of distinguishing between other Indian traditions where the conceptual differences are subtle.

7.2. The central theological components, the world as the play of consciousness, the focus on the visualization of the body as the cosmos, and the focus on the yoga of nāda and bindu are a few constituents that make this yoga system distinctly different from Patañjalian yoga. The positive attitude towards Siddhis or supernormal 'perfections' is yet another differentiating element.

7.3. The practice of Kundalī and the cakras makes this yoga distinct from the Patañjalian system and allows comparison with Tantric yoga. The concept of the body as the seminal form of the cosmos
with all cosmic forces dormant within the body relates to the concept of Kundalī, the cosmic force found within the body of each and every individual.

7.4. There are nevertheless multiple shared factors visible within the yogic traditions of India: they all instruct that specific mental training and visualization, chanting, or other physical practices culminate in an esoteric experience which is identified as a higher realization. In light of this awakening to the higher reality, the ordinary experience of the commonsense world becomes subordinate. Therefore, the approach here is not to claim that there is no interconnectedness among the broader yogic systems, but only to compare some tenets that relate the specific yoga system of the Nātha yogins to Tantric yoga.

7.5. A brief investigation into the language of the Nātha Siddhas reveals the deep relationship of this tradition to the Tantric Śaivite and Sahaja Siddha traditions. If vernacular Nātha literature is explored through this lens, the plethora of metaphors for expressing cosmic union, recognition of the inborn nature of divinity and of the body as the cosmos, and spiritual awakening parallels those found in the songs of the Sahaja Siddha tradition. The language of Nātha literature also manifests the phenomenon in which different traditions in medieval India merge rather freely. The establishment and fluidity of sects and cults render them more vibrant than previously conceived.

Abbreviations

APŚ Ajadapramāśīrsiddhi
AY Amanaskayoga
GŚ Goraksāśātaka
GSS Goraksasiddhāntasangraha
GVŚ Goraksavacanasangraha
MM Mahārāthamaṇjarī
MVT Mālinīvijayottaratantra
RTP Ratnātrayaparikṣā
SSP Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati
SSS Siddhasiddhāntasangraha
ST Svacchandatantra
TĀ Tantrāloka
VP Virūpāksapañcāśīkā

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